

INTRODUCTION TO

1 JOHN

Authorship: The text of this epistle does not bear the author's name, nor greetings common to the epistles, yet it is evidently the work of the apostle John. He claims to be an eyewitness of Christ, preaching to others the Savior he saw, touched, and heard (1:1–3; 4:14). He declares a message which he received from God (1:5). He writes as a spiritual father, addressing all his readers affectionately as “my little children” (2:1), just as the apostle Paul did (Gal. 4:19). He writes with great authority, for to refuse to listen to him shows that a person does not know God (4:6). Thus the author places himself in the circle of the apostles, men appointed by Christ to be His witnesses and authoritative spokesmen. The style and vocabulary of this epistle are remarkably similar to those of the gospel of John, which is why we may conclude that John is the author of this epistle as well. Polycarp (d. c. AD 155), a student of John, cites this epistle, and Irenaeus (d. AD 202), a student of Polycarp, attributes it to the apostle John.

Date: Uncertain; if written after the gospel of John, then perhaps AD 85 to 95. Clement of Rome appears to cite the book around AD 96.

Theme: Personal assurance of genuine salvation.

Purpose: To clarify the difference between those who belong to God and those who belong to this world so that the church may enjoy peace and joy in Christ.

Synopsis: *This Epistle's Contribution to Redemptive Revelation*

John does not name a church or region to which he writes. With Peter, the apostle to the Jews, John was a pillar of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 3:1; 4:13,19; 8:14; Gal. 2:8–9). Tradition locates his ministry in Ephesus after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. It may be that he wrote predominantly to Jewish believers, for he says they had known God's commandment “from the beginning,” a time frame reaching back to Genesis (1:1; 2:7,13–14; 3:8,11–12).

John's epistle addresses a situation where false teachers denied that the man Jesus was the Christ (2:22; 4:1–3; John 1:14). In Greek thinking, a spiritual being such as Christ could not become flesh. This may be the heresy of Docetism, which taught that Christ appeared human but in fact was a spirit. The false teachers may also have taught an early form of Gnosticism, for Irenaeus said that John wrote his gospel against the heresy of Cerinthus, who claimed that the Christ-Spirit came upon Jesus at baptism but left prior to the crucifixion. Such a divorce of spirit and body often implied that the acts of the body do not affect spiritual life; thus John stresses righteous conduct to counteract these false teachings. Though at first working in the church, the false teachers eventually broke away to form their own movement (2:18–19). This disruption in the church no doubt shook the confidence of the remaining believers.

John responded to this crisis by writing a pastoral letter that drew a simple yet profound picture of the difference between the children of God and the people of this world. The letter contains a series of stark contrasts: life versus death (1:1–2; 2:25; 3:14–16; 5:11–13,16–17,20), light versus darkness (1:5–7; 2:8–11), truth versus lies (1:6,8; 2:4,8,21–22,27; 3:7,18–19; 4:1,6; 5:6,20), righteousness and keeping God's commandments versus sin (2:3–4,7–8,29; 3:3–10,22–24; 4:21–5:3), and love versus hate (2:9–11; 3:10–18,23; 4:7–12,16–21; 5:1–3).

John's message centers on God's nature as light and love (1:5; 4:8,16), revealed in the person and work of His Son. Jesus is both the Son of God and God Himself (5:20). He came in the flesh, as a real man who could be seen and touched (1:1; 4:2). The Father sent His Son into the

world to give life to sinners (1:2; 4:9,14; 5:11–12), though the world hates God (3:13; 4:10). With Christ's incarnation, God's light shone into the darkness (2:8), and His love was displayed (4:9). Christ brought a message about God (1:5) and exemplified that message in His own sinless life (2:1,6,29; 3:5,7). He died as the propitiation for sins (2:2; 4:10) to make His people completely clean and forgiven (1:7,9; 2:12), and now He lives to intercede for His people as their heavenly Advocate when they sin (2:1). He causes blind sinners to know the true God (5:20) as the Spirit bears witness within them so they know the truth of Christ (2:20,27; 4:2,6; 5:6,10). Christ has power to conquer the devil and destroy sin in those united to Himself by faith (3:5–9; 5:5) as the Spirit dwells in them (3:24; 4:12–13). One day, Christ will come in glory so that the wicked will be ashamed (2:28) and God's children will see Him as He is (3:2).

John uses three expressions—"born of God," "abiding in him," and "knowing him"—to describe how God applies the work of Christ to the individual sinner. In the new birth, God produces a new nature inclined to faith, love, and righteous activity (2:29; 3:8–9; 4:7; 5:1,4,18). The implanting of gospel truth in the regenerated soul causes him to no longer deny his sinfulness but confess his sins to God (1:8–10). God the Father makes him into His child and a stranger to this world (3:1), which is ruled by the devil (3:9–10).

The Christian life is a life of "abiding"—entering and remaining in spiritual union with Jesus Christ (2:6,10,17). His Word and the anointing of the Spirit abide within the soul (2:14,24,27; 3:9) so that he dwells in union with God (4:15–16). God's life and love abide in the believer, transforming his soul (2:28–29; 3:6,15,17,24; 4:11–13). The believer abides in the true church (2:19), and enjoys fellowship with God, Christ, and all who walk in the light (1:3,7).

However, God's child still sins (1:8—2:1) and possesses a varying degree of maturity (2:12–14). He must resist the alluring idols of this world and live for eternity (2:15–17; 5:21), purifying himself of sin (3:3), and following in the self-denying, others-serving footsteps of Jesus (2:6; 3:18). Only when Christ returns will the Christian reach total Christlikeness (3:2).

Abiding in Him is not merely a mystical experience; it also involves spiritual knowledge. John repeatedly writes of "knowing" the Lord in a way unique to believers (2:3–4,13–14,29; 3:1,6; 4:6,7–8; 5:20). This knowledge includes doctrinal understanding and discernment (2:18,20–21; 3:2,5,15–16; 4:2,6,16; 5:18,20), and yet it is an experiential knowledge with practical results (2:3–4; 3:6; 4:7–8). Spiritual knowledge culminates in personal assurance that we know God and are united with Him in Christ (2:3,5,28–29; 3:14–15,19,24; 4:13; 5:2,13,15,19–20).

