# That Ye May Know

## The Epistles of John — First, Second and Third John, Verse by Verse, with the Antichrist and Love Explained

A verse-by-verse study of the three letters of John, with the antichrist and love explained at its centre.

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# The Purpose of This Study

When Israel came back from Babylon, the people gathered "as one man into the street that was before the water gate" (Nehemiah 8:1), and asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law. Ezra stood on a pulpit of wood, high enough for all to see him, and opened the book.

> **Nehemiah 8:5** *And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up:*
>
> **Nehemiah 8:8** *So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.*

That is the purpose of this study: to read John's letters distinctly, to give the sense, and to cause the reader to understand. Everything in the pages that follow serves one of those three things.

John told his readers his own purpose, and it is the title of this study:

> **1 John 5:13** *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.*

John did not write to make his readers wonder whether they belonged to God. He wrote so that they might *know*. A believer who reads these letters with understanding should close them sure of his life in

God, clear about the truth concerning Jesus Christ, warm in love toward his brethren, and awake to every teaching that would lead him astray.

**In short.** Read distinctly, give the sense, cause them to understand: so that the reader may know.

## How to Read This Study

**The study has five parts.**

- **Part One, Before We Read,** is six chapters. They tell who John was, when and where he wrote, the world his letters entered, where the letters stand among the other epistles, to whom they were written, and how First John is arranged. They are short, and each states its findings plainly.
- **Part Two, First John, Verse by Verse,** takes the whole letter in lettered sections.
- **Part Three, The Antichrist and Love,** gathers the two subjects that the structure of the letter sets against each other. Chapter 7 brings together everything John says about the antichrist, with what the rest of Scripture says; Chapter 8 does the same for love.
- **Part Four, Second and Third John, Verse by Verse,** takes the two short letters.
- **Part Five** draws the study together in a concluding summary, with a guide to what is in the appendices.

**Each section of Part Two opens the same way.** A short note tells where the section stands in the whole letter. A chart shows the section's own structure, drawn as E. W. Bullinger drew it, with matching parts marked by the same letter (the second in italics), so that the reader sees it from above before reading it. Then the whole section is printed straight through. After that, each verse is taken in turn:

- **The text** of the verse, printed in full.
- **The commentary,** which opens by tying the verse to what came before, then takes the verse phrase by phrase. Each phrase of substance stands in bold at the head of its paragraph. Every new word is explained, with the Greek where it helps. Every Scripture the verse draws on is quoted or retold, so that the reader need not leave the page. The questions a verse raises are answered plainly from the text.
- **Figures of speech,** where the verse uses one: the name E. W. Bullinger gives it, what it means, and what it does in the verse.

**Where readers divide.** At the few places where good readers have taken a verse in different ways, this study gives its answer plainly, with the reason in a sentence, and points to the appendix where the other reading and the evidence are set out. The narrative stays clear; nothing is hidden.

**God, and His Son Jesus Christ.** John's letters speak of "the Father" and "his Son Jesus Christ" (1:3) side by side, and never confuse them. God is one. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, "come in the flesh" (4:2), sent by the Father "to be the Saviour of the world" (4:14). This study names which one is meant wherever a pronoun could be taken either way.

**The gift of holy spirit.** John speaks of "the Spirit which he hath given us" (3:24). Where the word means God's gift to the believer, received at the new birth, this study writes "holy spirit" and calls it "it"; where it means God Himself, who "is a Spirit" (John 4:24), it says so.

**The King James Version** is the text throughout. Where the Greek behind it differs from other Greek texts in a way that matters, the study says so (Appendix D).

**In short.** Part One prepares the reader, Part Two reads First John verse by verse, Part Three gathers the antichrist and love, Part Four reads Second and Third John, Part Five draws it together. The evidence for every contested answer is in an appendix, named at the place it is needed.

## First John at a Glance

First John is not a loose collection of thoughts. It is built. E. W. Bullinger set out its structure in *The Companion Bible*, and this study has tested it against the Greek text and adopted it (Chapter 6; Appendix A).

**First John as a Whole**

*(Introversion and alternation)*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **A** | | | 1:1–2:17. CHRIST. |
| | **B** | **C** | 2:18-29. ANTICHRIST. |
| | | **D** | 3:1-24. LOVE. |
| | ***B*** | ***C*** | 4:1-6. ANTICHRIST. |
| | | ***D*** | 4:7-21. LOVE. |
| ***A*** | | | 5:1-21. CHRIST. |

*Structure after E. W. Bullinger, The Companion Bible.*

The letter begins with Christ and ends with Christ. Between, it sets the antichrist against love, and does it twice. The reader who keeps this picture in mind will never lose his way in the letter.

**In short.** Christ; antichrist and love; antichrist and love; Christ.

## Part One — Before We Read

Before the first verse, the reader should know who wrote these letters, when, where, to whom, and why. The six chapters that follow answer those questions as far as Scripture answers them, and say plainly where the answer comes from history rather than from Scripture.

# Chapter 1 — Who Is John?

None of the three letters names its writer. First John begins without a name at all, and Second and Third John begin simply, "The elder." Yet the early church never doubted who had written them, and the letters themselves point plainly to one man: John, the son of Zebedee, the disciple whom Jesus loved. This chapter introduces him, first from Scripture, then from what those who came after him remembered.

## A. The fisherman of Galilee

John grew up on the sea of Galilee. His father was Zebedee, a fisherman with his own boat and his own hired men (Mark 1:20). His brother was James. They worked alongside another pair of brothers, Simon Peter and Andrew, and Luke calls James and John "partners with Simon" (Luke 5:10).

It was in the boat, mending the nets, that the call came:

> **Matthew 4:21** *And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them.*
>
> **Matthew 4:22** *And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.*

Picture it: a working morning, the nets spread out over the gunwales, an old father and his two grown sons bent over the torn places. A voice calls from the shore. The sons put down the nets, step out of the boat, and go. Their father is left with the hired men. From that day John belonged to Jesus.

## B. A son of thunder

Jesus gave the two brothers a name of their own:

> **Mark 3:17** *And James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and he surnamed them Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder:*

The Gospels show why the name fitted. When a village of the Samaritans would not receive Jesus, James and John asked, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?" (Luke 9:54). Jesus turned and rebuked them. On another day John reported, "Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us" (Mark 9:38), and again he was corrected. And when the two brothers came asking, "Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory" (Mark 10:37), Jesus answered that they did not know what they asked.

Thunder, fire from heaven, the best seats in the kingdom: this was the young John. The old man who wrote these letters writes "God is love" (4:8, 16), and calls his readers "little children." He learned it. The fire did not go out of him (no one in the New Testament writes more sharply about liars and deceivers), but it came to burn for the truth and for the brethren rather than for himself.

## C. One of the three

Among the twelve, three were taken where the others were not: Peter, James and John. They alone went into the house when Jesus raised the daughter of Jairus: "he suffered no man to follow him, save Peter, and James, and John the brother of James" (Mark 5:37). They alone went up the mountain where "he was transfigured before them" (Mark 9:2). And in Gethsemane, on the night He was betrayed, "he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy" (Mark 14:33).

So John had seen what few men saw: death give back a child, the face of Jesus shine on the mount, and the agony of the garden. When he writes that his message is what "we have seen with our eyes" (1:1), he means it.

## D. The disciple whom Jesus loved

The Gospel of John never names John. Instead it speaks of "the disciple whom Jesus loved." He leaned on Jesus' breast at the last supper (John 13:23). He stood by the cross, where Jesus gave His mother into his care: "Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home" (John 19:27). He ran with Peter to the empty tomb and outran him (John 20:2-4). He was the first to know the risen Lord on the shore: "It is the Lord" (John 21:7). And he wrote the Gospel:

> **John 21:24** *This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true.*

Scripture does not say in so many words that this disciple is John. But the evidence is strong. He is always with Peter, and Peter's companion in Acts is John (Acts 3:1; 8:14). He is one of the inner circle, present at the supper. And the Gospel names nearly every other disciple but never John the son of Zebedee. The earliest witnesses say the same. Irenaeus, who as a young man had heard Polycarp, a disciple of John, wrote that "John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia" (*Against Heresies* 3.1.1).

## E. The apostle and the pillar

After Pentecost, John stood beside Peter. Together they went up to the temple "at the hour of prayer" (Acts 3:1), and a man lame from birth was healed. Together they were arrested and stood before the council, where the rulers "saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). Together they went down to Samaria when the Samaritans believed (Acts 8:14).

Years later Paul went up to Jerusalem, and named John as one of the three men who stood as pillars in the assembly there:

> **Galatians 2:9** *And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.*

A pillar holds up a building. James, Peter and John were the men on whom the believers at Jerusalem leaned. And this verse records an agreement: Paul and Barnabas would go to the Gentiles; the three pillars would go to "the circumcision," the Jews. Chapter 5 returns to this agreement, because it bears on the question of to whom John's letters were written.

## F. Patmos, and a long life

Near the end of his life, John was on a small island off the coast of Asia: "I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 1:9).

Jesus had once said of him to Peter, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" (John 21:22). The saying went round that John would not die, and John himself corrects it in his Gospel: "yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die" (John 21:23). But the saying shows that John outlived the others. Irenaeus records that John "remained among them up to the times of Trajan" (*Against Heresies* 2.22.5), and that "the Church in Ephesus, founded by Paul, and having John remaining among them permanently until the times of Trajan, is a true witness of the tradition of the apostles" (3.3.4). Trajan became emperor in A.D. 98. Eusebius adds that after the death of Domitian, John returned "from his exile on the island" and was "governing the churches of that region" in Asia (*Church History* 3.23.1).

Jerome, writing three hundred years later, preserves a story about John in extreme old age at Ephesus (*Commentary on Galatians*, on 6:10). He could no longer walk to the assembly, and his disciples carried him there. He could no longer preach a sermon. At each meeting he said only, "Little children, love one another." When the brethren grew weary of hearing the same words and asked why he always said this, he answered that it was the Lord's command, and if this alone were done, it was enough. It is a story from tradition, not from Scripture, and it is told here as such. But anyone who reads First John will recognise the man.

## G. "The elder"

Second and Third John open with the words "The elder" (2 John 1; 3 John 1). The Greek is *presbuteros* (Strong's G4245), an older man, and then one who holds the office of an elder among God's people.

**Could an apostle call himself an elder?** Peter did: "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ" (1 Peter 5:1). An old apostle writing to assemblies he had cared for over many years could hardly choose a warmer title. Everyone knew which elder was meant.

**Are the three letters one man's work, and his Gospel's writer?** They share their words, their thoughts and whole phrases with one another and with the Gospel of John. Chapter 4 sets them side by side. Three examples will do here:

- "That your joy may be full" (1 John 1:4), and "that our joy may be full" (2 John 12), echoing Christ's "that your joy might be full" (John 15:11).

- The commandment "that we love one another," which "we had from the beginning" (2 John 5; 1 John 2:7; 3:11; John 13:34).
- Those who "confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh" (2 John 7; 1 John 4:2-3).

**What did the early writers say?**

- Polycarp, who had known John, wrote to the Philippians early in the second century: "whosoever does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is antichrist" (*To the Philippians* 7.1). He is quoting 1 John 4:3 and 2 John 7.
- Papias, another hearer of John's generation, "uses testimonies from the first Epistle of John" (Eusebius, *Church History* 3.39.16).
- Irenaeus quotes 1 John 2:18-22 and 2 John 7 as written by "His disciple," John, "in his Epistle" (*Against Heresies* 3.16.5, 8).
- Eusebius, writing about A.D. 325, says that "not only his Gospel, but also the former of his epistles, has been accepted without dispute both now and in ancient times. But the other two are disputed" (*Church History* 3.24.17). In his list of the New Testament books he counts Second and Third John among those "recognized by many," but questioned by some "whether they belong to the evangelist or to another person of the same name" (3.25.3).

**"Another person of the same name."** Eusebius read a sentence of Papias as naming two Johns, the apostle and a "presbyter John," and noted that there were "two tombs in Ephesus, each of which, even to the present day, is called John's" (*Church History* 3.39.6). From this some have argued that "the elder" of 2 and 3 John was a different man. But Papias's own words, as Eusebius quotes them, call the apostles themselves "elders," and the three letters are bound to each other and to the Gospel by too many threads to be the work of two hands. The doubt about the two short letters arose because they are short, private, and seldom quoted, not because anything in them differs from First John. This study takes all three as the work of John the apostle, the elder of Ephesus.

**In short.** John was a Galilean fisherman, a son of thunder, one of the three, the disciple whom Jesus loved, a pillar at Jerusalem, an exile on Patmos, and in his old age the elder who wrote to his little children. The letters are his.

# Chapter 2 — When and Where He Wrote

## A. What Scripture says

Scripture gives no date and no place for any of the three letters. Nothing in them names a city, a ruler, or an event that can be dated. So everything in this chapter is either reasoning from the letters or the memory of the early church, and it is labelled as such. Nothing in this study rests on the date.

## B. The usual view: Ephesus, late in the first century

The early church remembered John living at Ephesus in his last years and governing the assemblies of Asia from there (Chapter 1 §F). Most students since have dated the letters about A.D. 85–95, written from Ephesus to the assemblies round about. They give these reasons:

1. **A history lies behind the letters.** Men had already "went out from us" (2:19). The readers had heard the message "from the beginning" (2:7, 24; 3:11). There are "fathers" among them who "have known him that is from the beginning" (2:13). This sounds like assemblies that had been in being for some time.
2. **The letters seem to follow the Gospel.** They take for granted words and teachings found in the Gospel of John, such as the new commandment and the advocate.
3. **The earliest quotations.** Polycarp, writing early in the second century, already quotes First John (Chapter 1 §G).

## C. Bullinger's earlier date

E. W. Bullinger thought otherwise. In *The Companion Bible* he wrote that "no definite statement can be made as to either place or time of writing," but that "the character of the contents indicates a much earlier date than is usually supposed." He reckoned First John among the earlier epistles written to the Jews of the Dispersion (those scattered among the nations), and gave three reasons:

1. The word *parousia*, "coming" (2:28), which is used of the Lord's return in Matthew 24:3 and 1 Thessalonians 2:19.
2. The possessive pronoun *hēmeteros*, meaning "our own" (used in 1:3 and 2:2), which he took to mean John's own people, the Jews.
3. John's commission "unto the circumcision" (Galatians 2:9).

He added that the letter's place among the general epistles, which follow Acts in the oldest manuscripts, strengthens the case.

## D. How this study handles it

Both views are possible, and the letters do not settle the question. The reasons for a later date are the stronger, because they come from the letters themselves (2:7, 13, 19). Bullinger's reasons bear more on the question of *to whom* the letter was written than *when*, and they are weighed in Chapter 5 and Appendix B. What matters for the reader is not the year but the situation the letters describe: assemblies of believers, some of whose own number had gone out from them and were now trying to lead the rest astray. That situation is in the text.

**In short.** Scripture gives no date. The early church placed John at Ephesus late in the first century. Bullinger argued for an earlier date. The study notes both and builds on the text.

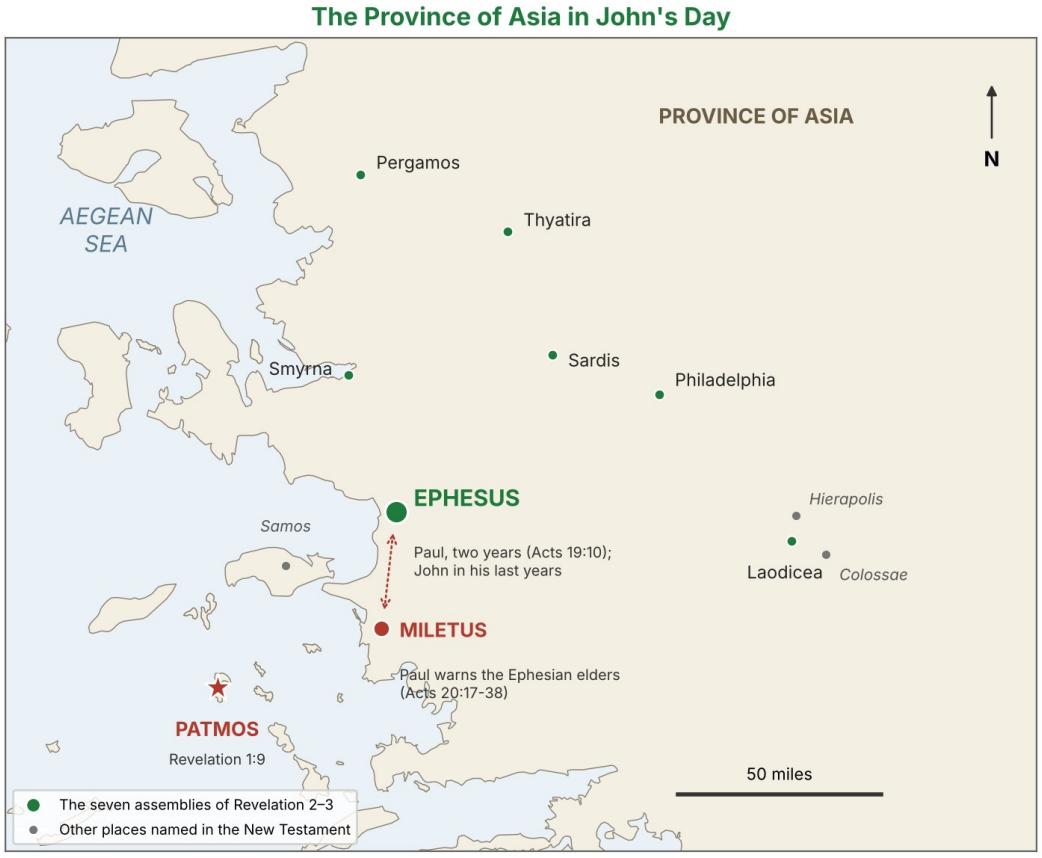
# Chapter 3 — The World the Letters Entered

## A. Paul's warning to Ephesus

Some thirty-five years before the usual date of First John, Paul spent more than two years at Ephesus, "so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10). On his last journey to Jerusalem he did not stop there, but sent for the elders of the Ephesian assembly to meet him at Miletus on the coast. There, knowing he would not see them again, he warned them:

> **Acts 20:29** *For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.*
>
> **Acts 20:30** *Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.*

Two dangers: wolves from outside, and men from inside. Then they knelt on the shore and prayed, and "they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more" (Acts 20:37-38).




*The province of Asia in John's day. Paul spent more than two years at Ephesus (Acts 19:10) and later warned its elders at Miletus (Acts 20:17-38). John was on Patmos "for the word of God" (Revelation 1:9), and the early church remembered him at Ephesus in his last years.*

First John describes the second danger come true. "They went out from us, but they were not of us" (2:19). They had arisen from among the believers themselves. They spoke perverse things about Jesus Christ. They were trying "to draw away disciples after them": "These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you" (2:26). If John wrote from Ephesus, as the early church remembered, he was writing to the very assemblies Paul had warned with tears.

## B. The same trouble elsewhere in Scripture

The New Testament shows the trouble growing in Asia in the years between Paul and John:

- Paul left Timothy at Ephesus "that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine" (1 Timothy 1:3).
- He warned Timothy against "oppositions of science falsely so called" (1 Timothy 6:20). "Science" is *gnōsis*, knowledge: a so-called knowledge that set itself against the truth.

- Hymenaeus and Philetus "concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some" (2 Timothy 2:18).
- "This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me" (2 Timothy 1:15).
- In the Revelation, the Lord says to the assembly at Ephesus, "thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars" (Revelation 2:2).

## C. What the early writers say the false teachers taught

Scripture describes the false teachers by what they denied. The early writers give some of the ideas that were abroad in Asia in John's day. These are history, not Scripture, and this study uses them only to help the reader see why John stresses what he stresses.

**Cerinthus.** Irenaeus describes a teacher named Cerinthus, educated in Egypt, who "represented Jesus as having not been born of a virgin, but as being the son of Joseph and Mary according to the ordinary course of human generation." He taught that "after his baptism, Christ descended upon him in the form of a dove," and that "at last Christ departed from Jesus, and that then Jesus suffered and rose again, while Christ remained impassible, inasmuch as he was a spiritual being" (*Against Heresies* 1.26.1). In this teaching "Jesus" and "the Christ" are two different beings. The man Jesus was not the Christ; the Christ only visited him for a time.

Irenaeus also records a story he had from those who heard Polycarp: John, "going to bathe at Ephesus, and perceiving Cerinthus within, rushed out of the bath-house without bathing, exclaiming, Let us fly, lest even the bath-house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within" (*Against Heresies* 3.3.4). The son of thunder had not changed entirely.

**Those who said Christ only seemed to suffer.** A few years after John, Ignatius wrote to assemblies in Asia against men who said that Jesus Christ "only seemed to suffer" (*To the Trallians* 10; *To the Smyrnaeans* 2). For them He was a spirit who appeared to have a body. Polycarp warned the Philippians against the same men, quoting John (Chapter 1 §G).

**A higher knowledge.** Both kinds of teaching claimed a knowledge above that of ordinary believers. John answers by telling plain believers what they already know: "ye know all things" (2:20); "ye need not that any man teach you" (2:27).

Against all of this, John insists:

- that what he declares is what he has "heard," "seen," "looked upon," and "handled" (1:1);
- that Jesus *is* the Christ (2:22; 5:1);
- that Jesus Christ is "come in the flesh" (4:2);
- that "This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood" (5:6).

### D. The synagogue

There was opposition from another side as well. John's Gospel records that "the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue" (John 9:22). To deny "that Jesus is the Christ" (2:22) was the synagogue's position as well as the false teachers'. Believing Jews faced it, and John's words would have struck them with force.

**In short.** Paul foresaw men arising from within to draw disciples after them. First John shows it happened. History names some of their ideas; this study draws its picture of them from John's own words.

## Chapter 4 — Where John's Letters Stand

### A. Two groups of epistles

The twenty-one letters of the New Testament fall into two groups.

1. **Paul's letters.** Seven are written to assemblies: Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians, the church epistles. Others are written to men: Timothy, Titus and Philemon. Hebrews, whose writer is not named, has stood with Paul's letters in most orders.
2. **The general letters.** James; First and Second Peter; First, Second and Third John; and Jude. Since early times these have been called "catholic," meaning "general," because most of them are not addressed to one named assembly.

In our English Bibles the general letters come after Paul's. In many of the oldest Greek manuscripts, including the Vatican and Alexandrian codices, they come directly after Acts, before Paul's letters. Bullinger drew attention to this order, and it suits the history: James, Peter and John were the pillars at Jerusalem before Paul's letters were written (Galatians 2:9).

### B. What sets John's letters apart

- **First John has no frame.** It has no greeting, no named writer, no named readers, and no closing greetings. It reads like a pastoral letter written for a circle of assemblies that knew the writer well, rather than a letter carried to one.
- **Second and Third John are true letters.** Each is the length of a single sheet of papyrus. Second John says so: "Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink" (2 John 12). Third John says the same (3 John 13).
- **No Old Testament quotation.** None of the three quotes the Old Testament. The only Old Testament person named is Cain (3:12).
- **Simple words, deep meaning.** First John uses few words, and short ones: light, darkness, life, love, truth, know, abide, sin, world. It repeats them and turns them over. A child can read it; no one ever reaches the bottom of it.

## C. First John beside the Gospel of John

| Subject | Gospel of John | First John |
|---|---|---|
| Why it was written | "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31) | "that ye may know that ye have eternal life" (5:13) |
| The beginning | "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1) | "That which was from the beginning … of the Word of life" (1:1) |
| Seen and witnessed | "we beheld his glory" (John 1:14) | "which we have seen with our eyes" (1:1) |
| Light and darkness | "the light shineth in darkness" (John 1:5) | "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1:5) |
| The new commandment | "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another" (John 13:34) | "a new commandment I write unto you" (2:8) |
| Joy full | "that your joy might be full" (John 15:11) | "that your joy may be full" (1:4) |
| The advocate (*paraklētos*, "one called alongside") | "he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever" (John 14:16); the same word again in John 14:26, 15:26 and 16:7 | "we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (2:1), the only place outside the Gospel where the word occurs |
| The spirit of truth | "Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive" (John 14:17); "when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13) | "Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error" (4:6) |
| Born of God | "which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13) | "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (5:1); "every one that loveth is born of God" (4:7) |
| The only begotten Son sent | "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16) | "God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him" (4:9) |
| The devil a liar | "he is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44) | "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?" (2:22) |
| Water and blood | "forthwith came there out blood and water" (John 19:34) | "This is he that came by water and blood" (5:6) |
| Overcoming the world | "I have overcome the world" (John 16:33) | "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (5:4) |

One difference matters above the rest. The Gospel was written "that ye might believe": it brings men to faith in Jesus Christ. First John was written "unto you that believe," "that ye may know": it assures those who already believe. The Gospel opens the door; the letter shows those inside the house that they are home.

## D. John's three kinds of writing

John wrote in three directions. His Gospel looks back to the life of Jesus Christ on the earth. His letters speak to believers in the present, about how they are to live and what they are to believe. His Revelation looks forward to the day of the Lord. Past, present and future, all centred on the same Person.

**In short.** John's letters belong with the general epistles, but they stand closest to John's own Gospel. The Gospel brings men to believe; First John assures believers that they know.

# Chapter 5 — To Whom They Were Written, and How They Speak to Us

## A. What the letters tell us about their first readers

First John names no readers, but it tells a great deal about them.

- **They were believers.** "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God" (5:13).
- **They were born of God.** "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (5:1). "Beloved, now are we the sons of God" (3:2).
- **Their sins were forgiven.** "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake" (2:12).
- **They knew the truth.** "I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it" (2:21).
- **They had received God's gift.** "Ye have an unction from the Holy One" (2:20). "Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us" (3:24; also 4:13).
- **They were waiting for Christ's appearing.** "When he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming" (2:28). "When he shall appear, we shall be like him" (3:2).
- **John knew them and loved them.** He calls them his "little children" again and again (2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21).
- **Some of their own had left.** "They went out from us" (2:19). Others were trying to lead them astray (2:26).
- **They lived among idols.** The letter's last words are "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (5:21). This suggests many were Gentiles, living in the cities of Asia, where every street had its shrines.

Second John is written "unto the elect lady and her children" (2 John 1). Third John is written "unto the wellbeloved Gaius" (3 John 1). Each is treated with its own letter in Part Four.

## B. The position of this study

**First John was written after Pentecost to born-again believers of John's day, Jew and Gentile, who had the gift of holy spirit and were waiting for Christ's appearing. That is the administration of grace, the one in which we live. So the letter speaks to us directly, not only by application.**

The reasons:

1. **The new birth.** Being "born of God" (3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18; compare 2:29) and being "sons of God" (3:1-2) are what God gives in the administration of grace. Jesus told Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7), speaking of what was to come; it became available when the gift was poured out on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:33). Paul writes to the same people: "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26).
2. **The gift of holy spirit.** The "unction" (2:20, 27) and "the Spirit which he hath given us" (3:24) are the gift that Christ, "being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost," poured out at Pentecost (Acts 2:33). Paul calls it the seal and "earnest of our inheritance" (Ephesians 1:13-14).
3. **The hope of His appearing.** The readers wait to see Christ and be "like him" (3:2), as Paul's readers "wait for his Son from heaven" (1 Thessalonians 1:10) and look for the day when He "shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body" (Philippians 3:21).
4. **Jew and Gentile together.** The letter speaks to "you" as one company, with no wall between Jew and Gentile, and it closes with a warning that fits a Gentile city (5:21).
5. **The likely place.** If the early church was right that John wrote from Ephesus, his readers were the assemblies of Asia, founded by Paul (Acts 19:10). The assembly at Ephesus received Paul's letter to the Ephesians and, years later, John's care.

## C. What can fairly be said on the other side

1. **First John does not teach the mystery.** It never speaks of the one body, of Jew and Gentile "fellowheirs, and of the same body" (Ephesians 3:6), or of the believer seated with Christ in the heavenlies. Those truths were revealed to Paul (Ephesians 3:3-9).
2. **John's commission was "unto the circumcision"** (Galatians 2:9).
3. **Bullinger read "our" in 1:3 and 2:2 as John's own people, the Jews.** "He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (2:2). On this reading, "ours" means Israel's, and "the whole world" means the Gentiles.

## D. The answer

1. **On the mystery.** First John does not reveal the mystery, but it does not contradict it either. What it teaches (the new birth, sonship, the gift of holy spirit, fellowship with the Father and the Son, walking in the light, the hope of His appearing) is what every believer in the administration of grace has. A letter can be written to members of the body without setting out the doctrine of the body. Paul's own letter to Titus does not set it out either.
2. **On the commission.** The agreement of Galatians 2:9 divided the work of the apostles in the early years. It did not forbid John ever to care for Gentile believers. By the time the early church remembers him at Ephesus, the assemblies there were mixed, as Acts 19:10 shows: "both Jews and Greeks."
3. **On "our" and "the whole world."** John himself uses the same contrast later in the letter, and there it is plainly between believers and unbelievers, not between Jews and Gentiles: "We know that we

are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness" (5:19). The Greek words for "the whole world" are the same in both verses. In 1:3, "our fellowship" is the fellowship of the apostles, those who had seen and heard (1:1-3), into which the readers are invited: "that ye also may have fellowship with us."

The fuller evidence on both sides is in Appendix B.

### E. How First John speaks to us

Because the letter is written to believers in the administration in which we live, the reader today may take it as written to him:

- **The assurance is ours.** "That ye may know that ye have eternal life" (5:13).
- **The way back into fellowship is ours.** When a son of God sins, he does not stop being a son. He confesses his sin, and fellowship is restored, because God "is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (1:9) on the ground of Christ's propitiation (2:2). Section A explains this at length.
- **The commandment is ours.** "That we should love one another" (3:11).
- **The warning is ours.** The teaching of antichrist, John says, is "even now already … in the world" (4:3). It did not end with John's generation.

**In short.** The first readers were born-again believers of John's day, Jew and Gentile, with the gift of holy spirit and waiting for Christ's appearing. That is the administration of grace, and so the letter speaks to us directly.

## Chapter 6 — How First John Is Arranged, and What It Is About

### A. John tells us why he writes

Five times in First John, John stops and says why he is writing:

| Verse | Why John writes |
|---|---|
| 1:3 | "that ye also may have fellowship with us" |
| 1:4 | "that your joy may be full" |
| 2:1 | "that ye sin not" |
| 2:26 | "concerning them that seduce you" |
| 5:13 | "that ye may know that ye have eternal life" |

Put together, these give the main thrust of the letter: **John writes so that believers, who already have eternal life, may know it; may walk in fellowship with the Father and with His Son, and with one**

**another; may not sin, and may know what to do when they do; and may not be led astray by those who deny the truth about Jesus Christ.**

## B. Three threads

Three words run through the whole letter like threads through cloth.

1. **Know.** Two Greek words for "know," *ginōskō* (Strong's G1097) and *oida* (Strong's G1492), occur forty times in five short chapters. Again and again John writes "hereby we know," or words like it (2:3, 5; 3:16, 19, 24; 4:2, 6, 13; 5:2). The letter is about certainty.
2. **Abide.** *Menō* (Strong's G3306), "to abide, remain, continue, dwell," occurs twenty-four times. The King James renders it several ways, which hides the thread from the English reader. This study points it out each time.
3. **Love.** The noun *agapē* (Strong's G26) and the verb *agapaō* (Strong's G25) occur forty-six times together. "God is love" (4:8, 16).

