

# **THE BOOK OF**

# **I JOHN**

**BY:**

**BOB STEWART\***

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**WITH THANKS TO OUR STUDY GROUP**

**(As always, revisions are necessary when new  
information is obtained)**

## **INTRODUCTION**

There are few books more misinterpreted than John's first epistle. Revelation, Hebrews and even the first few chapters of Genesis are among them. This is due to these books becoming interpreted based on theological and doctrinal parameters, instead of using the books to form those parameters. In addition, those who interpret these books are largely ignorant of the ancient mid-eastern Hebrew/Jewish styles of writing including both literary and linguistic styles.<sup>1</sup> So interpretation is not only done by imposing doctrinal ideas forcing the books to comply to them, but with western - abstract notions developed in the western world that do not reflect the eastern concrete expressions God used to convey His Word. Plus, add a lack of grasping the simplest cultural and historical settings - not to mention how language is used even in our own literature make these interpretations suspect.

Some of this will be discussed as we proceed, but in this introduction some important facts must be stated as a foundation for understanding what John was doing with what he was writing.

One simple thing, anyone interested in actually understanding the scriptures can do, is read the introduction to each book one is about to delve into. For that matter, it is helpful to read the introduction to the actual Bible version or translation itself to discover the principles which the translators used in translating their work. In most quality study Bibles, the Book of First John will have an introduction that will explain the situation within which John was writing and why he wrote what he did and when.

The Ryrie Study Bible, (Moody Press - NASB), The Archaeological Study Bible, (Zondervan Press - NIV), The Masters Study Bible, (Holman Publishers - NASB) and The NASB Study Bible (Zondervan) and nearly every commentary for example, will note that John's work was in response to the influence of the Gnostic philosophy/religion that had oozed its way into the early church and many began to come under its influence. Though the impact of this Jewish mysticism had come to have inroads near the latter half of the first century when John penned his epistle, Paul made several observations that hinted at his knowledge and dislike for this burgeoning movement. It would be another century before full blown Gnosticism was fully developed. But there was a considerable impact in John's day.

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<sup>1</sup> These styles, and their importance, are presented in my work on hermeneutics that can be studied in a correspondence course by contacting me at: [stewartinarizona@gmail.com](mailto:stewartinarizona@gmail.com)

In hearing or reading thoughts as to John's purpose in writing this book, we see the prejudices of those who wish to have John's work enforce their own ideas. So we have statements like: "John wrote in order to: 'help the sinner receive forgiveness', or to: 'help the believer be restored to fellowship with God,'" or "restore fellowship with the rest of the body, the church" or so believers "may not sin" and the like. Any of these topics would distort the truth because John says, twice, that, "These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you." (2:26; 3:7; II John 1:7)

The growing Docetic<sup>2</sup>/Gnostic movement was only one of several challenges to the truth of the gospel in the early church. Others included the insistence of the Judaizers on keeping the law in order to be saved, the current pagan pantheon of gods and goddesses the Greco/Roman empire was steeped in, other ancient religions from the far East having influence such as astrology, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism and the like.

The Apostle John is credited with the authorship of this first epistle and there is sufficient evidence to attribute it to him though he does not mention his name. We will not indulge in this debate but leave it to students who wish to do so. John's style is uniquely his own and identifying marks can be seen in all the documents attributed to him. In First John, his style is choppy. He introduces a topic, leaves it, returns to it and does this time after time. He doesn't explain himself or the meaning of what he says and so it takes extra work to glean his intent. It wouldn't be a bad idea to take his epistle and sort it into coherent subjects, all the same topics placed together in order. But he does not do that so we have to do some extra work and realize he is again speaking of a topic he has already talked about. We know that in his day, writing materials were not cheap and there was no "white out" or "cut and paste" capabilities.

Because of the influence of the Docetic/Gnostic movement, John has a four bladed axe to grind and he addresses these four issues repeatedly. First is the presentation the Jesus is the Christ of God come in the flesh. Second is the Sin/Law/forgiveness issue. Third is the definition of those who really are in the light and those who are in darkness - (those who truly belong to God versus those who don't.) Fourth is the matter of truly loving one's brethren that demonstrates that the Spirit of God works within the human form and shows that these who do so are truly God's children.

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<sup>2</sup> The belief that Jesus' body was only an illusion or a phantom appearing real, but having no substance.

Evidence suggests that the epistle was written near the end of the first century, likely between 85 and 95 C. E., before the persecution under the Roman emperor Domitian. John was indeed in Ephesus at this time and his audience was to the churches in that region and in the Asia Minor area. It has the style of a general epistle, one to be circulated among many churches.

There is a story that comes to us through Polycarp (Christian pastor, martyr and disciple of John - 69-115). Irenaeus (115-202)<sup>3</sup> records it. The story is told that John and young Polycarp were entering the steaming bathhouse in Ephesus when he realized that the Gnostic teacher Cerinthus was within it as well. John fled the bathhouse exclaiming something like, "Let's flee before the baths fall in! Cerinthus the enemy of the truth is inside."

The Gnostic heresy was influential in those days, and Cerinthus, once supposed to be an orthodox Christian, was caught up in its spell and began to change his views becoming a noted teacher of the doctrines. Another rising teacher, and more famous historically is Valentinus of Rome, who was born about the time of John's death. We have some of his writings and some of his history still with us today through the quotes of his teachings by others in his day. John's style reveals the manner in which the church(s) were in the midst of the controversy.