Thus John presents a vivid picture of authentic Christianity so that believers can know they are the children of God, united to His Son, and possessors of life—to their great joy (1:4; 5:13).

Outline:

John's first epistle is difficult to outline because of his fluid and cyclic style. At least a dozen different outlines have been proposed by scholars. The following outline notes a cycle in the first main section of two contrasts and then a promise, repeated four times (1:5—3:24). The second section focuses on exhortations and motives (4:1—5:17). Both sections end on a note of confidence or boldness toward God in prayer (3:21; 5:14).

- I. Incarnation of the Word of Life (1:1–4)
- II. Contrast between God's True Children and the World (1:5—3:24)
 - A. Walking with God in Gospel Forgiveness (1:5—2:2)
 1. Contrast: Fellowship with Light or Darkness (1:5–7)
 2. Contrast: Confession of Sin or Self-Deception (1:8–10)
 3. Promise of Christ's Propitiation and Intercession (2:1–2)
 - B. Obeying God's Law of Love in Gospel Privileges (2:3–14)
 1. Contrast: Obedience or Disobedience to His Commandments (2:3–6)
 2. Contrast: Love in the Light or Hate in the Darkness (2:7–11)
 3. Promises to Children, Young Men, and Fathers (2:12–14)
 - C. Resisting Temptation in Gospel Hope (2:15—3:3)
 1. Contrast: Love of the Father or Love of the World (2:15–17)
 2. Contrast: Christ-Centered Truth or Anti-Christian Lies (2:18–27)
 3. Promise of His Coming for God's Children (2:28—3:3)
 - D. Doing Righteousness and Love with Gospel Boldness (3:4–24)
 1. Contrast: Righteousness by Christ or Sin by the Devil (3:4–10)
 2. Contrast: Love and Life or Hatred and Death (3:11–18)
 3. Promise of Confidence toward God (3:19–24)

- III. Exhortations and Motives to Abide in God's Truth and Love (4:1—5:17)
 - A. Do Not Trust False Prophets (4:1–6)
 - B. Love One Another (4:7—5:3)
 - 1. God's Love in God's Son (4:7–10)
 - 2. God's Love in God's Children (4:11–21)
 - 3. Loving Brothers and Obeying God (5:1–3)
 - C. Hold Onto the Witness to Christ by Faith (5:4–13)
 - D. Pray with Confidence for Each Other (5:14–17)
- IV. Conclusion (5:18–21)
 - A. Knowledge Is in Christ (5:18–20)
 - B. Watch against Idols (5:21)

THE FIRST EPISTLE GENERAL OF

JOHN

CHAPTER 1

THAT which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life;

2 (For the life was manifested, and we have seen *it*, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)

3 That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

4 And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

5 This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

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

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

8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

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

Chapter 1: The Father sent His living Word to us to reveal His light, and true religion consists of walking in the light, though it exposes our sins.

INCARNATION OF THE WORD OF LIFE (1:1–4)

1:1 The *Word* that was *from the beginning* is God's eternal Son (Gen. 1:1; John 1:1). *heard . . . seen . . . handled*. The Word became flesh, a man in body and soul (4:2; John 1:14).

1:2 *with the Father*. In the eternal Trinity (John 1:2,18; 17:5). *seen . . . bear witness*. The author testifies as an eyewitness of Him who is *life* (John 1:4; 14:6). *manifested*. Appeared.

1:3 *fellowship*. Spiritual oneness with God and the church (John 17:21–23). The basis of fellowship is the apostolic teaching (*declare we unto you*) about the incarnate Word of life. *Son*. His deity and distinct personality from the Father. *Jesus*. His humanity and mission, a human name meaning "the Lord saves." *Christ*. His office, "anointed" (Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38) like God's prophets, priests, and kings (Ps. 105:15; Ex. 29:7; 1 Sam. 16:13).

1:4 *joy*. The result of fellowship and goal of the gospel (Luke 2:10; John 15:11; 16:22).

CONTRAST BETWEEN GOD'S TRUE CHILDREN AND THE WORLD (1:5—3:24)

Walking with God in Gospel Forgiveness (1:5—2:2)

Contrast: Fellowship with Light or Darkness (1:5–7)

1:5 *message . . . heard of him*. Teaching of Christ (v. 3), who revealed *God* (John 17:2–3,6,26). *light . . . darkness*. Righteousness, goodness, and truth versus sin, evil, and lies. *God is light*. His nature is absolute and infinite righteousness (Deut. 32:4). See also 4:8; John 4:24. *no darkness at all*. Greek double negative for emphasis.

1:6 *walk*. Our regular, daily pattern of conduct (present tense).

we lie. It is hypocrisy to claim we walk with God while living in unrepentant sin.

1:7 *walk in the light*. Obeying His truth as it reveals, exposes, and directs (John 3:21; 8:12). *blood . . . cleanseth*. Old Testament image of the sacrifice of *Christ*, both human (*Jesus*) and divine (*his Son*), that atones for *all sin* (Lev. 16:18–19,30) so that repentant sinners are counted clean and have *fellowship* with the church, no longer shut out of God's holy presence (Num. 5:1–4).

Contrast: Confession of Sin or Self-Deception (1:8–10)

1:8 *deceive ourselves*. Choose blindness rather than face corruption and guilt (John 3:19–20; 9:39–41). *truth is not in us*. The gospel has not penetrated the heart.

1:9 *confess*. Openly acknowledge (John 9:22). *faithful*. God's promise *to forgive* is sure (Ps. 32:1). *just*. Christ's death satisfied God's justice so as *to cleanse* guilt (v. 7; 2:2; Heb. 9:14).

1:10 *him a liar*. To contradict God's testimony is to insult God's truthfulness (5:10), as Satan did (Gen. 3:1–5). *word is not in us*. See v. 8.

Thoughts for Personal/Family Worship: Chapter 1

1. It was stunning and virtually inconceivable to the ancient Greek mind that the divine Word would become a physical man we could see and touch. It should be stunning to us today that the Lord Jesus would take our lowly nature to His glorious person. Life has come to us in a way we can relate to, with gentleness and sympathy for our weaknesses. Consider these truths and to spend some time praising God for what He did for sinners. How can Christians who lack joy in Christ acquire more genuine joy? What role does the Holy Spirit play in help-

CHAPTER 2

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: 2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins* of the whole world.