## C. Two messages

Twice John says "This is the message." The Greek word, *angelia* (Strong's G31), occurs only in these two places in the letter:

> **1 John 1:5** *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.*
>
> **1 John 3:11** *For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.*

God is light; love one another. The first message governs the first member of the letter, where the tests are about walking in the light. The second governs the members on love.

## D. The structure of the whole letter

Bullinger's structure of the whole letter is shown in *First John at a Glance*. The letter begins with Christ (1:1–2:17) and ends with Christ (5:1-21). Between, the antichrist (2:18-29) is set against love (3:1-24), and then the antichrist (4:1-6) is set against love again (4:7-21). Neither is a side issue. The antichrist forms two of the letter's members, and love forms the two members set against them. That is why Part Three of this study gathers both: the antichrist in Chapter 7, and love in Chapter 8.

## E. The structure of the first member, tested

The first member, 1:1–2:17, is "concerning Christ." Bullinger shows it as four pairs. In each pair, John first says why he writes, and then sets a test:

### 1:1–2:17. Concerning Christ

*(Repeated alternation)*

**a¹** | 1:1-5. Cause of writing: the Word of life; fellowship; joy; the message.

**b¹** | 1:6-10. Test of fellowship.

**a²** | 2:1-2. Cause of writing: that ye sin not.

**b²** | 2:3-6. Test of knowing God.

**a³** | 2:7-8. Cause of writing: the old commandment and the new.

**b³** | 2:9-11. Test of being in the light.

**a⁴** | 2:12-14. Cause of writing: little children, fathers, young men.

**b⁴** | 2:15-17. Test of loving God.

*Structure after E. W. Bullinger, The Companion Bible.*

This structure has been tested against the Greek text, and it holds with remarkable exactness (Appendix A):

- **The verb "write"** (*graphō*) occurs ten times in this member, and every one of them falls in the "a" members (1:4; 2:1, 7, 8, 12, 13 twice, 14 three times). It never occurs in a "b" member.
- **The verb "say"** (*legō*) occurs six times in this member: "If we say" (1:6, 8, 10) and "He that saith" (2:4, 6, 9). Every one falls in a "b" member. Each test begins with what a man claims.
- **Every "b" member is a test** set by a condition: "If we say … if we walk … If we confess" (1:6-10); "if we keep his commandments" (2:3); "He that saith he is in the light" (2:9); "If any man love the world" (2:15).

So John alternates between telling his readers why he writes, in warm and personal words, and setting before them a test that separates what a man says from what he is.

## F. The sections of Part Two

Each pair of the first member (why John writes, and the test that follows) makes one section. The later members are divided where their own structures divide them (Appendix A):

| Section | Verses | Member | Subject |
|---|---|---|---|
| A | 1:1-10 | Christ | The Word of life; fellowship; the test of walking in the light |
| B | 2:1-6 | Christ | "That ye sin not"; the advocate; the test of knowing Him |
| C | 2:7-11 | Christ | The old commandment and the new; the test of being in the light |
| D | 2:12-17 | Christ | Little children, fathers, young men; the test of loving God |

| Section | Verses | Member | Subject |
|---|---|---|---|
| E | 2:18-29 | Antichrist | The last hour; the antichrists; the anointing |
| F | 3:1-9 | Love | The Father's love; sons of God; inward purity |
| G | 3:10-15 | Love | The two families; Cain |
| H | 3:16-24 | Love | The Son's love; love in deed and in truth |
| I | 4:1-6 | Antichrist | Try the spirits |
| J | 4:7-21 | Love | God is love |
| K | 5:1-12 | Christ | Born of God; the victory; the witness |
| L | 5:13-21 | Christ | That ye may know |

**In short.** John writes so that believers may know they have eternal life and walk in fellowship. Know, abide and love are the threads. The letter begins and ends with Christ, and sets the antichrist against love twice. Its first member alternates four times between why John writes and a test.

# Part Two — First John, Verse by Verse

The first great member of the letter, 1:1–2:17, is *concerning Christ*, as Bullinger heads it. Four times John tells his readers why he writes, and four times he follows it with a test (Part One, Chapter 6 §E). The four pairs make Sections A to D.

# Section A — 1:1–1:10. The Word of Life, and Walking in the Light

## Where it stands

The first pair of the first member. John opens the letter by telling what he declares and why he declares it (1:1-5): the Word of life, which he and the other apostles heard, saw and handled, declared so that the readers may share their fellowship with the Father and with His Son, and so that their joy may be full. Then he sets the first test (1:6-10): a man may *say* he has fellowship with God, but does he walk in the light?

## Its structure

**1:1-10. The First Pair**

*(Cause of writing, and test)*

**a¹** | 1:1-5. Cause of writing: what was heard, seen and handled; fellowship; joy; God is light.

**b¹** | 1:6-10. Test of fellowship: three false claims, each answered.

*Structure after E. W. Bullinger, The Companion Bible.*

The test of 1:6-10 is built of three claims a man may make, each followed by the truth that answers it:

| | Verses | The claim, and the answer |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1:6-7 | "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness" — answered: "if we walk in the light" |
| 2 | 1:8-9 | "If we say that we have no sin" — answered: "If we confess our sins" |
| 3 | 1:10 | "If we say that we have not sinned" — answered in 2:1-2: "we have an advocate" |

## The text

**1 John 1. 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.

## Verse by verse

> **1 John 1:1** *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;*

The letter begins with no greeting and no name. There is no "John, an apostle," no "unto the saints which are at Ephesus," no "grace be unto you." It begins with the message itself, as though John cannot wait to come to it. The sentence that starts here does not reach its main verb until verse 3: "That which

we have seen and heard *declare we* unto you." Verse 1 piles up what John has to declare; verse 2 stops to explain; verse 3 at last declares it.

**"That which was from the beginning."** The very first word in the Greek is *ho*, "that which." It is neuter. John does not say "he who was from the beginning," but "that which." He is speaking of a thing, a message, a matter: what he is about to declare. He tells us what it is at the end of the verse: it concerns "the Word of life."

"From the beginning" (*ap' archēs*; *archē*, Strong's G746, "beginning, first") is a phrase John uses seven more times in this short letter. Almost every time, it means the beginning of the message as the believers first heard it: "an old commandment which ye had from the beginning" (2:7); "Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning" (2:24); "this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another" (3:11). It was the same phrase Jesus used of His apostles: "ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning" (John 15:27). Luke, too, speaks of the apostles as those "which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word" (Luke 1:2). When the apostles chose one to take Judas's place, he had to be a man who had been with them "Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us" (Acts 1:22).

So John begins where the apostles' witness began: with the things they heard and saw from the first days of Jesus' ministry. Verse 2 will add that the life they saw had been "with the Father" before it was shown to them.

**"Which we have heard."** Now John begins to pile up the ways he knows. The first is hearing. "We" is the apostles, the eyewitnesses; John speaks for all who were with Jesus. They heard Him teach by the sea and on the mountain, heard Him pray, heard Him call Lazarus out of the tomb, heard Him say from the cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30). The verb is in the perfect tense: they heard, and it remains with them.

**"Which we have seen with our eyes."** Hearing might be at second hand; seeing is not. "With our eyes" is added to leave no doubt. This was not a vision or a dream. John saw Jesus with the same eyes that saw his father's boat and the sea of Galilee.

**"Which we have looked upon."** This is a different word. "Seen" (*horaō*, Strong's G3708) is simply to see. "Looked upon" (*theaomai*, Strong's G2300) is to gaze at, to look long and carefully, to contemplate. It is the word John used in his Gospel: "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). John did not catch a glimpse of Jesus. He looked at Him for three and a half years.

**"And our hands have handled."** The last is touch. "Handled" is *psēlaphaō* (Strong's G5584), to feel, to touch with the hands, to handle so as to test. It is the very word the risen Christ used when the disciples thought they were seeing a spirit: "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have" (Luke 24:39). John was there. He had reclined beside Jesus at the supper, leaning on His breast (John 13:23). After the resurrection, the disciples handled Him and found He was flesh and bones.

Here is the first answer to the false teachers of Chapter 3. Some said that the Christ was a spirit who only visited the man Jesus; others that Jesus only seemed to have a body. John answers: we heard Him, we saw Him with our eyes, we looked at Him long, and our hands touched Him. He was a real man.

**"Of the Word of life."** Now John names his subject. All these things he heard, saw, looked upon and handled concerned "the Word of life." "Word" is *logos* (Strong's G3056): a word spoken, and the meaning it carries; the spoken expression of a mind. "Life" is *zōē* (Strong's G2222), life, and in John nearly always the life that comes from God, "eternal life" (1:2). "The Word of life" is God's own word about life: His purpose to give life, His message of life. And that word was not left in the air. It was spoken and shown in a man. John's Gospel says it in a single sentence: "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). What God had purposed and promised from the beginning took flesh in Jesus Christ, and John heard it, saw it and touched it.

**Figures of speech.** Bullinger names two figures in this verse. The repetition of "which ... which ... which" is *Anaphora* ("like sentence-beginnings"): the same word opens each clause, and, as Bullinger says, it "emphasizes with great solemnity the subject of the epistle which is opened thus in so stately a manner." And the order heard, seen, looked upon, handled is *Anabasis* ("gradual ascent"): each step comes closer than the last, from the ear, to the eye, to the long gaze, to the hand. John is building to a climax, and the climax is touch. The Word of life could be handled.

> **1 John 1:2** *(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;)*

John stops in the middle of his sentence to explain. The King James prints the whole verse in brackets, because it breaks into the sentence that began in verse 1 and is taken up again in verse 3.

**"For the life was manifested."** "The life" is the life just named in "the Word of life." "Was manifested" is *phaneroō* (Strong's G5319), to make visible, to bring out into the open, to show what was hidden. It is a key word of the letter: John uses it nine times. Life, God's own life, was hidden with God; then it was shown, in a man who walked the roads of Galilee. "In him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4).

**"And we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you."** Three things the apostles do with what was shown. They have *seen* it: the same word as in verse 1. They *bear witness*: *martureō* (Strong's G3140), to testify as a witness does in court, telling only what he has seen and heard. And they *shew* it to the readers. "Shew" here is *apangellō* (Strong's G518), to bring a report, to announce, to tell out. The same word is translated "declare" in verse 3. First the seeing, then the witnessing, then the telling: this is how the message came to John's readers, and how it has come to us. "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you" (1:3).

**"That eternal life."** Now John gives the life its full name. "Eternal" is *aiōnios* (Strong's G166), belonging to the age; in Scripture, the life of the age to come, the life that does not end, God's own kind of life. John uses "eternal life" six times in this letter, and he will close the letter with it: "This is the true God, and eternal life" (5:20).

What is eternal life? Jesus Himself defined it in His prayer: "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). It is not only life that goes on for ever. It is life that comes from knowing God and His Son, and it begins now: "He that hath the Son hath life" (5:12).

**"Which was with the Father."** Before it was shown, this life was "with the Father." The Greek is *pros ton patera*, "toward the Father," "with the Father," the same construction John used at the start of his Gospel: "the Word was with God" (John 1:1). The life belonged to God; it was in His purpose and in His keeping. Jesus said, "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself" (John 5:26). The life was the Father's first, and He gave it to His Son.

**"And was manifested unto us."** John says it again, because it is the heart of everything: the life was shown, and shown "unto us," to the apostles, to men who could hear and see and touch. God did not keep His life to Himself. He showed it, in His Son, before human eyes.

**Figures of speech.** The verse is a *Parembole* ("insertion"), Bullinger's name for a parenthesis that is complete in itself and explains what comes before it. The brackets in the King James mark it. It is also built on the repetition of "manifested" at its beginning and end ("the life was manifested ... and was manifested unto us"), so that the whole verse is wrapped in that one word.

> **1 John 1:3** *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.*

Now the sentence that began in verse 1 is finished. John has said what he has (verse 1) and explained it (verse 2); now he says what he does with it, and why.

**"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you."** "That which" picks up the "That which" of verse 1. "Seen and heard" sums up all four of verse 1's verbs. "Declare" is *apangellō* again, to bring the report. This is the main verb of the whole opening sentence. Everything has led to it: we declare it to you.

**"That ye also may have fellowship with us."** Here is the first reason John gives for writing (Part One, Chapter 6 §A). "Fellowship" is *koinōnia* (Strong's G2842), a key word of this chapter (1:3, 6, 7). It comes from *koinos*, "common," and means having something in common with others, sharing, partnership. It was used of business partners: Luke calls James and John "partners" (*koinōnoi*) with Simon in the fishing (Luke 5:10). Fishermen who share a boat share its work and its catch. That is *koinōnia*.

The first believers at Jerusalem "continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). John writes so that his readers may share that same fellowship: "with us," with the apostles who saw and heard.

**"And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."** And what is the apostles' fellowship? It is not only with one another. It is "with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." To share the apostles' fellowship is to share their fellowship with God and with His Son. The fishermen of Galilee had something in common with the Father in heaven.

Notice how John names the two. "The Father," and "his Son Jesus Christ." He does not confuse them, and he does not separate them. Fellowship with one is fellowship with the other: "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father" (2:23).

"Our" here is the strong possessive *hēmeteros*, "our own." The fellowship that John and the apostles have is their own, really theirs; and they hold it out to the readers.

**Figures of speech.** "And truly" translates two small words, *kai … de*, which add emphasis: "and our fellowship, too, is with the Father." John is not boasting; he is opening the door wider. The fellowship he offers is not with men only, but with God.

> **1 John 1:4** *And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.*

The second reason for writing, and the first time the verb "write" appears in the letter.

**"And these things write we unto you."** "These things" are what John is now writing: this letter. Until now he has said "declare." Now he says "write," and from here the verb appears again and again in the "why John writes" members of the letter (Part One, Chapter 6 §E). "We" is still the apostles' "we": John writes as one of the eyewitnesses.

**"That your joy may be full."** "Joy" is *chara* (Strong's G5479), gladness, delight. "May be full" is a perfect participle in the Greek: "may be filled up and stay full." A full cup cannot hold another drop. John wants nothing missing from his readers' joy.

The words come straight from Jesus. On the night before He died, He told the disciples: "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11). And again: "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:24). John heard Him say it. Now, an old man, he writes the same thing to his own little children. Fellowship with the Father and the Son is not a grim duty; it is the way to full joy.

The Greek texts differ here. The Received Text, from which the King James was translated, reads "your joy." Many older manuscripts read "our joy": John's joy, and the joy of all who share the fellowship, is full when the readers share it (Appendix D). Both are true. A father's joy is full when his children walk with him, and the children's joy is full in the walking.

> **1 John 1:5** *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.*

Now John states the message itself, the first of the two "messages" of the letter (Part One, Chapter 6 §C).

**"This then is the message."** "Message" is *angelia* (Strong's G31), a message brought, a report announced. The word occurs only twice in John's letters, here and at 3:11, and both times it introduces the heart of what follows. Here the message is that God is light; at 3:11 it is that we should love one another.

**"Which we have heard of him."** "Him" is Jesus Christ, just named at the end of verse 3. The message is not John's own idea. The apostles heard it from Jesus. He said, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). And He showed the Father in all He did: "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9).

**"And declare unto you."** "Declare" here is *anangellō* (Strong's G312), a close cousin of the "shew" and "declare" of verses 2-3: to report back, to tell out fully. The apostles heard it from Him, and they report it to us.

**"That God is light."** Here is the message in four words. "Light" is *phōs* (Strong's G5457). John does not say God *has* light, or *gives* light, though both are true. He says God *is* light. Light is what God is.

What does that mean? In Scripture, light stands for everything that is pure, true, open and good, and for the revelation that shows things as they really are. "The LORD is my light and my salvation" (Psalm 27:1). "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105). Light shows what is there. In the light nothing is hidden, nothing is pretended. God is wholly pure, wholly true, wholly open; there is nothing in Him that needs to hide.

The first thing God made, on the first day, was light: "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light" (Genesis 1:3). The last picture of the Bible is a city that "had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof" (Revelation 21:23).

**"And in him is no darkness at all."** "Darkness" is *skotia* (Strong's G4653), the opposite of light: what is hidden, false, impure, evil. In God there is "no darkness at all." The Greek is emphatic: "darkness in him there is not, none." Not a shadow. James says the same: "the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

This is why the message matters for everything that follows. If God is light, then fellowship with God means walking in the light. A man cannot walk with God and walk in darkness at the same time. The next five verses test exactly that.

**Figures of speech.** Bullinger names this a *Pleonasm* ("redundancy"): the same truth is stated twice, first positively ("God is light") and then negatively ("in him is no darkness at all"). The negative adds nothing new, but by adding nothing new it shuts every door. Not only is God light; there is not one corner of darkness in Him. The double negative in the Greek (*ouk … oudemia*, "not … none") makes it stronger still.

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

Now comes the first test of the letter (Part One, Chapter 6 §E), and it begins with something a man might say.

**"If we say."** These three words open three verses in this section (1:6, 8, 10). John is not writing about what men are, but about what they claim. "We" is gentle. John does not say "if *you* say" or "if *they* say." He puts himself among those who might make the claim, and so every reader must ask, "Have I said

this?" The false teachers who "went out" (2:19) said these things loudly. But any believer can say them quietly.

**"That we have fellowship with him."** The claim is the very thing John wants his readers to have (1:3): fellowship with God. The claim is easy to make.

**"And walk in darkness."** But the claim is tested by the walk. "Walk" is *peripateō* (Strong's G4043), literally "to walk around"; in Scripture, how a man lives, his daily conduct, the path his feet take. Paul uses it the same way: "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" (Ephesians 4:1). To walk in darkness is to live in what God is not: in what is false, hidden, impure, evil.

**"We lie."** John does not soften it. A man who claims fellowship with God, who is light, while walking in darkness, is lying. "Lie" is *pseudomai* (Strong's G5574). Light and darkness cannot share the same room; when you switch on a lamp, the darkness does not stay to keep the light company. "For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14).

**"And do not the truth."** "Truth" is *alētheia* (Strong's G225), what is real and true, as opposed to what only seems so. Notice: not "*speak* not the truth," but "*do* not the truth." Truth in John is something a man does, not only something he says. Jesus said, "But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God" (John 3:21). A man's life either matches his words or it does not.

> **1 John 1:7** *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.*

The first claim is answered with the truth.

**"But if we walk in the light."** Here is the opposite walk: in the light, in what is true, pure and open before God. Walking in the light does not mean being sinless; verse 8 will make that plain. It means living openly before God, hiding nothing, letting His light show us as we are.

**"As he is in the light."** God does not walk in the light; He *is* in the light, for He is light (1:5). He is "dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto" (1 Timothy 6:16). The believer is called to walk where God is. Paul says, "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8).

**"We have fellowship one with another."** We might have expected John to say, "we have fellowship with him." Instead he says "one with another." Fellowship with God shows itself in fellowship with His people. When two believers both walk in the light, they find themselves walking side by side. "One with another" is the believers' fellowship with each other, which flows from their fellowship with God. Some have taken it to mean God and the believer with one another; but John uses the same Greek word, *allēlōn*, throughout the letter only of believers ("love one another," 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12).

**"And the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."** Here is the wonder. The believer who walks in the light will see, in that light, his own sins; light shows everything. But he need not run back into the dark. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses him.

"The blood" is Christ's life poured out in death. "For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls" (Leviticus 17:11). "Without shedding of blood is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22). By His death, His resurrection, and His ascension to the right hand of God, Jesus Christ completed the work by which sins are put away.

"Cleanseth" is *katharizō* (Strong's G2511), to make clean, to purify. It is in the present tense: it goes on cleansing. Not once only, but continually, as the believer walks in the light. "From all sin" leaves nothing out. Not most sin, not small sins only: all sin.

"His Son": the blood is the blood of God's own Son. That is why it avails.

The Received Text reads "Jesus Christ his Son"; many older manuscripts read "Jesus his Son" (Appendix D). The sense is the same.

**Figures of speech.** Bullinger names "the blood … cleanseth" a *Metalepsis* ("double metonymy"): "blood" is put for death, and death is put for the atonement made by that death. It is not literal blood that washes; it is what His shed blood accomplished. And he makes a fine observation: "when it is a question of walking in the light, the saved sinner is reminded of that which put him there and which alone can keep him there. Whereas, in chapter 2:1 where it is a question of sin (If any man sin), the sinful child is reminded, not of the blood, but of the Father, with whom Christ, the righteous One, is the Advocate, to show that relationship has not been broken."

> **1 John 1:8** *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*

The second false claim.

**"If we say that we have no sin."** This claim goes further than the first. The first man claimed fellowship while walking in darkness. This man claims there is no sin in him at all. "Have no sin" means "there is no sin in us; we are without sin." Perhaps he says that sin no longer touches him because he has a higher knowledge; perhaps he says that what he does is not really sin. Either way he denies that he has anything to confess.

"Sin" is *hamartia* (Strong's G266), from a word meaning "to miss the mark," as an archer's arrow falls short of the target. It is the word for every falling short of what God requires. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

**"We deceive ourselves."** "Deceive" is *planaō* (Strong's G4105), to lead astray, to make to wander. It is the word John will use later of the false teachers: "These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you" (2:26), where "seduce" is the same verb. Here, the man who says he has no sin leads *himself* astray. He fools no one but himself; certainly not God, and seldom his neighbours.

**"And the truth is not in us."** He has shut the truth out. The truth about himself is that he has sin; the truth about God is that He is light and shows sin for what it is. A man who denies his sin has no room in him for the truth.

**Figures of speech.** Bullinger lists this verse, with 1:5, as a *Pleonasm*: "we deceive ourselves" is said again negatively, "the truth is not in us," so that the statement is complete from both sides.

> **1 John 1:9** *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

The second claim is answered, and the answer is one of the best-loved verses in the Bible.

**"If we confess our sins."** Here is the opposite of saying "we have no sin." "Confess" is *homologeō* (Strong's G3670), from *homos*, "the same," and *legō*, "to say": to say the same thing, to agree, to acknowledge. To confess our sins is to say about them what God says about them. It is not to make excuses, or to call them by softer names. It is to agree with God: this was sin.

The verb is in the present tense in the Greek, which presents the confessing as something done whenever it is needed. It is not a single confession made once at the start of the Christian life. John is writing to believers, "My little children" (2:1), and he includes himself in "we." When a child of God sins, he confesses it.

This is a word for sons, not for strangers. A believer who sins does not stop being a son of God. His sonship rests on his new birth, on being "born of God" (5:1), and that cannot be undone: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him" (3:9). What sin breaks is not his sonship but his fellowship, his walking in the light with his Father. Confession is the way back into the light. It is the same lesson David learned: "I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (Psalm 32:5).

**"He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins."** "He" is God, the Father with whom we have fellowship (1:3). He is "faithful": *pistos* (Strong's G4103), trustworthy, one who keeps His word. He has promised to forgive, and He will. He is "just": *dikaios* (Strong's G1342), righteous, one who does what is right. It might seem that a just God would punish sin, not forgive it. But God is just *in* forgiving, because the price of the sin has been paid: "he is the propitiation for our sins" (2:2). The forgiveness rests on God's faithfulness and on Christ's work, not on the confession itself. The confession is not a payment; it is agreement with God.

"To forgive" is *aphiēmi* (Strong's G863), to send away, to let go, to release. The sins are sent away. "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12).

**"And to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."** Not only forgiven but cleansed: "cleanse" is *katharizō*, the same word as in verse 7. "Unrighteousness" is *adikia* (Strong's G93), everything that is not right. Again, "all": nothing is left. The believer who confesses walks out of the shadow and back into the light, clean.

**In plain words.** When a believer sins, he does not need to be saved again, and he does not need to wonder whether he is still God's child. He tells God the truth about what he did, and God, who keeps His word and who has accepted Christ's payment, forgives him and makes him clean. His fellowship with his Father is restored. That is the whole of it.

> **1 John 1:10** *If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*

The third false claim, and the strongest.

**"If we say that we have not sinned."** The first man claimed fellowship while walking in darkness (1:6). The second claimed there was no sin in him now (1:8). This third man claims he has never sinned at all. The verb is in the perfect tense: "we have not sinned and are not sinners." He denies not only present sin but any sin, ever.

**"We make him a liar."** "Him" is God. The first man lied (1:6); the second deceived himself (1:8); the third makes God a liar. For God has said that all have sinned. "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:10). "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Ecclesiastes 7:20). God sent His Son to be the propitiation for sins (2:2). A man who says "I have not sinned" is saying that God was wrong about him, and that Christ died for nothing as far as he is concerned. "Liar" is *pseustēs* (Strong's G5583). John uses the word five times in this letter, each time with force.

**"And his word is not in us."** In verse 8 it was "the truth is not in us." Now it is "his word." God's word, which says plainly that all have sinned, has no place in such a man. He has not received it.

The answer to this third claim does not come until the next verse: "And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father" (2:1). Section B begins there.

**Figures of speech.** Bullinger notes that "We make him a liar" is an *Idiom*: it means, "we attempt so far as in us lies to make him a liar." No man can actually make God a liar. But by contradicting what God has said, he sets himself up as if God's word were false.

## In short

John declares what the apostles heard, saw and handled: the Word of life, God's own life shown in His Son. He declares it so that the readers may share the apostles' fellowship with the Father and the Son, and so that their joy may be full. The message is that God is light, with no darkness at all. Then come three claims that fail the test of the light: fellowship while walking in darkness, no sin now, no sin ever. Against them stand walking in the light, the cleansing blood, and confession, by which a son of God who sins is forgiven and cleansed and walks again with his Father.

# Section B — 2:1–2:6. "That Ye Sin Not": The Advocate, and Knowing Him

## Where it stands

The second pair of the first member. Section A ended with the man who says he has never sinned (1:10). Now John tells why he writes: not to excuse sin, but "that ye sin not." Yet if a believer does sin, he has an advocate with the Father (2:1-2). Then comes the second test: a man may *say* "I know him," but does he keep His commandments? (2:3-6).

## Its structure

**2:1-6. The Second Pair**

*(Cause of writing, and test)*

**a²** | 2:1-2. Cause of writing: that ye sin not; the advocate; the propitiation.

**b²** | 2:3-6. Test of knowing God: keeping His commandments, keeping His word, walking as He walked.

*Structure after E. W. Bullinger, The Companion Bible.*

The test (2:3-6) turns on three sayings and three keepings:

| | Verse | |
|---|---|---|
| The rule | 2:3 | "hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments" |
| The false claim | 2:4 | "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar" |
| The true keeping | 2:5 | "whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected" |
| The claim, and what it owes | 2:6 | "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" |

## The text

**1 John 2. 1** 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.

## Verse by verse

> **1 John 2:1** *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:*

Section A ended with three false claims about sin. A reader might come away thinking: "If everyone sins, and confession brings forgiveness, why worry about sin at all?" John answers that thought before it can take root.

**"My little children."** For the first time John speaks to his readers directly, and the first words are tender. "Little children" is *teknia* (Strong's G5040), the diminutive of *teknon*, "child": "dear children," "little ones." It is what Jesus called His disciples on the last night: "Little children, yet a little while I am with you" (John 13:33). John uses it seven times in this letter. He writes as an old father to children he has watched grow up. "My" makes it closer still.

**"These things write I unto you."** In 1:4 John wrote "we," speaking for all the apostles. Now he says "I," speaking for himself. "These things" are what he has just written about sin, confession and cleansing.

**"That ye sin not."** Here is the third reason John gives for writing (Part One, Chapter 6 §A). He has not written about forgiveness to make sin easy, but to keep his children from it. The verb is in a tense that looks at a single act: "that you may not commit a sin." The goal is not to sin at all. Paul answers the same misunderstanding: "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid" (Romans 6:1-2).

**"And if any man sin."** But John is a realist. He has just shown that anyone who says he has not sinned makes God a liar (1:10). So he goes on: if anyone does sin. "Any man" includes every believer, John himself among them.

**"We have an advocate with the Father."** Notice what John does *not* say. He does not say, "if any man sin, he has lost his place," or "he must be born again again." He says "we have," present tense, still have, "an advocate with the Father." The sinning believer still has a Father, and he still has an advocate. Bullinger notes that here, where a believer sins, he is reminded "not of the blood, but of the Father … to show that relationship has not been broken."

"Advocate" is *paraklētos* (Strong's G3875), from *para*, "beside," and *kaleō*, "to call": one called to stand beside another, a helper, especially one who speaks for another in a court. This is the only place outside the Gospel of John where the word occurs. In the Gospel, Jesus used it of the gift of holy spirit that the Father would send after He went away: "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever" (John 14:16). "Comforter" there is *paraklētos*. Jesus said "*another* Comforter," because He Himself was one. Here John shows Jesus Christ as the believer's *paraklētos* in the presence of the Father. While the gift of holy spirit stands beside the believer on earth, Jesus Christ stands for him before the Father in heaven.

"With the Father" is *pros ton patera*, the same words as in 1:2. The advocate stands "toward" the Father, face to face with Him. Paul says the same of the risen Christ: "It is Christ that died, yea rather,

that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Romans 8:34). And Hebrews: "he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

**"Jesus Christ the righteous."** The advocate is named, and given one title: "the righteous." "Righteous" is *dikaios*, the same word used of God in 1:9 ("faithful and just"). An advocate who was himself guilty could plead for no one. Jesus Christ never sinned: He "knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21); He "did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" (1 Peter 2:22). He alone can stand before the Father on behalf of those who have.

**Figures of speech.** "Advocate" is a picture from the law court, a *Metaphor*: Jesus Christ is not literally a lawyer, but He does for the sinning believer what an advocate does, speaking for him before the One whose law he has broken.

> **1 John 2:2** *And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*

Why can the advocate plead successfully? Because of what He Himself has done.

**"And he is the propitiation for our sins."** "He is": not "he made," but "he is." His work does not need to be done again; He Himself stands as the propitiation for ever.

"Propitiation" is *hilasmos* (Strong's G2434). It occurs only twice in the New Testament, here and at 4:10: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." A propitiation is that which satisfies justice and turns away wrath, the covering by which sin is atoned for and the sinner brought back to God. The Old Testament picture is the mercy seat, the golden lid of the ark of the covenant, where once a year on the day of atonement the high priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice "upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat" (Leviticus 16:15). There God met His people. Paul uses a related word for Christ: "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood" (Romans 3:25).

By His death, His resurrection, and His ascension to the right hand of the Father, Jesus Christ completed what all the sacrifices of the law pictured. That is why the Father can be "faithful and just to forgive" (1:9). Justice has been satisfied.

**"And not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."** Here the propitiation reaches beyond the readers. "Ours" is the strong possessive *hēmeteros*, "our own." "The whole world" is everyone.

Who is meant by "our" and by "the whole world"? Bullinger took "our" to mean John's own people, Israel, and "the whole world" to mean the Gentiles. But John uses the same contrast at the end of his letter, where it is plainly between believers and unbelievers: "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness" (5:19). The Greek for "the whole world" is the same in both verses. So "ours" here means the sins of us who believe, and "the whole world" means all mankind besides. Christ's propitiation was not for a few; it is enough for every sinner who ever lived (Part One, Chapter 5 §D; Appendix B).