Gnosticism developed from a combination of the philosophy of Plato mixed together with near and far eastern religious philosophies and Jewish tradition and mysticism. Aspects of Buddhism, Hinduism and other eastern religious philosophies look to enter into it. Gnosticism is a complex set of beliefs and there were more than once sect of the Gnostics. To understand John's epistle and the reason he wrote it the way he did, we must grasp a little of the Gnostic doctrine he was refuting. Once again, it is critical in interpreting John's epistle that the student actually pays attention to John's own words in chapter 2, verse 26 where he says, "These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you."

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<sup>3</sup> Irenaeus wrote "Against Heresies" to refute the teachings of various Gnostic groups; apparently, several Greek merchants had begun an oratorical campaign in Irenaeus' bishopric, teaching that the material world was the accidental creation of an evil god, from which we are to escape by the pursuit of *gnosis*. Irenaeus argued that the true *gnosis* is in fact knowledge of Christ, which redeems rather than escapes from bodily existence. (Wikipedia on line)

## BASIC GNOSTICISM\*

The very word "Gnosticism" is adapted from the Greek word "gnosis" (silent "g") which translates into "knowledge." So the basic tenant of this movement is "knowledge", but not a "general" knowledge. For this cult, it is a higher, spiritual, enlightened, secret "knowledge" only those initiated therein can understand and benefit by. We will look at the specifics in a moment.

The movement began around or just before the birth of Jesus and became a Jewish development. Some became entrenched in in this Jewish philosophy through adopting some of the teachings of the mystics of the mid-east, Persia, India, as well as some of the teachings of Plato, especially as it pertains to dualism. Plato (c. 400 B.C. E.) was the most prolific and influential philosopher of his day and delved into both the material and spiritual world. His dualism reflects the dichotomy between the two and this became attractive to Jewish thinkers in the 1st century C. E., if not before. His influence affected many thinkers and theologians including Augustine (354-430 C.E.) who had a major impact on the early Roman Catholic Church.

Plato proposed (in his work "phaedo") that the physical universe, as well as the physical body were separate entities from another realm - the realm of the mind and the soul, both which would transcend death while the physical would perish.

It is possible for the intellect to tap into or "ascend" to the world of "ideas" which is immortal. That particular world is a real world and has greater reality than the physical world which is nothing more than a reproduction of the eternal forms.

Hebrews 8:4-5 reflects the same concept but with an entirely different point:

4: "Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; 5: who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, 'SEE,' He says, 'THAT YOU MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN.'"

So these ideas were attractive to Jews who did not have a doctrine to explain any of this and the Old Testament says nothing about it. So the beginnings of Gnosticism, possibly in Alexandria, Egypt, took shape.

Alexandria (founded by and named after Alexander the Great) was the hub of great activity, both philosophical and religious as well as commercial enterprises. History was made there in the persons of Cleopatra, Mark Anthony, Octavian (later to become Emperor Augustus) as well as home to the largest urban Jewish community in the world. The Septuagint, a Greek version of the Tanakh, was produced there. The early Ptolemies (Greek descendants of one of Alexander's generals) kept it in order and fostered the development of its museum into the leading Hellenistic center of learning. The library of Alexandria was the largest and held the finest collections of written works in the world. The population consisted principally of Greeks, Egyptians, Middle Easterners and of course, Jews.

Much discussion of philosophical and religious matters were both prominent and popular. The developing views of Jewish mystics influenced by Greek philosophers, notably Plato, grew the early seeds of the coming Gnostic movement.

The concepts of the Gnostics, now having nearly a century of development, also appealed to many in the early church, and you will see many similarities to Biblical teachings. By the time John wrote his epistle, this religious philosophy had come a long way. They taught that there was a supreme being, that salvation was possible, but that this was achieved through the belief and adoption of (ascension to) their secret knowledge. A key tenant was that anything composed of physical matter was imperfect, even evil, and thus the creation could only be by an imperfect god.

For example, Paul's statement in I Corinthians 15:50, "Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable," quoted out of context could be used to support this view though against his beliefs. The creation came about as a result of the true "god", who, not having any contact with a material world himself, produced "emanations" of himself much like the sun produces light and then heat. So we have a thinly disguised "polytheism", concepts of most religions including Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, the Greek and Roman mythologies, ancient Egyptian, Canaanite, Phoenician and other mid-east religions, and most all religions except Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism.

Each emanation is a sentient being with the power to create, but inferior to the one before it - its parent. At the conclusion of these divine "emanations" or "supernatural powers" is the being who, being imperfect, created the physical universe, and is the God of the Jews. So if the supreme God is spirit and good, the god who created the material universe must be evil. That would be the God who

created everything in the Genesis account.

Theologically, this inferior being is called a "demiurge" (in both Gnosticism and other theological systems) and is a heavenly being though subordinate to the Supreme Being. This "demiurge" is considered to be the controller of the material world and antagonistic to all that is purely spiritual. Therefore, his creation and influence is one of "darkness" (lies and deception) while that of the true God is "light" (truth). This doctrine essentially eliminates most of the Old Testament having any legitimacy. Some have thought that this evil and dark "demiurge" is actually Satan, the Devil. But the Gnostics waffle and sidetrack the subject when it is raised.

