



1 JOHN

That You May Know

“These things I have written to you, who believe in the name of the Son of God,
so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

1 John 5:13



A Commentary by Aaron Ferguson
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1 John

That You May Know

Purpose

To *confront* the false doctrines of Gnosticism and to *confirm* the faith of true Christians

Summary

Gnosticism was a prevalent heresy in the early church. Proponents of this false gospel believed that they had special or additional revelation or knowledge (*gnostic*) that superseded the Scriptures. Thus, they claimed to have the upper hand on Christians, which discouraged and deceived many of them. Gnostics held that Jesus was not the Son of God, mistreated those people in the church, and lived lifestyles of wanton pleasure. Therefore, John met their deceptions head on and helped genuine believers discern the truth. One way he developed discernment in his readers was that he provided certain “tests” that enabled them to identify true and false converts. These tests are still helpful today, as many people claim to be Christian and yet they believe and live in ways that are inconsistent with the message and example of Christ.

Themes

- **Tests:** While John does not use the word “tests,” he provides some helpful traits to identify those who are genuine and pretending believers.
- **Love:** Of the “tests” or traits that John provides, in order to discern one’s conversion to Christ, the most recognizable is love. True believers will not be able to contain their love for the Lord or for other people. Since God is love, His people will be characterized by love.

Leading Ideas

- John’s eye-witness account confirms Jesus’ humanity and deity (1:1-4).
- One cannot be a follower of Christ and deny the existence of sin in his life (1:5-10).
- Though Satan has a strong case against us, we are acquitted before God (2:1,2).
- Obedience to Christ is evidence of salvation (2:3-6).
- Followers of Christ are obvious by the love they have for people (2:7-11).
- All of us are in various stages of spiritual growth (2:12-14).
- Those who are redeemed by Christ will show signs of resistance to the world (2:15-17).
- Those who claim to be Christians and deny Jesus as the Son of God are pretenders (2:18-25).
- Abiding in the Holy Spirit grows our confidence in the faith (2:26-29).
- As children of God, we are to look less like the world and more like Christ (3:1-3).
- No one who practices sin is born of God (3:4-10).
- Genuine followers of God will desire to help rather than hurt other people (3:11-18).
- When we obey God and please Him, we should have confidence in our prayer lives (3:19-24).
- Followers of God must practice discernment; false teachers are everywhere (4:1-6).
- The love of God, which is in us, is put on display through us (4:7-12).
- Because of Christ’s love, demonstrated on the cross, we no longer fear judgment (4:13-21).
- Our faith in God (and not ourselves) enables us to overcome the world (5:1-5).
- Those who deny the claims of Christ make God out to be a liar (5:6-12).
- God wants His people to know with certainty that they are His (5:13-21).
- Jesus is the one true God, the only way to eternal life; everything else is an idol (5:20, 21).

Penman

John, the disciple of Jesus

Recipients

The letter is untitled, meaning that it was not written to anyone in particular but rather it was sent to several Gentile congregations.

Date Written

Approx. 85-90 AD
from Ephesus

Special Feature

Many similarities exist between this letter and John’s Gospel account – same wording, main ideas, style of arguments, etc.

Key Verse

“These things I have written to you, who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

1 John 5:13

¹ “What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life – ²and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us – ³what we have seen and heard, we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and, indeed, our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.”

Conceived by the Holy Spirit
Luke 1:35

Holy God in Human Form
John 1:1, 14
John 10:30
Col. 2:9

Mediator of God and Man
1 Tim. 2:5

An Eye-Witness Account

Confronting False Doctrine

Leading Idea

John's eye-witness account confirms Jesus' humanity and deity.

John, the longest-living disciple of Christ (now some 50 or 60 years after Jesus' resurrection), felt compelled to confront a false teaching that was prevalent in his day; it was known as *Gnosticism*. Proponents of this heresy believed that they had special revelation or *knowledge* (gnostic) that superseded the Scriptures. Thus, their teaching confused Christians in the early Church.

Gnostics believed that *all physical matter was evil* and that *only the spiritual realm was good*. That being the case, Jesus, the Son of God, could not have been a human, who lived in the material world, or else He would have been evil. Thus, Gnostics denied Jesus' humanity, that He was fully a man; they claimed that Jesus was only spirit but never a tangible person. His appearance on earth, therefore, was merely an illusion, a spirit in human form.

As one could imagine, this message would cause many of Christ's followers to wonder whether or not the Gnostics were right and their own beliefs were wrong. Gnosticism was, no doubt, another one of Satan's inventions, hatched for the purpose of confusing Christians and, if possible, derailing their faith. As a result, many people would doubt Jesus' credentials and, therefore, their own salvation.

Seeing the destructive tendencies of such heretical teaching, John strikes back with truth. His first line of defense is his own eye-witness account of Jesus' life. As a disciple of Christ, a member of the inner circle, John's testimony is absolutely authoritative. He uses that authority to confirm that He saw Jesus with his own eyes, spoke with Him face to face, heard Him teach with his own ears, and touched Him with his own hands. His point is this – how could Jesus have been an illusion if I, John, experienced Him in such tangible ways? Thus, his eye-witness account trumped the Gnostic's claims.

It is important to note that what the Gnostics assumed – that Jesus could not have been human – would effectively disqualify Him from being the Messiah. In order for Christ to be qualified as the mediator between God and man, *He must be a representative of both parties*. In other words, for Jesus to represent both humanity and deity, He had to embody both at the same time. Simply put, Jesus had to be human, in order to represent man before God, and He had to be deity, in order to represent God before man. Thus, we see the importance of the hypostatic union – Jesus as fully God and fully man. If Christ was not human, as the Gnostics believed, then Jesus could not have represented man before God, which would have made Him ineligible to be the Savior.

Besides John's testimony, we have other eye-witness accounts in the New Testament. These men described Jesus' humanity in ways to which we can relate. For example, Jesus was hungry, He was thirsty, He was tired, He slept, He wept, He touched and healed people, He bled, He felt pain, etc. All of these descriptions confirm the fact that Jesus was not an illusion, but a real human being.

However, if Jesus were a man (which He was), how did He avoid the curse of man's sin and the fallen state of the earth? Through the miraculous virgin birth. Jesus was not conceived by Joseph, a sinful man, but rather by the Holy Spirit. While He took on the form of a man, He was not born with the sinful nature with which man is cursed. But, if Jesus were a man, how did He prove that He was of God? Through many miracles and prophecies, Jesus proved that He was more than a man. He exhibited power over nature, over the human body, over the demonic world, even over death. Jesus was whom He said He was – God in the flesh.

The bottom line is that John's eye-witness account confirms Jesus' humanity and disproves the erroneous teaching of the Gnostic heretics. Case closed.

⁵ “This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light and in Him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice 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 have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.”

Scripture Is of God Not Man
2 Timothy 3:16
2 Peter 1:20, 21
Galatians 1:12

God Is Holy
Numbers 23:19
Isaiah 6:3
James 1:17

Man Is Sinful
Genesis 6:5
Psalm 51:5; 58:3
Isaiah 64:6
Jeremiah 17:9
Romans 3:9-23; 5:12
Ephesians 2:1-5

Walking in the Light

Admitting and Confessing Sin

Leading Idea

One cannot be a follower of Christ and deny the existence of sin in his life.

First, John makes it clear that this message is not his own; it was one that he heard from Jesus Himself. It is important to remember that *the words of Scripture are not of man but are of God*. Passages like these have always served as proof, in my mind, that the Bible was not man’s idea, because man would not write such things. He would never admit that he is sinful, that he is in need of forgiveness. If man were the author of Scripture, he would have esteemed his own goodness, not his moral failures.

That idea – that man has no sin and does not need forgiveness – is the focus of this passage. The Gnostics denied the existence of sin in their lives and, therefore, excused their need for a Savior (which is the position of many in the world today). To hold this position is to oppose Jesus Himself and call Him a liar. For this reason, Jesus came into the world, to save men from their sin.

John points out the difference between what Jesus taught and what the Gnostics were teaching. His illustration is that of light and darkness, night and day. God is light, John says, a reference to His perfection, and in Him there is no darkness. In other words, God is holy, righteous, and truthful, and in Him there is no sin or error. That being the case, anyone who teaches contrary to Christ’s message is not in the light but is of the darkness. Light and darkness cannot exist in a person’s life at the same time. Simply put, one cannot be a Christian and deny the existence of sin in his life; to do so is to contradict the message of Christ Himself (*Matt. 19:25, 26; John 3:3; 8:34*).