This does not mean every man is saved whether he believes or not. John says plainly, "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (5:12). It means the propitiation is sufficient for all and offered to all. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

The King James adds the words "the sins of" before "the whole world" in italics. They are not in the Greek, which reads "but also for the whole world." Bullinger calls this an *Ellipsis* rightly supplied: the words are repeated in thought from the clause before.

**Figures of speech.** Bullinger names three figures here. The added words "the sins of" are an *Ellipsis* ("omission"), supplied from the clause before. "Not for ours only, but also ..." is an *Epanorthosis* ("correction"): John corrects himself, as if he had said too little, and widens the statement. And "the whole world" is a *Synecdoche* ("transfer"), the world put for the people in it.

> **1 John 2:3** *And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.*

Now the second test begins (Part One, Chapter 6 §E). Section A tested the claim to fellowship. This one tests the claim to know God.

**"And hereby we do know."** "Hereby" means "by this," "in this way." This is the first of the "hereby we know" sayings that run through the letter (Part One, Chapter 6 §B). John is going to give a way to be sure.

**"That we know him."** "Him" is God, or Christ, whom we know through God's word. "Know" is *ginōskō* (Strong's G1097), to know by experience, to come to know. In the Greek both verbs are the same word: "by this we know that we have come to know him." It is a perfect tense: we came to know Him, and we still know Him.

The false teachers of Asia claimed a special knowledge of God, above that of ordinary believers (Part One, Chapter 3 §C). John says that knowing God is not a matter of secret information. It shows.

**"If we keep his commandments."** Here is the test. "Keep" is *tēreō* (Strong's G5083), to watch over, guard, hold fast, observe. "Commandments" is *entolē* (Strong's G1785), a charge, an order given. "His commandments" are what God has told us to do. Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). And "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me" (John 14:21).

What are these commandments? John will sum them up later in one verse: "And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment" (3:23). To believe on His Son, and to love one another. That is not the law of Moses with its hundreds of ordinances; it is the commandment of the Father to His children.

Keeping His commandments does not make a man know God. It shows that he does. A tree does not become an apple tree by bearing apples; it bears apples because it is an apple tree. "Ye shall know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16).

> **1 John 2:4** *He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.*

The false claim.

**"He that saith, I know him."** Again the test is set against what a man *says*. Notice the change from "we" to "he." In Section A John included himself ("If we say"). Here he speaks of a third person, "he that saith," and the King James prints the claim as if quoted: "I know him." These are the very words of a man boasting of his knowledge.

**"And keepeth not his commandments."** He claims to know God, but he does not do what God has said.

**"Is a liar."** Plainly. "Liar" is *pseustēs*, as in 1:10. His claim is false.

**"And the truth is not in him."** As in 1:8, the truth has no place in him. His words are one thing, his life is another, and so there is no truth in him.

**Figures of speech.** The second half again restates the first negatively: "is a liar, and the truth is not in him." Bullinger lists it with 1:8 as a *Pleonasm*: the statement is made from both sides, so that there is no escape.

> **1 John 2:5** *But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.*

The true keeping.

**"But whoso keepeth his word."** In verse 3 it was "his commandments"; now it is "his word" (*logos*). The commandments are the particular things God has said; His word is the whole of what He has said. To keep His word is to hold fast all of it.

**"In him verily is the love of God perfected."** "Verily" is "truly," "in truth." "Perfected" is *teleioō* (Strong's G5048), to bring to its goal, to complete, to make full-grown. The perfect tense means "has been made complete and stands complete."

"The love of God" could mean God's love for us, or our love for God. Bullinger notes both possibilities. In John's letter both are bound together: "We love him, because he first loved us" (4:19). God's love comes to us, and in the man who keeps His word it reaches its goal, returning to God in obedience. Jesus said, "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:23).

John will use "perfected" of God's love three more times (4:12, 17, 18). Love that keeps His word is love grown up.

**"Hereby know we that we are in him."** "Hereby" again. By this keeping we know that we are "in him." "In him" is one of John's great phrases: to be in God, in His Son, in His life and love, as a branch is in the vine. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me" (John 15:4).

> **1 John 2:6** *He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.*

The last part of the test.

**"He that saith he abideth in him."** A third saying, and now the word is "abide." "Abideth" is *menō* (Strong's G3306), to remain, stay, continue, dwell. This is the first time it appears in the letter, and it will appear twenty-four times. It is one of John's three great threads (Part One, Chapter 6 §B). To abide in Him is to stay in Him, as a man stays in his home. The King James renders the same Greek word "abide," "remain," "continue" and "dwell," so the English reader may not notice how often it comes. This study will point it out.

**"Ought himself also so to walk."** "Ought" is *opheilō* (Strong's G3784), to owe, to be under obligation, to be bound. A man who claims to abide in Him owes something: a walk to match.

**"Even as he walked."** "He" is Jesus Christ. The Greek uses a different pronoun here, *ekeinos* (Strong's G1565), "that one." John uses it in this letter of Christ again and again: "as he is pure" (3:3), "he was manifested to take away our sins" (3:5), "even as he is righteous" (3:7), "he laid down his life for us" (3:16), "as he is, so are we in this world" (4:17). Bullinger notes how often "as He," referring to the Son, occurs in the letter. The walk to follow is the walk of Jesus Christ on the earth: His love, His obedience to His Father, His truth, His humility, His care for others. "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Peter 2:21).

John had watched that walk with his own eyes (1:1). When he writes "as he walked," he can see it.

### In short

John writes "that ye sin not." But if a believer does sin, he still has a Father, and Jesus Christ the righteous stands with the Father as his advocate, for He is the propitiation for our sins and for the whole world. The test of knowing God is keeping His commandments. The man who says "I know him" and does not keep them is a liar. The man who keeps His word has God's love made complete in him. And whoever says he abides in Him owes a walk like His.

## Section C — 2:7–2:11. The Old Commandment and the New

### Where it stands

The third pair of the first member. Section B ended with the walk that a man who abides in Him owes: "even as he walked" (2:6). How did He walk? In love. So John tells why he writes (2:7-8): not a new commandment, but the old one they had from the beginning; and yet a new one, because the true light now shines. Then comes the third test (2:9-11): a man may *say* he is in the light, but does he love his brother?

## Its structure

**2:7-11. The Third Pair**

*(Cause of writing, and test)*

**a³** | 2:7-8. Cause of writing: the old commandment, which is also new.

**b³** | 2:9-11. Test of being in the light: loving or hating the brother.

*Structure after E. W. Bullinger, The Companion Bible.*

The test is built as three statements about the brother:

| Verse | The man | Where he is |
|---|---|---|
| 2:9 | "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother" | "in darkness even until now" |
| 2:10 | "He that loveth his brother" | "abideth in the light" |
| 2:11 | "he that hateth his brother" | "in darkness … and knoweth not whither he goeth" |

## The text

**1 John 2. 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.

## Verse by verse

> **1 John 2:7** *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.*

John has spoken of keeping His commandments (2:3-4) and of walking as He walked (2:6). Now he names the commandment he has in mind, though he will not state it outright until verse 10: love.

**"Brethren."** The Received Text reads "Brethren"; most older manuscripts read "Beloved" (*agapētoi*), the word John uses five other times in the letter (3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11) (Appendix D). Either way it is a word of family and affection, and it fits the subject: John is about to write of love for the brother.

**"I write no new commandment unto you."** "New" is *kainos* (Strong's G2537), new in kind, fresh, not worn out. John is not bringing them something they have never heard. The false teachers were bringing "new" doctrines; John brings the old.

**"But an old commandment which ye had from the beginning."** "Old" is *palaios* (Strong's G3820), old, of long standing. "From the beginning" here means from the beginning of their life as believers, from the day they first heard the gospel (see 1:1). They had this commandment from the first day.

**"The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning."** The commandment is simply "the word" they had heard. John's readers had not been given one message at the start and another later. The word they heard first is the word they are to keep. Paul wrote the same to the Galatians: "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8).

Whether the second "from the beginning" stands in the original is a question of the Greek text; many older manuscripts omit it (Appendix D). The sense is unchanged, for the first half of the verse already says it.

What is the old commandment? John does not name it here, but the next verses show it is love for the brother. In 3:11 he says it outright: "For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." And it is older even than the gospel. The law said, "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Leviticus 19:18).

> **1 John 2:8** *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.*

Now John turns the same commandment round and shows its other face.

**"Again, a new commandment I write unto you."** "Again" means "on the other hand," "and yet." The commandment that is old is also new. How can it be both? John's readers would have known at once, because these are the words of Jesus on the last night: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13:34). The commandment to love was as old as Moses. What made it new was "as I have loved you." Love now had a new measure: the love of Jesus Christ, who "laid down his life for us" (3:16).

**"Which thing is true in him and in you."** "Which thing" is neuter in the Greek: not "which commandment" but "which matter," "which fact." The newness of the commandment is true, a reality, first in Him and then in the readers. It was true in Him, for He loved to the end: "having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John 13:1). And it is true in them, for they too have begun to love as He loved. The new commandment is not only a rule written on paper; it is a life already being lived.

**"Because the darkness is past."** "Is past" is *paragō* (Strong's G3855), in the present tense: "is passing away," "is going by." The darkness is on its way out. Like the night before dawn, it is not yet entirely

gone, but it is going. John uses the same word later of the world: "And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof" (2:17).

**"And the true light now shineth."** "True" is *alēthinos* (Strong's G228), real, genuine, the real thing as opposed to a copy or shadow. "Now" is "already." The true light is already shining. John wrote the same in his Gospel: "That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9). The light came into the world in Jesus Christ, and it is shining now, in Him and in those who walk in Him. The dawn has broken. That is what makes the old commandment new: it is lived in a new day.

**Figures of speech.** "Darkness" and "light" here are used for the old age of sin and ignorance and the new day that has dawned in Christ. Paul uses the same picture: "The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light" (Romans 13:12).

> **1 John 2:9** *He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.*

The third test begins (Part One, Chapter 6 §E), again with something a man says.

**"He that saith he is in the light."** The claim this time is to be in the light, where God is (1:5, 7). It is the same claim as in 1:6 ("we have fellowship with him"), seen from another side.

**"And hateth his brother."** Here is the test. "Hateth" is *miseō* (Strong's G3404), to hate, to detest, and also to love less, to set aside. In John there is no middle ground: a man either loves his brother or he hates him. Not to love is, in John's language, to hate. "His brother" is a fellow believer, a member of the same family of God.

**"Is in darkness even until now."** The claim is false. "Even until now" means: all along, up to this very moment. He has not moved out of the darkness at all, whatever he says. The light is shining (2:8), but he is not in it.

> **1 John 2:10** *He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.*

The opposite.

**"He that loveth his brother."** Now the verb for love appears for the first time in the letter: *agapaō* (Strong's G25), to love with the love that seeks the other's good, the love that gives. It is the love of God: "For God so loved the world, that he gave" (John 3:16). This is the word that, with its noun *agapē*, will run through the whole letter (Part One, Chapter 6 §B).

**"Abideth in the light."** "Abideth" is *menō* again (2:6). He does not visit the light now and then; he lives there.

**"And there is none occasion of stumbling in him."** "Occasion of stumbling" is *skandalon* (Strong's G4625), the trigger of a trap, and then anything a man trips over, a stumbling block. The word gives us our "scandal." In the man who loves his brother there is nothing to make anyone fall: nothing in him to trip his brother, and nothing to trip himself. A man walking in daylight sees the stones in the path. Jesus said, "If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world" (John 11:9).

> **1 John 2:11** *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.*

The man who hates, described in full.

**"But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness."** Three things are said of him. He *is* in darkness: that is where he lives. He *walks* in darkness: that is how he lives. And (the third) he does not know where he is going.

**"And knoweth not whither he goeth."** He is moving, but he does not know where. Picture a man walking at night with no lamp, on a road he does not know. Every step may take him off a cliff. Jesus said, "Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth" (John 12:35). John heard Him say it, and here repeats it almost word for word.

**"Because that darkness hath blinded his eyes."** "Hath blinded" is *tuphloō* (Strong's G5186), to make blind. Darkness does not only hide the road; long enough in the dark and the eyes themselves fail. Hatred is not only a dark place to be; it blinds. The man who hates his brother can no longer see clearly anything: his brother, himself, or God. Paul uses the same word of the god of this world, who "hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2 Corinthians 4:4).

The three statements go down step by step: first his place ("is in darkness"), then his life ("walketh in darkness"), then his blindness ("knoweth not whither he goeth … darkness hath blinded his eyes"). Hatred does not stand still. It takes a man lower.

### In short

The commandment John writes is old, for they had it from the beginning: love one another. And it is new, for Christ gave it a new measure, "as I have loved you," and the true light is already shining. The test of being in the light is love for the brother. The man who says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness, walking blind. The man who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is nothing in him to make anyone fall.

## Section D — 2:12–2:17. Little Children, Fathers, Young Men; Love Not the World

### Where it stands

The fourth and last pair of the first member. John has set three tests: fellowship (1:6-10), knowing Him (2:3-6), and being in the light (2:9-11). Before the last test, he stops to reassure. He has not written because he doubts his readers, but because of what is already true of them: their sins are forgiven, they

know the Father, they have overcome the wicked one (2:12-14). Then comes the fourth test, and with it a warning: love not the world (2:15-17).

After this section the letter turns to the antichrist (2:18), and the first member, *concerning Christ*, is complete.

## Its structure

### 2:12-17. The Fourth Pair

*(Cause of writing, and test)*

**a⁴** | 2:12-14. Cause of writing: to little children, fathers and young men.

**b⁴** | 2:15-17. Test of loving God: love not the world.

*Structure after E. W. Bullinger, The Companion Bible.*

The "why John writes" member is six sentences, in two rounds of three:

| | First round (I write) | Second round (I have written) |
|---|---|---|
| Little children | "because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake" (2:12) | "because ye have known the Father" (2:13) |
| Fathers | "because ye have known him that is from the beginning" (2:13) | "because ye have known him that is from the beginning" (2:14) |
| Young men | "because ye have overcome the wicked one" (2:13) | "because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one" (2:14) |

Bullinger shows the test (2:15-16) as alternate lines:

### 2:15-16. The World and the Father

*(Alternate lines)*

**a¹** | If any man love the world,

**b¹** | the love of the Father is not in him.

**a²** | For all that is in the world …

**b²** | is not of the Father,

**a³** | but is of the world.

*Structure after E. W. Bullinger, The Companion Bible.*

## The text

**1 John 2. 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 thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

## Verse by verse

> **1 John 2:12** *I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.*

After three hard tests, a word of comfort. John wants his readers to know that he has not written because he thinks they are liars or in darkness. He writes to them because they belong to God.

**"I write unto you, little children."** "Little children" is *teknia* again (2:1), John's word for all his readers, young and old. In the next verse he will address two groups among them, "fathers" and "young men." But "little children" here, as everywhere in the letter, takes in the whole family. Every believer, however old, is God's dear child.

**"Because your sins are forgiven you."** "Because" (*hoti*) could also be read "that": "I write to you that your sins are forgiven." Both are true, but "because" fits best: John writes *because* this is already so. "Are forgiven" is a perfect tense: they have been forgiven, and they stand forgiven. This is not a hope; it is a fact. The man who confesses (1:9) is forgiven; but long before that, every believer was forgiven when he believed. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1:7).

**"For his name's sake."** "His" is Jesus Christ. Their sins are forgiven not for their own sake, not because they deserved it, but on account of His name: who He is and what He has done. The name stands for the person. Peter preached, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). And "through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43).

> **1 John 2:13** *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.*

Now John speaks to two groups among his little children.

**"I write unto you, fathers."** "Fathers" are the older believers, mature in the faith: men and women who have walked with God a long time. In the assemblies of Asia there were some who had heard Paul himself, or John, many years before.

**"Because ye have known him that is from the beginning."** The words "that is" are added in italics in the King James. The Greek says simply "him from the beginning." Who is he? John has used "from the beginning" for the message of the Word of life that the apostles heard and saw (1:1). The one "from the beginning" is the one that message is about: Jesus Christ, declared from the first day of the gospel. The fathers have known Him a long time. Their knowledge is not new or shallow. It is the quiet, deep knowing of old friendship. Paul's great longing was "That I may know him" (Philippians 3:10). The fathers have had a lifetime of it.

**"I write unto you, young men."** "Young men" (*neaniskoi*, Strong's G3495) are believers in the strength of life, full of energy, in the thick of the fight.

**"Because ye have overcome the wicked one."** "Overcome" is *nikaō* (Strong's G3528), to conquer, to win the victory. It is a perfect tense: they have won, and the victory stands. "The wicked one" is *ho ponēros* (Strong's G4190), "the evil one": the devil. This is the first time he appears in the letter. He will appear again: Cain "was of that wicked one" (3:12); "that wicked one toucheth him not" (5:18); "the whole world lieth in wickedness" (5:19), literally "in the wicked one". Jesus prayed for His disciples, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil" (John 17:15), where "the evil" is the same word. He also used it in the parable of the sower: "then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart" (Matthew 13:19).

So the adversary is in John's letter from the start. Before John speaks of the antichrists (2:18), he has told the young men that they have already overcome the one behind them. Part Three gathers this thread.

How have they overcome him? Not by their own strength, as verse 14 will show, but because "the word of God abideth in you." And later: "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" (4:4).

**"I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father."** Here John begins the second round, and the word for "little children" changes. It is *paidia* (Strong's G3813), little ones, young children, a word Jesus used to His disciples on the shore after the resurrection: "Children, have ye any meat?" (John 21:5). The Greek texts differ on the verb: the Received Text reads "I write"; most older manuscripts read "I have written," as in the other two sentences of the second round, and they number this sentence as the start of verse 14 (Appendix D).

What the little children know is simple and first: they "have known the Father." Every child of God, however young, knows this: God is his Father. "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Galatians 4:6).

> **1 John 2:14** *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.*

The second round goes on.

**"I have written unto you, fathers."** Why the change from "I write" to "I have written"? John may mean the part of the letter he has already written, or he may be looking at the whole letter as a finished thing. Either way, the repetition is for emphasis. What he says to them, he says twice, as a father repeats what matters most.

**"Because ye have known him that is from the beginning."** The same words as in verse 13, exactly. For the fathers, nothing needs to be added. To know Him is everything. There is nothing beyond it.

**"I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong."** "Strong" is *ischuros* (Strong's G2478), mighty, powerful. The young men are strong; but where does their strength come from?

**"And the word of God abideth in you."** Here is the source. "Abideth" is *menō* again (2:6). The word of God does not visit them now and then; it lives in them. That is their strength. When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, He answered the devil three times with "It is written" (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). The young men fight the same way. Paul tells the Ephesians to "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might" (Ephesians 6:10), and to take "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17).

**"And ye have overcome the wicked one."** The same victory as in verse 13, now with its cause shown: they are strong, because the word of God abides in them, and so they have overcome.

**Figures of speech.** The six sentences of 2:12-14 are built on repetition: "I write unto you ... because" three times, and "I have written unto you ... because" three times. Each group is addressed twice, and the second time adds to the first. This kind of repeated beginning is *Anaphora* ("like sentence-beginnings"), the same figure Bullinger names in 1:1. It sounds like a father laying his hand on each child in turn.

> **1 John 2:15** *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.*

Now the fourth and last test of the first member (Part One, Chapter 6 §E). It is a command, and it follows naturally from what John has just said: the young men have overcome the wicked one; now they must not love the world he rules.

**"Love not the world."** "Love" is *agapaō*, the word for the highest love, God's own love (2:10). "The world" is *kosmos* (Strong's G2889), a key word of the letter (23 times). It first meant "order, arrangement," and then the ordered universe, and then the world of men.

Which "world" does John mean? Not the earth God made, which He called "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Not the people of the world, whom God loved so much that He gave His Son (John 3:16). John means the world as it is organised without God and against God: its ways, its values, its desires, its pride. It is the world that "lieth in wickedness" (5:19), under "the prince of this world" (John 12:31). Paul calls it "this present evil world" (Galatians 1:4). James puts it plainly: "the friendship of the world is enmity with God" (James 4:4).

**"Neither the things that are in the world."** Not only the world as a whole, but the things in it: whatever it offers. The next verse will name them.

**"If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."** Here is the test. A heart cannot love both. Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters" (Matthew 6:24). And "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:19). "The love of the Father" here, as in 2:5, may mean the believer's love for the Father, or the Father's love at work in him; either way, where love for the world fills the heart, the Father's love is shut out.

Paul knew the grief of this. "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2 Timothy 4:10). Demas had been Paul's fellow worker (Philemon 24). He did not deny Christ in words; he simply loved the world, and walked away.

> **1 John 2:16** *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.*

Why can't love for the world and love for the Father live together? Because everything in the world comes from somewhere else.

**"For all that is in the world."** John now lists what the world offers. There are three things, and they cover everything.

**"The lust of the flesh."** "Lust" is *epithumia* (Strong's G1939), strong desire, craving; in itself the word can be good or bad, but here it is desire that has run wild. "The flesh" is man's fallen nature, the body and its appetites acting apart from God. The lust of the flesh is every craving of the body that demands to be satisfied whether God allows it or not.

**"And the lust of the eyes."** The craving that comes through seeing: wanting what we see. Bullinger explains it as a figure: "The lust of the eyes: i.e., that which the eyes desire." Achan confessed, "When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment ... then I coveted them, and took them" (Joshua 7:21). David saw from his roof, and wanted (2 Samuel 11:2-4).

**"And the pride of life."** "Pride" is *alazoneia* (Strong's G212), boastful pretension, the swagger of a man who makes much of himself and what he has. It occurs only here and in James 4:16, "But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil." "Life" here is not *zōē*, the life of God (1:2), but *bios* (Strong's G979), the means of life: a man's living, his property, his position, his goods. The pride of life is boasting in what one owns and what one is in the eyes of the world.

These three are as old as the garden. When the serpent tempted Eve, "the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat" (Genesis 3:6). Good for food: the lust of the flesh. Pleasant to the eyes: the lust of the eyes. To be desired to make one wise: the pride of life. And the devil came to Jesus with the same three in the wilderness: stones made bread to satisfy hunger (Luke 4:3), all the kingdoms of

the world shown "in a moment of time" (Luke 4:5), and a leap from the temple to prove who He was (Luke 4:9). Where Adam and Eve fell, Jesus stood, answering each time with the word of God.

**"Is not of the Father, but is of the world."** "Of" means "out of," "from." These things do not come from the Father. They come from the world. The Father gives every good thing: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17). But the craving that grabs and the pride that boasts do not come from Him.

**Figures of speech.** Bullinger sets out verses 15-16 as alternate lines, a form of *Parallelism*: the world (a1), not the Father (b1), the world (a2), not the Father (b2), the world (a3). The lines swing back and forth between the two, and the last word is "the world," which leaves the reader with no doubt where these things belong. The phrase "the lust of the eyes," Bullinger notes, is a *Metonymy*: the desire is put for the thing desired.

> **1 John 2:17** *And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.*

The last verse of the first member sets the whole question in the light of time.

**"And the world passeth away."** "Passeth away" is *paragō* again (2:8), in the present tense: the world is passing away, going by, even now. Paul writes, "for the fashion of this world passeth away" (1 Corinthians 7:31). Everything the world offers is already on its way out.

**"And the lust thereof."** Not only the world but the craving for it passes away. The desires that seemed so strong will be gone, and with them whatever they won.

**"But he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."** Here is the contrast. "The will of God" is what God wants, what He has said. "Doeth" is in the present tense: he goes on doing it. And he "abideth for ever": *menō* again, "remains," "stays," "for ever" (literally "unto the age"). The world goes; he stays. "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever" (Isaiah 40:8). Peter quotes it and adds, "And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you" (1 Peter 1:25). The man who does God's will is bound up with what lasts.

So the first member of the letter, which began with eternal life "with the Father" and "manifested unto us" (1:2), ends with the man who does God's will and abides for ever.

## In short

Before the last test, John reassures. He writes to all his little children because their sins are forgiven and they know the Father; to the fathers because they have long known Him who was from the beginning; to the young men because they are strong, the word of God abides in them, and they have overcome the wicked one. Then the last test: love not the world. All that is in it, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, and it is passing away. He that does the will of God abides for ever.

### The first member in short

The first member of First John, 1:1–2:17, is *concerning Christ*. It opens with the Word of life, heard, seen and handled, and the fellowship it brings with the Father and His Son. Four times John says why he writes, and four times he sets a test: fellowship (walking in the light), knowing God (keeping His commandments), being in the light (loving the brother), and loving God (not loving the world). Against every test stand the cleansing blood, the advocate with the Father, the true light already shining, and the word of God abiding in those who have overcome the wicked one. The next member turns to the antichrist.

## Section E — 2:18–2:29. The Last Hour: The Antichrists, and the Anointing

### Where it stands

The second member of the letter (B — C): **Antichrist**. The first member was *concerning Christ*; this one is concerning those who are against Him. Its partner is 4:1-6, the other antichrist member. Between them, and after the second of them, stand the two members on love (3:1-24; 4:7-21).

The member has two halves. First John defines the antichrist (2:18-23); then he gives the believers their protection against him (2:24-29). Every verse of the section is explained here in its place; Part Three gathers the whole subject together.

### Its structure

Bullinger shows the first half (2:18-23) as an introversion:

**2:18-23. Antichrist: Definition**

*(Introversion)*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **c** | 2:18. | Antichrist. |
| **d** | 2:19. | Rejection of the truth. |
| **e** | 2:20. | The unction. |
| ***d*** | 2:21. | Rejection of the lie. |
| ***c*** | 2:22-23. | Antichrist. |

*Structure after E. W. Bullinger, The Companion Bible.*

The unction, God's gift to the believer, stands at the centre, with the antichrist on either side.

The second half (2:24-29) alternates three times between what the believers have and the promise or result that goes with it:

**2:24-29. Antichrist: Protection Against**

*(Alternation)*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **f¹** | 2:24. | The word heard: abiding in them. |
| **g¹** | 2:25. | His promise: eternal life. |
| **f²** | 2:26-27a. | The anointing: abiding in them. |
| **g²** | 2:27b. | His teaching: truth. |
| **f³** | 2:28. | Confidence through abiding in Him. |
| **g³** | 2:29. | His righteousness: they born of Him. |

*Structure after E. W. Bullinger, The Companion Bible.*

The word that holds the second half together is "abide" (*menō*): it occurs six times in four verses (2:24 three times, 27 twice, 28 once), and the King James renders it "abide," "remain," and "continue."

## The text

**1 John 2. 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: 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.

## Verse by verse

> **1 John 2:18** *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.*

Without warning, the subject changes. John has just said that "the world passeth away" (2:17). Now he says how near the end is, and what the sign of it is.

**"Little children."** Here the word is *paidia*, "young children" (as in 2:13). It is the whole family again, addressed with tenderness at the very moment John must speak of danger.

**"It is the last time."** The Greek is *eschatē hōra*, "the last hour." "Hour" (*hōra*, Strong's G5610) is a short span of time, a closing period. It is a word John uses of decisive moments: "the hour cometh, and now is" (John 4:23); "Father, the hour is come" (John 17:1). "The last hour" is the closing period before the end of this age and the return of Christ. Bullinger notes that "time" here is "hour," a part put for the whole of the period.

The apostles lived as men in the last hour. Peter on the day of Pentecost quoted Joel: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh" (Acts 2:17). Paul wrote that "the night is far spent, the day is at hand" (Romans 13:12). The "last hour" began then, and it has not yet ended. Nearly two thousand years have gone by; but "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Peter 3:8). Every generation of believers since has lived in the last hour.

**"And as ye have heard that antichrist shall come."** The believers had already been taught that "antichrist" would come. "Antichrist" is *antichristos* (Strong's G500), a word found only in John's letters, five times in all (2:18 twice, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7). It is made of *anti* and *christos*. *Christos* is "Christ," "the Anointed One," the Messiah. *Anti* can mean "against" or "instead of." So the antichrist is one who sets himself against the Christ, and one who would set himself up in the Christ's place.

Where had they heard it? Jesus had warned: "For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" (Matthew 24:5); "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets" (Matthew 24:24). Paul had taught the Thessalonians of one to come, "that man of sin ... the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God" (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4), and added, "Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?" (2 Thessalonians 2:5). Such teaching was part of what the believers heard from the start.

"Shall come" is in the present tense, "is coming." John does not deny the coming one. He confirms it: "as ye have heard." Chapter 7, §F, sets out what Scripture says of him.

**"Even now are there many antichrists."** But John's point is this: they need not wait for the coming one to meet the thing itself. "Even now" many antichrists "have come to be" (the Greek is a perfect tense, "have arisen"). Before the one, the many.

**"Whereby we know that it is the last time."** The many antichrists are the sign. Their very presence tells the believers what hour it is. John ends the verse where he began it: "the last hour."

**Figures of speech.** Bullinger sets out this verse as an *Antimetabole* ("counterchange"): last hour, antichrist to come, many antichrists, last hour. The verse turns back on itself, beginning and ending with the same words, so that the antichrists are framed by the hour they mark.

> **1 John 2:19** *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.*

Who were these "many antichrists"? John tells his readers something they already knew: they had been among them.

**"They went out from us."** "Went out" is *exerchomai* (Strong's G1831), to go out, depart. These men had been in the assemblies. They had sat with the believers, heard the same word, and perhaps taught. Then they left. Paul had told the Ephesian elders that this would happen: "Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:30). Here it is.

Notice the same verb in 4:1: "many false prophets are gone out into the world." The men who went out from the believers went out into the world, and the world listened to them (4:5). Chapter 7, §C, shows that the antichrists of chapter 2 and the false prophets of chapter 4 are the same men.

**"But they were not of us."** "Of us" means "from us," "belonging to us." They had been *with* the believers but never truly *of* them. They were in the company but not of the family.

**"For if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us."** "Continued" is *menō*, "abide." Those who are truly of the family abide; these did not. Their leaving showed what they had been all along.

**"But they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us."** "Made manifest" is *phaneroō*, the word used of Christ in 1:2: "the life was manifested." There, God's life was brought into the open in His Son. Here, the truth about these men was brought into the open by their leaving. While they stayed, no one could tell. When they went out, everyone could see.

"That they were not all of us" means "that not all [who are with us] are of us." Not everyone in the assembly is truly of the family of God. Jesus said the same in the parable of the wheat and the tares: the tares grow with the wheat until the harvest (Matthew 13:30).

**Figures of speech.** The words "they went out" in the second half of the verse are in italics in the King James, because the Greek leaves them out. Bullinger calls this an *Ellipsis* ("omission"), "correctly supplied in the A.V.": the words are understood from the start of the verse.

> **1 John 2:20** *But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.*

Now the centre of the first half (see the structure above). Against the antichrists who went out, John sets what the believers have.

**"But ye have an unction from the Holy One."** "But ye": the contrast is strong. *They* went out; *you* have something. "Unction" is *chrisma* (Strong's G5545), an anointing, the oil or ointment used to anoint. The word occurs only three times in the New Testament, all in this section (2:20, 27 twice).

Here John makes a play on words that his readers could not miss. The *antichristos* is against the *Christos*, the Anointed One. And the believers have the *chrisma*, the anointing. The antichrists have gone out against the Anointed; the believers have received anointing from Him.

What is this anointing? In the Old Testament, kings and priests were anointed with oil to set them apart for God's work. Samuel anointed David, "and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward" (1 Samuel 16:13). Jesus was "the Christ," the Anointed, because "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power" (Acts 10:38). And the believer too is anointed: "Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (2 Corinthians 1:21-22). The unction is the gift of holy spirit, which God gives to every believer at the new birth. Later John says so plainly: "hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us" (3:24).