Based on this premise, we now have many conclusions that stand in contrast to Christianity and which John refutes in his epistle. Remember, Gnosticism blossomed out a Jewish mysticism and that is why these Jewish mystics had easy access into the early church which was largely Jewish in the first century.

Let's summarize a few key tenets of this heresy:

1. Matter is imperfect and even evil, created by an inferior god. The true god is pure, spiritual and good.
2. Man, a product of the creating demiurge, is a "drop" or "spark" of the true spiritual essence of God but became trapped in the physical body due to the evil demiurge and this constitutes the so called, "fall of man."
3. However in man, due to this "spark," there is the capacity to ascend beyond the physical and material and be saved by employing one's mind and intellect and coming to believe in the knowledge imparted by the wise teachers of the Gnostics.
4. This "knowledge" then, frees one from the entrapment of the material, physical, temporal universe which will perish. Salvation is from the darkness of ignorance and the material/physical realm which is destined to perish. Salvation returns a person to the realm of spiritual existence before the flaw that created the physical universe.

"Gnosticism commonly held that "salvation is to escape from the bondage of the material existence and travel back to the home from which souls/spirits have fallen." God initiates salvation because he wants to draw back the stray bits and pieces of himself, and so he sends forth an emanation of himself - "a spiritual

redeemer" - who comes down from heaven and gives an attempt to teach some of the "divine sparks of Spirit" what their true identity is and where their real home lies. Once they are awakened by this redeemer they can then begin their journey back home. "Salvation is by knowledge - self-knowledge."<sup>4</sup>

5. So Jesus was indeed from the true God to show the way. He is the "light" of the world in contrast to the "darkness" in which the world is lost. But it is an error to claim He was born from a fleshy woman. That teaching is foolish because Jesus was not fleshly at all, but pure spirit who took on the appearance of a man. Paul says this in Philippians 2:6-7 and his statement, taken out of context could be quoted to support the Gnostic position.

6. As spirit, He avoided the contamination of the flesh and the evil material world. His appearance as a man was an illusion to some Gnostics, a physical appearance to others.

7. Jesus taught the secret knowledge to Gnostic true believers, hiding it from the materially minded Jews who founded the church. He taught that the spark of divinity was within every person.

8. At His baptism, Jesus was infused with the divine "Christ" - the savior now commissioned to bring the message of salvation from this entrapment to the world. But there were secret students whom Jesus taught "the way" when He had gone off to be by Himself. At His crucifixion, the divine spirit of the Christ left Him and departed into God's presence. (Matthew 27:50; Luke 23:46) So He (as the Christ) didn't actually die on the cross. The man "Jesus" was simply a shell in whom the true Christ dwelt for a time.

Thus, His crucifixion had no purpose relating to sin or salvation. He had taught man's true origin and the way to salvation was through a mental/spiritual ascent to the higher knowledge he imparted to selected teachers. He was simply killed. His blood, misinterpreted by the Jewish Christian apostles, had nothing to with sin or salvation at all because salvation is achieved by mental ascension - a spiritual act - not by the physical sacrifice of a fleshly, evil body.

9. So, sin does not actually exist as a reality since it relates to the material/fleshly world. True purity and spirituality is gained, not through faith in the fleshly

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<sup>4</sup> From "Theopedia" on line, "Gnosticism."

crucifixion of Christ and its purported purpose, but in ascension to the divine realm through man's inner spirit/mind. Therefore, no one actually sins. Again, this virtually eliminates the legitimacy of most of the Old Testament.

10. The fleshly/carnal acts of men have no bearing on the spiritual/mental ascension to salvation as they are in two separate realms, the flesh not affecting the spiritual at all and having no connection with it. Therefore, some branches of Gnosticism engaged in immorality and debauchery because there is no connection at all between the flesh and the spirit. The spirit is saved. The flesh perishes.

11. Jesus' resurrection did not actually occur as described in the Gospels. The gospels describe a bodily resurrection, but the Gnostics describe it as the removal of the spirit from the body, and that took place at His death on the cross. The burial of the remains took place, but the absence of the body in the tomb is not explained, only that a resurrection of the spirit takes place. What happened to His body is a mystery.

Please note that the Gnostics considered themselves Christians indeed, in fact truer Christians than those they met in local congregations. Here, for example is a quotation from a Gnostic document - a letter from a Gnostic to an initiate.

"My son Rheginos, some people want to become learned. That is their purpose when they begin to solve unsolved problems. If they succeed, they are proud. But I do not think they have stood in the word of truth. Rather, they seek their own rest, which we have received from our savior and our lord, the Christ. We received rest when we came to know the truth and rested on it."

"Since your pleasant question concerns what is the truth about the resurrection, I am writing you today to tell you. Many do not believe in it, but a few find it. So let us see."

"How did the lord proclaim things while he was in flesh and after he had revealed himself to be the son of god? He lived in this world that you live in, speaking about the law of nature, which I call death. And more, Rheginos, the son of god became a human son. He embraced both qualities, possessing humanity and divinity so he could, by being the son of god, conquer death, and, by being the human son, restore the pleroma. At the beginning he was above as

a seed of truth, which was before the cosmos came into being. In the cosmic structure many dominions and divinities have come into being."<sup>5</sup>

Note: In the entire document the name "Jesus" is not used because that would designate a human, physical being. That fact is unessential to the Gnostics. The "pleroma" is the "divine fullness" man was intended to enjoy. Note the last sentence revealing the plurality of gods and emanations.