By way of reminder, man is born with a sinful nature; he inherited it from Adam. From birth, it is our tendency to disobey God and displease Him. In fact, in our sin, there is nothing that we can do to please the Lord, because our deeds are stained by our condition. Not only is sin imputed to us from our forefathers, we have committed personal sins as well. In other words, we are guilty of God’s wrath from birth, because of our corrupt nature, but we are also guilty of God’s wrath because of the sins we commit on our own. It is because of our “darkened” state that we cannot have fellowship with Him who is light. Fellowship with God is only achieved by the removal of sin through the blood of Christ; He alone is able to eradicate our “darkness” with the light of His salvation.

However, it is important to point out that even though forgiveness has been granted for all sins -- past, present, and future -- we must continue to practice confession. Why is it necessary for us to practice confession, when we’ve already been forgiven of sin? It’s as simple as considering the relationship between a father and his son. While a son will always have the *love* of his father, no matter what he does, he will not always have the *fellowship* of his father. The son’s foolishness, disobedience, and defiance serve as a roadblock to enjoying open communication with his father. While the son will always be related to the father, because of his own sin, the relationship may not be a healthy one (i.e. Prodigal Son). It is important, then, for the son to maintain clear communication between himself and his father, by continually removing any clutter that may get in the way.

Likewise, though we have received forgiveness for our sins, once and for all, and our position with our heavenly Father will never be in jeopardy (because of Christ), we must be careful to maintain fellowship with the Lord by removing any clutter that may get in the way. *Positional* forgiveness occurs at the moment of salvation (Christ has paid sin’s penalty), but *parental* forgiveness is ongoing. Therefore, confessing our sins and receiving forgiveness is necessary to sustaining a healthy relationship with God our Father. The bottom line is that we must not ignore our sins, but, instead, we must “nip them in the bud,” by regularly dragging them out into the light, naming them specifically, taking sides with God against them, and boldly forsaking them, so that we may enjoy with God the fellowship afforded to us by Christ.

¹ “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And, if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous,² and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.”

Christ, Our Substitute

John 1:29
Romans 5:8; 6:23
2 Corinthians 5:21
Hebrews 9:11-15, 24-26

Our Righteous Defender

Jesus Christ, Advocate

Leading Idea

Though Satan has a strong case against us, we are acquitted before God because of Christ's death.

As the last surviving disciple of Jesus Christ, John is advanced in age when writing this letter. He obviously views himself as a father figure to those in the early church, as he refers to them as “little children.” John is not addressing those who are young in age but rather those who are young in their faith; therefore, calling them “children” is a term of endearment, not a personal insult.

In the passage previous to this one (1:5-10), John challenged Gnostic doctrine by saying that one cannot be a true believer in Christ and deny the existence of sin in his life. He reminds the early Christians that it is good to admit and confess sin regularly, in order to maintain a healthy relationship with the Lord. In this passage, John reminds them of another important truth regarding sin – that we have an *Advocate* before the Father, who is Christ our *propitiation* (see also 4:10).

In a trial, there are several key courtroom elements that influence the outcome – the judge, the prosecuting attorney (the one who is making accusations and pressing charges), the defense attorney (the one who is defending), the jury, and the evidence. In the case of our sin, Satan is the great accuser; he stands before God pointing out all of our mistakes, selfish attitudes, evil desires, fleshly passions, and moral failures. He has file cabinets full of evidence, records documenting why we are not worthy to enter into heaven and why we should be condemned to eternity in hell with him.

Unfortunately, Satan is right; he has a solid case. We are guilty before God and do not deserve to be pardoned for our crimes. However, despite the overwhelming case against us, *we have an outstanding defense attorney* (or advocate), *Jesus Christ, who has never lost a case*. Since we cannot make our own defense (because of our sin), Jesus argues before God on our behalf. His argument is that even though we are guilty of sin and unworthy of God's presence, He Himself has paid the penalty for our sin with His death on the cross. His blood has redeemed us from sin; and, though Satan has a strong case against us, we are acquitted because of what Christ did on our behalf! (Never does an attorney pay for the crimes of His client, but ours did.) As a result, we are no longer dead in our sin, but rather we are alive through Christ and we are given His righteousness. When God the Father, who is both our Judge and jury, looks at us, He sees Christ, and, therefore, He pardons us because of His righteousness.

The word “propitiation” is unfamiliar to us. It simply means “appeasement” or “satisfaction.” Our sins are offensive to God and anger Him greatly. For us to be pardoned, God's wrath must be appeased or satisfied. Only Christ can satisfy God's wrath; we cannot. Only Christ's death on the cross alleviates God's anger with sin. Note that Jesus not only paid for our sin but for the sins of the whole world.

The question that often arises, at this point, is this: did Christ's death on the cross cover the sins of the world, and if so, then why aren't all people granted salvation? While the answer is simple, it is hard to understand. *Christ's death was more than sufficient to cover the sins of the world, but it is only efficient for those who put their trust in Him*. It's as if God has given everyone a credit card so that He can pay their debts, but it is only effective if one activates the card and uses it. God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son for its sins, but it is only those who believe in Him that will have eternal life (John 3:16). That verse does not say that everyone will have eternal life. Pardon is not granted to those who do not believe or accept Christ's substitutionary death on their behalf.

Finally, John opens this passage with a challenge – “I am writing these things so that you may not sin.” He is not suggesting that we are sinless and will never make a mistake, rather he is warning us not to take advantage of Christ's forgiveness and use it as a license to sin. *Just because we are free from sin does not mean that we are free to sin*.

³ “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 the truth is not in him; ⁵but, whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: ⁶the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.”

Obedience to Christ
John 14:15, 21, 23
1 John 5:3
2 John 1:6

In the Same Manner

Obedience to Christ

Leading Idea

Obedience to Christ is evidence of salvation.

In keeping with the theme of his letter – exposing the Gnostics and reassuring Christians of their faith – John includes another “test of discipleship” – obedience. Simply put, *obedience to Christ is external evidence of one’s salvation*. Gnostics, like so many people today, claimed to be Christian, but, in fact, were only Christian by name. They did not exhibit any signs of genuine faith, because they did not obey the Lord’s commands.

It has been said that the greatest single cause of atheism is Christians, who claim Jesus with their lips, but who deny Him with their lifestyle. One who claims to be a follower of Christ and yet does not live his life as Jesus instructed – lying, cheating, foul mouthed, premarital sexual activity, gossip, hatred, etc. -- is deceiving himself and deceiving others. True Christians demonstrate their love for Christ by keeping His commandments and “walking *in the same manner* as He walked.”

For example, here are a few of Jesus’ general instructions:

- Practice self-control and guard yourself against lust, which is adultery of the heart
- Love your enemies and do good to those who persecute you
- Keep your word
- Store up heavenly treasures, not earthly treasures
- Avoid being judgmental
- Do unto others as you would have them do unto you
- Esteem your parents and honor marriage
- Deny sinful, selfish passions and desires
- Forgive others as you have been forgiven
- Be humble and serve others
- Be impartial and help the poor
- Love your neighbor as yourself
- Practice your righteousness in secret, not for attention
- Share with others what Christ has done for you

Opponents of Christianity are quick to point out those followers of Christ who have committed dishonorable deeds (i.e. murdering others in the name of Christ during the Crusades) and claim that they are no different than anyone else. In one aspect, they are correct. Although Christians have been redeemed by Christ and they have been given a new nature that desires to follow Him, Christians are still sinners who, at times, make mistakes. What opponents of Christianity will not admit is that the dishonorable things that Christians do are not condoned by Jesus. Critics are so quick to highlight our mistakes but neglect the fact that those wayward Christians were not following Christ’s example (He would never condone killing people in His name). *Christianity is not doomed by the actions of its followers, but rather it is exonerated by the perfect example of its model* – Jesus Christ. Although we can be a poor reflection of Him, true believers desire to be obedient to Him and follow in His steps.

John uses one of his favorite words – “abide” -- in the last verse. To abide is “to remain or to dwell continually in a permanent state” (*John 15:4-8*). It is important to note that once we are saved, we will always abide spiritually with Christ; salvation cannot be lost. However, in order to follow Christ’s example in our lives, we must abide in His word. Simply put, *to do what Christ says, we must know what Christ said*, and that means we must constantly abide in the Scriptures and put them to practice.

⁷ “Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. ⁸On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining. ⁹The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. ¹⁰The one who loves his brother abides in the Light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. ¹¹But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.”

Loving Others

Mark 12:30, 31

John 13:34, 35

John 15:12, 17

Romans 13:8-10

James 2:8

1 John 3:16

2 John 5, 6

A New Commandment

Loving Others

Leading Idea

Followers of Christ are obvious by the love they have for people.

The next test of discipleship, which John includes in his letter, is that of love. John reminded his readers that Jesus taught us to love others while He was here on earth. Love is not a “new” commandment but one that they had heard from Christ “from the beginning” of His earthly ministry. John was not telling them something they had not heard before but rather he was pointing out a truth that was very important to Jesus.