"The Holy One" is the one from whom the anointing comes. In the Gospels the title is used of Jesus: "I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24); and Peter said, "ye denied the Holy One and the Just" (Acts 3:14). Christ, being exalted, "having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this" (Acts 2:33). The anointing comes from God through His Son.

**"And ye know all things."** Because they have the anointing, they know. "All things" does not mean everything there is to know: about the stars, or history, or the future. It means all that they need to tell truth from lies, which is the subject of the passage. Jesus had promised that the spirit of truth "will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).

Many older manuscripts read "and ye all know" instead of "and ye know all things" (Appendix D). That reading makes a point the false teachers would not like: not a few with a special knowledge, but *all* of you know. Either way the meaning is the same: the believers are not without a guide. They do not need the "higher knowledge" of the men who went out.

**Figures of speech.** "Unction" and "anointing" are named by Bullinger under *Anthropopatheia* ("condescension"), the figure by which human actions are used of God: God "anoints" as men anoint with oil. The oil was a picture; the gift is the reality.

> **1 John 2:21** *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.*

The balancing member of the introversion: the rejection of the lie (answering the rejection of the truth in 2:19).

**"I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth."** John wants no misunderstanding. He does not write because he thinks they are ignorant. "I have written" is literally "I wrote," the letter seen as already sent.

**"But because ye know it."** He writes because they *do* know the truth. A man warns his friend about a forger not because his friend cannot tell good money from bad, but because he can, and the warning will help him use what he knows.

**"And that no lie is of the truth."** This is the heart of it. "Of the truth" means "out of," "from," the truth. A lie never comes from the truth. Truth and lies do not share a root. However close a lie may come to the truth, however many true things it may say, a lie is not of the truth. Jesus said of the devil, "When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44). Lies come from him.

**Figures of speech.** Bullinger names "no lie is of the truth" as an *Idiom*: "no ... not" is the Hebrew way of saying "none at all." Not one lie is of the truth.

> **1 John 2:22** *Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.*

Now John names the lie, and the liar.

**"Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?"** The Greek has the article: "Who is *the* liar?" It is the great lie, the lie of lies. "Denieth" is *arneomai* (Strong's G720), to say no, to refuse, to disown. And what is denied is "that Jesus is the Christ": that the man Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, God's Anointed, the promised Messiah.

This was exactly what the synagogue denied: "the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue" (John 9:22). It was also what the false teachers of Asia denied, by teaching that "the Christ" was a spirit who came on the man Jesus at his baptism and left him before he died (Part One, Chapter 3 §C). Either way, Jesus Himself is not the Christ.

Against this stands the whole witness of the apostles. Peter confessed, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). On the day of Pentecost he declared, "God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). And John wrote his Gospel "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31). The man who was born, who died, who rose, and who ascended is the Christ. There is no other.

**"He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son."** "He" is literally "this one." This man, the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ, is the antichrist. John defines the antichrist by what he denies. And he goes further: he "denieth the Father and the Son." To deny that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, is to deny the Son; and to deny the Son is to deny the Father who sent Him and bore witness to Him. The two cannot be separated, as the next verse says.

> **1 John 2:23** *Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.*

**"Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father."** "Whosoever" takes in everyone. However much a man may say about God, if he denies the Son, he does not have the Father. Jesus said,

"He that hateth me hateth my Father also" (John 15:23); and "no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). The only way to the Father is through His Son.

**"(But) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also."** Here is the other side. "Acknowledgeth" is *homologeō*, "confess," the word of 1:9: to say the same thing, to agree openly. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father too.

The King James prints this second half of the verse in italics. This is not because the words were added by the translators, as italics usually mean, but to mark them as doubtful in the manuscripts they had. In fact the words are found in the oldest manuscripts and in all modern Greek texts. The clause is genuine (Appendix D). Bullinger notes the italics here as an example of the old translators marking words "of doubtful MS. authority."

**Figures of speech.** Bullinger lists "whosoever" here among words of the figure *Synecdoche*, where "all" or "every" takes in each one of the kind, without exception.

> **1 John 2:24** *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.*

The second half of the member begins: the believers' protection against the antichrists (see the structure above). The first protection is what they heard.

**"Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning."** "Let … abide" is *menō* again. What they heard from the beginning is the gospel as the apostles first taught it (1:1; 2:7). The antichrists brought something new. The protection against the new is the old. Paul wrote to Timothy, "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them" (2 Timothy 3:14).

**"If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you."** "Remain" is *menō* again. If the old word stays in them …

**"Ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father."** "Continue" is *menō* a third time. If the word abides in them, they abide in the Son and in the Father. Notice the order: the Son first, then the Father. The way to the Father is through the Son (2:23).

**Figures of speech.** Bullinger draws attention to the unusual order of the Greek, which he calls *Hyperbaton* ("transposition"), and gives it literally: "Ye, then, what ye heard from the beginning, in you let it abide: if in you shall have abode what from the beginning ye heard, ye also, in the Son, and in the Father, shall abide." The words are turned about so that "you" and "abide" stand out. The verse uses *menō* three times, and the King James renders it three different ways: "abide," "remain," "continue." The repetition in the Greek is a hammer: abide, abide, abide.

> **1 John 2:25** *And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.*

**"And this is the promise that he hath promised us."** "Promise" is *epangelia* (Strong's G1860), a promise, a pledge. Bullinger notes that this is the only time the word occurs in John's writings. "He" is the Son, in whom they abide (2:24, 28).

**"Even eternal life."** What He promised is "eternal life" (see 1:2). Jesus said, "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:28). The antichrists could offer a new teaching. They could not offer life. Only He who promised it can give it, and He has: "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (5:11).

> **1 John 2:26** *These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.*

John steps back and states his purpose for this whole member. This is the fourth reason for writing in the letter (Part One, Chapter 6 §A).

**"These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you."** "Seduce" is *planaō*, "to lead astray," the same word as "deceive" in 1:8. In English "seduce" now suggests something else; here it means to lead someone off the right road. The present tense means "them that are trying to lead you astray." Bullinger names this an *Idiom*: the active verb is used of what men "would, or ... try to" do. The deceivers had not succeeded; but they were trying.

This word is a thread. "Seduce" (*planaō*) here; "the spirit of error" (*planē*) in 4:6; "many deceivers" (*planoi*) in 2 John 7. All come from the same root. Chapter 7, §C, follows the thread.

> **1 John 2:27** *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.*

The second protection: the anointing.

**"But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you."** "The anointing" is *chrisma*, as in 2:20. "Received" is a past tense: they received it at a point in time, when they were born of God. And it "abideth" (*menō*) in them. The gift does not come and go. It stays. Jesus promised that the Comforter would "abide with you for ever" (John 14:16).

**"And ye need not that any man teach you."** This does not mean that believers do not need teachers. John himself is teaching them in this very letter, and God gave "some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11). It means they do not need the teaching of the men who went out. They do not need anyone to bring them a new revelation that sets aside what they have. They have the anointing, and the word they heard from the beginning.

**"But as the same anointing teacheth you of all things."** The anointing *teaches*. "Of all things" means about everything they need to know of the truth (2:20). This is what Jesus promised: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26).

**"And is truth, and is no lie."** The anointing is "truth": the gift of God never leads astray. The antichrists' teaching is the lie (2:22). The anointing "is no lie."

**"And even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him."** As it taught them, they "shall abide" in Him. The verb can also be read as a command, "abide in him," and many read it so; the next verse begins with the same command.

> **1 John 2:28** *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.*

The third protection: abiding in Him, with His coming in view.

**"And now, little children, abide in him."** "Little children" is *teknia* (2:1). "Abide in him" is *menō* once more. "Him" is Christ, as the rest of the verse shows.

**"That, when he shall appear."** "Appear" is *phaneroō*, "be manifested," the word used of His first coming in 1:2 and 3:5. He was manifested once; He will be manifested again. Many older manuscripts read "if" rather than "when" (*ean* for *hotan*). In Greek such an "if" is often used of what is certain but not yet dated: "whenever."

**"We may have confidence."** "Confidence" is *parrēsia* (Strong's G3954), boldness, freedom of speech, the openness of one who has nothing to hide. John uses it four times of the believer: here; before God in prayer (3:21; 5:14); and "in the day of judgment" (4:17). Bullinger lists it as the language of *Eleutheria* ("candour"), free and open speech.

Notice the "we." John includes himself. Even the old apostle wants to stand without shame when Christ appears.

**"And not be ashamed before him at his coming."** "Be ashamed before him" is literally "be shamed away from him": shrink back from Him in shame. Picture a child who has disobeyed, hiding behind the door when his father comes home. John wants his children to run to the door.

"Coming" is *parousia* (Strong's G3952), "presence," "arrival," the word used of a king's visit to a city. It is the word Paul uses for the hope of the church: "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?" (1 Thessalonians 2:19). And "we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:15). This is the believer's hope in the administration of grace: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout ... and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

> **1 John 2:29** *If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.*

The last verse of the member, and a bridge to the next. It brings in a word that will fill chapter 3: "born of him."

**"If ye know that he is righteous."** "He" is God (the verse ends "born of him," and believers are "born of God," 3:9). "Righteous" is *dikaios*, the word used of God in 1:9 and of Jesus Christ in 2:1. "Know" here is *oida*, to know as a settled fact.

**"Ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him."** The second "know" is *ginōskō*, to recognise, to perceive. Because you know God is righteous, you can recognise His children: they do what is righteous. "Doeth" is in the present tense: he goes on doing it. "Is born" is *gennaō* (Strong's G1080), to beget, to be born. It is a perfect tense: "has been born, and so is." This is the first time the verb appears in the letter, and it will appear nine more times, nearly always as "born of God" or "begotten of God." A child has his father's nature. Those who are born of the Righteous One do righteousness.

Doing righteousness does not *make* a man born of God. It shows that he is. The new birth comes first; the righteous life follows from it, as fruit follows from the root.

### In short

It is the last hour, and the sign is the many antichrists. They went out from the believers, showing they were never truly of them. The antichrist is the liar who denies that Jesus is the Christ, and so denies the Father and the Son. Against them the believers have three protections: the word they heard from the beginning, the anointing that teaches them and abides in them, and abiding in Him, so that they will not be ashamed at His coming. Those born of God do righteousness, as their Father is righteous.

## Section F — 3:1–3:9. Behold What Manner of Love: The Sons of God, and Purity

### Where it stands

The third member of the letter (B — D): **Love**. It answers the antichrist member before it. Against those who deny the Father and the Son, John sets the love of the Father, who has made us His children (3:1-2), and the love of the Son, who laid down His life for us (3:16). Each love has its effect on us.

The member has four parts, in alternation:

### 3:1-24. Love

*(Alternation)*

**B** | 3:1-2. The Father's love to us.

**C** | 3:3-15. Effect upon us: inward purity (3-9); outward manifestation (10-15).

***B*** | 3:16a. The Son's love to us.

***C*** | 3:16b-24. Effect upon us.

*Structure after E. W. Bullinger, The Companion Bible.*

Chapter 8 gathers the whole subject of love together. Section F takes the Father's love and its first effect, inward purity (3:1-9). Section G takes the outward manifestation (3:10-15). Section H takes the Son's love and its effect (3:16-24).

## Its structure

The inward purity of 3:3-9 is built in two matching halves, with a warning between:

### 3:3-9. Inward Purity

*(Introversion and extended alternation)*

**E** | **h** | 3:3. Purity.

**i** | 3:4. Sin's character: lawlessness.

**k** | 3:5. Christ manifested: the reason.

**l** | 3:6. Test of abiding.

**F** | 3:7a. Warning against deceivers.

***E*** | ***h*** | 3:7b. Righteousness.

***i*** | 3:8a. Sin's origin: the devil.

***k*** | 3:8b. Christ manifested: the reason.

***l*** | 3:9. Test of being begotten of God.

*Structure after E. W. Bullinger, The Companion Bible.*

Even here, in the member on love, the warning against the deceivers stands at the centre: "let no man deceive you" (3:7).

## The text

**1 John 3. 1** 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 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.

## Verse by verse

> **1 John 3:1** *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.*

The last verse of the antichrist member spoke of those "born of him" (2:29). Now John stops in wonder at what that means.

**"Behold."** The Greek is *idete*, "see!", "look!" It is in the plural: John calls all his readers to stop and look. Bullinger calls such a word *Asterismos* ("indicating"), a word that points like a star to what follows, to make the reader stop and pay attention.

**"What manner of love."** "What manner of" is *potapos* (Strong's G4217), "of what sort," "from what country": a word of astonishment, as if the love came from some other land. The disciples used it on the sea when the wind obeyed Jesus: "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!" (Matthew 8:27). John is amazed at this love. It is not like anything in this world.

**"The Father hath bestowed upon us."** "Hath bestowed" is "hath given," a perfect tense: He gave it, and it stays given. Bullinger notes that "love" here is put for what love does: "not merely the feeling of love, but the manifestation of it in all that it has done for us." The Father did not only feel love; He gave it, in a gift we can name.

**"That we should be called the sons of God."** Here is the gift. "Sons" is *tekna* (Strong's G5043), "children," those born of a father. "Should be called" means named, given the title. God does not merely call us His children as a kindness, the way an old man might call any boy "son." He calls us His children because we are. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13).

Many older manuscripts add here "and such we are" (*kai esmen*) (Appendix D). Bullinger calls the added words an *Epicrisis*, a short comment added at the end of a sentence: "and so we are!" Not only called; truly His.

**"Therefore the world knoweth us not."** "The world" here means people who are without God (Bullinger, under *Metonymy*). Because we are God's children, the world does not recognise us. We do not belong to it, and it cannot place us.

**"Because it knew him not."** The reason: the world did not know Him. "Him" is God the Father, whose children we are (and, through Him, His Son). "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not" (John 1:10). "O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee" (John 17:25). If the world did not know the Father, it will not know His children. The believer should not be surprised to be a stranger here.

> **1 John 3:2** *Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.*

**"Beloved."** *Agapētoi* (Strong's G27): "loved ones." In a member on love, John calls them by the name of love.

**"Now are we the sons of God."** "Now": not some day, but now. Already, today, the believer is a child of God. Paul says the same: "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Romans 8:16).

**"And it doth not yet appear what we shall be."** "Appear" is *phaneroō* again, "has not yet been made manifest." We are God's children now, but what that will mean in the end has not yet been shown. A seed does not look like the tree it will become.

**"But we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him."** "He" is Christ, whose appearing was spoken of in 2:28. When He is manifested, we shall be "like him." Paul describes it: "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body" (Philippians 3:20-21). And "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump" (1 Corinthians 15:51-52). This is the hope of the believer in the administration of grace: Christ's appearing, the change of the body, and being for ever with Him (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

**"For we shall see him as he is."** We shall see Him not in a vision, not "through a glass, darkly," but "face to face" (1 Corinthians 13:12). And seeing Him, we shall be like Him. John had once seen Him with his eyes (1:1); he will see Him again.

> **1 John 3:3** *And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.*

The first effect of the Father's love on us: purity.

**"And every man that hath this hope in him."** "This hope" is the hope of 3:2: to see Christ and be like Him. "Hope" is *elpis* (Strong's G1680), confident expectation, not wishful thinking. "In him" is literally "on him": the hope rests on Christ.

**"Purifieth himself."** "Purifieth" is *hagnizō* (Strong's G48), to make pure, to cleanse from defilement. The word was used of the ceremonial purifying before the feasts: "many went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the passover, to purify themselves" (John 11:55). A believer who expects to meet Christ prepares to meet Him. A bride who knows her bridegroom is coming does not wait in a soiled dress.

**"Even as he is pure."** "He" is *ekeinos*, "that one," Christ (see 2:6). "Pure" is *hagnos* (Strong's G53), chaste, clean, free from defilement. The standard is not a man's own idea of purity; it is Christ's.

> **1 John 3:4** *Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.*

What is sin? John defines it.

**"Whosoever committeth sin."** "Committeth" is "doeth," in the present tense: he goes on doing it, makes a practice of it. It is the opposite of "doeth righteousness" in 2:29.

**"Transgresseth also the law."** In the Greek this is a noun: "doeth also lawlessness." "Lawlessness" is *anomia* (Strong's G458), from *a-*, "without," and *nomos*, "law": living as though there were no law, refusing any rule but one's own. Jesus used it of the false prophets: "And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:23), where "iniquity" is *anomia*.

**"For sin is the transgression of the law."** In the Greek: "and sin is lawlessness." The two are the same thing. Sin is not a small matter of falling short now and then; at its heart it is a refusal to be ruled by God. Paul calls the coming one "that man of sin" and "that Wicked" (literally "the lawless one," 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 8).

> **1 John 3:5** *And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.*

Why did Christ come? To deal with this very thing.

**"And ye know that he was manifested."** "Ye know" (*oida*): this is something they already knew for certain. "He" is *ekeinos*, Christ. "Was manifested" is *phaneroō*, the word of 1:2: He was made visible, He came into the open, He was born and lived among men.

**"To take away our sins."** "Take away" is *airō* (Strong's G142), to lift up and carry off. John the Baptist cried, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), the same verb. John the apostle was very likely the unnamed one of the two disciples who heard the Baptist say it and followed Jesus that day (John 1:35-40). Christ came to lift sin off us and carry it away. He did it by His death, His resurrection, and His ascension: "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24).

Many older manuscripts read "to take away sins" rather than "our sins" (Appendix D). The sense is the same.

**"And in him is no sin."** He could take away sin because He had none of His own. "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" (1 Peter 2:22). Like the Passover lamb, He was "without blemish" (Exodus 12:5).

**Figures of speech.** Bullinger notes that verses 5 and 8 begin alike, the figure *Anaphora* ("like sentence-beginnings"): "he was manifested to take away our sins" (3:5) and "the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (3:8). The two purposes of His coming are set side by side.

> **1 John 3:6** *Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.*

The first test (the "I" member): abiding.

**"Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not."** "Abideth" is *menō*. "Sinneth not" is in the present tense. This cannot mean that the believer never sins at all; John has already said, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves" (1:8), and has told what to do "if any man sin" (2:1). It means that the man abiding in Christ does not live in sin, does not make sin his way of life. More than that: in so far as he abides in Christ, he does not sin. Sin comes when he steps out of abiding. Verse 9 will give the reason.

**"Whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him."** The man whose life is sin has never truly seen Christ or known Him. Bullinger explains the tense as *Heterosis*: "hath not seen him" means "seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him." A man cannot look at Christ and go on in sin at the same time. When he sins, in that moment, he is not looking at Him.

> **1 John 3:7** *Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.*

At the centre of this little structure stands a warning.

**"Little children, let no man deceive you."** "Deceive" is *planaō*, the word of 2:26, "them that seduce you." The false teachers of the antichrist member are still in view. Some of them taught that what a man did in the body did not matter: a man could be "spiritual" and live as he pleased. John will have none of it.

**"He that doeth righteousness is righteous."** Doing shows being. The man who does what is right is righteous.

**"Even as he is righteous."** "He" is *ekeinos*, Christ, "Jesus Christ the righteous" (2:1). The child is like the Father, and the brother is like the elder brother.

**Figures of speech.** Bullinger names this verse a *Polyptoton* ("many inflections"): "doeth righteousness … righteous … righteous," the same root in different forms, driving the word home.

> **1 John 3:8** *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.*

The second half of the little structure: sin's origin, and Christ's coming against it.

**"He that committeth sin is of the devil."** "Committeth" is "doeth," present tense: he who practises sin, who lives in it. "Of the devil" means "from the devil," taking his character from him. "Devil" is *diabolos* (Strong's G1228), "slanderer," "accuser," from *diaballō*, to throw across, to accuse falsely. This is the first time John uses the word in the letter; he uses it four times, all in this chapter.

**"For the devil sinneth from the beginning."** He has sinned since the beginning of his rebellion, and he still sins. Bullinger notes an *Ellipsis*: "The devil sinneth from the beginning [and still sinneth]." The present tense means he has never stopped. Jesus said, "He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him" (John 8:44). The man who lives in sin takes after the one who began it.

**"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested."** Now the reason for Christ's coming, from the other side. In 3:5 it was to take away sins; here it is to deal with the one behind sin. "The Son of God" is His full title here: John wants the reader to feel who it is that came against the devil.

**"That he might destroy the works of the devil."** "Destroy" is *luō* (Strong's G3089), to loose, to untie, to break up, to dissolve. It is the word for untying a donkey (Mark 11:4) and for breaking down a building (John 2:19, "Destroy this temple"). Christ came to undo, to unbind, to break apart all that the devil had built. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2:14).

> **1 John 3:9** *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.*

The test of being begotten of God, and the most searching verse of the section.

**"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin."** "Born of God" is the perfect tense of *gennaō*: "has been begotten of God." "Doth not commit sin" is "doeth not sin." How can John say this, when he has said, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves" (1:8)?

The verse itself gives the answer.

**"For his seed remaineth in him."** "Seed" is *sperma* (Strong's G4690), the seed from which life is begotten. "His" is God's. When a man is born of God, God puts His own seed in him: a new nature, from God, which is the gift of holy spirit. Peter says the same: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Peter 1:23). "Remaineth" is *menō*: the seed abides. It is never taken back. "For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Romans 11:29).

**"And he cannot sin, because he is born of God."** That which is born of God cannot sin. The seed of God is of God's own nature, and God cannot sin. So the new nature in the believer does not and cannot sin.

But the believer also still has his old nature, the flesh, which can and does sin; that is why he must confess his sins (1:9). Paul describes the two: "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other" (Galatians 5:17). And "Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me" (Romans 7:17). When a believer sins, it is not the seed of God in him that sins; it is the old nature. What is born of God remains holy.

This is why sin cannot cancel a believer's sonship. The seed remains. And this is why John can say, with equal truth, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves" (1:8) and "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin." The first speaks of the believer's flesh; the second of what God has begotten in him.

Bullinger adds that "to do sin" is a Hebrew idiom for sinning wilfully, as a way of life. The man begotten of God does not live in sin as his own chosen way; the seed in him will not let him be at home there.

**Figures of speech.** The verse is built on the figure Bullinger calls *Idiom* ("to do sin" for sinning wilfully, as a practice). And it ends where it began, "born of God ... born of God," wrapping the whole verse in the new birth.

### In short

Behold what love: the Father has made us His children, and we are. The world does not know us, as it did not know Him. We do not yet see what we shall be, but when Christ appears we shall be like Him, and the hope purifies us now. Sin is lawlessness; Christ was manifested to take it away and to undo the devil's works. The man who practises sin takes after the devil. The man begotten of God has God's seed in him, and that which is born of God cannot sin.

## Section G — 3:10–3:15. The Two Families: The Children of God and the Children of the Devil

### Where it stands

The second effect of the Father's love on us (see Section F): outward manifestation. Section F looked inward, at the seed of God in the believer and the purity it brings. Section G looks outward, at what can be seen: two families in the world, the children of God and the children of the devil, made manifest by how they treat their brothers. The great example is Cain.

## Its structure

**3:10-15. Outward Manifestation**

*(Introversion and alternation)*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **G** | **m** | 3:10-11. Character of the two classes. |
| | **n** | 3:12. The origin of Cain. |
| | **H** | 3:13. The world's choice. |
| ***G*** | ***m*** | 3:14. Test of the two states. |
| | ***n*** | 3:15. Cain's followers. |

*Structure after E. W. Bullinger, The Companion Bible.*

At the centre stands the world's hatred of the believer (3:13). On either side, the two families, and Cain.

## The text

**1 John 3. 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? Because 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.

## Verse by verse

> **1 John 3:10** *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.*

**"In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil."** "Manifest" here is *phaneros* (Strong's G5318), "visible," "plain to see," the adjective of the verb *phaneroō* (1:2; 2:19; 3:5, 8). Section F spoke of what is inward and hidden: the seed of God. Now John speaks of what can be seen. There are two families in the world, and they can be told apart.

"Children of the devil" is strong language, and John does not soften it. Bullinger lists this verse under *Eleutheria* ("candour"), the figure of plain, free speaking, and adds that it is "too free for the false toleration" of those who would rather not say such things. Jesus said it first, to men who wanted to kill Him: "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do" (John 8:44). Paul said it to Elymas the sorcerer, who tried to turn a governor from the faith: "O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness" (Acts 13:10). Bullinger notes that "children of

the devil," like "children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3), is a Hebrew way of saying "those who have the devil's character" (*Enallage*). A man is the child of whatever he takes after.

**"Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God."** Here is the first mark. "Is not of God": Bullinger notes the *Ellipsis*: "is not [born] of God," supplied from verse 9. The man who does not do righteousness shows he is not of God's family. Notice that John does not say "whosoever does a wrong thing." He means the man whose life is not righteous, who does not *do* righteousness as a practice (2:29).

**"Neither he that loveth not his brother."** The second mark, and the one John will dwell on now. Righteousness and love go together. A man may keep many rules and not love his brother; John says such a man is not of God.

> **1 John 3:11** *For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.*

**"For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning."** The second "message" of the letter (Part One, Chapter 6 §C). The first was "God is light" (1:5); this one is about love. Both are "the message," *angelia*, and both were heard from the start.

**"That we should love one another."** Here it is, in plain words. "Love" is *agapaō*, in the present tense: "that we should go on loving." "One another" (*allēlōn*) is believers loving believers (see 1:7). It was Jesus' own command on the last night: "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12). It was the old commandment and the new (2:7-8). If Jerome's story is true (Part One, Chapter 1 §F), it was the last sermon John ever preached.

> **1 John 3:12** *Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.*

The first example in the whole letter from the Old Testament, and the only person from it John names.

**"Not as Cain."** The story is in Genesis 4. Adam and Eve had two sons: Cain, a tiller of the ground, and Abel, a keeper of sheep. "And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell" (Genesis 4:3-5). God spoke to Cain and warned him: "sin lieth at the door" (Genesis 4:7). But Cain would not hear. "And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him" (Genesis 4:8).

The first two brothers born into the world, and one killed the other. Hatred of a brother is as old as that.

**"Who was of that wicked one."** "That wicked one" is *ho ponēros*, the evil one, the devil (2:13). Bullinger notes the *Ellipsis* again: "who was [born] of that wicked one," meaning he took his character from him. Cain's act was born of the adversary, who, Jesus said, "was a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44). What the devil is, Cain did.

**"And slew his brother."** "Slew" is *sphazō* (Strong's G4969), to slaughter, to cut the throat, the word used of killing a sacrifice. Bullinger notes it occurs only here and in Revelation, where it is used of the Lamb "slain" (Revelation 5:6). It is a brutal word. Cain did not merely strike in anger; he butchered his brother.

**"And wherefore slew he him?"** John asks the question to make the reader stop and think. Why would a man kill his own brother?

**"Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous."** Not because Abel had wronged him. Abel had done nothing to Cain. Cain hated him because Abel was righteous and he was not. Abel's righteousness showed up Cain's evil, as light shows up darkness, and Cain could not bear it. "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous" (Hebrews 11:4). The children of the devil hate the children of God because they are what the others are not. Jesus said, "Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved" (John 3:20).

> **1 John 3:13** *Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.*

The centre of the structure.

**"Marvel not, my brethren."** "Marvel" is *thaumazō* (Strong's G2296), to wonder, to be astonished. Do not be surprised. Most older manuscripts read simply "brethren" (Appendix D). Apart from 2:7, where most older manuscripts read "Beloved," this is the only place in the letter where John calls his readers "brethren."

**"If the world hate you."** The "if" does not doubt it; it means "that." Cain hated Abel; the world hates the believer, and for the same reason. Jesus warned: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18). And "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again" (John 3:7): the same "marvel not," because what is born of God is strange to the world. Bullinger calls this member "the world's choice": the world chooses to hate.

> **1 John 3:14** *We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.*

**"We know that we have passed from death unto life."** "We know" (*oida*), with certainty. "Have passed" is *metabainō* (Strong's G3327), to move from one place to another, to change one's dwelling, in the perfect tense: we have moved, and we stay moved. We were in death; we now live in life. Bullinger notes that Jesus used the very same words: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). Paul writes, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1).

**"Because we love the brethren."** This is not the *reason* we passed from death to life; that was the new birth, by believing. It is the *evidence* by which we know it. "Because" here means "we know it because": our love for the brethren shows that we have life. A dead body does not love; a living one does.

**"He that loveth not his brother abideth in death."** "Abideth" is *menō*. He stays where he was. He has not moved house; he is still in death.

> **1 John 3:15** *Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.*

**"Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer."** "Murderer" is *anthrōpoktonos* (Strong's G443), "man-slayer." Bullinger notes it occurs only here and in John 8:44, where Jesus said of the devil, "He was a murderer from the beginning." Cain's followers take after Cain, and Cain took after the devil.

How can hatred be murder? Jesus taught it on the mountain: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment" (Matthew 5:21-22). Murder begins in the heart. The hand only finishes what hatred started. Cain was a murderer in his heart before he rose up in the field.

**"And ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him."** "Abiding" is *menō*. Eternal life (1:2) does not dwell in a man whose heart is set on killing. John does not mean that a believer who has once been angry has lost eternal life. He means that hatred and the life of God are opposites; where the one rules, the other is not at home. The man who lives in hatred shows he has no eternal life abiding in him.

### In short

Two families are in the world, and they can be told apart: those who do righteousness and love their brothers are of God; those who do not are of the devil. Cain is the pattern of the second: of the wicked one, he slaughtered his brother because his brother was righteous. So the world hates the believer; do not be surprised. We know we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren. Hatred is murder in the heart, and eternal life does not abide in the murderer.

## Section H — 3:16–3:24. He Laid Down His Life: Love in Deed and in Truth

### Where it stands

The second half of the member on love (see Section F). The Father's love made us His children (3:1). Now the Son's love: "he laid down his life for us" (3:16). And its effect upon us: we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren, love in deed and in truth, and so have confidence before God. The member ends with the first plain mention in the letter of the gift of holy spirit that God has given (3:24), which leads straight into the second antichrist member, where the spirits are tried (4:1).

## Its structure

**3:16-24. The Son's Love, and Its Effect**

*(Alternation)*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **B** | | 3:16a. The Son's love to us. |
| **C** | **o** | 3:16b-18. Love manifested to the brethren. |
| | **p** | 3:19-22. Proof of our state before God. |
| | ***o*** | 3:23. Commandment of God. |
| | ***p*** | 3:24. Proof of His abiding in us. |

*Structure after E. W. Bullinger, The Companion Bible.*

## The text

**1 John 3. 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 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.

## Verse by verse

> **1 John 3:16** *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.*

Section G showed love's opposite: Cain, the murderer, who took his brother's life. Now John shows love itself: the One who gave His own life.

**"Hereby perceive we the love of God."** "Hereby" is "in this." "Perceive" is *ginōskō*, "we have come to know," in the perfect tense: we came to know it, and we know it still. The words "of God" are in italics in the King James, because they are not in the Greek. John writes simply "Hereby we know love": this is what love *is*. If you want to know what love is, look here.

**"Because he laid down his life for us."** "He" is *ekeinos*, Christ (2:6). "Laid down" is *tithēmi* (Strong's G5087), to put, to place, to lay down as a man lays down a garment. "Life" is *psuchē* (Strong's G5590), the soul-life, the natural life of the body. "For us" is *huper hēmōn*, "on our behalf," "in our place."