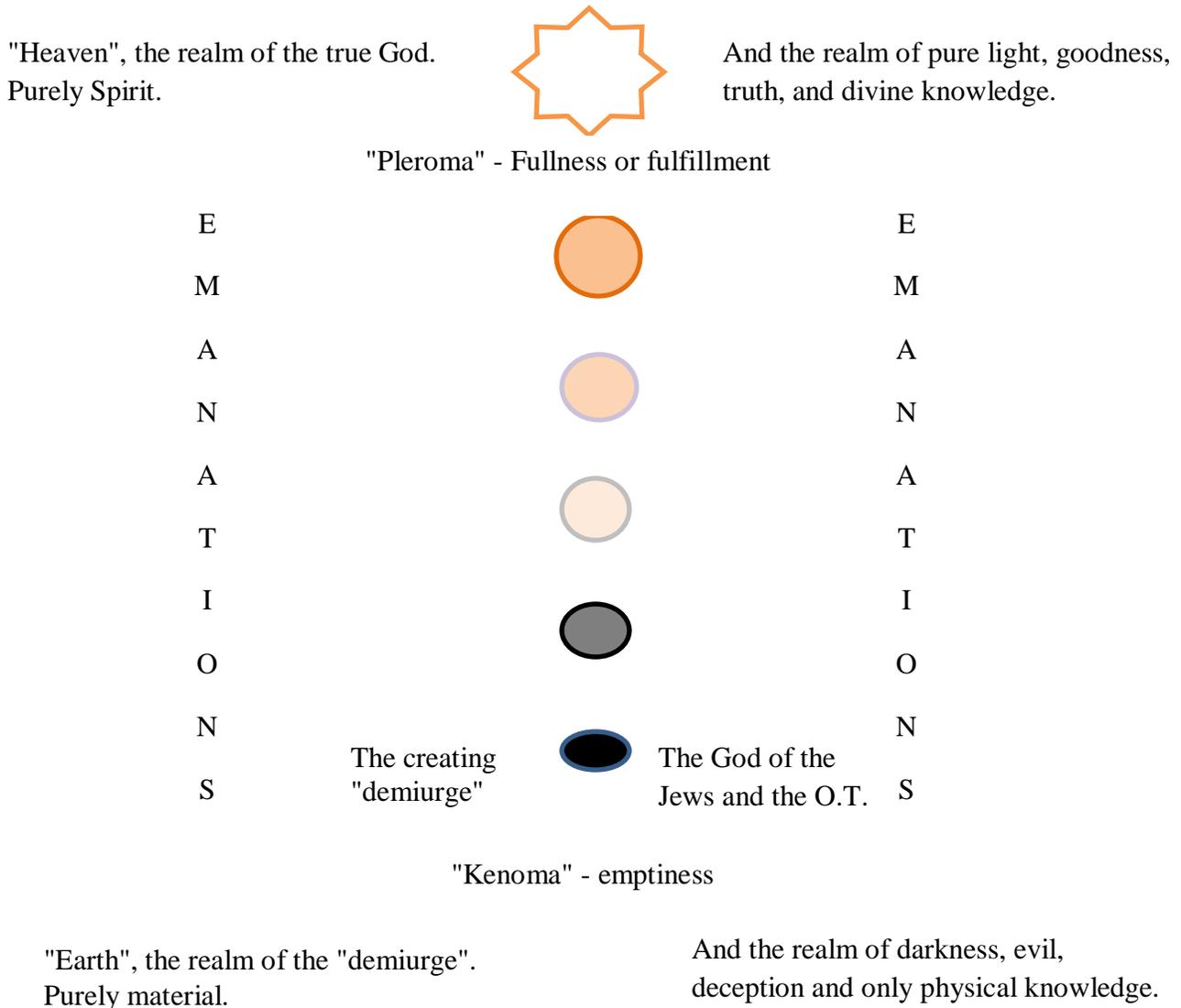
Finally, Gnosticism is alive and well in many religions and teachings today. Among them are some of the New Age concepts, Spiritism, Christian Science, Scientology, Some sects of Satanism, Astrology, as well as The Freemasons and others.

Gnosticism is another religion that depends on one's self for salvation. In this case, physical "works" are rejected as a means to salvation, the common element of most all religious practice and the intellect is employed.

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<sup>5</sup> This original translation of The Treatise on the Resurrection (Nag Hammadi Codex I, 4) is presented in the Gnostic Society Library by permission and under license from Dr. Willis Barnstone, who retains all copyright. Dr. Barnstone's translations of the Nag Hammadi texts are published in The Gnostic Bible, © 2003, Willis Barnstone & Marvin Meyer. [Copied from the on-line article.]