It is clear in Scripture that God loves people. Of all the things that He created, He loves people the most. Mankind was the climax of His creation. He saved the best for last. Everything that was created before man was created for man; and, all that was created was given to man to use and enjoy.

Not only was mankind the climax of creation, he was the only creature made in God’s image, an earthly reflection of His divine nature. No other creature shares this privilege. As an image-bearer, all men have value and purpose and deserve to be treated with respect. God also made a special place for man to dwell, He gave Him special abilities and attributes, and He delegated authority over creation to him, as stewards. Man is set apart among all creatures.

Furthermore, of all created beings, man was the only one given a soul. When God created man, He breathed life into his nostrils and man became a living being (soul, *Genesis 2:7*). Having a soul sets man apart as an eternal creature. While his body decays and dies, because of sin, his soul will live forever in eternity. Some men will live in eternity with God, while others will exist apart from God, but all men are eternal. *Since that is true, what we do in life, to invest in the lives of people, will have eternal consequences.* We will, no doubt, remember in eternity what was done here on earth.

God loves people so much that He sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross and redeem them from their sins. He paid the highest price possible to secure salvation for all those who would accept Him. Paul said that “God demonstrated His love for us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (*Romans 5:8*). God loves people.

Now, if people are such a high priority to God and the focus of Christ’s earthly ministry, then people should be important to us as well. As followers of Christ, we will follow in His steps and love people the way that He did – unconditionally and sacrificially. Our lives will reflect His life; our love will reflect His love. He loves people through us, when we are available and willing to do so.

But who are we to love exactly, only those who love us? Through the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus made it clear that we are to love all people, even those we would rather not love. The one who is selective with his love, the one who is prejudiced, partial, racist, or conditional with his love, does not follow the example set for us by the Lord. In fact, love that is conditional is not love at all; for true love is free and not earned.

Beware of the one who says that he is a Christian and does not love all people. As God is no respecter of persons (He demonstrates no partiality), we should be no respecter of persons. All men are equal and valuable in His eyes, despite age, color, nationality, ability, social status, etc.; thus, they should be equal and valuable in our eyes as well. Holding grudges, harboring bitterness or resentment, plotting vengeance, despising or hating others, even enemies, have no place in the Christian life. He who does these things exemplifies characteristics that are inconsistent with the example of Christ. Either they are living in sin and need to repent, or they have never truly been saved. What about you? Do you exhibit the love of God in the way that you treat others? He who “abides in the Light” will reflect light.

¹² "I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake. ¹³I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. ¹⁴I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you and you have overcome the evil one."

Salvation Is In Christ Alone

John 3:16; 14:6

Acts 4:12

Romans 6:23

2 Corinthians 5:21

Press On to Spiritual Growth

Ephesians 4:10-13

Philippians 3:14

Hebrews 5:11-6:1

Never Stop Growing

The Progression of a Disciple

Leading Idea

All of us are in various stages of spiritual growth.

In this passage, John addresses three groups that are at various stages of discipleship – little children, young men, and fathers. He attempts to confirm their faith in Jesus, as is the theme of his entire letter. He wants those people who read (or hear) his words to know that what they have in Christ is real.

To those Christians who are young in their faith – little children – John reminds them of two things. First, he reminds them that it is Christ who has removed their sins; no one else is able to accomplish that work. Second, he reminds them that they, at least, know the Father, meaning that they have completed step one of the discipleship process – salvation. Thus, John is encouraging the little ones in the faith, assuring them that they are on the right track, even though they have a long way to go to obtain maturity.

To those Christians who are further along in their faith – young men – John reminds them of three things: the word of God abides in them, they have become strong, and they have overcome the evil one. While it is during one's childhood years that so much of our Christian foundation is laid, it is during our youth and young adult phases that our foundation is tested. So many big decisions must be made, so many temptations vie for our attention, and so many battles must be fought during this time that either our faith flounders or it is melded into steel. Note, the weapon of choice to oust the devil's traps during this phase is the Word of God. It is so important for young people to take the faith of their parents and make it their own. To acquire the necessary strength to survive and thrive, they need to read, study, memorize, meditate on, and obey the Scriptures. The Psalmist warns us, "How can a young man keep his way pure, by keeping it according to Thy Word; for Thy Word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against God" (119:9, 11). Living a life grounded on the Bible is the way to overcome the devil's snares and schemes.

To those Christians who are mature in their faith – fathers – John commends them of the same thing twice -- they have known Him who has been from the beginning. After enduring years of tests and trials, those who are more mature in their faith are steady and consistent. Note, it is the test and trial that strengthens our faith. A life without tests makes for a flabby faith. The relationship the "fathers" have with Christ means more to them than anything else, and after a lifetime of service, love, and loyalty to the Lord, it is the bond that they cling to in their old age. We are blessed to have men and women like this all around us; those who have gone before us and who have exemplified the Christian life as our example. They are a testimony of God's goodness and a reminder that a life of faithfulness can be achieved.

Simply put, *all of us are in various stages of spiritual growth*. Some are just starting the process; all they have is Christ, the assurance of their salvation, and a lifetime of faith tests ahead of them. Others are in the midst of those tests now, doing their best to keep their heads above the water; their faith is being strengthened one trial at a time. Then, there are those who have walked with the Lord their entire lives and who have seen Him do mighty things in and through them. They are the ones whose faith is solid and who cannot wait to see the Lord in the next life.

Where are you in this adventure with Christ? Are you progressing in your faith? The Christian life is an uphill battle and there is no such thing as neutral. *You are either advancing up the hill or you are rolling down it, building up your faith or backsliding*. May we press on towards the prize of the upward call of God, to be all and do all that God expects. Physically, we will, in time, finish growing (up at least), but spiritually speaking, we are never finished growing. Praise God for the growth you've experienced already, and then press on; also, don't forget to help others grow along the way.

¹⁵ “Do not love the world nor 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 lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. ¹⁷The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.”

Love of God and Love of World in Opposition
Romans 12:2; 13:14
Ephesians 2:3
James 1:27; 4:4
1 Peter 2:11

War of the World

Rejecting the Worship of Self

Leading Idea

Those who are redeemed by Christ will show signs of resistance to the world.

The next test of true discipleship in John’s letter is *worldliness*. He sets the love that we have for God and the love that we have for this world in opposition to each other; and, he reminds us that we cannot simultaneously love both. By the “world,” John is not referring to creation or to people; he is referring to the religious system behind the world order, which is under the influence of the Devil. Remember, Lucifer was cast down to earth and given a great deal of power here; the system that he established on earth is against everything that God is for, and, in his favor, man’s sinful nature is bent towards him.

Therefore, to love the world, or the things of the world, is to love the Devil’s religious system. But one might say, “I don’t love the Devil or worship the Devil, so how can you say that I love the Devil’s religious system?” Satan is deceiving and very smart. While many think that the Devil’s religious system is called Satanism, or the Occult, it is not. He is much more cunning than that. In the big scheme of things, very few people directly worship the Devil; however, *the vast majority of the world worships the Devil indirectly by worshipping themselves*. Simply put, *Satan’s religion is humanism*, the worship of man. For this reason, John points out that the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life are not of God but are of the world; in other words, these humanistic lures are of the Devil.

These three categories have always been intriguing. I believe that John provides here the three categories of temptation. The lust of the flesh refers to our tendency to indulge our natural human desires. The lust of the eyes refers to greed (one of Satan’s favorite temptations), that which we desire with our eyes. The boastful pride of life refers to the root of all sin – the arrogance to crown ourselves god and to seek opportunities for self-display and self-glory.

Amazingly, these three categories appear in the first temptation of mankind in the Garden of Eden (*Genesis 3:6*). Eve desired the forbidden fruit because “it was good for food” (lust of the flesh), it was “a delight to the eyes” (lust of the eyes), and it would make her like God (the pride of life). The same temptations that Satan paraded before Eve at the beginning of time, he has used to distract and derail every human being in history. He even attempted to use these temptations against Jesus (*Matthew 4:1-11*). He challenged Christ to turn stones into bread to eat (lust of the flesh), he tempted Him with all the kingdoms of this earth (lust of the eyes), and he dared Jesus to display His greatness before all by throwing Himself off of the temple (pride of life). Thus, when the author of Hebrews says that Jesus has been tempted in all things, as we are, yet without sin, he is right (*4:15*).

Every person is caught between these two loves – the love of God and the love of the world – and every day, we make decisions that move us one step in either direction. We must be intentional to deepen our love for God (through self-control and the spiritual disciplines), or we will fall more in love with ourselves and the things of this world. There is no such thing as neutral, for if we do nothing to deepen our love for God, our fleshly tendencies will move us in the opposite direction. We must be persistent to identify those areas in which Satan is tempting us and be vigilant to battle against him.