Jesus said these very words: "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). And "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself" (John 10:17-18). John stood at the cross and watched Him do it (John 19:26). Cain took a life; Christ gave His.

**"And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."** Now the effect upon us. "Ought" is *opheilō*, "we owe," as in 2:6. If He laid down His life for us, we owe the same to the brethren. Jesus said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Few believers are ever called to die for a brother. But all are called to the same kind of love: love that gives itself up. The next verse shows how it looks on an ordinary day.

**Figures of speech.** Bullinger notes the *Ellipsis* supplied by the translators in "the love *of God*." Without it, the sentence is sharper: here is love itself.

> **1 John 3:17** *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?*

From the great to the small: from dying for a brother to sharing with him.

**"But whoso hath this world's good."** "This world's good" is *ton bion tou kosmou*, "the living of the world": the means of life, money and goods (*bios*, as in 2:16). Bullinger renders it "the life of the world." Whoever has enough to live on.

**"And seeth his brother have need."** "Seeth" is *theōreō* (Strong's G2334), to look at, to watch, to gaze: not a passing glance, but seeing plainly. He sees his brother's need, and he knows it.

**"And shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him."** "Bowels" is *splanchna* (Strong's G4698), the inward parts: in the language of Scripture, the seat of the tender feelings, as we say "the heart." The words "of compassion" are added in italics in the King James to make the meaning clear. The picture is of a man who sees his brother hungry and closes his heart like a door. "Shutteth up" is *kleiō* (Strong's G2808), to shut, to lock.

**"How dwelleth the love of God in him?"** "Dwelleth" is *menō*: how can God's love abide in such a man? The question needs no answer. James asks the same: "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?" (James 2:15-16).

**Figures of speech.** Bullinger names this verse an *Aposiopesis* ("sudden silence"): John breaks off with a question and leaves the reader to finish the thought. He does not need to say what becomes of such a man's claim to love God.

> **1 John 3:18** *My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.*

**"My little children."** *Teknia* again. John says the hard thing gently.

**"Let us not love in word, neither in tongue."** "Us": John includes himself. "In word" is "in speech"; "in tongue" is "with the tongue." Love that only talks. It is easy to say, "I love you, brother," and do nothing.

**"But in deed and in truth."** "In deed" is "in work," in action. "In truth" is in reality, not pretence. The two belong together: love that acts, and love that is real. The new commandment was not "say that you love one another," but "love one another; as I have loved you" (John 13:34), and He showed His love with towel and basin, and with a cross.

> **1 John 3:19** *And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.*

The second "p" member: the proof of our state before God.

**"And hereby we know that we are of the truth."** "Hereby" is "by this": by loving in deed and in truth. Bullinger notes the *Ellipsis* again: "we are [born] of the truth." Love in action shows we belong to the truth, as hatred shows a man belongs to the lie.

**"And shall assure our hearts before him."** "Assure" is *peithō* (Strong's G3982), to persuade, to set at rest, to reassure. "Before him" is in God's presence. A believer's heart is sometimes uneasy, troubled by what it knows of itself. By this, by real love, we can set it at rest before God.

> **1 John 3:20** *For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.*

**"For if our heart condemn us."** "Condemn" is *kataginōskō* (Strong's G2607), to know against, to find fault with, to blame. It is the word Paul used of Peter at Antioch: "I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed" (Galatians 2:11). The heart, our own conscience, can accuse us. Sometimes rightly: we have sinned. Sometimes wrongly: we go on blaming ourselves for what God has forgiven.

**"God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things."** Here is the comfort. God is greater than our heart. Our heart knows only part; God knows all. When Peter, who had denied Jesus three times, was asked, "Lovest thou me?" he answered, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee" (John 21:17). John was there and heard it. He knew that a man's heart can condemn him, and that the Lord who knows all things sees more than the heart does: He sees the love that is really there, and He sees the propitiation that covers the sin (2:2). "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

**Figures of speech.** Bullinger lists "greater than our heart" under *Anthropopatheia* ("condescension"): human comparisons used of God so that we may grasp what He is.

> **1 John 3:21** *Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.*

**"Beloved, if our heart condemn us not."** When the heart is at rest, when we are walking in the light, with nothing hidden and nothing unconfessed ...

**"Then have we confidence toward God."** "Confidence" is *parrēsia*, the boldness of 2:28. "Toward God" is *pros ton theon*, face to face with Him. A child who knows his father's love and has nothing between

them runs into his presence and speaks freely. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace" (Hebrews 4:16).

> **1 John 3:22** *And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.*

**"And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him."** "Ask" is *aiteō* (Strong's G154), to ask, to request. "Whatsoever": the promise is large. Jesus made it on the last night: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7). Notice the condition there: "if ye abide in me, and my words abide in you." The one who abides asks what Christ's words have put in his heart. John will add the same in 5:14: "if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us."

**"Because we keep his commandments."** "Keep" is *tēreō*, as in 2:3. This is not payment for answered prayer. It is the condition of the child who walks with his Father, whose wishes have become his own.

**"And do those things that are pleasing in his sight."** "Pleasing" is *arestos* (Strong's G701), what pleases. Jesus said of Himself, "for I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29). The child does what pleases the Father, and asks as one who knows His mind.

> **1 John 3:23** *And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.*

The second "o" member: the commandment of God, summed up in one verse.

**"And this is his commandment."** Singular: one commandment, with two parts. All the "commandments" of 2:3 are gathered into one.

**"That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ."** The first part: believe. "Believe" is *pisteuō* (Strong's G4100), to trust, to be persuaded of, to rely upon. This is the first time the word appears in the letter. "On the name" means on all that He is: "the name" stands for the person (2:12). "His Son Jesus Christ": the full name and title, as in 1:3. When the crowd asked Jesus, "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" He answered, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent" (John 6:28-29).

**"And love one another, as he gave us commandment."** The second part: love. Believing on the Son and loving the brethren are one commandment. They cannot be pulled apart. Faith shows itself in love: "faith which worketh by love" (Galatians 5:6). "As he gave us commandment" points back to Christ's words on the last night (John 13:34).

> **1 John 3:24** *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.*

The last verse of the member, and the second "p": the proof of His abiding in us.

**"And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him."** "Dwelleth" is *menō*. Notice that it goes both ways: the believer abides in God, and God in the believer. Jesus said, "He that eateth

my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him" (John 6:56), and "Abide in me, and I in you" (John 15:4).

**"And hereby we know that he abideth in us."** How can we know that God abides in us? John has given tests of conduct. Now he gives the deepest proof of all.

**"By the Spirit which he hath given us."** "The Spirit" here is the gift of holy spirit, which God gave to us when we were born of Him. It is the "unction" of 2:20 and the "anointing" of 2:27. "Hath given" is a past tense: He gave it, once. "Of the Spirit" (*ek tou pneumatos*) means "from" or "by means of" the spirit. The gift itself is the evidence that God is in us. Paul writes, "In whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance" (Ephesians 1:13-14). An "earnest" is a down payment, a pledge that the rest will follow. The gift of holy spirit in the believer is God's own pledge that He abides in him.

This is the first time in the letter that John uses the word *pneuma*, "spirit." He has spoken of the unction and the anointing; now he names the gift. And having named it, he turns at once to the other spirits, the ones that are not of God. The next member begins: "Beloved, believe not every spirit" (4:1). The reader who knows what God's gift is will know how to try the rest.

### In short

Here is love: Christ laid down His life for us, and we owe the same to the brethren. A man who has goods and shuts his heart to a brother in need has no claim to God's love abiding in him. Love in deed and in truth, not in word only. By this our hearts are set at rest before God, who is greater than our heart and knows all things; and with a quiet heart we have boldness and receive what we ask. His commandment is one: believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another. And we know He abides in us by the gift of holy spirit that He has given us.

## Section I — 4:1–4:6. Try the Spirits: The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error

### Where it stands

The fourth member of the letter (B — C): **Antichrist**, the second time. It answers the first antichrist member (2:18-29). There the antichrists were people who went out from the believers. Here John shows how to recognise them and what moves them: "try the spirits … because many false prophets are gone out into the world." The member on love just ended with the gift of holy spirit God has given us (3:24); now John turns to the teachings that claim to come from God's spirit and do not.

This member is the heart of the subject of Part Three. Its meaning is explained verse by verse here, and gathered with the rest of Scripture there.

## Its structure

Bullinger shows the member as an alternation: spirits, then people.

**4:1-6. Antichrist**

*(Alternation)*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **J** | 4:1. | Discrimination of spirits. |
| **K** | 4:2-3. | Test of spirits. |
| ***J*** | 4:4-5. | Discrimination of professors. |
| ***K*** | 4:6. | Test of professors. |

*Structure after E. W. Bullinger, The Companion Bible.*

The spirits of verses 1-3 and the people of verses 4-6 stand in matching places. The structure itself shows that John is speaking of one subject from two sides: the spirit is known through the people who speak.

## The text

**1 John 4. 1** 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.

## Verse by verse

> **1 John 4:1** *Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*

**"Beloved."** *Agapētoi*, "loved ones." John begins a warning with a word of love.

**"Believe not every spirit."** This is the question every reader must ask: what does John mean by a "spirit" that we are to believe, or not believe?

No believer ever hears a spirit speak by itself. We do not see spirits, and they do not stand in front of us and talk. What we do hear is people: people who stand up and teach, and who claim that what they teach comes from God, by His spirit. That is what John means. In this passage "spirit" is put for the teaching that comes out through a person who claims to speak from God.

Scripture often speaks this way. Paul told the Thessalonians not to be shaken "neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us" (2 Thessalonians 2:2). "Spirit" stands there in a list with "word" and "letter": three ways a message might reach them. A "spirit" was a message claimed to come by revelation. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets" (1 Corinthians 14:32): the "spirit" is the prophesying, and it is under the prophet's control. And he warned of a man who "preacheth another Jesus," so that "ye receive another spirit ... or another gospel" (2 Corinthians 11:4): the other spirit comes by the preaching.

Bullinger names the figure *Metonymy*, the cause put for the effect: "spirit" is put for what is spoken. On this very verse he writes: "Beloved, believe not every spirit (i.e., every doctrine that is put forth as the teaching of the Spirit), but try the spirits (i.e., their teaching and doctrines, Acts 17:11)." The early believers heard prophecy in their meetings (1 Corinthians 14), and anyone could stand up and say, "Thus saith the spirit." John says: do not believe every such teaching.

**"But try the spirits whether they are of God."** "Try" is *dokimazō* (Strong's G1381), to test, to prove, as metal is tested in fire to see whether it is genuine. Paul says the same: "Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:20-21), where "prove" is the same word. The Bereans did it: "they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). And the Lord commended the assembly at Ephesus because "thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars" (Revelation 2:2).

**"Because many false prophets are gone out into the world."** Here is the reason, and it shows plainly what John means. Why try the spirits? *Because* of false prophets. The spirits are tested by testing the prophets: by testing what they teach. John gives no other way.

"False prophets" is *pseudoprophētai* (Strong's G5578), those who claim to speak for God and do not. Jesus warned of them: "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:15-16). And "many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many" (Matthew 24:11).

"Are gone out" is *exerchomai*, the very verb of 2:19: "They went out from us." The men who went out from the believers are the false prophets now gone out into the world. The antichrists of chapter 2 and the false prophets of chapter 4 are the same men, seen from two sides.

> **1 John 4:2** *Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:*

Now the test itself.

**"Hereby know ye the Spirit of God."** "Hereby" is "by this." This is how to recognise what comes from God's spirit. "The Spirit of God" here is God's gift, the holy spirit given to the believer at the new birth (3:24), as it shows itself through a true prophet. "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal" (1 Corinthians 12:7), and among the manifestations are "prophecy" and

"discerning of spirits" (1 Corinthians 12:10). When the gift of holy spirit is at work in a man, what comes out agrees with God's truth.

**"Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God."** "Every spirit": every teaching put forth as from God. "Confesseth" is *homologeō*, to say the same thing, to acknowledge openly (1:9; 2:23). A spirit "confesses" through what its prophet teaches. Bullinger renders it: "Every spirit (i.e., doctrine) which confesseth (or teacheth) that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God."

"Jesus Christ is come in the flesh" is in Greek "Jesus Christ having come in flesh," a perfect participle: He came, and His coming stands. Bullinger explains "in the flesh" as "in His real human nature." Jesus Christ was a real man, born of a woman, with a real body of flesh and blood. "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman" (Galatians 4:4). He was hungry and thirsty and tired; He wept; He bled and died; and He rose in a body that could be handled (Luke 24:39). John had touched Him (1:1).

So the test is this: does the teaching acknowledge Jesus, the real man, as the Christ come in the flesh? Or does it split Jesus from the Christ, or turn Him into a spirit who only seemed to have a body (Part One, Chapter 3 §C)? The teaching that holds forth Jesus Christ come in the flesh is of God.

> **1 John 4:3** *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.*

**"And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God."** The other side of the test. Every teaching that does not acknowledge Jesus Christ come in the flesh is not from God, however spiritual it sounds, and however much it claims God's spirit.

Many older manuscripts read more briefly: "every spirit that confesseth not Jesus is not of God" (Appendix D). And some of the earliest writers knew another reading still. Irenaeus, writing about A.D. 180, quotes the verse as "every spirit which *separates* Jesus Christ is not of God" (*Against Heresies* 3.16.8). That reading names exactly the error John's readers faced: the teaching that separated the man Jesus from the Christ. Whichever reading is followed, the meaning is the same: the teaching that does not acknowledge the real Jesus as the Christ is not of God.

**"And this is that spirit of antichrist."** The word "spirit" here is in italics in the King James, because it is not in the Greek. John writes simply: "and this is that [thing] of the antichrist." The translators supplied "spirit" from the verses before, and it is a fair supply. But John's meaning is plain: this teaching is the antichrist's. As Bullinger says, "As Antichrist himself has not yet come, it must mean his teaching which is already here."

**"Whereof ye have heard that it should come."** "Should come" is "is coming." The believers had heard that antichrist was coming (2:18).

**"And even now already is it in the world."** It is here already. The coming one has not yet come, but his teaching has. It is "in the world," spoken by the false prophets who "are gone out into the world" (4:1). The antichrist teaching did not wait for the antichrist.

> **1 John 4:4** *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.*

The second half of the member turns from the spirits to the people (see the structure above).

**"Ye are of God, little children."** "Ye" is emphatic: *you*, in contrast to them. "Of God" means born of God, belonging to Him. "Little children" is *teknia*.

**"And have overcome them."** "Them" is the false prophets (4:1). "Have overcome" is *nikaō* in the perfect tense: you have won, and the victory stands. The same was said to the young men: "ye have overcome the wicked one" (2:13). How had they overcome the false prophets? By not believing them. When the men went out, the believers stayed (2:19). The lie did not take them.

**"Because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world."** Here is the reason. "He that is in you" is God, who abides in the believer by the gift of His spirit (3:24; 4:13). "He that is in the world" is the adversary, the wicked one, "the prince of this world" (John 12:31), whose teaching the false prophets speak. Paul calls him "the god of this world," who "hath blinded the minds of them which believe not" (2 Corinthians 4:4), and "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2). Paul also names the source of the false teaching: "seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils" (1 Timothy 4:1).

So Scripture does name a source behind the false teaching. But it is God who is greater, and He is in the believer. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

> **1 John 4:5** *They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.*

**"They are of the world."** "They" are the false prophets. "Of the world" is "from the world," taking their character from it. They went out from the believers (2:19) into the world (4:1), and they belong there.

**"Therefore speak they of the world."** Here is how they are known: by what they *speak*. Their teaching comes out of the world, fits the world's ideas, and pleases the world's ears.

**"And the world heareth them."** And the world listens. False teaching is popular because it comes from the world and suits it. Paul warned Timothy that "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears" (2 Timothy 4:3). Jesus said, "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive" (John 5:43).

> **1 John 4:6** *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.*

The test of the people.

**"We are of God."** "We" here is the apostles, as in 1:1-4: "we" who heard, saw and handled, and who now declare. John speaks as one of those who taught the believers from the beginning.

**"He that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us."** Here is the second test. Who listens to the apostles' teaching? The man who knows God hears it. The man not of God does not. Jesus said, "He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God" (John 8:47). And "My sheep hear my voice" (John 10:27). The test of any teaching is whether it agrees with what the apostles taught. For us, that teaching is written in the Scriptures.

**"Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error."** "Hereby" is "by this," that is, by what is spoken, and by who hears it. "The spirit of truth" and "the spirit of error" are known by their teaching, and by its hearers.

"The spirit of truth" is the name Jesus gave to the gift He promised: "Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him" (John 14:17). "Error" is *planē* (Strong's G4106), wandering, straying, deception. It is the same family of words as "them that seduce you" (2:26, *planaō*) and "many deceivers" (2 John 7, *planoi*). The people who lead astray in chapter 2 are moved by the spirit of error in chapter 4. The spirit of error is seen in the people who lead astray.

### In short

Do not believe every teaching that claims to come from God's spirit. Test it, because many false prophets have gone out into the world: the same men who went out from the believers. A spirit is known only by what its prophet teaches. Every teaching that acknowledges Jesus Christ come in the flesh is from God; every teaching that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God: it is the antichrist's teaching, which the believers heard was coming and which is already in the world. They are of the world, they speak of the world, and the world listens. The believers are of God and have overcome them, because He who is in them is greater than he who is in the world. And the spirit of truth and the spirit of error are known by who hears the apostles' word.

## Section J — 4:7–4:21. God Is Love

### Where it stands

The fifth member of the letter (B — D): **Love**, the second time. It answers the first member on love (3:1-24). As 3:1-24 followed the first antichrist member, so this follows the second. After the spirit of error comes the love of God. The antichrist member was about what we are to believe; this one is about how we are to love. And it reaches the summit of the whole letter: "God is love" (4:8, 16).

Chapter 8 gathers the whole subject of love together. The love words of this member show its weight: the noun and verb for love occur twenty-seven times in these fifteen verses. In the two antichrist members they do not occur at all (Appendix A).

## Its structure

Bullinger shows the member as an introversion, turning on its centre like a hinge:

**4:7-21. Love**

*(Introversion)*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **q** | 4:7-8. | Call to love the brethren. |
| **r** | 4:9. | Proof of God's love to us. |
| **s** | 4:10. | God's love first. |
| **t** | 4:11-12. | Love perfected. |
| **u** | 4:13-14. | Hereby ... because. |
| **v** | 4:15. | God's indwelling. |
| ***v*** | 4:16. | Dwelling in God. |
| ***u*** | 4:17. | Herein ... because. |
| ***t*** | 4:18. | Perfected in love. |
| ***s*** | 4:19. | God's love first. |
| ***r*** | 4:20. | Proof of our love to God. |
| ***q*** | 4:21. | Command to love the brethren. |

*Structure after E. W. Bullinger, The Companion Bible.*

At the centre stand the two sides of the same truth: God dwells in us (4:15), and we dwell in God (4:16).

## The text

**1 John 4. 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 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.

## Verse by verse

> **1 John 4:7** *Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.*

The false prophets have been named and tested. Now John turns back to the believers, and to love.

**"Beloved, let us love one another."** "Beloved" is *agapētoi*, "loved ones," and the command is *agapōmen*, "let us love": the same root, side by side. Those who are loved are to love. "Us": John includes himself.

**"For love is of God."** "Of God" is "from God," "out of God." Love has its source in God. It does not begin in us. Human beings can feel affection, but the love John speaks of, *agapē*, the love that gives itself for another's good, comes from God.

**"And every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God."** If love comes from God, then the one who loves in this way shows that he has God's nature in him: he "is born of God" (perfect tense: has been begotten, and so is). And he "knoweth God" (present tense: goes on knowing Him). Love is the family likeness.

> **1 John 4:8** *He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.*

**"He that loveth not knoweth not God."** The other side. Bullinger notes that the tense here is a past: "knew not," which he explains (*Heterosis*) as "knoweth not, or never knew" God. The man who does not love has never truly come to know God, whatever he may say.

**"For God is love."** Here is the summit of the letter. John said, "God is light" (1:5). Now he says, "God is love." He does not say only that God loves, or that God has love, or that God shows love, though all are true. He says love is what God *is*. Everything God does is done in love, because love is His nature.

This is why John has pressed love so hard. A man who does not love cannot know God, because to know God is to know love. Light and love are the two great words John uses for what God is. Light: He is pure and true, with no darkness. Love: He gives Himself for the good of others. Neither can be separated from the other.

> **1 John 4:9** *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.*

How do we know God is love? By what He did.

**"In this was manifested the love of God toward us."** "Manifested" is *phaneroō*, the word of 1:2: brought into the open, shown. God's love was not left as an idea. It was shown, in an act. "Toward us" is literally "in us," "among us": shown in our midst.

**"Because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world."** Here is the act. "Sent" is *apostellō* (Strong's G649), to send on a mission, to send as one's representative (from which comes "apostle"). It is a perfect tense: He sent Him, and the sending stands. "His only begotten Son" is *ton huion autou ton monogenē*. "Only begotten" is *monogenēs* (Strong's G3439), "only," "unique," "one of a kind," from *monos*, "only," and *genos*, "kind." It was used of an only child: the widow's son at Nain was "the only son of his mother" (Luke 7:12), and Jairus' daughter was "one only daughter" (Luke 8:42). Jesus is God's only Son in a way no other is: the one Son, begotten of God in Mary, as the angel told her, "therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

"Into the world": God sent Him to the world of men, as Jesus said in His prayer: "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John 17:18). The same words, "sent into the world," are used of the apostles. God sent His Son on a mission, to the world that needed Him.

This is the verse that John's Gospel puts in its best-known form: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

**"That we might live through him."** The purpose: life. "Live" is *zaō* (Strong's G2198). We were dead (3:14); He was sent that we might live. "Through him": the life comes by Him, by His death, His resurrection, and His ascension. "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

> **1 John 4:10** *Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

**"Herein is love."** "Herein" is "in this." If you want to see what love really is, here it is.

**"Not that we loved God."** Love did not start with us. We did not love God first and win His love in return. We did not love Him at all. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

**"But that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."** God loved first, and He showed it by sending His Son to be the "propitiation," *hilasmos*, the word of 2:2: the sacrifice that satisfies justice and takes away sin, the reality behind the blood sprinkled on the mercy seat. The propitiation was completed by Christ's death, His resurrection, and His ascension to the Father's right hand. Love is God providing, at His own cost, the very sacrifice that our sin required.

> **1 John 4:11** *Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.*

**"Beloved, if God so loved us."** "If" here means "since": it is not in doubt. "So" means "in this way," "to this extent": as verses 9-10 have just shown.

**"We ought also to love one another."** "Ought" is *opheilō*, "to owe," as in 2:6 and 3:16: we owe it. We owe God's love onward. We cannot pay it back to Him; we pay it forward to the brethren. Jesus told the parable of the servant forgiven ten thousand talents who would not forgive his fellow servant a hundred pence (Matthew 18:23-35). The one who has been loved so much owes love.

> **1 John 4:12** *No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.*

**"No man hath seen God at any time."** "Hath seen" is *theaomai*, to gaze upon, the "looked upon" of 1:1. John wrote almost the same at the start of his Gospel: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18). God is invisible. He is "dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see" (1 Timothy 6:16). John is careful to keep the Father and the Son apart: no one has seen God; but John has seen and handled His Son (1:1).

**"If we love one another, God dwelleth in us."** No one can see God. But when believers love one another, God is seen living in them. "Dwelleth" is *menō*. The love of the brethren makes the invisible God visible.

**"And his love is perfected in us."** "Perfected" is *teleioō*, as in 2:5: brought to its goal, made complete. God's love came down to us in His Son; it reaches its goal when it flows on from us to one another.

> **1 John 4:13** *Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.*

**"Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us."** "Hereby" again: here is how we can know. "Dwell" is *menō*, both ways (3:24).

**"Because he hath given us of his Spirit."** As in 3:24, the proof is the gift of holy spirit. "Of his Spirit" is *ek tou pneumatos autou*, "out of His spirit": God has given us from His own spirit. He is Spirit (John 4:24), and He has given of Himself to His children. The perfect tense, "hath given," means the gift is given and stays given. "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Galatians 4:6).

> **1 John 4:14** *And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.*

**"And we have seen and do testify."** "We" is again the apostles, the eyewitnesses. "Have seen" is *theaomai*, "gazed upon," the same word as in verse 12. No man has seen God; but the apostles have seen what God did: they have seen His Son. And they "testify" (*martureō*), bear witness, as in 1:2.

**"That the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world."** "Saviour" is *sōtēr* (Strong's G4990), deliverer, rescuer, the one who makes safe. "Of the world": not of a few, but of all mankind (2:2). The Samaritans said it after Jesus stayed two days in their town: "Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world" (John 4:42). John was there.

> **1 John 4:15** *Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.*

The centre of the member.

**"Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God."** "Confess" is *homologeō*. In 4:2-3 it was used of the teaching that does or does not acknowledge Jesus Christ come in the flesh. Here it is used of the believer's own confession: "Jesus is the Son of God." It was Peter's confession: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). It was the confession John wrote his Gospel to bring men to (John 20:31). It is the confession Paul names: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Romans 10:9).

**"God dwelleth in him, and he in God."** "Dwelleth" is *menō*. Whoever makes this confession has God dwelling in him, and he dwells in God. "Whosoever": the door is open to anyone.

> **1 John 4:16** *And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.*

The other side of the centre.

**"And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us."** "Known" and "believed" are both perfect tenses: we came to know it and know it still; we came to believe it and believe it still. "Hath to us" is literally "hath in us": the love God has, and has shown, in our midst.

**"God is love."** Said a second time (4:8). It is the centre of the centre.

**"And he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."** "Dwelleth" is *menō*, three times in one sentence. To live in love is to live in God, because God is love. And God lives in the man who lives in love. Verse 15 said: confess the Son, and God dwells in you. Verse 16 says: live in love, and you dwell in God. Believing and loving are the two sides of the same life (3:23).

> **1 John 4:17** *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.*

**"Herein is our love made perfect."** The Greek reads "Herein is love made perfect with us." "Made perfect" is *teleioō*, perfect tense: has been brought to its goal.

**"That we may have boldness in the day of judgment."** "Boldness" is *parrēsia*, the confidence of 2:28 and 3:21. Bullinger lists it as the open speech of *Eleutheria* ("candour"). "The day of judgment" is the day when God judges. A believer whose life is filled with God's love will not shrink from that day; he will face it with open face.

Why can he be bold? Because his standing does not rest on himself. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Jesus said, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is

passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). The believer will give account (Romans 14:12), but he comes as a son, not as a criminal.

**"Because as he is, so are we in this world."** "He" is *ekeinos*, Christ (2:6). As He is now, accepted with the Father, loved by the Father, so are we, even while we are still "in this world." What is true of Him before the Father is true of us in Him. That is the ground of our boldness: we are "accepted in the beloved" (Ephesians 1:6).

> **1 John 4:18** *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.*

**"There is no fear in love."** "Fear" is *phobos* (Strong's G5401), dread, terror. Love and fear of punishment cannot live together. A child who knows he is loved does not cower before his father.

**"But perfect love casteth out fear."** "Perfect" is *teleios* (Strong's G5046), complete, grown up, the adjective of the verb "made perfect." "Casteth out" is "throws out of doors." When love is full grown, it shows fear the door.

**"Because fear hath torment."** "Torment" is *kolasis* (Strong's G2851), punishment. Bullinger notes it occurs only here and in Matthew 25:46: "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment." Fear has punishment in it: it is the dread of punishment, and it is a punishment in itself. The man who fears God's judgment lives under the shadow of it already.

**"He that feareth is not made perfect in love."** If a believer still fears punishment from God, he has not yet grown up in love. He has not yet taken in how much he is loved. "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15).

This is not the "fear of the LORD" which is "the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10): the reverence and awe due to God, which love does not cast out but deepens. It is the terror of punishment, which love removes.

> **1 John 4:19** *We love him, because he first loved us.*

**"We love him, because he first loved us."** Here is the root of all. "First": His love came before ours (4:10). Bullinger notes the tense (*Heterosis*): "We love Him because He first loved us: i.e., before we loved Him." Our love is only an answer to His.

Most older manuscripts read simply "We love, because he first loved us," without "him" (Appendix D). Then the verse is even wider: all our loving, of God and of one another, springs from His loving us first.

> **1 John 4:20** *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?*

The proof of our love to God.

**"If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar."** "If a man say": the same kind of claim as in 1:6, 8, 10 and 2:4, 6, 9. "Liar" is *pseustēs*, as in 1:10 and 2:4. A man who says "I love God" while he hates his brother is not telling the truth.

**"For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"** Here is the argument. The brother is in front of him, visible, touchable. God is unseen (4:12). If a man cannot love the one he can see, how can he love the One he cannot? Love for the unseen God shows itself in love for the seen brother. A man who says he loves the father while he beats the father's children is lying.

> **1 John 4:21** *And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.*

**"And this commandment have we from him."** "From him": from God, given through His Son.

**"That he who loveth God love his brother also."** The member ends where it began (4:7): love one another. Love for God and love for the brother cannot be separated. Jesus joined the two great commandments: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart" (Matthew 22:37); "And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 22:39).

### In short

Love is from God, and the one who loves is born of God and knows Him; the one who does not love has never known God, for God is love. His love was shown when He sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him, to be the propitiation for our sins. He loved first; we owe that love to one another. No man has seen God, but when we love, God dwells in us and His love is made complete. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God has God dwelling in him; whoever dwells in love dwells in God. Love made complete gives boldness for the day of judgment, and casts out the fear of punishment. We love because He first loved us. And whoever loves God must love his brother also.

## Section K — 5:1–5:12. Born of God: The Victory, and the Witness

### Where it stands

The sixth and last member of the letter (A): **Christ**, answering the first member (1:1–2:17). The letter began with the Word of life heard, seen and handled; it ends with believing on the Son, the witness God has given of Him, and the life that is in Him.

The member alternates twice between believing in Christ and the witness to Him:

**5:1-21. Christ**

*(Alternation)*

**L** | 5:1-5. Belief in Christ.

**M** | 5:6-12. Witnesses to us that He has come.

***L*** | 5:13-19. Belief in Christ.

***M*** | 5:20-21. Witnesses in us that He has come.

*Structure after E. W. Bullinger, The Companion Bible.*

The words show it plainly. "Believe" (*pisteuō*) occurs seven times in this member, more than in all the rest of the letter together; "witness" and "bear witness" (*marturia*, *martureō*) occur ten times, all of them in 5:6-11 (Appendix A).

Section K takes the first pair (5:1-12); Section L the second (5:13-21).

## Its structure

**5:1-12**

*(The first pair of the last member)*

**L** | 5:1-5. Belief in Christ: whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, loves, keeps, and overcomes.

**M** | 5:6-12. Witnesses to us that He has come: the water, the blood, the spirit; the witness of God; the life in His Son.

*Structure after E. W. Bullinger, The Companion Bible.*

## The text

**1 John 5. 1** 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. **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.

## Verse by verse

> **1 John 5:1** *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.*

**"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God."** Here is the answer to the great lie of 2:22: "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?" The antichrist denies it; the child of God believes it. "Believeth" is *pisteuō*, present tense: goes on believing. "Is born" is the perfect tense of *gennaō*: has been begotten of God, and so is. Believing does not come after the new birth as a mere sign of it; whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12).