**SIMPLE DIAGRAM OF GNOSTICISM**



Jesus is from the true God and sent to "redeem" mankind, but not from sin but from ignorance. He was not born of flesh, but a spirit who was manifested in appearance as a man. He taught the secret knowledge to selected secret disciples who came to be called "Gnostics" - those who had the true knowledge of the way of salvation. Man, created with a "spark" of the true God, has the ability, by his intellect and mind ascend to the true knowledge of salvation which is the separation of the mind (and thus the spirit) from the evil, physical and temporal world (in which he was trapped in the physical creation) to the pure and divine realm of the true God. Thus all physical matter is evil and is to be discarded through this process which is salvation.

## JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

### CHAPTER ONE

1:1-4,

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

1-3: John begins right off with an unusual statement. First he references "the beginning." Throughout the New Testament, "the beginning" normally refers to the creation. John uses this same phrase in the opening sentences of his gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." (John 1:1-3) All of this is about Jesus, and it reflects the time of the creation. Jesus, (whom the Gnostics saw as the perfect light, but not the creator) was indeed the creator of the physical universe John states right off. So this statement by John stands in total opposition to the primary Gnostic doctrine about Jesus. There is no reason to think he is changing his designation here in his first epistle.

For Gnosticism, the man "Jesus" was simply the host of the spiritual light called "Christ" (the Messiah). The ministry of "the Christ Spirit" began when the true "Christ" from God entered the host or shell of a man called Jesus at His baptism and departed when the man died on the cross.

John also uses the term "beginning" to refer to the initiation of the proclamation of the gospel and Christ's teachings in 2:7; 2:24; and 3:11. He uses it this way also in II John 1:5-6.

Then, in the first chapter of his epistle John employs the simple pronoun "what" five times in the first three verses and "which" once. In using these relative pronouns in this manner, John forces the reader to consider the cosmic meaning of such a phrase with the intention of simply pointing out that it is Jesus to whom he

refers. Jesus is the legitimate source of creation and eternal life. But since the Gnostics place the creation in the hands of an evil, dark demiurge, then Jesus, the true Son of the pure God cannot be the creator. Plus, John uses the designation "Jesus" for the "Christ" (Greek for Jewish Messiah) which the Gnostics do not use.

Still, the Gnostics saw "Jesus" as the legitimate Son of the true Creator both light and good when He was teaching the secret doctrines of the "Savior" to His secret disciples, but not as the "Christian/Jewish Christ that, "...takes away the sin of the world." But if He did indeed create the world as a material creation, as John implies, then, according to Gnostic thinking, he really either didn't do so or is not the Son of God because the material creation is evil - as is its creator according to the Gnostics. So something is amiss somewhere. It is clear from John that Jesus existed at creation and is the source of the creation itself. Plus, He is the true creator's son, and the Word of Life made flesh (John 1:14). And, in his gospel, John makes the point that Jesus is God and is the creator so all that He made, as the prime deity, is not evil or darkness, but good and light as he is. Paul makes the same assertion in Colossians 1:15-23, worthy of reproducing here as it contradicts the Gnostic view exactly,<sup>6</sup>

15: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16: For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17: He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 18: He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. 19: For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, 20: and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. 21: And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, 22: yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach-- 23: if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister."

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<sup>6</sup> As well as that of the Judaizers and all other dissenters from the truth.

So immediately both John (and Paul) pull the rug out from under the key foundational premise of Gnosticism and therefore undermine everything built on it. To add insult to injury, John goes on to speak of "us" "hearing", "seeing and "handling" the "Word of Life." The context reveals that this is indeed Jesus he is speaking about. He repeats terms like "manifested" (φανερόω) - "fahn-eh-rah-oh" which means, "made to appear." The "us" would be those who were in personal contact with Jesus while He was here on earth. He is most likely speaking of the disciples. So, immediately, John states a contradiction to the Docetic/Gnostic doctrines about the creation and who made it.

He goes on to say that the "Word of Life" was "manifested" - that is, made to appear in a form. He says the same thing in his gospel in 1:14, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."

He is simply saying that Jesus was not a phantom or an illusion, but a real man in a mortal body - whom they "handled" - and he will establish that in this true physical form Jesus was not evil or darkness, but good and light. So, since the "Word" was in the beginning with God and was God and that all things were made by Him, John refutes Docetic/Gnostic doctrine from the very first words of both his gospel and epistle.

Finally, he states that Jesus was with the "Father." The Gnostics call the true creator, "The Father" as well, but in John's portrait, Jesus was with the Father, is the Creator come in the flesh and that true "fellowship" (koinonia - meaning "participation with") consists of the believer, Jesus and God together, not a mental ascension to some secret knowledge. So we have fleshly human beings able to have fellowship with God and His Son. Not possible in the Gnostic system.

4: "These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete." My thought is that John is anticipating their understanding of the truth and rejecting the deception and that would make their joy complete (or fulfilled). Recognizing the truth would bring them into fellowship with The Father and the son as well as with the rest of the saints in Christ.

1:5-10,

5: "This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that

God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. 6: If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; 7: but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. 8: If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9: If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous 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."

Comment: Verse 9 of this passage is frequently quoted as applying to believers who trust in Christ. However, I believe it is quoted out of context and misapplied to believers due to John's use of the pronoun "we." Evidence of this misapplication will be seen as we examine the entire passage and its context.