John makes it clear that those who have surrendered to worldliness demonstrate no evidence of salvation; *the one who has been redeemed by Christ will show signs of resistance to the world*. Since these two loves are in opposition to each other, the Christian, who is indwelt with the Holy Spirit, will desire the things of God; and, in time, the temptations of this world will slowly lose their effectiveness to distract his attention. No doubt, *this world has everything humans would want, but for followers of Christ, it has nothing that we need*. Why would we cling to a system that will one day fail and fall, when we have a true, everlasting treasure in Jesus Christ?

¹⁸“Children, it is the last hour; and, just as you have heard that Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us. ²⁰But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. ²¹I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth. ²²Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. ²³Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also. ²⁴As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. ²⁵This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life.”

The Antichrist

Daniel 8:9-11
Daniel 11:31-38; 12:11
Matthew 24:15
2 Thessalonians 2:1-12
Rev. 13:1-5; 19:20; 20:10

Enduring to the End

John 8:31; Romans 2:7
1 Corinthians 1:8
Phil. 1:6; Col. 1:23
Revelation 2:7

Really Not Of Us

Perseverance of the Saints

Leading Idea

Those who claim to be Christians and, yet, deny Jesus as the Son of God are pretenders.

At this point in his letter, John refers to the Antichrist for the first time (see also 4:3; 2 John 7). The Antichrist is that long-awaited final world leader, of whom it has been prophesied will usher in the end times and rule all nations in the authority of Satan himself. Of course, the Antichrist will oppose anything and anyone having to do with Christ; and, he will ultimately aim at eliminating any hint of God or His people.

John believed that he was living in the “last hour,” the final days before the Antichrist’s arrival and Jesus’ second coming. Obviously, John’s days were not the final days of the world, as we are still here, but that should not deter us from the truth that Jesus will return someday. We should not be surprised or discouraged that John was wrong in this assumption, as the Bible tells us that no one, not even Jesus, knows the time of His return (*Matt. 24:36-44; Acts 1:7*).

However, neither the Antichrist nor the Second Coming is the main topic of this passage. Rather John emphasizes the rise of many “antichrists” in the last days, referring to false teachers and false converts, those who either communicate or confess a false gospel. John says that this will be a sign that the end is near – that a large number of people will fall away from the true Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The possibility of this mass apostasy poses an interesting question – can Christians fall away from the faith and deny that Jesus is Lord? There are multiple answers to this question, depending on one’s definition of “falling away.”

- True followers of Christ (those who have been born again, and within whom the Holy Spirit resides) can experience difficulty in their lives, question and even doubt their faith, and “fall away” for a time; but, if they are truly saved and the Spirit, indeed, lives within them, they will, most likely, return to the Lord, for the Spirit will zealously pursue them, to be reconciled with Christ. This “falling away” period does not imply a loss of salvation.
- On the other hand, those who are Christian by name or association, or those who have based their Christianity on works, on tradition, on family, on an experience, or on something or someone other than Christ, can fall away from the faith and never return. However, these people were never born again and the Holy Spirit never indwelt them. Thus, John says, “they go out from us because they were never part of us.” These people are the ones who can deny Christ as the Son of God or renounce their “faith” because their relationship with Christ was never genuine in the first place. Note, *a person who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit* (part of the trinity) *would never reject, renounce, or deny Christ* (another part of the trinity). Both Christ and the Spirit are on the same team; therefore, any time someone who claimed to be a Christian completely turns their back on Christ, it is certain that he was never a child of God.

It is by way of this topic we arrive at the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints (true followers of Christ), which basically has two parts. First, since salvation is not in our hands but in God’s hands (we had nothing to do with it), our salvation is secure (it will persevere). Second, while on earth, when perseverance is demonstrated by the saints, that they endure to the end, it is a sign of genuine salvation. Of course, their salvation is not secured by enduring to the end, but rather their enduring to the end is evidence of salvation.

Simply put, *those who claim to be Christian and, yet, deny Jesus as the Son of God are pretenders*. In time, their true colors will be revealed, their mask will be removed, and their false gospel exposed.

²⁶“These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. ²⁷As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him. ²⁸Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. ²⁹If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.”

Purpose and Role of the Holy Spirit

John 14:16, 17, 26
John 16:5-15
Acts 2:1-4
1 Corinthians 3:16
Galatians 5:13-25

Abiding in the Spirit

Called Alongside to Enable

Leading Idea

Abiding in the Holy Spirit grows our confidence in the faith.

Here again we are given the purpose of this letter – to expose the Gnostics, who were trying to deceive the early Christians. Those false teachers in the Gnostic movement claimed to have new or additional “knowledge,” which supposedly gave them an advantage over the Christians. However, John reminds his readers that, if they are truly saved, they have the Holy Spirit (“the anointing”), who is the ultimate Teacher, indwelling them. In other words, John tells them that they have no need for anyone who claims to know more than the Holy Spirit.

It is fitting, here, to remember the purpose and role of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. When Jesus announced that He would be crucified and resurrected, and that He would return to His Father, He comforted His followers with a promise – He would “give them another Helper who would be with them forever” (*John 14*). That Helper, of course, was the Holy Spirit, who would indwell all believers.

These words, “another Helper,” are better understood in the Greek – *allos parakletos* (pronounced “al-ohs pair-uh-kleet-ohs”). The definition of a *parakleet* is “one who is called alongside to enable.” In a previous verse in this letter (2:1), John uses the same word to describe Jesus as our Advocate (defense attorney). The English word “Helper” is comparatively weak, in my opinion, to describe the Spirit. It gives the connotation that the Spirit is only there to assist us when we need it. The fact is that we need the Spirit at all times, because the Christian life (living the life of Christ in a sinful body) cannot be achieved in human power. It can only be achieved in the power of the Spirit. The Christian life is a supplied life, and the supply is not human but spiritual. Thus, I prefer to refer to the Holy Spirit not as the Helper but as the great “Enabler,” for we would not be able to live the life of a Christian without the Spirit’s presence and power.

While the word “*parakleet*” is critical to our understanding of the Holy Spirit, so is the word “*allos*.” The word “*allos*” simply means “another,” but there are two uses for “another.” The first one is another of a different kind, and the second one is another of the same kind. Jesus uses “*allos*” as another of the same kind, meaning that the Person whom He would send, to enable His followers to live the Christian life, would be One just like Him. In other words, Jesus was not going to send the second string Helper but rather another varsity starter, another member of the Trinity, someone who could do all that He could, as God, and more, because of Christ’s human limitations.

One of the Spirit’s responsibilities, in the lives of Christians, is to be our teacher. Jesus describes Him as the Spirit of truth, and says that He will guide us into all truth. Later, when we are given the Scriptures, the Spirit enables us to understand them. He reveals to us what is true, and, then, He enables us to live a life worthy of that truth. That knowledge and those expectations, Jesus said, would never contradict His teaching or His example; in other words, the Holy Spirit would always glorify or compliment Christ. What the Gnostics were teaching was false, as they were leading believers away from the truth that Jesus was, indeed, the Son of God, a claim that the Holy Spirit would never make.

Because the Holy Spirit does not mislead believers, as were the Gnostics, John urges Christians to abide in Him, which means “to remain with or to continue in Him,” so that we will grow in confidence and not shrink away from Christ upon His return. Remember, the Spirit is called alongside to enable us; therefore, in order to abide in the Spirit, we must remain alongside Him. How do we do that exactly? First, we must make sure that nothing comes between us (i.e. an idol or a sin), thus, the importance of regular confession; we must not do anything to grieve the Spirit, for then He is less desirous to enable us. Second, we must practice those things that keep us by His side (i.e. immediate obedience to His prompting, and the spiritual disciplines, specifically Scripture intake and prayer).

1 John 3:1-3

¹“See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason, the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

²Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is; ³and everyone who has his hope fixed on Him purifies himself just as He is pure.”

The Wonder of Salvation

Ephesians 1:3-6

Children of God

John 1:12
Romans 8:16, 17
2 Peter 1:4

Aliens and Strangers

1 Corinthians 2:15, 16
Philippians 3:20
Hebrews 11:13
1 Peter 1:1; 2:11
1 Peter 4:3, 4

What We Will Be

Romans 8:19, 29
1 Corinthians 15:42-49
Ephesians 4:24
Philippians 3:21
Colossians 3:10

Children of God

Benefits and Consequences

Leading Idea

As children of God, we are to look less like the world and more like Christ.