3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

6 He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

7 Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning.

8 Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.

9 He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.

10 He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.

11 But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.

12 I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.

13 I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him *that is* from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father.

14 I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him *that is* from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.

15 Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

17 And the world passeth away, and the lust

ing true believers experience fullness of joy?

2. A relationship with the righteous God cannot coexist happily with sin. We must not call ourselves Christians and walk in the darkness; we must walk in the light, allowing Christ to expose our sin, wash us clean, and lead us in His ways. How often do you confess your sins to God? How are you using the Word to help you to see, hate, and forsake sin?

Chapter 2: Standing upon Christ's atoning work, true Christians walk in obedience and love as they enjoy the privileges of God's children at every stage of the Christian life.

Promise of Christ's Propitiation and Intercession (2:1–2)

2:1 *My little children.* John wrote with fatherly authority and affection (1 Thess. 2:11). *that ye sin not.* Forgiveness (1:9) does not promote sin (Ps. 130:4). *advocate.* Friend who speaks for you before a judge. *the righteous.* Christ's perfect obedience (3:5) is the basis of God's acceptance of believers (Isa. 53:11).

2:2 *propitiation.* Sacrifice (1:7) appeasing God's righteous anger against sinners (4:10; Rom. 3:25). *not for ours only.* Not limited to an ethnic group such as the Jews (John 10:16; 11:51–52; Rev. 5:9). *the whole world.* Many, but not every person (see "world" in 5:19; Rom. 1:8; Col. 1:6).

Obeying God's Law of Love in Gospel Privileges (2:3–14)

Contrast: Obedience or Disobedience to His Commandments (2:3–6)

2:3 *hereby.* By this. Assurance of salvation is possible when people *know* God (v. 13) such that they obey His *commandments* (Jer. 22:16).

2:4 *truth is not in him.* See note on 1:8.

2:5 *whoso.* Whoever. *verily.* Truly. *perfected.* Reaches its goal of producing people who obey God (4:12). *hereby.* By this. *in him.* In union with Christ by the Spirit.

2:6 *abideth in him.* Lives in union with Christ. *walk.* See note on

1:6. *as he walked.* Union with Christ results in likeness to Him.

Contrast: Love in the Light or Hate in the Darkness (2:7–11)

2:7–8 *ye had from the beginning.* Perhaps addressing Jews regarding the Old Testament. The *old commandment* of love (Lev. 19:18) became *new* when Christ came and displayed God's love in His death (4:9–10; John 13:34). In Him, the new era of *light* has already dawned (Isa. 60:1; Mal. 4:2; John 1:9; Rom. 13:12). *is past.* Literally, "is passing away" (present tense, see v. 17).

2:9 Hatred of fellow Christians reveals hypocrisy (4:20; John 15:18).

2:10 *none occasion of stumbling.* No cause of sin and harm to himself or others.

2:11 *whither.* Where he goes—to destruction (Prov. 4:18–19; Jer. 23:12; John 11:10; 12:35).

Promises to Children, Young Men, and Fathers (2:12–14)

2:12–14 John assures new converts (*little children*) of their justification in Christ and adoption by *the Father*; mature and aging believers (*fathers*) of their relationship with the unchanging, eternal God; and believers striving for holiness (*young men*) of their victory over the devil (*the wicked one*). *forgiven . . . known . . . overcome.* Greek perfect tense: being in an established state. *for his name's sake.* Because of Him alone, and so for His glory alone (1:7; 2:1–2). *have known* (three times). Believers in Christ do not need a new "knowledge" offered by false teachers.

Resisting Temptation in Gospel Hope (2:15–3:3)

Contrast: Love of the Father or Love of the World (2:15–17)

2:15 *the world.* We must love people but not the present age (v. 17; John 12:25); the world is the devil's kingdom (4:4; John 16:11) of hatred against God (3:1; John 8:23; 14:17; 15:18).

2:16 *lust of the flesh . . . of the eyes.* Strong desires to please the body and to possess visible treasures (Luke 8:14). *pride of life.* Boasting in one's acts and resources.

2:17 *passeth away.* Already falling under Christ's judgment

thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

18 Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.

19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would *no doubt* have continued with us: but *they went out*, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

20 But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.

21 I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.

22 Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.

23 Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: *[but] he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.*

24 Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye

also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.

25 And this is the promise that he hath promised us, *even* eternal life.

26 These *things* have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.

27 But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

28 And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.

29 If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.

CHAPTER 3

BEHOLD, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we

(v. 8; John 12:31). *thereof*. Of it. *abideth for ever*. A member of the eternal kingdom (Isa. 9:7; 40:8).

Contrast: Christ-Centered Truth or Anti-Christian Lies (2:18–27)

2:18 *the last time*. Final period of this age between Christ's first and second coming (Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:2). *antichrist shall come*. One yet in John's future who attempts to take Christ's office or position (2 Thess. 2:3–4). *many antichrists*. False teachers who usurp Christ's office as the true teacher (v. 22; 4:3; Matt. 24:24; 2 John 7). *whereby*. By which.

2:19 *from us . . . not of us*. Once part of the true church, but having rejected it and departed from it, they show that they never truly belonged. The elect persevere with the church. *made manifest*. Plainly shown.

2:20 *unction*. Anointing (Greek *chrisma*) by the Spirit, with Christ (Greek *christos*, "anointed"; see note on 1:3) to know God's truth, in contrast to the antichrists (Greek *antichristoi*).

2:22 False teachers reject *Jesus* as God's *Christ*, His anointed Prophet, Priest, and King, probably because they denied that a physical man could be the spiritual Lord (4:3; 2 John 7).

2:23 *Whosoever*. Everyone who. It impossible to know God without trusting and confessing Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Rom. 10:9).

2:24 *which ye have heard*. The ancient revelation of Christ in Scripture (John 5:39). *abide in . . . continue in*. Remain in spiritual union.

2:26 *seduce*. Lead astray.

2:27 *anointing*. Same word as "unction" (v. 20). Anointed with Christ's Spirit, they are subordinate prophets, priests, and kings (Acts 2:18; Rev. 1:6). *need not that any man teach you*. The new covenant promise (Isa. 54:13; Jer. 31:34; John 6:45). *anointing teacheth you of all things*. The ministry of the Spirit of truth, promised by Christ (John 16:13).