5: In verse 4, John states, "These things we write..." Here, in verse 5, he says that the message they have heard is being announced to them. It is simply, "God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." The God he speaks of is the God of the Bible, the Creator and Father of Jesus who was with Him and was Him and engaged in the creation of the physical universe. Since the Gnostics claim that the creation was done by an evil "demiurge" and is the creation of "darkness," John refutes this notion in this verse pointing out that the creator is "light" not "darkness."

There is no reason for John to use terms like "light" or "darkness" except that these terms are employed by the Gnostic teachers. These adjectives are philosophical metaphors for truth/goodness, (light) and lies/evil, (darkness). We call them "jargon" meaning that they are terms used by a specific group in their propaganda.

Comment relating to verses 6-10: Okay, here is where we must look carefully at how he phrases his message. First remember that these teachers of the Docetic/Gnostic doctrines are considered Christian believers by both themselves and by the churches at this time. They are considered a part of the body of Christ just like any other believer. They are also Jews for the most part at this time, as was the majority of the church early on. Gentiles had come into the churches a well and were quite interested in the philosophical views of these teachers as that was their background in the Greco/ Roman world of the time.

So when John uses the term "we" beginning in verse 6, he is both including himself with the church and identifying with it, but at the same time excluding himself

from those who teach or believe what these false teachers are promulgating. This is called the "editorial" use of a pronoun.<sup>7</sup>

So in verses 6-10, I believe it will be easy to see how he does this and clear as to whom he is talking to and what about. I am going to reproduce each verse and comment on them separately.

6: "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;" Here is my point. John uses "we" but does that include himself and the believers who have not slipped into this deception? In other words, does John's use of "we" mean that he himself and those in fellowship with him say they have fellowship with Him yet walk in darkness and lie, not practicing the truth? Of course not. So what is he saying and whom is he talking about? What if he had used the pronoun "you?" Then what? See the problem?

7: "...but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin."

So we have a contrast between those who walk in the light with those who walk in darkness. If this verse now applies to John and others in fellowship with him, then how can they walk both in the darkness and the light at the same time? Obviously he is speaking to a group within which there are both orthodox believers and those having come under the influence of this heresy. John identifies with them as believers but notes the division in them they themselves may or may not not recognize.

In this verse also, we see that John recognizes that those who walk in the fellowship of light in Christ are always cleansed of any sin that might incur. In bringing up the subject of sin, John deals with it because the Gnostics don't believe in sin as it is of the flesh in relationship to the law. The law, of course, was placed in force by an inferior "god" who is comprised of darkness and evil.

Now, a key verse for our understanding.

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<sup>7</sup> Paul uses the term "we" in the same way as does the writer of Hebrews. For Paul, the context determines to whom he is referring. Sometimes it is the Jews when he is speaking to them as one of them, sometimes it is those with him on his team and sometimes it is simply believers - and so on. The same with the writer of Hebrews.

8: "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us."

Is John, by using the pronoun "we" confessing that he and others with him are saying that they have no sin? Of course not. Is he saying the truth is not in himself or those in fellowship with him? Absurd. One cannot come to Christ for salvation without recognizing they are lost in sin. John makes this clear. But since the Gnostics believe that Christ's death had nothing to do with sin, and that sin doesn't exist in the real "pleroma" wherein the pure reside, then doesn't this make it clear that John is using these terms to point out the error of the false teachers?

Here is a clarifying idea in a rhetorical question. "In using the term 'we' in 1:8 and 1:10, is John including himself among those who say they have not sinned?"

The rhetorical question expects the answer, "No, he is not."

Then, who is he including when using the pronoun "we"? The answer, I believe, is that he is talking to those in his audience to whom the condition applies.

Thus verse 9, as we will see, sandwiched in between 8 and 10 would also be a part of this context and he is telling those to whom his argument applies that in order to be a beneficiary of God's forgiving grace, they must first acknowledge that they, themselves have sinned. Something the Gnostic doctrine denies as even a reality.

Hopefully this helps. Now, verse 9.

9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

This verse is between verses 8 and 10 and remains in the context. It is not some "out of the blue" verse that John inserted to apply to believers. In our study, we discovered that the finished work of Christ brings forgiveness to all mankind for all time. John also notes this in this epistle in 2:2, just three verses from now. No, we have a context in which verse 9 is placed. But this verse begs the question, "Has John now changed the intent of his pronoun for this one verse and now it only applies to believers?" Or is he still prompting those under this false teaching to come to the truth?

For those in his audience reading John's epistle, it is critical that those under the

influence of the Gnostic teachers recognize not only have they sinned, but that it must be "confessed" [meaning - "to agree (with God") or "acknowledge"] in order to have receive the benefit of Christ's sacrifice.

It is important also to note that this is the only verse in the New Testament where "confessing of sins" is mentioned in reference to God's forgiveness. In James 5:16 confessing of sin to one another to clear the conscience and bring about healing is spoken of.

John Gill finds himself confused and contradictory about this.<sup>8</sup> He writes,

"...forgiveness of sin here intends not the act of forgiveness, as in God, proceeding upon the bloodshed and sacrifice of Christ, which is done at once, and includes all sin, past, present, and to come; but an application of pardoning grace to a poor sensible sinner, humbled under a sense of sin, and confessing it before the Lord; and confession of sin is not the cause or condition of pardon, nor of the manifestation of it, but is descriptive of the person, and points him out, to whom God will and does make known his forgiving love; for to whomsoever he grants repentance, he gives the remission of sin; in doing of which he is faithful to his word of promise; such as in Proverbs 28:13; "and just"; in being "true", as the Arabic version adds, to his word; and showing a proper regard to the blood and sacrifice of his Son; for his blood being shed, and hereby satisfaction made to the law and justice of God, it is a righteous thing in him to justify from sin, and forgive the sinner for whom Christ has shed his blood, and not impute it to him, or punish him for it; ..." blah. Blah, blah.