As John transitions into the next phase of his letter, he pauses in amazement at the great love that God has lavished upon us. He is specifically astonished at the thought that we have been made His children, included as part of His family. The idea that God chose us from the beginning, that He predestined to give us faith to believe in Him, that He loved us despite our sinfulness, that He dispatched His only Son to redeem us through His death, that He transferred us from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light, that He adopted us as one of His own children, to receive the glories and riches of His inheritance, and that He gave us His Spirit to enable us in this life is truly overwhelming to consider. These are thoughts that we should ponder every day. We should never want for a reason to be grateful. Oh, the wondrous love of God!

However, John points out that because we, as Christians, have been rescued from the ruler of this world, because we have been given a new “unworldly” nature in Christ, because we think and act in ways that are different than the world, and because the pleasures of this world have less (or no) attraction on us, those people still in the world “do not know us, just as they did not know Jesus.” As a result of what God has done in our lives, through Christ, we are set apart from unbelievers, as though we are living in a land that is not our own. Thus, the Bible oftentimes refers to us as aliens, strangers, sojourners, and such, not of this world but citizens of heaven, living temporarily on earth.

Even still, though we have a new nature and new desires, John reminds us that we are “not yet what we will be.” We are currently trapped in our sinful flesh, and so our redeemed spirit struggles against its human restraints. Though God is at work in us, continuously molding us into the image of His Son, He cannot complete His work here on earth, until our body of sin is done away with. However, there will be a day when our spirit will be freed from its prison and allowed to complete its work of transformation. That day will be when Jesus returns, and we will get to see Him “as He is.” The image of God, that was intended for us from the beginning and which we marred with our sin, will be restored in us, and we will finally be like Christ. Note, becoming like Him (Christ) is not the same as becoming Him; we will never be a deity, a god, as the Mormons teach, but rather we will still be human, with our own unique features, yet with new, glorified, uncorrupted, sinless bodies.

As mentioned before, though the image of Christ will be made complete in us that day, the Holy Spirit is actively working in us now, to move us toward that image. Therefore, the longer that we have to live our earthly lives, the more like Christ we should become. Thus, John says that we, who look forward to that final day, should be preparing ourselves even now, purifying ourselves (or allowing the Spirit to purify us) as Christ was pure. Thus, the last verse (v.3) is a springboard into the next section of the letter. John is going to provide ways for us to purify ourselves, to follow Christ’s example by practicing righteousness and love.

⁴“Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. ⁵You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and, in Him there is no sin. ⁶No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. ⁷Little children, make sure no one deceives you, the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; ⁸the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. ⁹No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. ¹⁰By this, the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious; anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.”

Christians Should Battle with Sin

Romans 6:1-15
Romans 7:7-25
2 Corinthians 5:17, 21
Galatians 5:1
Ephesians 5:25-27

Occasional or Ongoing?

Avoiding the Practice of Sin

Leading Idea

No one who practices sin is born of God.

Evidently, while the false teachers of the Gnostic movement claimed to be the “true” Christians, having new or additional knowledge, they lived rather loose personal lives, participating in sinful acts on a regular basis. In this section of his letter, John makes a case against their conversion, by pointing out some obvious discrepancies with Jesus’ own teaching and example. Thus, he lays out several points regarding sin, to help us distinguish true and false converts.

It must be stated from the outset that *genuine Christians still sin*. We are not perfect people. While we have been forgiven of our sin and released from its penalty, and while we have been given a new nature, we are still bound by the prison of our sinful flesh, which will be dealt with at Christ’s return (see 3:1-3). While our spiritual desire is to do what’s right, our flesh (physical and mental) desires to pursue selfish whims. Thus, there is an epic battle waging in our bodies (see *Romans 7*), and, unfortunately, at times, Christians succumb to sin.

However, John says that while Christians may sometimes succumb to sin, *they will never surrender to sin*. But, aren’t those words – succumb and surrender – the same? No, while Christians may temporarily yield to sinful bents, they will never surrender to them long-term. John uses the word “practice.” True Christians will never practice sin, meaning that sin will not become habitual. *While they may commit sin occasionally, they cannot do so in an ongoing manner*. The one who claims to be a Christian and yet is constantly overcome by sin should wonder if he was ever really saved at all.

The first reason, John says, why genuine Christians cannot practice sin is because it is lawlessness, anarchy. To live in a state of anarchy is to live by one’s own rules, which a Christian would never do. Genuine Christians understand that there is a higher law – God’s law – to which all men are accountable; and, consequently, they will govern themselves accordingly. In other words, a believer will not live a life of lawlessness but rather his life will reflect obedience to God (*James 4:17*).

The second reason why genuine Christians cannot practice sin is that it goes against the nature and purpose of the One who saved them. Jesus came to earth for the sole purpose of defeating the power of sin over men, and He did it by committing no sin Himself and by laying down His perfect life in exchange for others. Since Christ battled sin and was victorious over it, His followers will also battle sin and experience victory over it. Why would someone who has been delivered from the darkness continue to live in the darkness? He wouldn’t, but rather he would exhibit a progressive eradication of the darkness until his life is a shining light, external evidence of an internal transformation.

The third reason why true believers cannot practice sin is because Christ’s seed is in them. Because of the new nature and the presence of the Holy Spirit, that seed will grow and, in time, will produce evidence of spiritual growth. Jesus Himself taught that a good tree produces good fruit; *a good tree will not produce bad fruit*. Therefore, He said, His disciples shall be known by their fruit (*Matthew 7:18-20*). Thus, someone who claims to be a Christian (a good tree) and, yet, is known by loose living, habitual sin, vice, or addiction (bad fruit), how can his salvation be genuine?

Just as there are similarities between all members of a family, so do Christians exhibit similarities to Christ, as part of the family of God. To look at a family photo, were all members have similar qualities, and then to spot one who has no semblance to the others, causes one to wonder if he or she truly belongs to the family. So it is with God’s family photo. Do you look and act like a member of God’s family, or do people observe your actions and words and wonder whether or not you belong?

¹¹“For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, ¹²not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother’s [deeds] were righteous. ¹³Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you. ¹⁴We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. ¹⁵Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life aiding in him. ¹⁶We know love by this: that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. ¹⁷But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? ¹⁸Little children, let us not love with word of with tongue, but in deed and truth.”

Love for Others
John 13:34, 35
Mark 12:30, 31
1 Corinthians 13
Ephesians 2:4, 5
1 John 4:7, 8, 11

Giving Yourself Away

Sacrificial Love

Leading Idea

Genuine followers of God will desire to help rather than hurt other people.

After John finishes his section on personal holiness, he enters into a discussion of a subject that dominates much of his writing – love. For some reason, this part of Jesus’ teaching meant most to John, perhaps because he was a loving person himself and he was moved most by this message. Whatever the reason, a good portion of John’s challenges to the early church had to do with love.

In this passage, which was introduced in the preceding verse (10b), John points out three ways to tell if one is a genuine believer or a pretender. However, before explaining these points, let’s first define the love that John describes here. The word “love” is greatly over-used, misused, and abused in the English language. We love food and we love friends. Is that the same love? We love movies and we love our family. Is that the same love? Of course not, but in the English language there is only one word for love. In the Greek (which is the language of the New Testament), there are three different words for love – “philéo, eros, and agapé.”

The Greek word “philéo” describes the love that we have for our friends or neighbors, a *brotherly* love. The Greek word “eros” describes the love that we have for a spouse, a *romantic* love. The Greek word “agapé” is a *sacrificial* love, the most serious kind of love, in which one gives of himself to another. It is this kind of love, “agapé” love, which John uses in this passage. It is this type of love that Jesus, “from the beginning” of His ministry, taught His followers to exhibit.

The first point that John makes concerning love is that the pretending believer does not give of himself to others but rather he takes from others. The example that John uses is Cain, who externally offered sacrifices to God (pretending) but who internally harbored a deep hatred towards his brother, Abel. In fact, that hatred ultimately exhibited itself through the evil act of murder. Vengeful jealousy is not of God but is of the Devil. Genuine Christians should never exhibit this trait.

The second point that John makes concerning love is that the pretending believer (he who “abides in death”) harbors ongoing hatred for others, a desire to hurt and/or hinder them. Jesus equated this type of hatred to murder. Since the Devil does not desire good for anyone, but the failure and downfall of everyone, a person who exhibits a spiteful bitterness towards other people reflects his control in his life. Thus, John says, that we should not be surprised that the world hates people, most of all the followers of God; they are simply doing what comes naturally, from their sinful nature, from the character of the evil one. Someone who has put their faith in God (who has “passed out of death into life”), who has been given the nature of Christ, and who has the Holy Spirit indwelling him will not, cannot, harbor ongoing hatred for others.

Finally, the third point that John makes concerning love is that the pretender does not care for people or desire to meet their needs. A “devilish” person cares only for himself and, therefore, will not share with others freely; if he does, his generosity is only shallow and superficial. While Jesus was here on the earth, it was His desire to help and heal others. How can those, who have His spirit abiding in them, not desire the same? Thus, John says that genuine believers will not simply love others with shallow words but with actions, by giving of themselves and their resources to others (which is true “agapé” love).