Promise of His Coming for God's Children (2:28—3:3)

2:28 *abide in him*. Stay joined to God by clinging to Christ as the Bible reveals Him (v. 24; John 15:5–7). *he shall appear*. Christ's *coming* in visible glory (3:2) on judgment day (4:17).

ashamed. The destiny of the wicked, not those who trust in Christ (Ps. 25:2–3; 31:1,17).

2:29 *born of him*. A new spiritual beginning caused by God (3:9; 4:7; 5:1,4,18; John 1:13; 3:1–8), creating a new heart in God's *righteous* image inclined to do *righteousness* (Ezek. 36:26–27).

Thoughts for Personal/Family Worship: Chapter 2

1. Sometimes when we take our children to a park, we pay for their admission and their hands get stamped to show that their admission price has been paid. John explains the stamp that marks those who truly know God: they obey God's laws, love God's people, and receive God's doctrines. They should remember, however, that these marks did not pay for their admission to the kingdom; only the death and intercession of God's righteous Son does so. How can the marks and payment of salvation guide a person doubting his salvation?
2. Why is it important to fight against sin? How can we go on fighting against sin without becoming discouraged by our numerous failures? What comfort do true believers find in Jesus' work as their advocate when they do sin and repent of it?
3. God's people have the anointing of the Spirit to teach them the truth. Their faith does not depend on human testimony or secret knowledge from a special teacher, but on God's Spirit speaking through God's Word (1 Cor. 2:1–5). However, God's Spirit does work through Bible teachers (John 21:15; Eph. 4:11). How should we give due respect and attention to teachers without giving them the place of the Spirit?

Chapter 3: Christian hope motivates purity, and true spiritual life produces righteousness and love in God's children, so that they may have confidence in their prayers to God.

3:1 *manner*. Kind. *bestowed*. Given. *sons*. Literally, "children"

know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

3 And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

4 Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.

5 And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.

6 Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.

7 Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.

8 He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

9 Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

10 In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

11 For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

12 Not as Cain, *who* was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Be-

cause his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.

13 Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.

14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not *his* brother abideth in death.

15 Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

16 Hereby perceive we the love of *God*, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren.

17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of *compassion* from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

19 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

20 For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

21 Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, *then* have we confidence toward God.

22 And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

23 And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and

(also v. 2). Adoption by God (John 1:12) is an astonishing gift from the extraordinary *love* of the *Father* (Eph. 1:4–6), but God's children are strangers to *the world*.

3:2 *doth not yet appear*. The blessedness of God's children is still hidden (Rom. 8:18–25), but when Christ *shall appear*, their vision of His glory (John 17:24) will transform them into the same image (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:42–49).

3:3 Christian *hope* includes love and reverence for the coming Christ, and thus striving to be *pure* in expectation of His appearing in glory (2:28; Titus 2:12–13).

Doing Righteousness and Love with Gospel Boldness (3:4–24)

Contrast: Righteousness by Christ or Sin by the Devil (3:4–10)

3:4 *whosoever*. Everyone who. *transgression of the law*. Lawlessness, or rebellion against God's law (Rom. 8:7), either doing what it forbids or not doing what it requires.

3:5 *was manifested*. Appeared on earth. *take away our sins*. By His propitiation (2:2; Ps. 103:12; John 1:29; Heb. 10:4) and personal righteousness (*in him is no sin*, see 2:1).

3:6 *Whosoever*. Everyone who. *sinneth*. Greek present tense: continuing in constant sin without repentance. *seen him*. The spiritual sight of His glory transforms (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:6; 3 John 11).

3:8 *the devil sinneth from the beginning*. See Gen. 3:1–5; John 8:44; Rev. 12:9. Christ came to *destroy* sin. He is the seed of Eve (Gen. 3:15) who conquered *the devil* (John 12:31; 16:11).

3:9 *born of God*. See note on 2:29. *his seed*. Christ's kingdom is planted in the soul in the new birth through the Word (Matt. 13:3,32,38; 1 Peter 1:23), so that the person's nature changes and he *cannot* continue in a lifestyle of habitual *sin* (present tense), though he still sins (1:8–10).

3:10 *manifest*. Clearly seen. *children of the devil*. The "seed" of the serpent, people made by God but ruled by Satan (Gen.

3:15; John 8:44). *whosoever*. Everyone who.

Contrast: Love and Life or Hatred and Death (3:11–18)

3:11 On the ancient law of love, see note on 2:7–8.

3:12 *of that wicked one*. A child of the devil. *slew*. Violently killed (Gen. 4:8). *wherefore*. Why. *Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous*. See John 3:19–20; 7:7; 15:22,24.

3:13 *Marvel not*. Do not be amazed. See John 15:18–19; 16:1–4; 17:14.

3:14 The new birth is a spiritual resurrection *from death unto life* through Christ (John 5:24–26; Eph. 2:5), evident through the *love* it produces (4:7).

3:15 *Whosoever*. Everyone who. See Matt. 5:21–22; Rev. 21:8; 22:15.

3:16 *Hereby perceive we*. By this we have come to know. *and we ought to*. Believers are obligated to imitate Christ's love (John 15:12–13; Eph. 4:32–5:2).

3:17 *whoso*. The one who. *this world's good*. Physical resources. *shutteth up his bowels*. Refuses to extend sympathy and mercy from his heart. *dwelleth . . . in him*. See 4:12.

3:18 *deed*. Work. Love must be more than talk; it leads to faithful action (cf. James 2:15–16).

Promise of Confidence toward God (3:19–24)

3:19 *hereby*. By this. *of the truth*. People who believe and obey Christ's Word (John 18:37). Believers who love others in self-denying action (vv. 14,16–18) may have a settled assurance that they are saved (2:3). *before him*. In God's presence.

3:20 *if our heart condemn us*. Believers may experience guilt and fear (4:18), but they can trust that God's love (v. 16) *is greater*, and He knows their sincere love (John 21:17).

3:21 *confidence*. Boldness to draw near to the Father.