Gill's comment, (which continues on) is one long garbled sentence. But he recognizes that Christ's death brought forgiveness to all men for all time. But Gill has no knowledge of the Gnostic influence or chooses to ignore it even though he acknowledges them as one of many false religious influences in the first century in his introduction to the epistle. He says nothing else about how that could have affected John's purpose in writing this epistle.

In the comments on I John 1:9 in the NASB Study Bible by Professor Donald Burdick, we have clear evidence of the ingrained teachings about this verse. Burdick, a Seminary Professor, Writes in the footnote;

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<sup>8</sup> John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible, E-sword online, The epistle of I John. Other commentators are also found to struggle with this verse.

"*faithful and righteous.*" Here the phrase is virtually a single concept (faithful-and-righteous). It indicates that God's response toward those who confess their sins will be in accordance with His nature and His gracious commitment to His people (see Ps 143:1; Zech 8:8).<sup>9</sup> *Faithful To His promise to forgive* (see Jere 31:34; Mic 7:18-20; Heb 10:22-23).<sup>10</sup> *To forgive us.* To provide the forgiveness that restores the communication with God that had been interrupted by sin (as requested in the Lord's Prayer, Matt 6:12)"

Burdick reverts back to his Baptist background when interpreting this verse. His explanation reveals that he does not know the difference between the Old covenant (The Law) and the New Covenant initiated at Christ's death and resurrection. In referring to Old Testament texts and the "Lord's Prayer" he relies on Old Covenant concepts to interpret the verse. In the Lord's Prayer (where Christ taught under the Law-Galatians 4:4-5), It says:

"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."  
Matthew 6:12-15

This last phrase begs the question, "Is this true for believers under the grace of the New Covenant?" Paul answers this question in both Ephesians 4:32, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" and in Colossians 3:13, "...bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you."

Burdick's interpretation of I John 1:9, so commonly taught in the churches today, denies both the finished work of Christ<sup>11</sup> and the context and intent of John's writing. What is fascinating, is that once Burdick gives the common interpretation of this verse, he reverts back to the actual context in verse 10 where he says, "*we have not sinned.*" Gnostics denied that their immoral actions were sinful."

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<sup>9</sup> My footnote. Neither verse has anything to do with confessing sin or forgiveness.

<sup>10</sup> Though these verses speak of God's forgiveness and so on, Burdick has no clue about the New Covenant spoken of by Jeremiah in 31:31 or by the writer of Hebrews in 8:8; 9:15 or 12:24.

<sup>11</sup> See our work on this subject online at: [www.bibleclassroom.org](http://www.bibleclassroom.org)

So due to a powerfully ingrained false interpretation of verse 9, it never dawned on him that verses 8 and 10 might be in the same context.

So, bottom line, are believers required to confess their sins in order to be forgiven? In other words, are we saying that Christ's work on the cross was not finished?

Well, looking ahead to 2:12, John writes, "I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake."

Let's be sure as we look at verse 10.

10: "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us."

This ought to make it crystal clear the audience is to whom he is speaking. If not, then there is a serious problem with John! Or, maybe with those who insist on forcing this verse into their theological presuppositions.

Really, is John, a believing Christian, saying he has not ever sinned? Please!!! How about the next verses where he acknowledges the reality of sin both for others, himself and the world. Remember there were no chapters or verses in the original documents. We will see more clarification as we proceed.

## JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

### CHAPTER TWO

2:1-2,

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

This ought to help us realize that John is dealing with the distortion about the "sin" matter and how the Lord Jesus Christ and His Father have dealt with it.

"My little children" suggests that: 1. John is indeed older; 2. He sees them the same way as Paul saw Timothy, as children in which he had a major role in bringing them to the faith; 3. As a term of endearment to assure them he is not angry, but very concerned like a father would be.

"Advocate" is, "παράκλητος" - (para-klee-tos) again, one called alongside to help. "Propitiation" is, "ἱλασμός" - (hil-ahs-mohs) and means to satisfy requirements and appease the one who imposed them. Similar to "expiation" that means "to atone for."

Now, why would John say, "I am writing these things to you so that you may not Sin."? Perhaps because there is a Gnostic sect that taught the since there works of the flesh mean nothing in achieving salvation (since it is through mental ascension) therefore there is no such things as sin. Thus, one can sin and even be involved in immorality and if has no effect on one's salvation. This, of course would be a terrible distortion of grace. Paul wrote clearly, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be!" (Romans 6:1-2a)

2:3-4,

3: "By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4: The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;"

3-4: The Gnostic false teachers denied any validity to all commandments whatsoever. Commandments did not relate to the secret mental and intellectual ascension to eternal life, and so they were useless and discarded. However, those who are His, will seek to do as he commands. "Him" refers to Jesus and is the antecedent to verses 1 and 2.