The bottom line is that true followers of Christ will desire to heal others rather than hurt them. Genuine Christians will want to help others rather than hinder them. Those who are truly saved will give of themselves to others rather than take from others for themselves. Do you know “Christians” who harbor jealousy, bitterness, even hatred for others? They are pretenders, Christian in name only.

¹⁹“We will know by this that we are of the truth and will assure our heart before Him ²⁰in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. ²¹Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; ²²and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. ²³This is His commandment: that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commands us. ²⁴The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.”

Prayer

Matthew 6:6; 7:7
John 15:7
Romans 8:26, 27
Ephesians 3:20
Philippians 4:6, 7
Hebrews 4:15, 16
James 4:2; 5:16-18
1 John 5:14, 15

Prerequisites to Powerful Prayer

Having Confidence Before God

Leading Idea

When we obey God and please Him, we should have confidence in our prayer lives.

This passage is a continuation of the previous one, which focused primarily on the evidence of love in the lives of true Christians. Thus, John says (v.19) that “we will know by this that we are of the truth” – our supernatural tendency to love others. The evidence of love in our lives should “assure our hearts” that we are, indeed, children of God. Even if we doubt our love, and even more our salvation, because of “whatever it is of which our heart condemns us,” we can be sure that God knows those who are His.

However, let it be known that God does not want us to guess whether or not we are saved (5:13). He wants us to have confidence in the fact that we are one of His children. An indescribable peace covers a person who knows for sure that he is saved. Likewise, when there is nothing of which one’s heart condemns him, he exhibits confidence before God (not arrogance), that he is part of God’s family and, as such, will be used of God to advance His kingdom.

Along with that confidence in one’s salvation, comes *a confidence in prayer*. John reminds his readers that whatever they ask of God they will receive from Him. Remember, the prayer of a righteous person can accomplish much; and, oftentimes, we have not because we ask not. As the hymn goes – “Oh what power we often forfeit, oh what grief and pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.”

However, it is important to note, as John does (v.22), that *with the power of prayer come prerequisites to prayer*. With the promise, that we may receive from God what we ask, come stipulations that we often neglect. John is not offering prayer as a way to fulfill all of our selfish pleasures. Prayer is not a blank check on which we can name and claim all of our earthly desires. That teaching, which is so prevalent in our culture today, is a false doctrine. Prayer is not a tool to be used for human treasure but for obtaining heavenly treasure. Sure, God may bless our “kingdom” on earth, but it is only to give us opportunities to build His.

What are the prerequisites to powerful prayer? In his gospel account, John recorded Jesus’ teaching on this subject (*John 15*). Jesus said, “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you.” John echoes those words, when he says, “if you keep God’s commands and do the things that are pleasing in His sight,” ask whatever you wish and you will receive it. Evidently, *effective prayer is conditional*; it is based on whose desires are being requested – yours or God’s. God will always answer those requests that are in line with His will and His purposes; thus, it is critical that we learn what His will and purposes are and align our life’s path and desires accordingly.

If we know and keep God’s commands, which will result in righteous living, then we will live lives that are increasingly pleasing to Him; and, our desires will ultimately become God’s desires, our purposes will align with His purposes, and our will and motives will mirror His. If that is true, then how could God deny our prayers? The problem is so many of us neglect prayer, or when we do pray, we offer up unrepentant, arrogant, self-righteous, and self-centered requests. Why would God be obligated to answer anything we request from a heart like that?

Finally, at the end of this passage is a preview of the next one. John introduces the topic, when he says, “We know that God abides in us by the Spirit whom He has given us.” John is going to tackle a very difficult subject in the next section of his letter, the act of practicing discernment, of recognizing the work of God’s spirit and those devilish spirits of this world.

Spirits of Error

Discerning False Teachers

¹“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

²By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; ³and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.

⁴You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. ⁵They are from the world; therefore, they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”

Practicing Discernment

Matthew 24:23-27
2 Corinthians 11:15
Galatians 1:7,9
Ephesians 5:6
Colossians 2:8
1 Timothy 6:20
1 John 2:22

Leading Idea

Followers of God must practice discernment, recognizing that false teachers are everywhere.

John interrupts his teaching about love for a brief tangent regarding false spirits. It seems that when he mentioned the Holy Spirit in the previous verse (v.24b), it triggered his mind to include some thoughts about the other spirits in the world. Therefore, this section is a “by the way” moment in John’s letter. When someone says, “by the way,” he is going to pause from his conversation and interject some additional (sometimes unrelated) but important ideas to consider. Thus, John provides his readers with a warning, two simple tests, and a bit of encouragement, before continuing his lesson on love (v.7-21).

The Warning

Many false prophets (teachers) exist; do not believe them without first testing them.

John makes a point to remind Christians that while they are to love and accept people, they are also to *practice discernment*. To be discerning is to have the wisdom to understand that not everything is what it seems on the surface, that there exist underlying motives for all things. To be discerning is to separate or distinguish one thing from another. Discernment, in general, is a quality for which all should aspire, but in the case of one’s spiritual life, *discernment is critical*.

By using the word “spirits,” John indicates that there are many spirits that exist; however, by saying “do not believe every spirit,” he also indicates that many (if not most) of them are false and that they exist to distract Christians from following the true Spirit of God. It is important for God’s people to remember that behind our physical world is a spiritual world, and every issue, activity, or person that we encounter has a spiritual element to consider. While we are expected to be pure and righteous, we are never to be so naïve that we are unaware of the spiritual dangers that surround us. Satan has devised every scheme possible to deceive us and to keep us from finding and following the One True God. Thus, John warns that there are many “antichrists” in the world; we must learn to discern them.

Test 1

What do they believe about Christ? The first test John urges Christians to use is a foundational one: Is Jesus who He said He was? For example, was Jesus born of a virgin, was He sinless, was He fully God and fully man (aimed at the Gnostics), was (and is) He the only way to eternal life, was His death on the cross sufficient to cover our sins, and was He resurrected? A negative answer to any of these questions would reveal a false teacher, because one who has the Holy Spirit within him would never deny these claims.

Test 2

Do they promote Biblical doctrine or worldly philosophies? The second test John prescribes is also a good one: Is the message being propagated full of man-centered (humanistic) or God-centered (Biblical) ideas. One can claim to believe in Jesus, thus passing Test 1, and, yet, teach false doctrine. Christians should be skeptical of all teaching, as were the Bereans, measuring it against the Scriptures. Another good test is popularity; messages that are popular are most likely full of humanistic rhetoric that tickles ears. In our culture’s all-inclusive New Age views, we must remember that Christianity is exclusive; He alone is the only way to the Father. Doctrine either promotes Him or it is against Him.

A Word of Encouragement

Greater is the Spirit of God than the spirits of the world. Though there are many spirits in the world, we can have confidence that they are puny when compared to the Spirit of God. We must never fear worldly spirits because even they must bow to the might and sovereignty of Almighty God.

⁷“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and, everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.”

**Love Is Up, Down,
and All Around**

Mark 12:30, 31
John 3:16; 13:34, 35
Romans 5:8
Ephesians 5:1, 2
Hebrews 13:16
1 John 3:1, 23, 24

Up, Down, All Around

Directions of Love

Leading Idea

The love of God, which is in us, is put on display through us.

As a point of review, John’s letter provides many “tests” to identify genuine believers. The primary way to recognize those who are truly saved is by the love demonstrated in their lives. Love, then, is the most prevalent topic in this letter. Here again, we have another discussion about love.

In this passage, John provides three reasons why love is important in the Christian’s life; he will provide two other reasons in the next passage (4:13-21). John also mentions what I call the “directions of love,” of which there are three – up, down, and all around. Let me explain.

Love Is Down

John makes it clear (v.10) that God loved us before we loved Him (see also v.19). It had to be this way, for in our sinful nature, we were enemies of God and naturally would not choose to love Him.

However, because God loved us, even though we were sinners (*Romans 5:8*), He chose to reconcile us to Himself, by sending His only Son to pay the penalty of our sins on the cross (He is our propitiation; see note on 2:2). No greater love has ever been demonstrated. *Love first came down* to us, in the form of Jesus Christ.

Love Is Up

Because of what Christ did on the cross, we have been given new life in Him. Because of His love for us, we now can demonstrate our love towards Him; and, because we have God’s Spirit residing in us, we supernaturally desire to love God. Thus, *our love is up*.

Love Is All Around

Finally, because the Spirit of God the Father (who is love) and God the Son (who was the greatest demonstration of love) is in us, we supernaturally desire to love others. Because God’s loves is in us, *we cannot help but to love those around us*. It is a result of the conversion we have experienced.