3:22 *whatsoever*. What. Forgiven and sanctified in Christ (1:7;

love one another, as he gave us commandment.
24 And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

CHAPTER 4

BELOVED, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that *spirit* of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

4 Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

5 They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.

6 We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth

us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

12 No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son *to be* the Saviour of the world.

15 Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

16 And we have known and believed the love that

2:1–2; 3:5,8), the works of believers are *pleasing* to God, and the Father answers their prayers (5:14).

3:23 God's will is summed up by faith in Christ and love for people (John 6:29; 13:34). *name*. The revealed glory of Christ's person and work.

3:24 *dwelleth in him*. Abides in him. *hereby*. By this. The *Spirit* of God gives assurance by producing His fruit and giving the spiritual insight to recognize His work in the soul (Rom. 8:9,13–16; Gal. 5:22–23).

Thoughts for Personal/Family Worship: Chapter 3

1. This chapter contrasts God's children and the world in terms of righteousness versus sin, love versus hatred, and life versus death. How would you summarize the difference between a true Christian and an unsaved person? Where do you stand?
2. If we are true believers, how does a proper understanding of the doctrine of adoption impact our relationship with God as our Father (v. 1)? With the world (v. 1)? With the future (v. 2)? With ourselves (v. 3)? With the family of believers (vv. 14–18)?
3. If you are born of God, then God has given you promises. When Christ comes, you will gaze into His glory without shame and be made like Him. You can have confidence toward God right now because the Spirit is working in your life. Do you have a right to claim these promises? Which of these promises is most precious to you now, and why?

EXHORTATIONS AND MOTIVES TO ABIDE IN GOD'S TRUTH AND LOVE (4:1—5:17)

Chapter 4: Having distinguished between God's children and the world, John now calls the church to reject false teachers and to love one another as a sign of union with God in Christ.

Do Not Trust False Prophets (4:1–6)

4:1 *spirits*. Spiritual powers operating in people (*prophets*) who claimed an extraordinary gift to speak divine revelations; in that time of new revelation, the apostolic church had to test (*try*) whether they were from God (1 Cor. 14:29–31; Eph. 2:20; 3:4–5; 1 Thess. 5:19–22).

4:2 *Hereby*. By this. True teaching by the Spirit declares the incarnate person (*come in the flesh*) and office (*Christ*) of the Savior (*Jesus*; see notes on 1:3; 2:22).

4:3 *spirit of antichrist*. Satan (see note on 2:18). *whereof*. Of which.

4:4 *Ye are of God*. The church belongs to God's kingdom. *he that is in you*. God (3:24; 4:12,16). *he that is in the world*. The devil (3:8; 5:19).

4:5 *They are of the world*. The false prophets belong to Satan's kingdom. *speak they of the world*. They teach from the world's deceptive, lustful, and proud mindset (2:15–17).

4:6 *We are of God*. The apostles were sent by God. *heareth us*. How people receive the teachings of the apostles reveals whether they belong to God (John 13:20). *Hereby*. By this.

Love One Another (4:7—5:3)

God's Love in God's Son (4:7–10)

4:7 *every one that loveth is born of God*. The world has selfish love (2:15–16; Matt. 5:46–47; 7:9–11; Eph. 5:29), but Christlike love (3:16) is a supernatural gift and sign of salvation.

4:8 *God is love*. God's essence is pure and infinite love (Ex. 34:6). God is also spirit and light (1:5; John 4:24), so divine love is not physical attraction or tolerance for sin.

4:9 *was manifested*. Appeared, became visible. *sent*. On a mission to do His Father's will (John 4:34; 6:29,38; 17:3–4). *only begotten Son*. God's only Son by nature not adoption (John 1:1,14,18), and uniquely precious to Him like Isaac was to Abraham (Gen. 22:2,12).

4:10 *Herein*. In this. *God so loved* people who hated Him and provoked His anger that He sacrificed His Son (John 3:16,20,36) to satisfy His justice and pacify His anger (*propitiation*, see note on 2:2).

God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

19 We love him, because he first loved us.

20 If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

21 And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

CHAPTER 5

WHOSOEVER believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.

2 By this we know that we love the children of God,

when we love God, and keep his commandments.

3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.

4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, *even* our faith.

5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

6 This is he that came by water and blood, *even* Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.

7 For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.

8 And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

9 If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son.

God's Love in God's Children (4:11–21)

4:11 *we ought also.* The gospel obligates the saved to imitate their Savior (see note on 3:16).

4:12 *seen God.* God's essence is invisible (v. 20; John 1:18; 1 Tim. 1:17; Heb. 11:27). *love is perfected.* God's love, always perfect in Him, reaches its perfect goal when it unites God and man to become visible in God's human image (2:5; 4:17–18; Gen. 1:26; Col. 1:15; 3:10).

4:13 *Hereby.* By this. *dwell.* Same word as "abide." of *his Spirit*. A measure of the Spirit's work of love and faith, by which Christians *know* they are one with God (3:24).

4:14 *we have seen and do testify.* The eyewitness testimony of the apostles (1:2). *Saviour of the world.* Not just Jews, but sinners of all nations (John 4:40–42).

4:15 *Whosoever.* The one who. See 2:23.

4:16 *love . . . to us.* Or, love "in us." They can experience His love (Rom. 5:5). *dwelleth.* Abides.

4:17 *our love made perfect.* Literally, "the love has been fulfilled with us." God's love in Christ (vv. 9,16) makes people like Christ (*as he is*) to some degree even now (*in this world*) so that they have confident hope for *the day of judgment*.

4:18 *casteth out fear.* Love goes hand in hand with the fear of reverence toward God (Ps. 33:18; 103:11; 130:4). But God's love drives out the fear of future divine punishment (*torment*, 2:28; 4:17; Matt. 25:46). *not made perfect.* Not reached maturity in assurance of God's love.

4:19 Our love is born of His grace (v. 7).

4:20 *If a man say . . . liar.* See 1:6; 2:4.

4:21 See 3:11; Matt. 22:35–40.