**"And every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him."** "Him that begat" is God the Father. "Him also that is begotten of him" is every other child of God, every brother. If you love the father, you love his children. Love for God and love for the family cannot be separated (4:20-21).

> **1 John 5:2** *By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.*

**"By this we know that we love the children of God."** In 4:20 John turned it one way: love for the brother proves love for God. Now he turns it the other way: love for God, shown in obedience, proves that our love for the brethren is real. "Children" is *tekna*.

**"When we love God, and keep his commandments."** Love for God's children is not sentiment, and it is not approval of whatever they do. It is love that flows from loving God and doing what He says. The two loves test each other.

> **1 John 5:3** *For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.*

**"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments."** Love for God is not first a feeling; it is obedience. Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Bullinger notes that keeping His commandments is the result of His love, which "is shed abroad in our hearts" (Romans 5:5).

**"And his commandments are not grievous."** "Grievous" is *barus* (Strong's G926), heavy, burdensome. God's commandments are not a crushing weight. Jesus said, "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:30). The Pharisees "bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders" (Matthew 23:4), using the same word. God's one commandment, to believe on His Son and love one another (3:23), is not like that. It is the natural life of a child of God.

> **1 John 5:4** *For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*

Why are His commandments not heavy? Because the new nature in us is able to keep them.

**"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world."** Notice "whatsoever," not "whosoever." The Greek is neuter: "every thing that is begotten of God." Bullinger explains that it is put in the neuter "on account of the spiritual or new nature which is referred to (spirit being neuter)." It is the seed of God in the believer (3:9), the new nature, that overcomes. The world cannot defeat what God has begotten. "Overcometh" is *nikaō*, present tense: goes on overcoming.

**"And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."** "Victory" is *nikē* (Strong's G3529), the only time the noun occurs in the New Testament. "That overcometh" is a past tense in the Greek: "the victory that overcame the world." It looks back to the moment of believing, when the battle was won. Bullinger calls this a *Metonymy*: "victory" is put for the faith that wins it. Our faith is our victory. Jesus said, "be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Our faith joins us to Him who has already won.

> **1 John 5:5** *Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?*

**"Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"** John asks the question so that the reader will answer it himself. Who overcomes? Not the strong, not the clever, not the man of special knowledge. The one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. In 5:1 the confession was "Jesus is the Christ"; here it is "Jesus is the Son of God." The two belong together: "these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31).

> **1 John 5:6** *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.*

Now the witness (the "M" member). What is the evidence that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?

**"This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ."** "This" is Jesus, the Son of God of verse 5. "Came" is a past tense: He came, once, into the world, and His coming is marked by water and by blood.

What is "the water"? Bullinger explains it as Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, "when witness was given to Him by the voice from heaven and the descent of the Spirit." "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:16-17). There God bore witness that Jesus is His Son.

What is "the blood"? His death on the cross, where He poured out His life. At the cross, too, there was witness: the soldier pierced His side, "and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true" (John 19:34-35). John saw it.

So His ministry was bounded by water at the start and blood at the end, and God bore witness at both.

**"Not by water only, but by water and blood."** Here is the answer to the false teaching of John's day. Some taught that "the Christ" came upon Jesus at His baptism and left Him before He suffered (Part One, Chapter 3 §C). On that view the Christ came by water only: He was present at the baptism but not at the cross. John says no. Jesus Christ came by water *and* by blood. The same Jesus Christ who was baptized was the One who died. The Christ did not leave Him before the cross; the Christ was crucified.

**"And it is the Spirit that beareth witness."** A third witness: "the Spirit." At the baptism, God's spirit descended on Jesus (Matthew 3:16). On the day of Pentecost, after His resurrection and ascension, the gift of holy spirit was poured out, as Peter said: "having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear" (Acts 2:33). The gift itself witnesses that Jesus is risen and exalted. And it goes on bearing witness in every believer: "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Romans 8:16).

**"Because the Spirit is truth."** God's spirit cannot lie. It is "the spirit of truth" (4:6). Bullinger explains "is truth" (*Antimereia*) as "is true": "the witness of the Holy Spirit concerning Christ is true in every place and in every particular."

> **1 John 5:7** *For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.*

The King James prints this verse in a longer form than the Greek manuscripts support, and the reader should know this plainly.

**What the Greek says.** In the Greek manuscripts, verses 7-8 read simply: "For there are three that bear witness, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one." The words "in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth" are not part of what John wrote.

**Where the added words came from.** They are found in no Greek manuscript earlier than the late Middle Ages, and in only a handful of late ones. They first appear in Latin writers, from the late fourth century, and then in the margins and later the text of Latin Bibles. Bullinger says of them in *The Companion Bible*: "The words are not found in any Greek MS. before the sixteenth century. They were first seen in the margin of some Latin copies. Thence they have crept into the text." When Erasmus printed the first Greek New Testament in 1516, he left them out, because his Greek manuscripts did not have them. They entered the printed Greek text in his third edition of 1522, and so passed into the Received Text from which the King James was translated in 1611 (Appendix D).

**Why it matters.** John did not write about witnesses in heaven. He wrote about witnesses on earth, to the fact that Jesus is the Son of God: the water of His baptism, the blood of His cross, and the spirit poured out. The added words change the subject of the passage. This study follows what John wrote.

So read verses 7-8 as John wrote them:

*"For there are three that bear witness, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one."*

> **1 John 5:8** *And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.*

**"And there are three that bear witness in earth."** As explained under verse 7, the words "And there are three that bear witness in earth" belong to the added passage. John's sentence runs straight on from "For there are three that bear witness."

**"The spirit, and the water, and the blood."** The three witnesses of verse 6, now named together. The water: God's voice at the baptism. The blood: His death, and the life it bought. The spirit: the gift poured out at Pentecost and given to every believer. The law required that "at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established" (Deuteronomy 19:15). God has given three.

**"And these three agree in one."** Literally "the three are into the one": they point to one thing; they all say the same. Bullinger notes that "these three" is masculine in the Greek, though "spirit," "water," and "blood" are all neuter. He calls it *Heterosis*: the witnesses are treated as persons, because they testify like witnesses in a court.

> **1 John 5:9** *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.*

**"If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater."** Every day we accept what people tell us: a neighbour's word, a doctor's report, two witnesses in court. If we accept the witness of men, how much more God's? His witness is "greater," because He cannot lie.

**"For this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son."** The water, the blood and the spirit are God's own witness, given about His Son. "Hath testified" is a perfect tense: He gave it, and it stands.

> **1 John 5:10** *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.*

**"He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself."** The believer does not have to rely on someone else's report alone. He has God's witness inside him: the gift of holy spirit, which "beareth witness with our spirit" (Romans 8:16). He knows from within.

**"He that believeth not God hath made him a liar."** To refuse God's witness about His Son is to call God a liar. It is the same as in 1:10: "we make him a liar." The man who does not believe is not neutral; he has said God's word is false.

**"Because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son."** "Record" is *marturia*, "witness," the same word as before. The unbeliever has heard God's witness and rejected it.

> **1 John 5:11** *And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.*

What is the witness? John now states it in one sentence.

**"And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life."** "Hath given" is a past tense: He gave it. Not "will give," not "may give if we are good enough." God has given us eternal life (1:2). The gift is already ours.

**"And this life is in his Son."** Where is this life? "In his Son." Not in ourselves, not in our works, not in a church or a ceremony. It is in the Son. "In him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

> **1 John 5:12** *He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.*

**"He that hath the Son hath life."** If the life is in the Son, then whoever has the Son has the life. It is as simple as that. To have the Son is to believe on Him, to receive Him (John 1:12).

**"And he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."** And the man who does not have the Son does not have life, whatever else he may have. John does not soften it. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36).

### In short

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, loves God's children, keeps His commandments, and finds them not heavy; for what is born of God overcomes the world, and our faith is the victory. Jesus Christ came by water and blood, His baptism and His death, not by water only; and the spirit bears witness, because the spirit is truth. The longer form of 5:7-8 in the King James was added from Latin copies; John wrote of three witnesses on earth: the spirit, the water and the blood, which agree in one. God's witness is greater than man's. The believer has it in himself; the unbeliever makes God a liar. The witness is this: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that has the Son has life.

## Section L — 5:13–5:21. That Ye May Know

### Where it stands

The second pair of the last member (see Section K): belief in Christ (5:13-19), and the witness in us that He has come (5:20-21). Here John states the purpose of the whole letter (5:13), and then gathers up what we know. Three times in three verses he says "we know" (5:18, 19, 20). The letter that began with what the apostles heard, saw and handled ends with what every believer knows.

## Its structure

**5:13-21**

*(The second pair of the last member)*

***L*** | 5:13-19. Belief in Christ: that ye may know; confidence in asking; the brother who sins; "we know."

***M*** | 5:20-21. Witness in us that He has come: the understanding given; keep yourselves from idols.

*Structure after E. W. Bullinger, The Companion Bible.*

## The text

**1 John 5. 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.

## Verse by verse

> **1 John 5:13** *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.*

**"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God."** "Have I written" is literally "I wrote," the letter seen as finished. "These things" are all that John has written. "You that believe on the name of the Son of God": here are John's readers, named at last. They are believers.

**"That ye may know that ye have eternal life."** Here is the purpose of the whole letter, and the title of this study. "Know" is *oida*, to know as a settled fact. Not "that ye may hope," not "that ye may wonder," but "that ye may know." And what they may know is "that ye *have* eternal life": present tense, now. John has given test after test (Part One, Chapter 6 §E), not to make believers anxious, but so that, seeing the marks of God's life in them (believing, obeying, loving), they may be sure.

The Gospel was written "that ye might believe" (John 20:31). The letter is written to those who believe, "that ye may know."

**"And that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God."** The King James adds this clause, which many older manuscripts do not have (Appendix D). If it stands, it means "that ye may go on believing": knowing that they have life, they will keep trusting Him who gave it.

> **1 John 5:14** *And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:*

**"And this is the confidence that we have in him."** "Confidence" is *parrēsia*, the boldness of 2:28, 3:21 and 4:17. "In him" is literally "toward him," face to face.

**"That, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us."** Here is the condition John mentioned in 3:22: "according to his will." Prayer is not a way to make God do our will; it is how a child asks for what the Father wants to give. Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, "nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). How do we know His will? From His word. "He heareth us" means more than that He notices: He hears with favour, He listens to grant.

> **1 John 5:15** *And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.*

**"And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask."** If we know He hears us (and we do, when we ask according to His will) ...

**"We know that we have the petitions that we desired of him."** "We have": present tense. Not "we shall have someday," but "we have." The answer is already ours, even before we see it. Jesus said, "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:24). Bullinger notes the *Ellipsis* in "whatsoever we ask [according to his will]," supplied from verse 14.

> **1 John 5:16** *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.*

One kind of prayer in particular: prayer for a brother who sins.

**"If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death."** A believer sees a fellow believer sinning. "Not unto death" means a sin that does not lead to death.

**"He shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death."** The believer who sees it "shall ask": he prays for his brother. And "he shall give him life." Bullinger notes the *Ellipsis*: "[God] shall give him life." God answers the prayer and gives life to the sinning brother. Instead of gossip or condemnation, the brother who sees sin prays. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness" (Galatians 6:1).

**"There is a sin unto death."** What is this? John does not name it, and he does not need to; his readers knew. Bullinger explains it as a sin that leads to the believer being cut off by death, and points to 1 Corinthians 11:30. There Paul wrote of believers who came to the Lord's table in an unworthy way: "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." "Sleep" means they had died. Ananias and Sapphira, who lied to the holy spirit, fell down dead (Acts 5:1-10). James writes of a believer sick

because of sin, for whom "the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him" (James 5:15). Sickness and even death can come as the result of some sins, and here John says that prayer for such a sin is not what he is urging.

**"I do not say that he shall pray for it."** John does not forbid prayer; he simply does not command it. The word for "pray" here (*erōtaō*) is different from "ask" (*aiteō*) earlier in the verse. Some sin has gone to the point where the result must follow, as Saul's had when Samuel was told, "How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him?" (1 Samuel 16:1). The other readings of this verse are set out in Appendix C.

> **1 John 5:17** *All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.*

**"All unrighteousness is sin."** "Unrighteousness" is *adikia*, as in 1:9. Every wrong is sin. John does not want anyone to think that because some sins are "not unto death" they do not matter.

**"And there is a sin not unto death."** But not every sin leads to death. There is hope for the brother, and prayer for him will be heard.

> **1 John 5:18** *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.*

The first of three "we know"s that close the letter.

**"We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not."** As in 3:9: what is begotten of God does not sin; the believer does not live in sin.

**"But he that is begotten of God keepeth himself."** "Keepeth" is *tēreō*, to guard, watch over. The Received Text reads "keepeth himself": the believer guards himself. Most older manuscripts read "keepeth him," and the phrase "he that is begotten of God" (a different form of the verb) is then taken as Christ, who keeps the believer (Appendix D). Both are true. Jesus prayed, "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name" (John 17:12). And Jude: "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling" (Jude 24). The believer guards himself, and is guarded.

**"And that wicked one toucheth him not."** "That wicked one" is the devil (2:13). "Toucheth" is *haptomai* (Strong's G680), to lay hold of, to grasp. Bullinger lists "touch" as an *Idiom* for doing harm. The wicked one cannot lay hold of the one begotten of God. He may attack, but he cannot seize him as his own.

> **1 John 5:19** *And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.*

The second "we know."

**"And we know that we are of God."** "Of God": born of Him, belonging to Him.

**"And the whole world lieth in wickedness."** The Greek is "the whole world lieth in the wicked one." Bullinger notes the *Ellipsis*: "The whole world lieth in [the power of] the wicked one." The world (its people without God) lies in his grip, like a man asleep in another's arms who does not know where he is. "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not" (2 Corinthians 4:4). Two families, two places: we are of God; the world lies in the wicked one.

This verse is also the key to 2:2. There, "our sins" and "the whole world" were set side by side; here "we … of God" and "the whole world" are set side by side, in the same Greek words, and the contrast is plainly between believers and unbelievers (Part One, Chapter 5 §D).

> **1 John 5:20** *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.*

The third "we know," and the last witness: the witness in us.

**"And we know that the Son of God is come."** "Is come" is *hēkō* (Strong's G2240), "has come and is here." He came, and He remains present in His work. Bullinger notes that John's other word for "come" in 4:2 and 5:6 is *erchomai*; this one stresses the arrival, the presence.

**"And hath given us an understanding."** "Understanding" is *dianoia* (Strong's G1271), the mind, the power to understand. The Son of God has given us minds able to know. Jesus "opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures" (Luke 24:45).

**"That we may know him that is true."** "Him that is true" is "the true one," *ton alēthinon*. Bullinger takes this as the Father, and so do most readers: Jesus called Him "the only true God" (John 17:3).

**"And we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ."** We are in the true one, and we are in His Son. The word "even" is added by the translators; the Greek simply repeats "in": "in the true one, in his Son Jesus Christ." Being in the Son is how we are in the Father (2:23-24).

**"This is the true God, and eternal life."** To whom does "this" refer? Readers have long divided. Bullinger takes it as the Father, "the source of life," who "is the true God," and refers to John 5:26 ("For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself"). Others take it as "his Son Jesus Christ," the nearest name before it. This study does not rest anything on either reading, and sets out the evidence in Appendix C. What the verse says without any doubt is that the Father and His Son are named side by side and distinguished: "him that is true … his Son Jesus Christ." And John has already defined eternal life in the Gospel: "this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3).

**Figures of speech.** Bullinger names "the true God" an *Epitheton* ("epithet"): an adjective used not to qualify but "to distinguish Him from them who" are falsely called gods. That distinction leads straight into the last verse: the true God, set against the idols.

> **1 John 5:21** *Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.*

**"Little children."** *Teknia*, for the last time. The old father's last word.

**"Keep yourselves from idols."** "Keep" here is *phulassō* (Strong's G5442), to guard, to stand sentry over. "Idols" is *eidōla* (Strong's G1497), images, false gods. In the cities of Asia, idols stood in every temple and on every street: Artemis of the Ephesians, whose silversmiths once filled the theatre shouting "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" (Acts 19:34). Believers lived among them.

But Bullinger adds a word that reaches every reader: "An idol may not be a material one, but may consist in whatever a man looks to for help, apart from the Living God." Paul called covetousness "idolatry" (Colossians 3:5). Anything that takes the place of the true God, of whom John has just spoken (5:20), is an idol. The letter that began with fellowship with the Father and His Son ends with a guard set over the heart, so that nothing else takes His place.

### In short

John wrote to those who believe, so that they may know they have eternal life. With that knowledge comes boldness: whatever we ask according to His will, He hears, and we have it. When a brother sins, we pray, and God gives him life; there is a sin unto death, for which John does not command prayer. We know three things: whoever is born of God does not live in sin, and the wicked one cannot seize him; we are of God, and the whole world lies in the wicked one; and the Son of God has come and given us understanding to know Him who is true, in whom we are, in His Son Jesus Christ. Little children, guard yourselves from idols.

# Part Three — The Antichrist and Love

The structure of First John sets the antichrist against love, and does it twice: the antichrist (2:18-29) against love (3:1-24), and the antichrist (4:1-6) against love (4:7-21). The warning against the deceivers also stands at the very centre of Second John (verses 7-8), framed by the commandment to love. Each of these passages has been explained in its place. This part gathers both subjects together, with what the rest of Scripture says: first the antichrist (Chapter 7), then the love that answers him (Chapter 8).

# Chapter 7 — What Exactly Is the Antichrist?

### A. The word

The word "antichrist," *antichristos*, occurs five times in the Bible, and only in John's letters:

| Verse | Words | What it says |
|---|---|---|
| 1 John 2:18 | "as ye have heard that antichrist shall come" | One was expected |
| 1 John 2:18 | "even now are there many antichrists" | Many were already present |
| 1 John 2:22 | "He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son" | Defined by what he denies |
| 1 John 4:3 | "this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world" | His teaching already in the world |
| 2 John 7 | "This is a deceiver and an antichrist" | One who does not confess Jesus Christ coming in the flesh |

The word is made of *anti* and *christos*. *Christos* is "the Anointed One," the Christ, the Messiah. *Anti* means "against," and also "instead of." The antichrist is one who opposes the Christ, and one who would put himself, or another, in the Christ's place.

John plays on the word in the very passage where he first uses it. The antichrists are against the Anointed One (*Christos*); the believers have "an unction," an anointing (*chrisma*), from Him (2:20, 27). The word *chrisma* occurs nowhere else in the New Testament.

The words "man of sin" (2 Thessalonians 2:3) and "beast" (Revelation 13) are not the word "antichrist." Whether they speak of the same person is a question taken up in §F.

## B. Everything John says, in the order he says it

**1. It is the last hour, and many antichrists have come (2:18).** The believers had heard that "antichrist shall come." John confirms it, and adds that "even now are there many antichrists." Their presence is the sign "that it is the last time" (Section E).

**2. They went out from us (2:19).** The antichrists had been among the believers. They left, and their leaving showed that they had never truly been "of us." Paul had foretold it to the elders of Ephesus: "Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:30).

**3. The believers have the anointing (2:20, 27).** Against the antichrists, God has given the believers the gift of holy spirit, which "teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie" (2:27).

**4. The liar denies that Jesus is the Christ, and so denies the Father and the Son (2:22-23).** This is John's definition: "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son." To deny the Son is to be without the Father.

**5. They are trying to lead you astray (2:26).** "These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you." "Seduce" is *planaō*, to lead astray.

**6. The protection is what you heard from the beginning (2:24-28).** The word heard from the start, the anointing, and abiding in Him.

**7. Behind them stands the wicked one (2:13-14; 3:8-12).** Before the antichrists are ever named, the young men "have overcome the wicked one" (2:13). In chapter 3 the source is named plainly: "He that committeth sin is of the devil" (3:8); there are "children of the devil" (3:10); Cain "was of that wicked one" (3:12).

**8. Try the spirits, because many false prophets are gone out (4:1).** The same men who "went out from us" (2:19) have "gone out into the world" (4:1). The verb is the same.

**9. The teaching that does not confess Jesus Christ come in the flesh is the antichrist's (4:2-3).** "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" (4:3).

**10. Greater is He that is in you (4:4).** The believers "have overcome them," because God, who is in them, is greater than "he that is in the world."

**11. They speak of the world, and the world hears them (4:5-6).** The spirit of truth and the spirit of error are known by what is spoken, and by who listens to the apostles' word.

**12. A deceiver and an antichrist (2 John 7-11).** "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" (2 John 7). The believers are not to receive such a man into their house or bid him God speed (2 John 10-11).

## C. People first, then spirits? How chapter 4 relates to chapter 2

In chapter 2 the antichrists are people. In chapter 4 John speaks of spirits. Has he changed his subject? He has not. Chapter 4 looks at the same thing from another side.

**1. A spirit is known only through someone.** No one ever hears a spirit speak by itself. What we hear is people: people who teach and claim that their teaching comes from God's spirit. When John says "believe not every spirit," he means: do not believe every teaching put forth as from God. Scripture often uses "spirit" this way:

- "neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us" (2 Thessalonians 2:2): "spirit" stands beside "word" and "letter" as a way a message comes;
- "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets" (1 Corinthians 14:32): the "spirit" is the prophesying, under the prophet's control;
- "another Jesus … another spirit … another gospel" (2 Corinthians 11:4): the other spirit comes by the preaching;
- "a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets" (1 Kings 22:22): the lying spirit was known by what the prophets said;
- "seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy" (1 Timothy 4:1-2): spirits come paired with doctrines, and the lies are spoken by men;
- even in the Gospels, when an unclean spirit was heard, it was "a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out" (Mark 1:23).

Bullinger calls this the figure *Metonymy*, the spirit put for what is spoken. On 1 John 4:1-3 he writes: "believe not every spirit (i.e., every doctrine that is put forth as the teaching of the Spirit), but try the spirits (i.e., their teaching and doctrines, Acts 17:11) … Every spirit (i.e., doctrine) which confesseth (or teacheth) that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God … and this is that spirit (i.e., teaching) of Antichrist whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now is it in the world. As Antichrist himself has not yet come, it must mean his teaching which is already here."

**2. John tests the spirits through the prophets.** "Try the spirits … *because* many false prophets are gone out into the world" (4:1). The only way to try a spirit is to try the prophet's teaching.

**3. The spirits are known by speaking and hearing.** "They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them … he that knoweth God heareth us … Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error" (4:5-6). "Hereby": by what is spoken and heard.

**4. In 4:3 the word "spirit" is supplied.** The Greek reads "this is that [thing] of the antichrist." The translators supplied "spirit," fairly, from the verses before; the King James prints it in italics. What was "coming," and is "now already … in the world," is the antichrist's teaching.

**5. The same men are described three ways.** They "went out from us" (2:19); "many false prophets are gone out into the world" (4:1); "many deceivers are entered into the world" (2 John 7, where most older manuscripts read "went out," the same verb again). And the same denial is charged against them each time (2:22; 4:3; 2 John 7).

**6. One word ties it together.** "Them that seduce you" (2:26) is *planaō*; "the spirit of error" (4:6) is *planē*; "many deceivers" (2 John 7) is *planoi*. All from the same root, "to lead astray." The people who lead astray in chapter 2 are moved by the spirit of error in chapter 4, and the spirit of error is seen in the people who lead astray.

**7. The structure pairs them.** Bullinger's structure of 4:1-6 sets *discrimination of spirits* (4:1) and *test of spirits* (4:2-3) against *discrimination of professors* (4:4-5) and *test of professors* (4:6). The spirits and the people stand in matching places.

So the antichrist appears in John's letters as people, and chapter 4 shows what is at work in them: a teaching that claims to come from God, that is "of the world," that the world listens to, and that does not acknowledge Jesus Christ come in the flesh.

## D. What the antichrist denies

John defines the antichrist entirely by what he denies, never by what he does or how he looks. Three phrases say it.

**1. "That Jesus is the Christ" (2:22).** The denial is that the man Jesus of Nazareth is God's Anointed, the promised Messiah. It was the synagogue's denial: "if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue" (John 9:22). And it was the false teachers' denial in another form. Cerinthus, Irenaeus records, taught that "after his baptism, Christ descended upon him in the form of a dove," and that "at last Christ departed from Jesus, and that then Jesus suffered and rose again, while Christ remained impassible" (*Against Heresies* 1.26.1). On that teaching the man Jesus was not the Christ; the Christ only visited him. John answers that Jesus Christ "came by water and blood … not by water only, but by water and blood" (5:6): the same Jesus Christ was baptized and was crucified.

**2. "The Father and the Son" (2:22-23).** To deny that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, is to deny the Son. And "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father" (2:23). The Father sent the Son and bore witness to Him (5:9); a man cannot reject the Son and keep the Father.

**3. "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh" (4:2-3; 2 John 7).** The denial is that Jesus Christ came as a real man, in real flesh. Some taught that He only seemed to have a body, and "only seemed to suffer," as Ignatius wrote against them a few years later (*To the Trallians* 10; *To the Smyrnaeans* 2). John answers with the apostles' witness: "which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled" (1:1). "In the flesh," Bullinger explains, means "in His real human nature." "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman" (Galatians 4:4).

In 1 John 4:2 the verb is a perfect participle: Jesus Christ "having come" in flesh, a coming that stands. In 2 John 7 it is a present participle: "coming" in flesh. Bullinger takes the present tense of 2 John 7 to look forward to Christ's coming again in the same body, "this same Jesus … shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). Irenaeus understood it the same way: the same Jesus Christ, "who shall also come in the same flesh in which He suffered" (*Against Heresies* 3.16.8). Both are true: He came in the flesh, and the same Jesus, raised in a body, will come again.

The earliest writers who quoted John read him exactly so. Polycarp, who had known John, wrote: "whosoever does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is antichrist; and whosoever does not confess the testimony of the cross, is of the devil" (*To the Philippians* 7.1). Irenaeus quoted 4:3 as "every spirit which separates Jesus Christ is not of God" (*Against Heresies* 3.16.8): the teaching that separated the man Jesus from the Christ.

**And the opposite confession.** John also tells who passes the test. "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (5:1). "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God" (4:15). The antichrist's denial and the believer's confession are the two sides of one question: who is Jesus?

## E. The source behind the teaching

Scripture does name a source behind false teaching. John speaks of "the wicked one" (2:13; 5:18-19), of the devil who "sinneth from the beginning" (3:8), and of "he that is in the world" (4:4). Jesus called the devil "a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44), and "the liar" is John's name for the antichrist (2:22). Paul writes of "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2) and of "seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils" (1 Timothy 4:1). In the Revelation, "three unclean spirits" come "out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet" (Revelation 16:13).

But notice where these spirits are always found: in the mouths of speakers, in doctrines, in what men say. The believer is never told to detect a spirit directly. He is told to test what is taught. John keeps the test where it belongs: on the teaching, which can be heard and compared with what was "heard from the beginning" (2:24). And he gives the believer his confidence: "greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (4:4).

## F. The antichrist who "shall come"

John does not deny that one antichrist is coming. He confirms it: "as ye have heard that antichrist shall come" (2:18). He only adds that the believers need not wait for him to meet his teaching, because "even now are there many antichrists."

What does the rest of Scripture say of a coming opponent of Christ? The following passages do not use the word "antichrist," and joining them to John's word is an inference. But they describe one who opposes Christ and puts himself in God's place, at the end of this age:

- **Christ's warning.** "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matthew 24:24). And "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive" (John 5:43).
- **Paul's "man of sin."** "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God" (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). His coming is "after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders" (2 Thessalonians 2:9). And Paul adds, "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work" (2 Thessalonians 2:7): the same thing John says, that the antichrist's teaching is "even now already ... in the world."
- **The beast.** "And the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority" (Revelation 13:2). With him stands "the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast" (Revelation 19:20).

These passages share John's picture exactly: a person, empowered by the adversary, who opposes Christ and sets himself in God's place, attended by false prophets and deception. The many antichrists of John's day were forerunners; their teaching was "the mystery of iniquity" already at work. At the end it will come to a head in one man.

How strong is this link? That a coming individual is expected is stated by John himself (2:18). That he is the same as Paul's man of sin and John's beast in Revelation is a reasonable inference, because the descriptions match, but none of those passages uses John's word. Appendix C, Question 8, sets out the reasoning.

## G. The definition

Gathering it all together, this is what John's letters say the antichrist is:

**In John's letters, antichrist is:**

1. **A coming person**, whom the believers had been taught to expect, who will oppose the Christ and set himself in His place;

2. **The many people already present** in John's day, who had gone out from the believers, who denied that Jesus is the Christ, denied the Father and the Son, and did not confess Jesus Christ come in the flesh, and who were trying to lead the believers astray;
3. **The antichrist teaching**, put forth as if from God, which does not acknowledge Jesus Christ come in the flesh. It is "of the world," moved by the spirit of error, whose source is the wicked one, and it is "even now already … in the world."

The teaching works through people now, and it will come to a head in one man at the end.

## H. What the antichrist is not

Because John defines the antichrist so exactly, his definition also guards against careless use of the word.

- **John defines him by a denial about Jesus.** He does not define him by cruelty, power, wealth or worldliness, though the coming one will have all of these. The test John gives is what a teaching says about Jesus Christ.
- **John's test is a test of teaching, not of feelings or of signs.** The coming one will work "lying wonders" (2 Thessalonians 2:9). Signs prove nothing by themselves. What a teaching says about Jesus, the Christ come in the flesh, compared with what was heard from the beginning, is the test.
- **John names no one.** He gives his readers a test and trusts them, with the anointing, to use it.

## I. What the believer is to do

John's purpose was never to make his readers afraid, but to make them sure. He gives six plain instructions:

1. **Try the spirits** (4:1): test every teaching that claims to come from God.
2. **Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you** (2:24): the original word, now written in the Scriptures, is the standard.
3. **Rely on the anointing** (2:20, 27): God's gift in you "is truth, and is no lie."
4. **Know that greater is He that is in you** (4:4): the believer has already overcome.
5. **Do not receive the deceiver or bid him God speed** (2 John 10-11): do not give a platform to the teaching that denies Christ.
6. **Keep yourselves from idols** (5:21): let nothing take the place of the true God and His Son.

**In short.** John defines the antichrist by what he denies: that Jesus is the Christ, the Father and the Son, and Jesus Christ come in the flesh. In John's day there were many antichrists, men who had gone out from the believers into the world. Chapter 4 shows what was at work in them: a teaching put forth as from God, moved by the spirit of error, whose source is the wicked one. A spirit is known only by what is taught, and the test is what the teaching says of Jesus. One antichrist is still to come, in whom it will all come to a head. Against all of it the believer has the word from the beginning, the anointing, and God, who is greater.

# Chapter 8 — What Is the Love John Means?

The antichrist forms two members of First John. Love forms the two members set against them (3:1-24; 4:7-21), and it fills those members as nothing else does: the noun and verb for love occur forty-six times in the letter, thirty-six of them in the two love members, and not once in the antichrist members (Appendix A). The antichrist shows what is false about Jesus Christ. Love shows what is true of those who are born of God. Every verse on love has been explained in its place (Sections C, F, G, H and J). This chapter gathers the subject together, so that the reader may see it whole.