Reasons to Love

Of the three reasons why love is important (two more to come, v.13-21), the first is that *love is a sign of conversion* (v.7, 8). As I have already discussed this point, I will just provide a brief review. All people can demonstrate love for others, but the Christian cannot help but to demonstrate love for others; and, the love that they exhibit towards others is a supernatural love that is unconditional, unselfish, and marked by patience and forgiveness.

The second reason is that *we are to follow Christ’s example* (v.9-11). As Christ is our prototype, the model after which we pattern our lives, the image to which we are conforming, then we should love people the way that He loved people. Thus, our love is to be sacrificial, like His.

The third reason is *so others can see what God is like* (v.12). Notice that John does not say that God loves, but rather He says that God is love (v.8). Love is part of God’s nature and it influences all that God is and does. But, if God is an invisible spirit and no one has ever seen Him, how will people know what God is like? Of course, people can know what God is like by looking to Jesus’ life, but now that Jesus is no longer on earth, John says people can see God’s love through us. The Church, of which all true believers are a part, we are now the physical demonstration of God’s love.

Are you demonstrating love towards others as Christ loved you? Is God’s love pouring out of you and spilling over into the lives of those around you? If you are truly saved and God’s Spirit resides in you, you will not be able to contain His love, but rather it will permeate all that you do.

¹³“By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

¹⁴We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God.

¹⁶We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in Him. ¹⁷By this, love is perfected with us,

so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. ¹⁸There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.

¹⁹We love, because He first loved us. ²⁰If someone 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, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

²¹And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.”

No Fear of Judgment

Romans 5:16
Romans 8:1, 2, 14, 15, 39
2 Corinthians 5:17, 21
Galatians 2:20
2 Timothy 1:7

Perfect Love Casts Out Fear

Confidence Before God

Leading Idea

Because of Christ’s love for us, demonstrated on the cross, we no longer have to fear judgment.

Before John moves on to another topic in the next section of his letter, he reiterates some of his points on love. These verses (v.13-21), then, are a summary of his message so far to the early church. It is the prevailing theme of his entire letter.

In this passage, John completes his five reasons why love is so important in a Christian’s life (the first three reasons were given in 4:7-12). In review, the first reason is that love is *a sign of conversion* for others to see that salvation has occurred (v.7, 8). The second reason is that we are to *follow Christ’s example of love* (v.9-11), to be unconditional and sacrificial, as He was during His ministry. The third reason is *for others to see what God is like* through our love for them (v.12). Though we have not seen God, we can see a tiny glimpse of what He is like through the love that is exhibited in our lives.

Now, John provides the fourth reason why love is so important. Our love for the Lord *assures us of our salvation* (v.13-16, 19). Those who are truly saved have been given the Holy Spirit; He resides in them. The Holy Spirit naturally confesses a love for God and that Jesus is the Son of God. If one can express these confessions without hesitation, then “God abides in Him,” meaning he is truly saved. Our love for the Lord is not an outflow from our sinful nature; in our original state, we would not have chosen to love God. But, because He loved us first and moved our hearts towards Him, we now can demonstrate love for Him. Anyone who sincerely loves the Lord should be confident of his salvation.

Finally, John gives us the fifth reason why love is so important in the Christian’s life. Understanding God’s love for us *gives us confidence in the “day of judgment”* (v.16-18). God’s love for us is a mystery, for sure, and impossible to understand completely. However, when we begin to comprehend what Christ has done for us on the cross, that our sins have been completely wiped away and we have been made right with God because of Christ, we lose our fear of the future judgment. Because of what Christ did, we will not bear the penalty for our sins; therefore, we will not be condemned when we stand before God in the afterlife. Thus, “perfect love casts out fear,” says John, meaning when we recognize Christ’s love for us, we will no longer worry about God’s wrath or the punishment that awaited us before salvation. Paul said it this way, “There is, therefore, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, for the law of life, which is in Christ Jesus, has set you free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:1,2). God’s wrath towards us has subsided because of Christ’s sacrifice.

When John says, “as He is (Christ), so also are we in this world,” he is referring to Christ’s current status. He is standing in the presence of the Father, in complete confidence, having done all that He was instructed, bearing the penalty for sin in His flesh and defeating the power of sin by His death. The judgment for sin has passed away for those who are in Him, for those who are His followers; therefore, we can have confidence that God sees us as He sees Christ, without sin.

John closes this section of his letter with a reminder of all that he has written about love (v.20,21). It is impossible to love God (or to have the love of God in us) and hate people. If the love of God is in us, we will naturally (or supernaturally) love others. His love will spill out of us onto those around us. If we are truly one of His children, we will not be able to contain His love for other people.

The Overcomers

The Life of a Conqueror

¹“Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him. ²By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. ³For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. ⁴For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. ⁵Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”

Overcomers

John 16:33

Romans 8:37; 12:21

2 Peter 2:19, 20

1 John 2:13, 14; 4:4

Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26

Revelation 3:5, 12, 21

Revelation 21:7

Leading Idea

Our faith in God (and not ourselves) enables us to overcome the world.

It has been said that “repetition is the mother of learning.” When we hear a truth over and over, it becomes ingrained in our minds. John is the master of repetition. He continues, in this passage, to reinforce some of the key truths that he’s offered throughout his letter.

Here are the truths that John repeats for his readers (v.1-3):

- True Christians believe and profess that Jesus is the Son of God.
- Followers of Christ will exhibit a genuine love for the Lord.
- Those who love God will also love others, especially other “children of God” (believers).
- Perhaps the clearest evidence of our love for God is our obedience to Him.

Note that John says God’s commandments are not burdensome (v.3). Unlike man-made traditions, rituals, or religious legalism, which enslaves, obeying God’s Word liberates His followers. Too often, we as Christians get caught up in the “do’s and don’ts” of Scripture and see obedience simply as a duty. We miss the bigger picture of what Christ has done for us, that from which He has rescued us and the freedom that following Him produces. When we keep these things in mind, our obedience to His commands is not a duty but a delight. We must not focus solely on the letter of our faith and neglect the Author of the faith. *When we fall in love with the Author, obeying Him becomes a pleasure.*

In the second half of this passage (v.4, 5), we are introduced to another one of John’s favorite words – “overcome.” Like the word “abide,” John repeats the word “overcome” in this and other books (i.e. Gospel of *John*, *Revelation*). An overcomer is simply another term for a follower of Christ. Here a few truths regarding overcomers:

- The word “overcome” literally means “to conquer, to gain victory over.”
- We are not overcomers, spiritually speaking, on our own, for we were once slaves to sin; but, we are overcomers through Christ, who conquered sin and death for us.
- Through Christ, we can overcome sin and temptation in our lives, we can overcome the demonic forces, we can overcome the perverted humanistic world system in which we live, and we can overcome the trials and tribulations that we face.
- Our ability to overcome (which has been given to us by God’s Spirit) is evidence of our salvation; thus, John says that the overcomer is “he who believes in the Son of God.”
- Going back to an earlier thought that John expressed, an overcomer is one who perseveres to the end. “Those who depart from us,” remember, “were never really part of us”; they are not overcomers. But those who persevere until the end, despite opposition, they are overcomers.
- John connects overcoming to our faith. Oftentimes, Christians live their lives with a puny faith. When we realize and trust the power of God, that has been given to us and which resides in us (*Acts 1:8*), our faith grows stronger and we will, indeed, become conquerors.

⁶“This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with water and with the blood.

It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. ⁷For there are three that testify: ⁸the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. ⁹If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for the testimony of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son. ¹⁰The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in him; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. ¹¹And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. ¹²He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.”

Exclusivity of Christianity

John 3:16; 14:6; 17:3
Acts 4:12
Romans 6:23
2 Corinthians 5:21
1 Timothy 2:5

The Water and the Blood

Confirming the Deity of Christ

Leading Idea

Those who deny the claims of Christ make God out to be a liar.

Until this passage, John’s letter is simple and straightforward, without difficulty or controversy. However, these verses (v.6-12) include two issues that are unusual. The first issue has to do with difficulty in interpretation, and the second issue has to do with a mysterious “missing” verse.

First, scholars disagree on the meaning of “the One who came by water and blood.” Without clouding these comments with all of the various interpretations, let me simply express my thoughts. It makes sense to me to view this description of Jesus, “having come by water and by blood,” in light of the purpose of the letter, which was to refute the Gnostic teaching of the day. Gnostics held to the belief that Jesus was a man, but that He was not fully God. They were of the opinion that the God part settled on Jesus the man at His baptism but then departed from Jesus before His death. In essence, Gnostics discounted Jesus’ sacrificial death. Why does it make sense to interpret “by water and blood” in light of this heresy? John is confirming that Jesus was the Messiah both at baptism (water) and on the cross (blood); thus, he is exposing the false teaching of the Gnostic proponents.