Thoughts for Personal/Family Worship: Chapter 4

1. What false teachers present themselves to us today in person or through media? How can you recognize them? (See 4:2; Deut. 13:1–3; Matt. 7:15–20; Acts 17:10–12; Gal. 1:8–9; 1 Tim. 4:1–5.) How should you respond? How do the differences between those who are of the world and those who are of God affect your daily life and relationships? Should it affect you and your family more? In what ways?
2. God is love; as the Puritans said, Christ is love covered

over with flesh. The Christian life is the indwelling of God's love in men, women, and children. Christ's coming aims to produce peace and joy in His beloved, not terror. How prominent is love in your view of God? Is His love hidden behind His majesty or wrath? How can you meditate more on His love? How can you grow in your own practice of Christlike love?

Chapter 5: The children of God have true, spiritual knowledge of God, by which they can stand together against the world for the true faith.

Loving Brothers and Obeying God (5:1–3)

5:1 *Whosoever.* Everyone who. *believeth.* Believing (present tense) results from having been *born of God* (perfect tense; John 1:12–13; 3:3). It is impossible to love the Father (*him that begat*) without loving all believers, for they are His children in His image (*begotten of him*).

5:2–3 To love people requires obeying God's *commandments*. Law directs love. *not grievous.* Not a painful burden. Love delights in God's law (Ps. 1:2; 119:97; John 14:15).

Hold Onto the Witness to Christ by Faith (5:4–13)

5:4–5 Everything God produces in the new birth (*whatsoever is born of God*) conquers (*overcometh*) the devil's power, for God comes to reign in the soul (4:4) through *faith* in the Word (2:14). Believers still suffer and sin, but they conquer because *faith* unites them to the incarnate *Son of God* who suffered but overcame the world by the cross (John 16:11,33; Rev. 5:5,9; 17:14).

5:6 *water and blood.* Christ's baptism (John 1:32–34) and death (1:7). *beareth witness.* Testifies.

5:7 *bear record.* Testify (same word as "bear witness," vv. 6,8). *Word.* Christ (1:1–2). *Holy Ghost.* Holy Spirit. *three are one.* See Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28:19; John 10:30; 14:10–11; 17:21–23.

5:8 *three that bear witness.* The Father testified at Christ's baptism (Mark 1:11). Christ's death testified of fulfilling the Old Testament (John 19:35–37). The Spirit testifies to Christ through the apostolic word (John 15:26–27; 16:7–15). *agree in one.* All confirm that Jesus is God's Son.

5:9 *witness of God.* The divine testimony of the Word and the

10 He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.

11 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

12 He that hath the Son hath life; *and* he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

14 And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

15 And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

16 If any man see his brother sin a sin *which is* not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.

17 All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.

18 We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.

19 *And* we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.

20 And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, *even* in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

Spirit is the authoritative and sufficient basis for saving faith in Christ (1 Cor. 2:1–5).

5:10–11 *witness in himself.* The Spirit testifies within the heart (2:27). *record.* Testimony. *life is in his Son.* A summary of the gospel.

5:12 Without *the Son* there is no *life* (John 14:6). The gospel excludes all other religions (2:23; 2 John 9), demanding faith in Christ alone.

5:13 *written . . . that ye may know that ye have eternal life.* The main purpose of this epistle is for believers to rejoice (1:4) in knowing they have life in God through Christ (2:3,5,28–29; 3:14–15,19,24; 4:13; 5:2,19–20). *that ye may believe.* See John 20:31.

Pray with Confidence for Each Other (5:14–17)

5:14–15 *confidence . . . in him.* Boldness toward God (3:21). God revealed much of *his will* in the law (2:17) and gospel (John 6:38–40) to direct His children in confident prayer (John 15:7).

5:16–17 Believers should pray for God to give spiritual renewal (*life*) to someone observed in a pattern of disobedience (present tense *sin*). John gives no encouragement to pray for false teachers who, after experiencing the gospel and the church (2:19), become enemies of Christ, cutting themselves off from life (*sin unto death*, Gal. 1:9; Heb. 6:4–6).

CONCLUSION (5:18–21)

Knowledge Is in Christ (5:18–20)

5:18–20 These three verses conclude John's teaching with three assertions of what *we know*.

5:18 *whosoever.* Everyone who. *sinneth not.* See notes on 3:6,9. *begotten.* Either the child of God guards *himself* (v. 21; 3:3) or (another reading) the only *begotten* Son guards him.

wicked one. The "Evil One," Satan (2:13–14). *toucheth.* Holds or harms (4:4; Ps. 105:15).

5:19 *of God.* In God's kingdom. *whole world.* Not every person, but all people not born of God. *lieth in wickedness.* Are part of the kingdom of the Evil One (3:8,10).

5:20 *given us an understanding.* By His Word (1:5) and Spirit (2:20). *Jesus Christ* is not only the revealer of God, but He is also *the true God, and eternal life* (1:2; John 1:1,4; 20:28).

Watch against Idols (5:21)

5:21 *keep.* Watch over and guard. *idols.* Images of gods (Ex. 20:4–6), or any thing or idea that takes the place of the true God in our lives (v. 20; 2:15–16; Matt. 6:24; Rom. 1:23; Col. 3:5).

Thoughts for Personal/Family Worship: Chapter 5

- Christ is the teacher of His people by His Word and Spirit. He gives us the truth and convinces us of its validity by divine and authoritative testimony in the Word and in the heart. The triune God is Himself the witness to this truth. Therefore, we should submit to the Bible and receive all that it says, regardless of what men may say.**
- Consider what it means to "overcome the world." Why is it necessary to engage in spiritual warfare in order to overcome the world? In what ways can we rise above the world's way of thinking and resist worldly peer pressure? Who gives us the power to do that? Offer an example from your own life of overcoming the world by the Spirit's grace.**
- God wants His children to know that they have life. He does not delight in slavish fear among believers, but in their assurance. Based on what you have read in this book, how can someone have assurance of being God's child? How can one grow in that assurance?**