## A. The word

John uses two words: the noun *agapē* (Strong's G26), "love," and the verb *agapaō* (Strong's G25), "to love." Greek had other words for love: *philia*, the warm affection of friends, and *erōs*, desire, which never appears in the New Testament. *Agapē* is the love that seeks the good of another and gives itself for it. It is not first a feeling, though feeling goes with it. It is a choice and an act. Its pattern is God's own giving: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16). God's love is shown in what He gave.

The King James translators sometimes render *agapē* "charity," from the Latin *caritas*: "Charity suffereth long, and is kind" (1 Corinthians 13:4); "Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church" (3 John 6). In John's letters it is nearly always "love."

## B. God is love

John says it twice: "God is love" (4:8, 16). He has already said "God is light" (1:5). These are the two great statements of the letter about what God *is*. God does not only have love, or show love; love is His nature, and everything He does is done in love.

So love does not begin with us. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us" (4:10). "We love him, because he first loved us" (4:19). Love "is of God" (4:7): it comes out of God. Our love is only an answer to His.

## C. Love defined by an act

John does not define love with a list of feelings. He points to two acts.

**The Father gave.** "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" (4:9). "He loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (4:10). The Father's love made us His children: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (3:1).

**The Son laid down His life.** "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us" (3:16). John had stood at the cross and seen it. Jesus had told them, "Greater love hath no man than

this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Paul writes, "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

These two acts are the measure of love. Bullinger's structure of the member 3:1-24 is built on them: the Father's love to us (3:1-2) and its effect upon us; the Son's love to us (3:16) and its effect upon us (Section F).

## D. The old commandment and the new

"Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning" (2:7). The commandment to love was old. The law said, "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Leviticus 19:18).

"Again, a new commandment I write unto you" (2:8). What made it new was the measure Jesus gave it on the last night: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13:34). Love now had a new standard: not "as thyself," but "as I have loved you." And it was new because "the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth" (2:8): it is lived in a new day.

The same commandment reaches Second John: "not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another" (2 John 5).

## E. Love and obedience

John will not let love float free of obedience, or obedience of love. Each defines the other.

- "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (5:3).
- "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" (2 John 6). Love is walking in the commandments; the commandment is walking in love.
- "But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected" (2:5).

And the commandment is one, with two parts: "And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment" (3:23). Here the two halves of the letter meet. The antichrist fails the first part: he does not believe that Jesus is the Christ. Cain fails the second: he hated his brother. The child of God keeps both.

## F. Love and its opposite

In John there is no middle ground between love and hatred. Not to love is to hate.

- **Hatred is darkness.** "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now" (2:9). Hatred blinds: "darkness hath blinded his eyes" (2:11).

- **Hatred is the mark of the other family.** "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" (3:10).
- **Hatred is murder in the heart.** Cain "was of that wicked one, and slew his brother" (3:12). "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer" (3:15).
- **Hatred makes a man a liar.** "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar" (4:20).
- **The world hates.** "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you" (3:13).

And there is a love that is forbidden: "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" (2:15). Love set on the world is love turned the wrong way.

## G. Love in deed and in truth

Love that is only talk is not love. "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (3:18).

- **Sharing goods.** "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?" (3:17).
- **Laying down life.** "We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (3:16): in great things if called to it, and in small things every day.
- **Hospitality.** Gaius received the travelling brethren and strangers, "Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church" (3 John 6). Believers who receive and send on such workers become "fellowhelpers to the truth" (3 John 8).

But love does not receive everything. Second John, the letter that begins with "love one another" (2 John 5), also says of the deceiver: "receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed" (2 John 10). Love "rejoiceth in the truth" (1 Corinthians 13:6). It does not give a home to what denies Christ.

## H. What love does in the believer

**Love shows that we have life.** "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (3:14).

**Love shows that we know God.** "Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God" (4:7). "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (4:8).

**Love makes the unseen God visible.** "No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us" (4:12).

**Love sets the heart at rest.** "Hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him" (3:19).

**Love gives boldness and casts out fear.** "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment" (4:17). "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment" (4:18).

**Love is God's love brought to its goal.** "Perfected" (*teleioō*) is used of love four times (2:5; 4:12, 17, 18). God's love came down to us in His Son; it reaches its goal when it flows on from us to one another. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (4:11).

## I. Antichrist and love, side by side

The structure of the letter sets each antichrist member against a love member. Read together, they answer each other.

| The antichrist members (2:18-29; 4:1-6) | The love members (3:1-24; 4:7-21) |
|---|---|
| They "went out from us" (2:19) | "we love the brethren" (3:14) |
| "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?" (2:22) | "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar" (4:20) |
| They deny "the Father and the Son" (2:22) | "the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world" (4:14) |
| "every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh" (4:3) | "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him" (4:15) |
| "the spirit of error" (4:6) | "we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us" (3:24) |
| "They are of the world" (4:5) | "Therefore the world knoweth us not" (3:1) |
| "them that seduce you" (2:26) | "Little children, let no man deceive you" (3:7) |
| "the anointing ... abideth in you" (2:27) | "God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us" (4:12) |

The antichrist goes out; love stays. The antichrist denies the Son; love was shown in the Son. The antichrist is a liar about Jesus; the hater is a liar about God. The antichrist is of the world; love does not love the world. Truth about Jesus and love for the brethren are the two marks of those born of God, and John will not let either stand without the other.

## J. Summary: the love John means

**In John's letters, love is:**

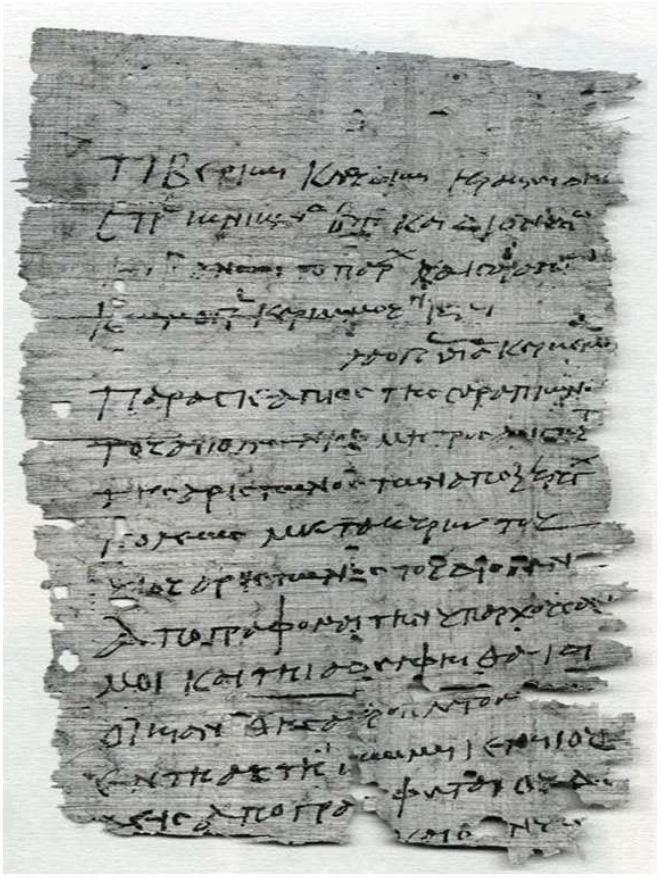
1. **God's own nature:** "God is love" (4:8, 16);
2. **Shown in an act:** the Father sent His Son, and the Son laid down His life for us (3:16; 4:9-10);
3. **First God's, then ours:** "We love him, because he first loved us" (4:19);
4. **The old commandment made new:** "as I have loved you" (John 13:34; 1 John 2:7-8);
5. **One with obedience:** "this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments" (5:3);
6. **The opposite of hatred,** which is darkness, murder in the heart, and a lie;

7. **Real, in deed and in truth:** in goods shared, life given, and brethren received;
8. **The sign of life:** "we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (3:14);
9. **The end of fear:** "perfect love casteth out fear" (4:18).

**In short.** Love is what God is, and He showed it when He sent His Son, who laid down His life for us. Our love answers His. The commandment is old and new: love one another, as He loved us. Love keeps His commandments, and it cannot live with hatred, which is darkness and murder in the heart. It acts in deed and in truth. Where it is, it shows that we have passed from death to life, that God dwells in us, and that we need not fear. The antichrist denies the truth about Jesus; love lives the truth of those born of God. John sets them side by side, and the believer keeps both: believe on the name of His Son, and love one another.

# Part Four — Second and Third John, Verse by Verse

Second and Third John are the shortest books in the Bible, each written on a single sheet of papyrus. They are true letters, from "the elder" (Part One, Chapter 1 §G) to particular readers, about particular matters. Yet they are a pair. Second John tells a believing household not to receive a deceiver who brings a false teaching. Third John praises a believer for receiving faithful workers, and rebukes a leader who would not. Together they teach discernment in both directions: whom to shut out, and whom to welcome.



*A letter written on a single sheet of papyrus, from Oxyrhynchus in Egypt (Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 77, A.D. 223). Second and Third John would each have fitted on a sheet like this, written "with paper and ink" (2 John 12). Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.*

# Section M — 2 John 1–13. To the Elect Lady: Walk in Truth, Receive Not the Deceiver

## Before we read

**From whom.** "The elder," John the apostle in his old age (Part One, Chapter 1 §G).

**To whom.** "The elect lady and her children" (verse 1). Readers have taken this two ways. Some take "the elect lady" as a figure for an assembly, and "her children" as its members, with "thy elect sister" (verse 13) as a sister assembly. Others take her as a real woman, a believer whose house and children John knew. Bullinger, following Alford, takes her as a real woman, and notes that "lady" (*kuria*) may be her name: "In all probability a proper name 'Kyria'." This study takes her as a real Christian woman and her children. The letter speaks to her personally ("I beseech thee, lady," verse 5), speaks of "thy children" (verse 4), and sends greetings from "the children of thy elect sister" (verse 13), which reads most naturally as a family. The other reading is set out in Appendix C. Either way the meaning of the letter is the same: it is written to believers who met in a house, where travelling teachers came and went.

**Why.** Some of her children were walking in the truth, and John rejoiced. But deceivers were going about, and a believing house was the natural place for a travelling teacher to stay. John writes to warn her: do not give a deceiver a home.

## Where it stands

The letter is a small picture of First John. It has the same commandment (love one another), the same warning (deceivers who do not confess Jesus Christ come in the flesh), and the same words: truth, love, abide, the Father and the Son, "from the beginning," "that our joy may be full."

## Its structure

Bullinger shows it as an introversion:

**The Second Epistle of John**

*(Introversion)*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **A** | 1-3. | Elect lady and children: benediction. |
| **B** | 4-6. | Children walking according to the Father's commandment. |
| **C** | 7-8. | Warning against deceivers. |
| ***B*** | 9-11. | Transgressors rejecting Christ's teaching. |
| ***A*** | 12-13. | Joy fulfilled: children of elect sister. Salutation. |

*Structure after E. W. Bullinger, The Companion Bible.*

The warning against the deceivers stands at the exact centre. On either side, those who walk in the commandment and those who run ahead of the teaching of Christ.

## The text

**2 John 1. 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: **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.

## Verse by verse

> **2 John 1:1** *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;*

**"The elder."** *Ho presbuteros*, "the elder," with the article: the elder whom everyone knows. Bullinger notes that it is "not an official title" here, but refers to the apostle's age. Compare Paul, who wrote to Philemon as "Paul the aged" (Philemon 9).

**"Unto the elect lady and her children."** "Elect" is *eklektos* (Strong's G1588), chosen. Every believer is chosen of God: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). "Lady" is *kuria* (Strong's G2959), the feminine of *kurios*, "lord," "master": a lady, a mistress of a household. As explained above, it may be her name, Kyria. "Her children" are her own children, at least some of whom were believers (verse 4).

**"Whom I love in the truth."** "Love" is *agapaō*. "In the truth": not only truly, sincerely, but within the truth, in the sphere of God's truth which they share. John loves them as fellow members of God's family.

**"And not I only, but also all they that have known the truth."** Every believer who knows the truth loves them too. The family of God is wider than one house.

> **2 John 1:2** *For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever.*

**"For the truth's sake."** The reason for the love is the truth. Bullinger notes an *Ellipsis*: "[Loving you] for the truth's sake," supplied from verse 1.

**"Which dwelleth in us."** "Dwelleth" is *menō*. The truth abides in believers. It is not something they visit; it lives in them.

**"And shall be with us for ever."** Truth does not pass away like the world (1 John 2:17). It "shall be with us for ever." "The word of the Lord endureth for ever" (1 Peter 1:25).

> **2 John 1:3** *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.*

**"Grace be with you, mercy, and peace."** The Greek is stronger: "grace, mercy, peace *shall be* with us." It is not only a wish; it is a promise. "Grace" (*charis*) is God's undeserved favour; "mercy" (*eleos*) His pity for those in need; "peace" (*eirēnē*) the wholeness and rest that follow. Paul uses the same three in his letters to Timothy (1 Timothy 1:2). Bullinger notes that "mercy" occurs only here in John's writings.

**"From God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father."** Two sources, named and distinguished: God the Father, and Jesus Christ His Son. "The Son of the Father" occurs only here in the

New Testament, Bullinger notes. It says plainly whose Son He is. Many older manuscripts omit "the Lord" (Appendix D).

**"In truth and love."** The two words that fill this letter. Truth without love is hard; love without truth is soft. God gives both.

> **2 John 1:4** *I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.*

**"I rejoiced greatly."** "Greatly" is *lian*, "exceedingly." Bullinger notes that the word occurs only here and in 3 John 3 in John's writings.

**"That I found of thy children walking in truth."** "Of thy children": some of them. John had met them, perhaps on a visit, and found them walking in the truth. He does not say all; there may have been some who were not. A father's heart is glad over every child who walks with God. "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 4).

**"As we have received a commandment from the Father."** Walking in the truth is not a matter of taste; it is what the Father commanded.

> **2 John 1:5** *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.*

**"And now I beseech thee, lady."** "Beseech" is *erōtaō*, "I ask," "I request." John speaks to her directly, gently.

**"Not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning."** As in 1 John 2:7: not a new commandment, but the old one they had from the start.

**"That we love one another."** The commandment, as always (1 John 3:11). John includes himself: "we."

> **2 John 1:6** *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.*

**"And this is love, that we walk after his commandments."** What is love? Walking according to His commandments. Love is not a feeling detached from obedience (1 John 5:3).

**"This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it."** And what is the commandment? To walk in love. Love is keeping the commandment; the commandment is to love. The two are one.

**Figures of speech.** Bullinger sets out this verse as an *Antimetabole* ("counterchange"): this is love, that we walk after His commandments; this is the commandment, that we walk in love. The words cross over, love defining commandment and commandment defining love, so that neither can be pulled away from the other.

> **2 John 1:7** *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.*

The centre of the letter: the warning.

**"For many deceivers are entered into the world."** "For": here is the reason John has been urging love and the commandment. "Deceivers" is *planoi* (Strong's G4108), those who lead astray, from the same root as "them that seduce you" (1 John 2:26) and "the spirit of error" (1 John 4:6). "Are entered" is the reading of the Received Text; most older manuscripts read "went out" (*exēlthon*), the very verb of 1 John 2:19 and 4:1 (Appendix D). They went out from the believers into the world.

**"Who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh."** The same denial as in 1 John 4:2-3. Here the verb is a present participle, "coming in flesh." Bullinger takes the present tense to point to Christ's coming again, in the same body: "this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). Irenaeus, quoting this verse, spoke of Christ "who shall also come in the same flesh in which He suffered" (*Against Heresies* 3.16.8). The deceivers denied that Jesus Christ came as a real man; and they would deny that the same Jesus, raised in a body, will come again. The true confession holds both (Chapter 7, §D).

**"This is a deceiver and an antichrist."** The Greek has the article: "this is *the* deceiver and *the* antichrist." Each such man is the deceiver and the antichrist in person. Here is the fifth and last use of the word "antichrist" in the Bible (Chapter 7, §A).

> **2 John 1:8** *Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.*

**"Look to yourselves."** "Look" is *blepō*, "see," "watch out." Be on your guard.

**"That we lose not those things which we have wrought."** The Received Text reads "we lose ... we have wrought"; most older manuscripts read "ye lose ... we have wrought" (Appendix D). The apostles had laboured to bring them to the truth. If the deceivers drew them away, that labour would be lost.

**"But that we receive a full reward."** "Reward" is *misthos* (Strong's G3408), wages, pay for work done. Bullinger notes that in John's writings it occurs only here, in John 4:36, and in Revelation 11:18 and 22:12. God rewards faithful work, and John wants them to receive the reward in full: "every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour" (1 Corinthians 3:8).

> **2 John 1:9** *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.*

**"Whosoever transgresseth."** The Received Text reads "transgresseth" (*parabainō*, to step across). Most older manuscripts read "goeth before" (*proagō*, Strong's G4254), "runs ahead" (Appendix D). Bullinger notes: "This refers to false teachers who claimed to bring some higher teaching, beyond the apostle's doctrine." These men did not say they were abandoning Christ. They said they were going further, to a higher knowledge. John says that to run ahead of the teaching of Christ is to leave it.

**"And abideth not in the doctrine of Christ."** "Abideth" is *menō*. "The doctrine of Christ" is the teaching about Christ, and the teaching Christ gave: the truth about who He is. To stay in it is to abide; to go beyond it is to leave it.

**"Hath not God."** Whatever he claims to have found, he does not have God.

**"He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son."** The man who stays with the teaching of Christ has both: the Father and the Son. It is 1 John 2:23-24 again.

> **2 John 1:10** *If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed:*

The practical command.

**"If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine."** Travelling teachers went from assembly to assembly and stayed in believers' homes. The assemblies themselves met in homes: "the church that is in their house" (Romans 16:5). If such a teacher came and did not bring the doctrine of Christ ...

**"Receive him not into your house."** Do not take him in. To give him a room was to give him a base and a platform: he would teach in the very house where the believers met.

**"Neither bid him God speed."** "Bid him God speed" is literally "say to him, Rejoice!" (*chairein*), the common greeting of the day, like "Greetings!" or "Good luck!" It was the greeting given to a traveller setting out. John means: do not send him on his way with your blessing.

This is not a command to be unkind or uncivil to unbelievers. Paul says, "If thine enemy hunger, feed him" (Romans 12:20). It concerns a teacher who comes as a teacher, bringing a doctrine that denies Christ, and who would use a believer's house and blessing to spread it.

> **2 John 1:11** *For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.*

**"For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds."** "Is partaker" is *koinōneō* (Strong's G2841), to share, to have fellowship with: the verb of the noun *koinōnia*, "fellowship" (1 John 1:3). To bless the deceiver's work is to share in it. Fellowship is a precious thing; it must not be given to the lie.

> **2 John 1:12** *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.*

**"Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink."** "Paper" is *chartēs* (Strong's G5489), a sheet of papyrus; Bullinger notes it occurs only here. "Ink" is *melan*, "black." John had much more to say, but a sheet of papyrus was not the place for it.

**"But I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face."** "Face to face" is literally "mouth to mouth." John hoped to visit and talk with them in person. Some things are better said face to face.

**"That our joy may be full."** As in 1 John 1:4. Joy is full when the family is together in the truth. Many older manuscripts read "your joy" (Appendix D).

> **2 John 1:13** *The children of thy elect sister greet thee. Amen.*

**"The children of thy elect sister greet thee."** The lady's sister, also "elect," a believer, had children with John, wherever he was writing from. They sent their greetings. The letter ends as it began, with a family: an elect lady, her children, her elect sister, and her sister's children, all in the truth.

**"Amen."** The Received Text ends with "Amen"; most older manuscripts do not have it (Appendix D).

### In short

The elder writes to a believing lady and her children, whom all who know the truth love. Grace, mercy and peace shall be with them, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father. Some of her children walk in the truth; John rejoices, and repeats the old commandment: love one another, which is to walk after His commandments. At the centre, the warning: many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ coming in the flesh; each is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch out, so as not to lose what was worked for. Whoever runs ahead of the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever abides in it has the Father and the Son. Do not receive such a teacher into your house or send him on with your blessing, for that is to share in his evil work. John hopes to come and speak face to face.

## Section N — 3 John 1–14. To Gaius: Receive the Brethren; Beware of Diotrephes

### Before we read

**From whom.** "The elder," as in Second John.

**To whom.** "The wellbeloved Gaius" (verse 1). Gaius was one of the commonest names in the Roman world, and several men of that name appear in the New Testament: Gaius of Macedonia, Paul's companion at Ephesus (Acts 19:29); Gaius of Derbe (Acts 20:4); and Gaius of Corinth, Paul's host, "mine host, and of the whole church" (Romans 16:23; 1 Corinthians 1:14). Bullinger says "it is impossible to say whether this was the same as any one of the others." What the letter tells us is enough: he was a believer who walked in the truth, and his house was open to travelling brethren.

**Why.** Brethren travelling to teach and preach had come to Gaius' assembly. Gaius had welcomed them. But a man named Diotrephes, who loved to be first, had refused to receive them, and had refused even a letter from John, and was putting out of the assembly any who did receive them. John writes to thank Gaius, to warn him about Diotrephes, and to commend a man named Demetrius, probably the bearer of the letter.

### Where it stands

Second John said: do not receive the deceiver. Third John says: do receive the true worker. Diotrephes turned this upside down: he shut out the faithful. Between them, the two letters show that hospitality is part of the truth, and so is discernment.

### Its structure

Bullinger shows it as an introversion, with Diotrephes at the centre:

### The Third Epistle of John

*(Introversion)*

**A** | 1-2. Salutation.

**B** | 3-4. Witness as to walk in the truth.

**C** | 5-8. Commendation: love to strangers.

**D** | 9-10. Malice of Diotrephes.

***C*** | 11. Exhortation: follow good.

***B*** | 12. Witness as to walk in the truth.

***A*** | 13-14. Salutation.

*Structure after E. W. Bullinger, The Companion Bible.*

## The text

**3 John 1. 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, neither 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.

## Verse by verse

> **3 John 1:1** *The elder unto the wellbeloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth.*

**"The elder unto the wellbeloved Gaius."** "Wellbeloved" is *agapētos*, "beloved," the word John uses again and again in the letter (verses 2, 5, 11).

**"Whom I love in the truth."** As in 2 John 1: John loves him within the truth they share. The word "truth" occurs six times in this short letter.

> **3 John 1:2** *Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.*

**"Beloved, I wish above all things."** "Wish" is *euchomai* (Strong's G2172), to pray, to wish. "Above all things" is literally "concerning all things": in every way.

**"That thou mayest prosper and be in health."** "Prosper" is *euodoō* (Strong's G2137), literally "to have a good journey," to go well, to succeed. "Be in health" is *hugiainō* (Strong's G5198), to be sound, well. It was the usual way for a letter of that day to begin: after the greeting came a wish for the reader's health. Many letters of John's time open with almost the same words. John is wishing his friend well, as any friend would. This is a personal wish to one man, in the manner of the day; it is not a promise to every believer that he will always be prosperous and healthy (Appendix C).

**"Even as thy soul prospereth."** "Soul" is *psuchē*, here the inner man, his life with God. Gaius was doing well within; John wishes that everything else might go as well for him. It is a lovely compliment. Of how many could it be said that their outward life would do well to match their inward one?

> **3 John 1:3** *For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth.*

**"For I rejoiced greatly."** "Greatly" is *lian*, as in 2 John 4.

**"When the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee."** Travelling brethren had come back to John and told of Gaius. "Testified" is *martureō*: they bore witness. What they told was "the truth that is in thee": literally "thy truth," his faithfulness to the truth.

**"Even as thou walkest in the truth."** Gaius did not only hold the truth; he walked in it. His life matched what he believed.

> **3 John 1:4** *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.*

**"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."** "My children": Gaius may have come to faith through John, or John may simply speak as the old father of all the believers in his care. Nothing gives him greater joy than to hear that his children walk in the truth. Paul felt the same: "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?" (1 Thessalonians 2:19).

> **3 John 1:5** *Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers;*

**"Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers."** "Faithfully" is "a faithful thing": whatever he did for them was an act of faithfulness. "Strangers" (*xenos*, Strong's G3581) were brethren he had not met before: travelling believers who arrived at his door, unknown to him, and found a welcome. Most older manuscripts read "to the brethren, and that strangers" (Appendix D): "the brethren, and strangers at that."

Hospitality was a mark of the early believers. "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrews 13:2). "Use hospitality one to another without grudging" (1 Peter 4:9).

> **3 John 1:6** *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:*

**"Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church."** "Charity" is *agapē*, "love." The travelling brethren had told the whole assembly where John was of Gaius' love.

**"Whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well."** "Bring forward on their journey" is *propempō* (Strong's G4311), to send someone on his way, provided with what he needs: food, money, company for the first miles. It was what the assemblies did for Paul: "And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria" (Acts 15:3). "After a godly sort" is "worthily of God": as befits servants of God, and as God Himself would treat them.

> **3 John 1:7** *Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles.*

**"Because that for his name's sake they went forth."** "His name" is Christ's name (as in 1 John 2:12). They went out for His sake, to make Him known. "Went forth" is *exerchomai*, the same verb used of the deceivers in 1 John 2:19, 4:1 and 2 John 7. The deceivers went out from the truth; these went out for His name. The same road, two kinds of travellers.

**"Taking nothing of the Gentiles."** "Gentiles" here is *ethnikos* (Strong's G1482), "heathen," people of the nations who did not know God. The workers would not take support from unbelievers, so that no one could say they preached for money. Paul did the same: "What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge" (1 Corinthians 9:18). So they depended on believers like Gaius.

> **3 John 1:8** *We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth.*

**"We therefore ought to receive such."** "Ought" is *opheilō*, to owe, as in 1 John 2:6, 3:16 and 4:11: we owe it. "Receive" is *hupolambanō*, to take up, to welcome and support. Since they take nothing from unbelievers, believers owe them support.

**"That we might be fellowhelpers to the truth."** "Fellowhelpers" is *sunergos* (Strong's G4904), fellow worker, co-worker. The one who stays at home and supports the worker who goes is a fellow worker in the truth. He shares in the work, as the one who blesses a deceiver shares in his evil deeds (2 John 11). Both are fellowship; one with the truth, the other with the lie.

> **3 John 1:9** *I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.*

The centre of the letter.

**"I wrote unto the church."** John had already written a letter to Gaius' assembly, perhaps commending these same brethren. Some think it was Second John; more likely it was a letter that has not survived. Most older manuscripts read "I wrote something unto the church" (Appendix D).

**"But Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them."** "Loveth to have the preeminence" is one word in the Greek, *philoprōteuō* (Strong's G5383): "loving to be first." Bullinger notes it occurs only here. Diotrephes was a leader in the assembly who wanted to be the first man in it. Jesus had warned the disciples against this very thing: "But whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Matthew 20:26-27). Of Christ alone is it written: "that in all things he might have the preeminence" (Colossians 1:18).

**"Receiveth us not."** Diotrephes would not receive John: not his letter, not his authority, not the brethren he sent. "Receiveth" is *epidechomai* (Strong's G1926), to welcome, to accept; Bullinger notes it occurs only here and in verse 10.

> **3 John 1:10** *Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.*

**"Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth."** "Remember" means "bring to mind," "call attention to." If John comes, he will bring Diotrephes' deeds into the open before the assembly. The son of thunder is still there (Part One, Chapter 1 §B).

John lists four things Diotrephes was doing:

**"Prating against us with malicious words."** "Prating" is *phluareō* (Strong's G5396), to talk nonsense, to babble; Bullinger notes it occurs only here. Diotrephes was talking against John with evil words: empty, spiteful talk.

**"And not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren."** He would not take in the travelling brethren himself.

**"And forbiddeth them that would."** He stopped others who wanted to.

**"And casteth them out of the church."** "Casteth out" is *ekballō* (Strong's G1544), to throw out. He put out of the assembly those who received the brethren. Bullinger compares John 9:34, where the Pharisees "cast him out" (the same word) of the synagogue, the man born blind whom Jesus had healed.

Here was a man in the assembly who shut out the faithful and threw out those who welcomed them. Second John showed the danger of receiving the wrong men; Third John shows the danger of a man who will receive no one but himself.

> **3 John 1:11** *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.*

**"Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good."** "Follow" is *mimeomai* (Strong's G3401), to imitate, to copy. Do not copy Diotrephes; copy what is good.

**"He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God."** "Doeth good" is one word, *agathopoieō*; "doeth evil" is *kakopoieō*. As in First John, conduct shows the source. "Hath not seen God": as in 1 John 3:6, the man who does evil shows that he has never truly seen God.

**Figures of speech.** Bullinger sets out this verse as an *Antimetabole*: evil, good; good, evil. "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." The words turn back on themselves, setting the two ways face to face.

> **3 John 1:12** *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.*

**"Demetrius hath good report of all men."** "Hath good report" is literally "has been witnessed to": everyone speaks well of him. Demetrius was probably the bearer of this letter, a worker whom John commends so that Gaius will receive him, whatever Diotrephes may say.

**"And of the truth itself."** The truth itself bears witness to him: his life matches it.

**"Yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is true."** Three witnesses: all men, the truth, and John. Most older manuscripts read "thou knowest" (Appendix D). John uses the words of his Gospel: "and we know that his testimony is true" (John 21:24).

> **3 John 1:13** *I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee:*

**"I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee."** As in 2 John 12. "Pen" is *kalamos* (Strong's G2563), "reed": a reed pen, cut to a point.

> **3 John 1:14** *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.*

**"But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face."** "Face to face" is again literally "mouth to mouth," as in 2 John 12.

**"Peace be to thee."** The old greeting, *shalom*. Jesus greeted His disciples with it after He rose: "Peace be unto you" (John 20:19).

**"Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name."** "Friends" (*philoi*): the believers with John, and the believers with Gaius. "By name": one by one. John's last written words are a greeting to each friend by name. Many Greek texts number these last words as verse 15.

## In short

The elder writes to Gaius, whom he loves in the truth, wishing him well in body as he is in soul. Travelling brethren have told of Gaius' faithfulness and love: he took in strangers who went out for Christ's name and took nothing from unbelievers. Believers owe such men support, and so become fellow workers with the truth. But Diotrephes, who loves to be first, would not receive John or the brethren, talked against John with malicious words, and put out of the assembly those who received them. John will deal with it when he comes. Do not copy evil, but good. Demetrius has a good witness from all, from the truth, and from John. Peace be to thee; greet the friends by name.

# Part Five — Concluding Summary

# Chapter 9 — Concluding Summary: That Ye May Know

## A. What John set out to do

John told his readers why he wrote: "that ye may know that ye have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). He did not write to unsettle believers, but to settle them. Every test in the letter, every "If we say" and "He that saith," was given so that a believer could look at his own life and see in it the marks of God's: believing that Jesus is the Christ, keeping His commandments, loving the brethren. Where those marks are, there is life, and he may know it.

## B. What the letters have shown

**God.** God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). God is love (4:8, 16). He is the Father, who has made us His children (3:1), who sent His Son (4:9-10, 14), and whom no man has seen at any time (4:12). He is greater than our heart (3:20) and greater than he that is in the world (4:4).

**His Son.** Jesus is the Christ (2:22; 5:1), the Son of God (4:15; 5:5), come in the flesh (4:2). The apostles heard Him, saw Him, gazed upon Him and handled Him (1:1). He came by water and blood (5:6). He laid down His life for us (3:16); He is the propitiation for our sins and for the whole world (2:2; 4:10); and, risen and ascended, He is our advocate with the Father (2:1). He will appear again, and we shall be like Him (2:28; 3:2).