One other interpretation of “water and blood” is noteworthy. In the Old Testament ceremonial system of tabernacle sacrifice, the priests were purified by two things – externally by the water laver and internally by the blood on the Mercy Seat. As the Priest of the New Testament, instituting a new covenant through Himself, Jesus symbolically came by water through His baptism (laver) and by blood at the cross (Mercy Seat). In essence, He covered the bases set forth in the Old Testament.

The second difficult issue in this passage is regarding the “missing” verse. Evidently there are certain ancient manuscripts of this letter that have extra words added to Verse 7 (notice how short it is). The words refer to the trinity, which would make sense because “there are three that testify.” However, because of the controversy of whether or not to include them in modern passages, some translators have excluded them from their versions. Either way, the interpretation of the passage is the same.

To continue his refutation of the Gnostics, John reminds his readers that true believers have the Holy Spirit residing in them, and the Spirit would confirm in and through us that Jesus is the Messiah. In other words, if one has the Spirit within him, he would not deny the fact that Jesus was the Son of God. Thus, a believer would profess that Jesus was the Messiah His entire earthly ministry. John says it this way: “The Spirit, the water, and the blood are all in agreement.” John then hammers this point even further by referring to legal matters, in which two or three witnesses must support a truth claim. If we receive truth claims from human witnesses, he says, then how could we not receive the witness of the Holy Spirit? His witness alone is greater than any man’s. John calls this witness (Spirit) the “testimony,” and says that those who believe in the Son of God have the “testimony” (Spirit) in them.

The last few verses of this passage (v.10b-12) deal with the exclusivity of Christianity, meaning that Christ is the only way to be saved. John says that “God has given eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life, and he does not have the Son does not have the life.” No doubt John remembered what Jesus said while He was here; he even recorded it in his own Gospel account: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and no man can come to the Father but by Me” (John 14:6). Simply put, there is but one door through which one can enter heaven and that’s through Jesus. To claim any other way to salvation is to make Him a liar. Exclusivity is not new; every religion claims to have the only way to be saved. The problem is that while they all may be wrong, they all cannot be right. So how does one work his way through the religious maze? Consider this: all other religions in the world are works-based (man-based); in Christianity, salvation is not man’s doing but God’s. It is unique among the religions of the world. That’s because it is the one true religion; all others are distractions.

¹³“These things I have written to you, who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. ¹⁴This 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 we have the requests which we have asked from Him. ¹⁶If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. ¹⁷All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death. ¹⁸We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. ¹⁹We know that we are of God, and that 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 is the true God and eternal life. ²¹Little children, guard yourselves from idols.”

That You May Know

Assurance of Our Faith

Leading Idea

God wants His people to know with certainty that they are His.

Here is the conclusion of John’s first letter. In his final comments, John attempts to summarize, as any good teacher would, all that he has said, so that his readers would catch what is most important. Thus, this passage is full of truths that he had already emphasized (see previous comments for details).

If John’s letter had a thesis statement or a leading idea, then it would be the first verse (v.13). Because of the doctrinal confusion produced by the Gnostic teachers and the consequential fallout of the false converts, the early church was shaken. Therefore, the thrust of John’s letter was *to confront the heresy* of the false teachers and *confirm the faith* of those who were genuine believers. He wanted them to know for sure that they were saved and to have confidence in Christ and the gift of eternal life that He promised. Even today, the Lord does not want His followers to be confused about whether or not they are saved. That is why He has given us the Scriptures, His Spirit, and indications of the change within us so *that we may know* for sure that we are one of His children.

Here are John’s closing reminders:

- When we seek God’s will, we should have confidence in our prayers (v.14, 15). The problem is we tend to seek our own will, interests, and purposes, not His (see also 3:19-24).
- God’s children are obvious because they do not practice sin (v.17, 18a). Remember, true Christians make mistakes, but they will not exhibit a lifestyle of habitual sin (see also 3:4-10).
- The power of Christ’s blood and the presence of God’s Spirit in our lives overwhelm the spiritual forces of the Devil (v.18b, 19). While God has given Satan a great deal of influence on the earth, he cannot thwart God’s Church or purposes (see also 4:4).
- Christ was a real person, who performed all of the miracles, who prophesied, and who lived a sinless life so that He could pay the debt for our sins (v.20). John’s eye-witness account verifies these facts, and we can have confidence that Jesus is the true God (see also 1:1-4).

In the midst of these listed truths, John mentions a new topic – “the sin leading to death” (v.16, 17). This phrase has been widely debated, as to what exactly John is referring. It must be noted that all sin leads to spiritual death, “for the wages of sin is death” (*Romans 6:23*), but spiritual death is not the subject here; it is physical death. All sins have consequences, and God punishes or disciplines accordingly; however, perhaps the best way to understand this phrase – the sin leading to death -- is that there is a sin (or are some sins) that God has chosen to punish by death. What those are, John does not disclose, perhaps lying to the Holy Spirit as did Ananias and Sapphira (*Acts 5:1-11*), committing incest as in the church in Corinth (*1 Corinthians 5:1-5*), or abusing the Lord’s Supper (*1 Corinthians 11:27-30*). This sin may even have connections with the unpardonable sin that Jesus mentioned (*Matthew 12:22-32*), that is attributing to Satan the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit.

Whatever the exact sin is, it is not important. Perhaps that is the reason why God has kept it hidden all of these centuries. It is easy, sometimes, to get down into the weeds and miss the point or the big picture of the passage. The importance of John’s exhortation is to pray for others, even those who are errant in their theology, living in ungodly ways, or being intentionally deceptive and divisive.

Finally, John closed his letter by affirming his readers’ faith, a reminder that he has written these things that they will know that Jesus is the true God and in Him there is eternal life (see next page).

1 John 5:20, 21

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 is the true God and eternal life.
²¹Little children, guard yourselves from idols.”

The One True God

In a League of His Own

Leading Idea

Jesus Christ is the true God, the only way to eternal life; anything else is an idol.

The last two verses are perhaps the most important of John’s entire message. His readers were being confused by false teachers and competing doctrines (namely Gnosticism), and they needed clarification regarding the distinctions of Christianity. After all of his teaching, John ended his letter with a thunderous affirmation – “Jesus Christ is the true God and eternal life” is in Him! John put Jesus and Christianity in a league of their own. I agree, and here are some reasons why.

Jesus Is the Son of God

Christ was more than a good man and more than a prophet. He claimed to be the Son of God (*Luke 22:70; John 3:18*). The evidence for His existence and deity are overwhelming. He demonstrated His deity through miracles, prophecies, and His own resurrection; no other religious leader comes close.

Jesus Never Sinned

Every religious leader had shortcomings. Muhammad of Islam admitted that he needed forgiveness; but not Jesus. He was without sin. This attribute was vital to His mission, as it would not do any good for a sinner to redeem other sinners (*2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 1 John 3:5*).

Jesus Is Alive

Every religious leader in history is dead, but, Jesus was resurrected (*Luke 24:6*). We have 500 eye-witnesses; even the authority of the day, the Romans, attempted to prevent it, then, covered it up.

Christianity Is Not Works-Based

While other religions promote rules, obligations, sacraments, etc., in which an adherent must “work for his salvation,” Christianity does not. Since men are fallen and sinful, it wouldn’t do any good for them to try to save themselves with works. Works don’t work (*Eph. 2:8, 9; Titus 3:5; Heb. 7:19*). Salvation solely rests in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, not in any flawed efforts made by men.

Jesus Is the Only Way to God

Every religion is exclusive and claims to have the only way to God; but, Christianity does not require jumping through hoops, but, rather, trusting in the person of Jesus (*John 3:16; 8:32, 36; 14:6*). Christianity holds that man cannot reach God; God must reach to man, which He did through Christ.

Christianity Is Enemy #1

No other religion in history has endured such hostility like Christianity. The wrath that men have hurled against Christianity only proves its validity. If it were a false religion, Satan would not care.

Christianity Is Supported by the Bible

The Bible is the most attacked book in the world. So many hammers have beaten upon it, and yet, it survives, with no sign of wear and tear. The Bible has endured because it is truly God’s word to men.

Christianity Is Set Apart by Its Fruit

If Christians live the way that Jesus instructed, they will be the most hard-working, unselfish, self-governed, upstanding, charitable, and peaceful individuals in any society by far (*John 15:8; Col. 1:10*).

Although Christians are not perfect, by any means, it is clear that Christianity is not only set apart but superior to the religions of the world, which means that every individual is responsible for his assessment of the claims of Jesus and John. Either Jesus was a crazy kook, or He was the Christ, the only way to God, and everything else is an idol, a distraction. What will you decide? Choose wisely, for your decision is one of life and death. Choose life. Choose Christ!