INTRODUCTION TO

2 JOHN

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- Authorship:** The author identifies himself simply as “the elder,” but the style and teachings of this epistle link it (and the third epistle) closely to John’s first epistle (see the Introduction to 1 John). An apostle could refer to himself as an elder, for Peter did so (1 Peter 5:1). Irenaeus (d. AD 202) quotes 2 John and ascribes it to John, the disciple of the Lord. Thus we may conclude that it was written by the apostle John.
- Date:** Uncertain. This epistle appears to address the same crisis as 1 John (v. 7; 1 John 2:18–27) and thus may have been written around the same time (perhaps AD 85–95).
- Theme:** The importance of love and truth for the church of the elect.
- Purpose:** To lovingly exhort a church and its members to watch that they continue in love and the truth of Christ though false teachers have appeared.
- Synopsis:** *This Epistle’s Contribution to Redemptive Revelation*
John’s second letter addresses “the elect lady and her children,” which, given that Israel (Isa. 52:2), the church (Rev. 21:9), and ancient cities (Isa. 47:1) were often addressed as women, likely refers to a church and its members. He shows them that the Christian life consists of both truth and love (v. 3). God’s truth commands us to love one another (v. 5), and enters the soul to produce that love (v. 1). Love makes Christian leaders rejoice to hear that people are faithfully living in submission to the truth (v. 4). Love especially moves Christians to rejoice in being together with other faithful people (v. 12). Yet, John warns, love does not encourage us to welcome every teacher, but to remain faithful to the ancient truth revealed by God (v. 6). Churches must discern those who fundamentally reject God’s truth about Christ (v. 7), staying alert for they threaten their eternal well-being (v. 8). Teachers who do not receive the truth of Christ are outsiders to God and His church, and should receive no welcome or encouragement from the people of God (vv. 10–11).
- Outline:**
- I. Greetings in Truth and Love (vv. 1–3)
 - II. Commendation for Walking in Love (vv. 4–6)
 - III. Warning against False Teachers (vv. 7–11)
 - IV. Conclusion and Greetings (vv. 12–13)

THE SECOND EPISTLE GENERAL OF

JOHN

CHAPTER 1

THE elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth;

2 For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever.

3 Grace be with you, mercy, *and* peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

4 I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.

5 And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another.

6 And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.

7 For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

8 Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.

9 Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.

10 If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed:

GREETINGS IN TRUTH AND LOVE (VV. 1–3)

1 *elect*. Chosen by God (John 17:2,6; Rev. 17:14). *lady and her children*. Most likely a metaphor for a church and its members. *love in the truth . . . known the truth*. The Word of God (1 John 1:8,10) creates a bond of love among all who believe and obey it (1 Peter 1:22–23).

2 *For the truth's sake*. Because of the Word. *dwelleth in us*. Is received permanently in the heart (John 8:31–32; 15:7; 1 John 2:14). *with us for ever*. Eternal, unchanging truth (John 10:35).

3 *Grace*. Undeserved blessing for the needy. *mercy*. Help for the suffering. *peace*. Restored relationships of harmony with God and people. Salvation and spiritual growth come from both *the Father and the Son*, implying that both are fully God. *in truth and love*. Spiritual blessings come through knowing and believing biblical teachings and practicing them in Christian love.

COMMENDATION FOR WALKING IN LOVE (VV. 4–6)

4 *rejoiced greatly*. The faithfulness of Christians is the joy of Christian ministers. *found of*. Discovered or learned. *walking in truth*. Living in faith and obedience to the Word.

5 *beseech*. Ask. *new . . . from the beginning*. The ancient law of love (Lev. 19:18; 1 John 2:7).

6 *walk after his commandments*. Conduct ourselves according to God's laws. Love is not contrary to obedience to the law, but is fulfilled in it (John 14:15; Rom. 13:8–10; 1 John 5:2–3).

WARNING AGAINST FALSE TEACHERS (VV. 7–11)

7 *deceivers . . . antichrist*. False teachers opposing Christ (1 John 2:18,22; 4:3). *Christ*. The office of the Savior as God's anointed Prophet, Priest, and King. *in the flesh*. Incarnate as a man.

8 *Look*. Watch. *wrought*. Worked or accomplished. Church members must be alert or false teaching may ensnare them

and rob them of eternal *reward* gained by faithfully supporting the proclamation of the gospel (John 4:36).

9 *Whosoever*. Everyone who. *transgresseth, and abideth not*. Steps outside of and leaves behind. *doctrine of Christ*. Teaching about Christ's person and work. Rejecting the gospel is not an alternative form of spirituality, but a life without God (*hath not God*, 1 John 2:22–23; 5:11–12).

10–11 Christians should refuse even basic hospitality to teachers of heresy. This does not refer to confused believers or unbelieving neighbors, but to people intentionally seeking to spread heresy (Rom. 16:17; Gal. 1:8–9; Titus 3:10). *bid him God speed*. Literally, "says to him, 'Rejoice'"; speaks to him a greeting. To speak a blessing on a false teacher is to become a partner (*partaker*) with him in *evil*. This may refer to the official blessing of a church on a visiting missionary.

CONCLUSION AND GREETINGS (VV. 12–13)

12 *paper*. Probably a sheet of papyrus, made of fiber from papyrus reeds. *that our joy may be full*. Those who love each other desire personal, *face to face* meetings, not just letters.

13 *children of thy elect sister*. Perhaps members of another local church (see note on v. 1).

Thoughts for Personal/Family Worship

1. Truth and love are closely related to each other. What are the consequences of having truth without love? Love without truth? What does it mean to love someone "in the truth" (v. 1)? How can we improve the balance of truth and love in our relationships at home, at church, at school, and in society?
2. The truth of Christ creates love in the family of God. Why is this so? Why is it that those who trust in God's truth

11 For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

12 Having many things to write unto you, I would not *write* with paper and ink: but I trust

to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full.

13 The children of thy elect sister greet thee. Amen.

find themselves attracted to each other and desiring to serve one another?

3. Christians must give no approval or support to false teachers. Those who seek to publicly promote lies contrary to fundamental truths about Christ are not mis-

guided brothers but deadly enemies. Christians should love them, pray for them, and try to show them their errors. But believers should not offer them the least encouragement or hospitality, for this gives false teachers an open door to spread their soul-damning errors.

INTRODUCTION TO

3 JOHN

Authorship: The apostle John. See the Introduction to 2 John: Authorship.

Date: Uncertain; probably late in the first century.

Theme: Love for the truth; and support for true Christian teachers.

Purpose: To encourage love among brothers and service to traveling missionaries.