**The believer.** He is born of God (5:1), a child of God now (3:2), with God's seed abiding in him (3:9) and the gift of holy spirit, the anointing, given him (2:20, 27; 3:24; 4:13). His sins are forgiven (2:12). When he sins, he still has a Father and an advocate, and when he confesses, God is faithful and just to forgive and to cleanse (1:9; 2:1-2). He has overcome the wicked one (2:13-14), the false prophets (4:4), and the world (5:4). He walks in the light (1:7), keeps His commandments (2:3), loves his brother (2:10; 3:14; 4:7), and does not love the world (2:15). He has boldness before God in prayer (3:21-22; 5:14-15) and in the day of judgment (4:17). He knows (5:18-20).

**The commandment.** One commandment, with two parts: "That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another" (3:23). It is old, for they had it from the beginning; and it is new, for Christ gave it a new measure: "as I have loved you" (John 13:34; 1 John 2:7-8).

**The antichrist.** The liar who denies that Jesus is the Christ, and so denies the Father and the Son (2:22). Many had already gone out from the believers into the world; their teaching, which does not acknowledge Jesus Christ come in the flesh, was "even now already … in the world" (4:3). It is a teaching put forth as from God, moved by the spirit of error, from the wicked one; it is known by what is spoken and by who hears it (4:5-6). One antichrist is still to come (2:18). Against all of it the believer has the word from the beginning, the anointing that teaches him, and God, who is in him and is greater (Part Three).

**Love.** What God is, shown when the Father sent His Son and the Son laid down His life for us (3:16; 4:9-10). Our love answers His (4:19). It keeps His commandments, it cannot live with hatred, it acts in deed and in truth, and it casts out fear (3:18; 4:18; 5:3). The antichrist denies the truth about Jesus; love lives the truth of those born of God. The letter sets them side by side, and the believer keeps both (Chapter 8).

**The two short letters.** Second John: walk in truth and love, and do not give a home or a blessing to a deceiver who runs ahead of the teaching of Christ. Third John: receive and send on those who go out for His name, and do not copy a man who loves to be first.

## C. To whom, and to us

These letters were written to believers of John's own day, Jew and Gentile, born of God, with the gift of holy spirit, waiting for Christ's appearing (Part One, Chapter 5). That is the administration of grace, in which we live. So they speak to us directly. What John's little children could know, we may know. What they were warned against, we are warned against. What they were commanded, we are commanded.

## D. The last word

The letter that began with fellowship with the Father and with His Son (1:3) ends with a guard set over the heart: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (5:21). And if the old story is true, the elder's last sermon was the shortest he ever preached: "Little children, love one another." Between those two, light and love, truth and fellowship, is the whole of John's letters.

## E. Where to Find More

The narrative of this study gives plain answers and moves on. The evidence behind those answers is gathered at the back of the book, for the reader who wants to see it.

- **How the letter is built.** Appendix A shows how Bullinger's structure was tested against the Greek text: where the words "write," "say," "love," "believe" and "witness" fall, and how the two antichrist members match point for point.
- **To whom it was written.** Appendix B sets out, side by side, the evidence that First John was written to believers in the administration of grace, and the case Bullinger made for an earlier date to the Jews of the Dispersion, with the answer to each point.
- **Where readers divide.** Appendix C takes fifteen questions on which careful readers have differed: among them "from the beginning" (1:1), confession (1:9), "he cannot sin" (3:9), the spirits of 4:1-3, the coming antichrist, the water and the blood (5:6), the sin unto death (5:16), "This is the true God" (5:20), the elect lady, and the wish for Gaius' health. Each gives the readings and this study's answer.
- **The Greek text.** Appendix D lists every place where the King James and the older manuscripts differ in these letters, and tells the history of the longer text of 1 John 5:7-8.
- **John's letters and his Gospel.** Appendix E sets the two side by side, subject by subject.

- **John's words.** Appendix F counts the key words of the letters: love, know, abide, world, truth, and the rest.
- **How sure is each answer?** Appendix G lists the study's main claims, how much weight each bears, what the other reading fairly answers, and what would change the study's mind.
- **Greek words.** Appendix H is a glossary of every Greek word explained in the study, with where it is explained.
- **Every Scripture quoted.** The Scripture Index lists every passage quoted outside John's letters, with where it is quoted.

**In short.** John wrote that we may know: know God, who is light and love; know His Son, the Christ come in the flesh; know that we have eternal life; know how to walk in the light and love one another; and know the antichrist's teaching when we hear it.

# Appendices

The appendices hold the evidence behind the plain answers given in the narrative.

# Appendix A — The Structure Tested

## A. What was tested

E. W. Bullinger's structure of First John (*The Companion Bible*) divides the letter into six members: Christ (1:1–2:17); Antichrist (2:18-29); Love (3:1-24); Antichrist (4:1-6); Love (4:7-21); Christ (5:1-21). This study tested it against the Greek text (SBL Greek New Testament, with the Received Text compared) by counting where the key words of each member fall.

## B. The six members: where the key words fall

| Member | Love words | Antichrist, false, lie, deceive | Confess, deny | Believe, faith | Witness | "Write" |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A — Christ (1:1–2:17) | 5 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 10 |
| C — Antichrist (2:18-29) | **0** | **7** | **4** | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| D — Love (3:1-24) | 9 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| C — Antichrist (4:1-6) | **0** | **3** | **2** | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| D — Love (4:7-21) | **27** | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| A — Christ (5:1-21) | 5 | 1 | 0 | **7** | **10** | 1 |

"Love words" are *agapē* and *agapaō*. The second column counts *antichristos*, *pseudoprophētēs*, *planaō*, *planē*, *pseustēs* and *pseudos*.

**Findings.**

1. The love words do not occur at all in either antichrist member, and they fill the two love members (36 of 46).
2. The words of falsehood and the words "confess" and "deny" cluster in the two antichrist members.
3. "Believe" and "witness" cluster in the last member (7 of 10; 10 of 12), as Bullinger's headings "Belief in Christ" and "Witnesses … that He has come" require.
4. "Write" belongs almost entirely to the first member.

## C. The two antichrist members match

| | 2:18-29 | 4:1-6 |
|---|---|---|
| "Ye have heard" that it comes | "as ye have heard that antichrist shall come" (2:18) | "whereof ye have heard that it should come" (4:3) |
| Already present | "even now are there many antichrists" (2:18) | "even now already is it in the world" (4:3) |
| They went out | "They went out from us" (2:19) | "many false prophets are gone out" (4:1) |
| The believers' gift | "ye have an unction" (2:20, 27) | "greater is he that is in you" (4:4) |
| The lie and the error | "no lie is of the truth" (2:21) | "the spirit of error" (4:6) |
| Deny and confess | "denieth … acknowledgeth" (2:22-23) | "confesseth … confesseth not" (4:2-3) |

## D. The first member: "write" and "say"

In 1:1–2:17, all ten occurrences of *graphō*, "write," fall in Bullinger's "cause of writing" members (1:4; 2:1, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14). All six occurrences of *legō*, "say," fall in his "test" members ("If we say," 1:6, 8, 10; "He that saith," 2:4, 6, 9). There is not one exception.

## E. The sub-structures adopted

| Member | Sub-structure | Section |
|---|---|---|
| 1:1–2:17 | Four pairs: cause of writing / test | A–D |
| 2:18-29 | 2:18-23 introversion (antichrist, rejection of truth, unction, rejection of the lie, antichrist); 2:24-29 alternation (what they have / the promise or result) | E |
| 3:1-24 | The Father's love (3:1-2) and its effect (3:3-15: inward 3-9, outward 10-15); the Son's love (3:16a) and its effect (3:16b-24) | F, G, H |
| 4:1-6 | Spirits (1-3) / professors (4-6), in alternation | I |
| 4:7-21 | Introversion, turning on God's indwelling (15) and dwelling in God (16) | J |
| 5:1-21 | Belief in Christ (1-5) / witnesses (6-12) / belief in Christ (13-19) / witness in us (20-21) | K, L |
| 2 John | Introversion, with the warning against deceivers (7-8) at the centre | M |
| 3 John | Introversion, with the malice of Diotrephes (9-10) at the centre | N |

### F. Finding

Bullinger's structure of First John is confirmed by the distribution of the letter's own key words, and is adopted. His structures of Second and Third John are adopted as drawn.

## Appendix B — To Whom It Was Written: The Evidence

### A. The question

Was First John written to believers in the administration of grace (Part One, Chapter 5 §B), or to Jewish believers of the Dispersion in an earlier time, as Bullinger held (*Companion Bible*, introduction to First John)?

### B. The evidence for the administration of grace

| # | Evidence | Where |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | The readers are "born of God" and "sons of God" | 3:1-2, 9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18 |
| 2 | They have received "an unction from the Holy One," "the Spirit which he hath given us" | 2:20, 27; 3:24; 4:13 |
| 3 | They wait for Christ's appearing, and to be "like him" | 2:28; 3:2 |
| 4 | Their sins are forgiven "for his name's sake" | 2:12 |
| 5 | They are one company, with no distinction of Jew and Gentile | throughout |
| 6 | They are warned against idols, which fits a Gentile city | 5:21 |
| 7 | "Our sins" and "the whole world" (2:2) are contrasted as "we" and "the whole world" in 5:19, where the contrast is believers and unbelievers | 2:2; 5:19 |
| 8 | The early church placed John at Ephesus, among assemblies founded by Paul and made up of "both Jews and Greeks" | Acts 19:10; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.3.4 |

### C. The evidence for the Dispersion (Bullinger)

| # | Evidence | Answer |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | John's commission was "unto the circumcision" (Galatians 2:9) | The agreement divided the early work; it did not forbid John to care for mixed assemblies later. |
| 2 | *Hēmeteros*, "our own," in 1:3 and 2:2 marks John's own people, Israel | In 1:3 "our fellowship" is the apostles' fellowship, into which the readers are invited. In 2:2 the same contrast as 5:19 is between believers and the world. |
| 3 | *Parousia*, "coming" (2:28), is the word of Matthew 24:3 | Paul uses the same word of the hope of the church: "at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints" (1 Thessalonians 3:13); "the coming of the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:15). |
| 4 | The letter's place after Acts in the oldest manuscripts, among the general epistles | The order of books shows how they were grouped, not to whom each was written. |
| 5 | John 11:51-52 contrasts "that nation" with "the children of God that were scattered abroad," which might suggest 2:2 means Israel and the nations | In John 11 the contrast is named ("that nation"); in 1 John 2:2 it is not, and 5:19 shows John's own use. |
| 6 | The letter does not teach the mystery of the one body | It does not contradict it; what it teaches belongs to every believer in the administration of grace. |

### D. Finding

The evidence from the letter itself supports the study's position: First John was written to believers in the administration of grace, Jew and Gentile, and speaks to us directly. Bullinger's case is stated in full above; its strongest point, the commission of Galatians 2:9, bears on the early years and not on the assemblies of Asia late in John's life.

## Appendix C — The Contested Questions

For each question: the readings, and this study's answer with the reason.

**Question 1. "That which was from the beginning" (1 John 1:1).** *Readings:* (a) the beginning of the apostles' witness, when they first heard and saw Jesus; (b) Bullinger reads "That which" as "Him who was" from eternity. *Answer:* (a). John uses "from the beginning" in this letter of the beginning of the message as the believers heard it (2:7, 24; 3:11), as Jesus used it of the apostles (John 15:27) and Luke of the eyewitnesses (Luke 1:2). "That which" is neuter. Verse 2 adds that the life was "with the Father" before it was manifested.

**Question 2. Confession of sins (1 John 1:9).** *Readings:* (a) an ongoing confession by believers, restoring fellowship; (b) the sinner's first confession, once for all. *Answer:* (a). The verb is present tense; the "we" includes John; the next words are to "My little children" (2:1); the subject is fellowship (1:3-7). Sonship rests on the new birth and is not lost.

**Question 3. "Our sins ... the whole world" (1 John 2:2).** *Readings:* (a) believers and all mankind besides; (b) Bullinger: Israel and the Gentiles. *Answer:* (a), because John uses the same contrast in 5:19, where it is plainly believers and unbelievers (Appendix B).

**Question 4. "Ye know all things" (1 John 2:20, 27).** *Readings:* (a) all things needed to tell truth from the lie; (b) older manuscripts, "ye all know." *Answer:* Both readings give the same sense: every believer, by the anointing, can recognise the lie. It does not mean all knowledge of every kind.

**Question 5. "Ye need not that any man teach you" (1 John 2:27).** *Answer:* Not a rejection of teachers (John is teaching them, and God gave teachers, Ephesians 4:11), but of the new teaching of the men who went out. The believers already have the anointing and the word from the beginning.

**Question 6. "He cannot sin" (1 John 3:9; compare 3:6).** *Readings:* (a) the new nature, God's seed, cannot sin, while the old nature can (Galatians 5:17); (b) the present tense means the believer does not live in sin as a practice. *Answer:* Both are true, and the study gives both. The reason John himself gives is the seed: "his seed remaineth in him ... because he is born of God." Bullinger notes that "to do sin" means to sin wilfully, as a way of life.

**Question 7. The "spirits" of 1 John 4:1-3.** *Readings:* (a) the teaching put forth as from God, known through the prophet who speaks it (Bullinger: *Metonymy*); (b) spirit beings, tested directly. *Answer:* (a). The reason for trying the spirits is the false prophets (4:1); the spirits are known by speaking and hearing (4:5-6); the word "spirit" in 4:3 is supplied; Scripture uses "spirit" this way elsewhere (2 Thessalonians 2:2; 1 Corinthians 14:32; 2 Corinthians 11:4). Even on reading (b), the only way to test such spirits is by what the prophets teach, so the practical test is the same.

**Question 8. Is John's coming antichrist Paul's man of sin and Revelation's beast?** *Answer:* John states that one antichrist is coming (2:18). That he is the man of sin (2 Thessalonians 2:3-12) and the beast (Revelation 13) is a reasonable inference, because the descriptions match (one who opposes Christ, sets himself in God's place, is empowered by Satan, and is attended by false prophets and lying wonders), but none of those passages uses John's word.

**Question 9. "By water and blood" (1 John 5:6).** *Readings:* (a) His baptism and His death (Bullinger); (b) the water and blood from His side (John 19:34); (c) later readers: baptism and the Lord's supper. *Answer:* (a), because John says He "came" by them: they mark His coming, and God bore witness at both. Reading (b) is a true echo John himself saw. Reading (c) reads later practice into the verse.

**Question 10. The sin unto death (1 John 5:16).** *Readings:* (a) a sin that leads to a believer's being cut off by physical death under God's discipline (Bullinger; compare 1 Corinthians 11:30; Acts 5:1-10; James 5:15); (b) the denial of the Son by those who went out, which places a man outside life (5:12); (c) a list of especially grave sins. *Answer:* (a) as the more natural reading of "a brother," with Scripture's own examples of believers' deaths following sin. John does not name it, and does not forbid prayer; he simply does not command it.

**Question 11. "Keepeth himself" or "keepeth him" (1 John 5:18).** *Answer:* The Received Text reads "himself": the believer guards himself. Most older manuscripts read "him": Christ, "he that was begotten of God," keeps the believer. Both are taught in Scripture (Jude 21, 24).

**Question 12. "This is the true God" (1 John 5:20).** *Readings:* (a) the Father, "him that is true," as Bullinger reads it, referring to John 5:26 and John 17:3; (b) "his Son Jesus Christ," the nearest name before "this." *Answer:* This study holds the question open. The nearest-name rule favours (b); the verse's own distinction of "him that is true" from "his Son," and John 17:3 ("thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent"), favour (a). Nothing in the study rests on it. What is certain is that the verse names the Father and the Son side by side and distinguishes them.

**Question 13. The elect lady (2 John 1).** *Readings:* (a) a real Christian woman and her children, perhaps named Kyria (Bullinger, after Alford); (b) a figure for an assembly and its members. *Answer:* (a). She is addressed personally ("I beseech thee, lady," verse 5), and the greeting from "the children of thy elect sister" reads most naturally as a family.

**Question 14. Come, or coming, in the flesh (2 John 7).** *Readings:* (a) a timeless present, the same as "is come in the flesh" (1 John 4:2); (b) His coming again in the same body (Bullinger; Irenaeus). *Answer:* Both are true. Jesus Christ came in the flesh, and the same Jesus will come again in like manner (Acts 1:11). The deceivers denied both.

**Question 15. The wish for Gaius' health (3 John 2).** *Readings:* (a) a personal wish to one man, in the usual form of a letter of that day; (b) a promise to every believer of health and prosperity. *Answer:* (a). Letters of the time commonly opened with a wish for the reader's health. John wishes his friend well; he makes no promise to all.

# Appendix D — The Text of John's Letters

The King James Version was translated from the Received Text. Most modern Greek texts follow older manuscripts that differ in some places. The table lists the differences noted in this study. Only one (1 John 5:7-8) bears on doctrine.

| Verse | King James (Received Text) | Older manuscripts (critical texts) | Note |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 John 1:4 | "your joy" | "our joy" | Section A |
| 1:7 | "Jesus Christ his Son" | "Jesus his Son" | Same person |
| 2:7 | "Brethren" | "Beloved" | John's usual address |
| 2:7 | "the word which ye have heard from the beginning" | "the word which ye have heard" | Already said in the verse |
| 2:13 | "I write unto you, little children" | "I have written unto you, little children" | Begins verse 14 in critical texts |
| 2:20 | "and ye know all things" | "and ye all know" | Appendix C, Q4 |

| Verse | King James (Received Text) | Older manuscripts (critical texts) | Note |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2:23 | "[but] he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also" (printed in italics) | Same words, present in the oldest manuscripts | The clause is genuine |
| 2:27 | "ye shall abide in him" | "abide in him" (command) | |
| 2:28 | "when he shall appear" | "if he shall appear" | "Whenever" |
| 3:1 | "that we should be called the sons of God" | adds "and such we are" | Bullinger: *Epicrisis* |
| 3:5 | "our sins" | "sins" | |
| 3:13 | "my brethren" | "brethren" | |
| 4:3 | "every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh" | "every spirit that confesseth not Jesus"; Irenaeus: "every spirit which separates Jesus Christ" | Section I |
| 4:19 | "We love him" | "We love" | |
| 5:7-8 | "in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth" | Not present: "For there are three that bear witness, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one" | See below |
| 5:13 | "and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God" | Not present | |
| 5:18 | "keepeth himself" | "keepeth him" | Appendix C, Q11 |
| 2 John 3 | "the Lord Jesus Christ" | "Jesus Christ" | |
| 2 John 7 | "are entered into the world" | "went out into the world" | Same verb as 1 John 2:19; 4:1 |
| 2 John 8 | "that we lose not" | "that ye lose not" | |
| 2 John 9 | "transgresseth" | "goeth before" (runs ahead) | Section M |
| 2 John 12 | "our joy" | "your joy" | |
| 2 John 13 | ends "Amen" | no "Amen" | |
| 3 John 5 | "to the brethren, and to strangers" | "to the brethren, and that strangers" | |
| 3 John 9 | "I wrote unto the church" | "I wrote something unto the church" | |
| 3 John 12 | "ye know" | "thou knowest" | |
| 3 John 14 | one verse | divided into 14 and 15 | Numbering only |

## The longer text of 1 John 5:7-8

The words "in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth" are found in no Greek manuscript earlier than the late Middle Ages, and in only a handful of late ones. They first appear in Latin writers from the late fourth century, and then in the margins, and afterwards the text, of Latin Bibles. Erasmus did not print them in his Greek New Testament of 1516 or 1519, because his Greek manuscripts lacked them; he added them in his

third edition of 1522, and from there they passed into the Received Text and so into the King James Version of 1611. Bullinger wrote in *The Companion Bible*: "The words are not found in any Gr. MS. before the sixteenth century. They were first seen in the margin of some Latin copies. Thence they have crept into the text." The verse as John wrote it speaks of three witnesses on earth, to the fact that Jesus is the Son of God: the spirit, the water, and the blood (Section K).

# Appendix E — First John and the Gospel of John

| Subject | Gospel of John | Letters of John |
|---|---|---|
| Purpose | 20:31 | 1 John 5:13 |
| The beginning; the Word; life | 1:1-4 | 1:1-2 |
| Seen, beheld, handled | 1:14; 20:27 | 1:1 |
| Light and darkness | 1:5; 3:19-21; 8:12; 12:35 | 1:5-7; 2:8-11 |
| Doing the truth | 3:21 | 1:6 |
| The new commandment | 13:34; 15:12 | 2:7-8; 3:11, 23; 2 John 5 |
| Joy full | 15:11; 16:24; 17:13 | 1:4; 2 John 12 |
| The advocate, *paraklētos* | 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7 | 2:1 |
| The spirit of truth | 14:17; 15:26; 16:13 | 4:6 |
| Teaching all things | 14:26 | 2:27 |
| Born of God | 1:12-13; 3:3-8 | 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18 |
| Sons / children of God | 1:12; 11:52 | 3:1-2, 10; 5:2 |
| The only begotten Son sent | 3:16-17 | 4:9-10, 14 |
| No man hath seen God | 1:18 | 4:12, 20 |
| Abiding in Him | 6:56; 15:4-10 | 2:6, 24, 27-28; 3:6, 24; 4:13-16 |
| Keeping His commandments | 14:15, 21; 15:10 | 2:3-5; 3:22, 24; 5:2-3 |
| Asking and receiving | 14:13-14; 15:7; 16:23-24 | 3:22; 5:14-15 |
| Laying down life | 10:11, 15, 17; 15:13 | 3:16 |
| Passed from death unto life | 5:24 | 3:14 |
| The world hates you | 15:18-19; 17:14 | 3:13 |
| The devil a liar and murderer from the beginning | 8:44 | 2:22; 3:8, 12, 15 |
| The prince of this world | 12:31; 14:30; 16:11 | 4:4; 5:19 |
| Overcoming the world | 16:33 | 2:13-14; 4:4; 5:4-5 |
| Water and blood | 19:34 | 5:6-8 |
| The witness of God | 5:32-37; 8:18 | 5:9-11 |
| Life in the Son | 5:26; 14:6 | 5:11-12, 20 |
| Eternal life is to know God | 17:3 | 5:20 |
| "We know that his testimony is true" | 21:24 | 3 John 12 |

# Appendix F — Key Words

Counted in the Greek text (SBL Greek New Testament). The King James may render one Greek word several ways.

| Greek | English | 1 John | 2 John | 3 John |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *agapaō* | love (verb) | 28 | 2 | 1 |
| *ginōskō* | know | 25 | 1 | 0 |
| *menō* | abide, remain, continue, dwell | 24 | 3 | 0 |
| *kosmos* | world | 23 | 1 | 0 |
| *huios* | son | 22 | 2 | 0 |
| *agapē* | love (noun) | 18 | 2 | 1 |
| *hamartia* | sin (noun) | 17 | 0 | 0 |
| *oida* | know | 15 | 0 | 1 |
| *entolē* | commandment | 14 | 4 | 0 |
| *patēr* | father | 14 | 4 | 0 |
| *zōē* | life | 13 | 0 | 0 |
| *pneuma* | spirit | 12 | 0 | 0 |
| *gennaō* | beget, be born | 10 | 0 | 0 |
| *hamartanō* | sin (verb) | 10 | 0 | 0 |
| *alētheia* | truth | 9 | 5 | 6 |
| *phaneroō* | manifest, appear | 9 | 0 | 0 |
| *pisteuō* | believe | 9 | 0 | 0 |
| *teknion* | little child | 7 | 0 | 0 |
| *marturia, martureō* | witness, bear witness | 12 | 0 | 5 |
| *nikaō* | overcome | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| *agapētos* | beloved | 6 | 0 | 4 |
| *pseustēs* | liar | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| *homologeō* | confess, acknowledge | 5 | 1 | 0 |
| *antichristos* | antichrist | 4 | 1 | 0 |
| *diabolos* | devil | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| *parrēsia* | confidence, boldness | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| *chrisma* | unction, anointing | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| *planaō, planē, planos* | seduce, error, deceiver | 4 | 2 | 0 |
| *angelia* | message | 2 | 0 | 0 |

| Greek | English | 1 John | 2 John | 3 John |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *hilasmos* | propitiation | 2 | 0 | 0 |

# Appendix G — The Claims of This Study, Their Weight, and What Would Change Its Mind

The weights used: **Direct statement** (Scripture says it in so many words); **Strong inference** (follows closely from what Scripture says); **Reasonable inference** (the more natural reading, though a careful reader may take it otherwise); **Corroboration** (consistent with the claim, from outside Scripture).

| # | Claim | Weight | What the other reading fairly answers |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | John wrote so that believers may know they have eternal life | Direct statement (5:13) | — |
| 2 | First John was written to believers in the administration of grace, and speaks to us directly | Strong inference (Ch. 5; App. B) | It does not teach the mystery; John's commission was to the circumcision |
| 3 | The letters are John the apostle's | Strong inference, with early corroboration (Ch. 1 §G) | Eusebius records doubts about 2 and 3 John |
| 4 | Bullinger's structure of the letter | Strong inference, confirmed by word distribution (App. A) | Other divisions (at 1:5 and 3:11) are also possible |
| 5 | The antichrist is defined by what he denies about Jesus | Direct statement (2:22; 4:3; 2 John 7) | — |
| 6 | "Spirit" in 4:1-3 is the teaching put forth as from God, known through the prophet | Strong inference (§I; Ch. 7 §C) | Revelation 16:14 and 1 Timothy 4:1 speak of spirit beings as the source |
| 7 | The antichrists of ch. 2, the false prophets of ch. 4 and the deceivers of 2 John are one group | Strong inference (Ch. 7 §C) | A shared verb does not by itself prove one group; the shared denial does |
| 8 | One antichrist is still to come | Direct statement (2:18) | John might be redefining the expectation; but he says "as ye have heard" without correcting it |
| 9 | He is Paul's man of sin and Revelation's beast | Reasonable inference (Ch. 7 §F) | None of those passages uses John's word |
| 10 | Confession (1:9) restores fellowship, not sonship | Strong inference (§A) | Some read 1:9 as the sinner's first confession |
| 11 | God's seed in the believer cannot sin (3:9) | Direct statement, explained by Galatians 5:17 (§F) | The present tense alone could mean "does not practise sin" |
| 12 | The longer text of 5:7-8 is not part of what John wrote | Direct statement of the manuscript evidence (App. D) | — |

| # | Claim | Weight | What the other reading fairly answers |
|---|---|---|---|
| 13 | The sin unto death is sin leading to a believer's physical death under discipline | Reasonable inference (§L; App. C, Q10) | It may be the denial of the Son by those who went out |
| 14 | The elect lady is a real woman | Reasonable inference (§M; App. C, Q13) | The title may be a figure for an assembly |
| 15 | "This is the true God" (5:20) | Held open (App. C, Q12) | — |

### What would change this study's mind

1. On the antichrist: a passage in John's letters defining the antichrist by anything other than a denial about Jesus Christ. There is none.
2. On the spirits of 4:1-3: a passage in which believers are told to test a spirit apart from what a speaker teaches. There is none.
3. On to whom: a passage in First John addressing the readers as the nation of Israel, or placing them under the law for acceptance. There is none.
4. On 5:7-8: Greek manuscripts from the early centuries containing the longer text. None are known.

## Appendix H — Glossary of Greek Words

| Greek | Strong's | Meaning | Where explained |
|---|---|---|---|
| *agapē, agapaō* | G26, G25 | Love that gives itself for another's good | §C (2:10); §J |
| *agapētos* | G27 | Beloved | §F (3:2) |
| *aiōnios* | G166 | Eternal, of the age to come | §A (1:2) |
| *alazoneia* | G212 | Boastful pretension, pride | §D (2:16) |
| *alētheia* | G225 | Truth, reality | §A (1:6) |
| *angelia* | G31 | A message brought | §A (1:5) |
| *anomia* | G458 | Lawlessness | §F (3:4) |
| *antichristos* | G500 | Against, or instead of, Christ | §E (2:18); Ch. 7 §A |
| *aphiēmi* | G863 | To send away, forgive | §A (1:9) |
| *archē* | G746 | Beginning | §A (1:1) |
| *arneomai* | G720 | To deny, disown | §E (2:22) |
| *chrisma* | G5545 | Anointing, unction | §E (2:20) |
| *diabolos* | G1228 | Devil, slanderer | §F (3:8) |
| *dokimazō* | G1381 | To test, prove | §I (4:1) |
| *eidōlon* | G1497 | Idol | §L (5:21) |
| *epithumia* | G1939 | Strong desire, lust | §D (2:16) |

| Greek | Strong's | Meaning | Where explained |
|---|---|---|---|
| *gennaō* | G1080 | To beget, be born | §E (2:29) |
| *ginōskō* | G1097 | To know, come to know | §B (2:3) |
| *hilasmos* | G2434 | Propitiation | §B (2:2) |
| *homologeō* | G3670 | To confess, say the same thing | §A (1:9); §I (4:2) |
| *kolasis* | G2851 | Punishment, torment | §J (4:18) |
| *koinōnia* | G2842 | Fellowship, sharing | §A (1:3) |
| *kosmos* | G2889 | World | §D (2:15) |
| *logos* | G3056 | Word | §A (1:1) |
| *menō* | G3306 | To abide, remain, dwell | §B (2:6) |
| *monogenēs* | G3439 | Only begotten, unique | §J (4:9) |
| *nikaō* | G3528 | To overcome, conquer | §D (2:13) |
| *paraklētos* | G3875 | Advocate, one called alongside | §B (2:1) |
| *parousia* | G3952 | Coming, presence | §E (2:28) |
| *parrēsia* | G3954 | Confidence, boldness | §E (2:28) |
| *phaneroō* | G5319 | To manifest, make visible | §A (1:2) |
| *planaō*, *planē*, *planos* | G4105, G4106, G4108 | To lead astray; error; deceiver | §A (1:8); §I (4:6); §M (2 John 7) |
| *pneuma* | G4151 | Spirit | §H (3:24); §I |
| *presbuteros* | G4245 | Elder | Ch. 1 §G |
| *pseudoprophētēs* | G5578 | False prophet | §I (4:1) |
| *pseustēs* | G5583 | Liar | §A (1:10) |
| *sperma* | G4690 | Seed | §F (3:9) |
| *teknion* | G5040 | Little child | §B (2:1) |
| *tēreō* | G5083 | To keep, guard | §B (2:3) |
| *zōē* | G2222 | Life | §A (1:1) |

# Sources Consulted

**The text.** The Holy Bible, King James Version (1769 text), in the open-source edition of the aruljohn *Bible-kjv* project; every verse block was generated from it by machine, and every quotation checked against it. The Greek of John's letters from the SBL Greek New Testament (MorphGNT edition); readings of the Received Text as noted in *The Companion Bible*.

**Structure and figures of speech.** E. W. Bullinger, *The Companion Bible* (notes and structures on 1, 2 and 3 John); E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (1898).

**Early writers.** Polycarp, *To the Philippians*; Ignatius, *To the Trallians* and *To the Smyrnaeans*; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*; Eusebius, *Church History*; Jerome, *Commentary on Galatians* (on 6:10). All in the *Ante-Nicene* and *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* translations.

**Word numbers.** Strong's numbers are given from James Strong, *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (1890).

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