Synopsis: *This Epistle's Contribution to Redemptive Revelation*

John wrote this letter to a faithful Christian man about whom we know little except his name, Gaius. This common Latin name belonged to other men in the New Testament (Acts 19:29; 20:4; Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:14)—and to more than one Roman dictator. The Gaius whom John loved was no dictator. John calls him “beloved” four times in this short epistle (vv. 1,2,5,11), a lavish reminder of his pleasure in Gaius’s faithfulness. He is a model of soul prosperity (v. 2) by the power of God’s truth (vv. 3–4), producing the fruit of love and missionary support (vv. 5–8).

In contrast stands Diotrephes, a leader in a local church. Whereas true servants of the Lord seek the glory of His name through the gospel (v. 7), Diotrephes sought his own glory (v. 9). It does not appear that he was a heretic, for John makes no mention of false doctrine here. Yet despite his orthodoxy the truth had not entered his heart, and his proud and divisive conduct implied that he did not belong to God (v. 11). He slandered the broader church and refused to allow anyone in his congregation to welcome missionaries as they traveled through the area (v. 10).

Where John’s second epistle warns against welcoming false teachers, the third gives a balancing exhortation for believers to warmly receive and help preachers who seek the glory of Christ and to maintain fellowship with other congregations.

Outline:

- I. Greeting: Love in the Truth (v. 1)
- II. Blessing and Joy in Gaius (vv. 2–4)
- III. Commendation for Caring for Missionaries (vv. 5–8)
- IV. Warning against Diotrephes (vv. 9–11)
- V. Conclusion and Greeting (vv. 12–14)

THE THIRD EPISTLE GENERAL OF

JOHN

CHAPTER 1

THE elder unto the wellbeloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth.

2 Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.

3 For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth.

4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

5 Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers;

6 Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well:

7 Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles.

8 We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth.

9 I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.

10 Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, nei-

GREETING: LOVE IN THE TRUTH (V. 1)

1 *wellbeloved*. Loved, same Greek word as “beloved” (vv. 2, 5, 11). *love in the truth*. Love as a fellow follower of God’s Word (see note on 2 John 1).

2 *wish*. Pray (KJV marg.). *even as thy soul prospereth*. The most important prosperity is the flourishing of the soul in union with Christ (Mark 8:36; Phil. 3:8).

BLESSING AND JOY IN GAIUS (VV. 2–4)

3 *I rejoiced greatly . . . walkest in the truth*. See note on 2 John 4. *brethren*. Brothers in God’s family. *truth that is in thee*. God’s Word planted in the heart with power (John 5:38; 1 Thess. 2:13; 1 John 2:14; 2 John 2).

4 *my children*. Christians, whom John addressed as a spiritual father (1 John 2:1). It is the *joy* of God’s servants to see people transformed by biblical *truth* (1 Thess. 2:19–20; Phil. 4:1).

COMMENDATION FOR CARING FOR MISSIONARIES (VV. 5–8)

5 *whatsoever*. Whatever. Gaius *faithfully* served visiting Christians (*brethren*), even though they were *strangers* to him—a model of hospitality (Heb. 13:2; 1 Peter 4:9).

6 *borne witness*. Testified. *charity*. Love. *bring forward*. Send out with assistance (Rom. 15:24; 1 Cor. 16:6, 11). *after a godly sort*. In a way worthy of God and glorifying to God.

7 *for his name’s sake*. To glorify God in preaching the gospel of Christ—the highest motive for missions (John 12:28; Acts 9:15–16; Rom. 1:5; Phil. 1:18, 20). *taking nothing*. Not seeking payment from the peoples they evangelized, relying instead upon the generosity of believers.

8 *fellowhelpers to the truth*. Christians who give hospitality and support to missionaries are coworkers with them for the spreading of the Word of God (Phil. 1:5, 7; 4:15–19).

WARNING AGAINST DIOTREPES (VV. 9–11)

9 *I wrote unto the church*. This letter was not preserved. *loveth to have the preeminence*. Loves to have first place, which be-

longs to Christ (Col. 1:18). *receiveth us not*. His pride led him to cut off relations with the apostle’s church and ignore the apostle’s authority.

10 *Wherefore*. For this reason. *remember his deeds*. Implement church discipline. *prating*. Speaking nonsense. *therewith*. With that. *casteth them out*. Like a dictator over his kingdom, he isolated the church and excommunicated those who welcomed other believers.

11 *follow not*. Do not imitate. *of God*. Belongs to God’s kingdom (1 John 4:4; 5:19). *hath not seen God*. Lacks the spiritual knowledge of God that makes the soul like God (see note on 1 John 3:6).

CONCLUSION AND GREETING (VV. 12–14)

12 *Demetrius*. Possibly the carrier of this letter. *hath good report*. Has been testified to. *and of the truth itself*. The gospel itself testifies of the character of a true believer, the qualities that Demetrius clearly had. *bear record*. Testify. *our record is true*. See John 21:24.

13–14 *pen*. Reed with cut tip dipped in ink for writing. *not with ink . . . speak face to face*. See note on 2 John 12. *salute*. Greet. Some translations separate the words from *Peace* onward into a separate verse (v. 15). Verse divisions were not inspired by God but added centuries later.

Thoughts for Personal/Family Worship

1. How is Gaius a good example for us to follow? What does it mean to be “walking in the truth” (vv. 3–4)? How could we and our families walk in the truth more effectively?
2. William Carey, pioneer missionary to India, once compared missions to descending into a deep mine to recover treasures, and said, “I will go down, but you must hold the ropes.” Missionaries need the support of other Christians. This epistle makes it clear that they need not only financial assistance, but also love and hospitality. How are you sharing your resources, love, and home

ther doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth *them* out of the church.

11 Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.

12 Demetrius hath good report of all *men*, and of

the truth itself: yea, and we *also* bear record; and ye know that our record is true.

13 I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee:

14 But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace *be* to thee. *Our* friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name.

to strengthen those who go out to the nations for the Lord's sake?

3. It is easy to point the finger at arrogant leaders like Diotrephes who try to take Christ's place, but we must begin with our own pride. John Newton said, "I have read of many wicked popes, but the worst pope I ever

met is Pope Self." How do you see Diotrephes's pride operating in yourself? How can you combat it? Demetrius was spoken well of by all men (v. 12). What would those who know us best say about our love for the truth and for hospitality? What would our non-Christian neighbors say?