2:5-6,

5: "...but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: 6: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked."

5-6: A parallelism and conclusion to John's point in 3 and 4. He also clarifies that the "commandments" are "keeping His word" and that keeping His word is to walk (conduct one's life) in the same manner he did. This means caring for and ministering to others. This understanding becomes the framework for his next admonition.

2:7-11,

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

7: Simply put John is repeating, in his own words, the commandment they have already heard and we can tell by what it is that this is from the Lord, and likely confirmed by the Holy Spirit. John's use of specific Gnostic jargon in the next few verses leans toward that probability. Here John uses the term "beginning" referring to the initiation of Christ's teaching ministry contained within the proclamation of the gospel.

8: In the middle of his writing the "old commandment" John realizes he needs to include a qualifier regarding "darkness and light." The "darkness" is passing away

he says. "Darkness" is a metaphor for lies, evil, deceit, and deception. This, John assures them, is passing away because the "true light" is already shining. "Light" is a metaphor for truth. The Gnostics were big on this "light" being their secret truth. But John includes the adjective "true" in his statement about light, and it corresponds to Christ ("true in Him"). The fact that it is "already shining" and is not something one has to ascend to in the Gnostic system to see, is also testimony to John's intent in writing this epistle.

9-11: This "new commandment" is not found in the law, but is from the Lord.<sup>12</sup> It is that we who are His are to love our brothers and sisters in Christ. The word love here is "agape" of course. Gnostics were far more interested in "phileo" and "eros" general "love" or erotic "love" but due to their exclusive attitude, non-participants were kept at arm's length and looked down upon.

So, as far as John is concerned, the Gnostics were still in "darkness." Loving one's brother constitutes "abiding in the light" and all the false teachings about this are nonsense. "Abide" means to "remain," "continue" or "stay" in the light. So being in Christ, who is the "light," and loving one's brother as He commanded. This is confirmed in II John 1:5-6,

5: "Now I ask you, lady, not as though I were writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another. 6: And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it."

2:12-14,

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

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<sup>12</sup>John 13:34. And 15:12 and 17.

12: John does two things in this verse. (1) He addresses them with a term of endearment to show he is appealing to them as one who cares for them like a father. In my opinion this term is for all who know the Lord and the truth, but he could also be including all those he truly cares for and wishes to divest themselves of this heresy. (2) He speaks of "sins" and notes they have been forgiven for Jesus' name's sake. In this phrase John also makes it clear that sin is a real issue but that they are forgiven due to all Christ did on the cross. By faith in Him, they stand before God forgiven because all the demands of the law regarding sin is finished. This, of course, makes the idea of believers having to confess their sins to receive forgiveness of sins pure foolishness. So they stand in a continual state of forgiveness and, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death." (Romans 8:1-2)

In contrast, Jesus confronted the Pharisees with a statement that could be applied to the Gnostics as well, "And Jesus said, 'For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind.' Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and said to Him, 'We are not blind too, are we?' Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.'" (John 9:39-41)

Our study group is of the mind that each of the designations: "little children," "fathers" and "young men" appear not to be just age differences but also indicate different levels of spiritual understanding and maturity. The "little children" may well be those relatively new believers who, in all innocence, are easily persuaded to give attention to the doctrines of the "older and wiser" Gnostic teachers. Yet, they know the Father (verse 13) and so have some grounding.

13-14: We find that verses 13 and 14 nearly duplicate each other. First, in 13, John says, "I am *writing* to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning." In 14 it says, "I have *written* to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning." The only difference are in the words, "writing" (present active indicative) and "written" (aorist active indicative).

These "fathers" are most likely older men who know the Lord and have known Him and walked with the Lord. "From the beginning" indicates Jesus who was from "the beginning." Some think that these older men have the experience of knowing Jesus when He walked in His ministry. This is unlikely, in my opinion.

The "beginning" would be the time of creation where John makes it clear Jesus was the One involved as the "Word of God" and the power of creation. John may be appealing to these "fathers" to take a stand based on their experience in the truth and help keep others from slipping into this heresy.

Then John addresses the "young men." He says in verse 13, "I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one." And, with the same change of tense he says in 14, "I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one."

These "young men" are mature adults in the assembly who know God's word (perhaps also an illusion to Jesus Himself), and due to this, they are strong and have overcome (or subdued) the evil one.

Again, perhaps a subtle appeal for them to help John make an impact in the confused assembly.

Finally, John addresses the "children." In 12 he said, "I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake." And in 13, "I have written to you, children, because you know the Father."

In my opinion John is addressing not very young and small children, but either all of them as his "children" or the true "children" of the Lord or as noted before, those not yet mature in their understanding of the faith. Yet they are believers as they "know the Father." In his gospel John says, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name..." (1:12)

In "knowing the Father" this places them in fellowship with God but outside of the Gnostic doctrine that denies this possibility unless their path is followed. But John may be concerned that they could be or are being influenced by these heretical teachers.

2:15-17,

15: "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16: For all that is in the world,

the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17: The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever."

Comment: This admonition is not "out of the blue" in my opinion. Though it is a good foundational instruction for all believers, it could also be a warning to those under Gnostic influence. One key tenant of a sect of the Gnostic movement is that since material and spiritual realms are totally separate, whatever one does in the flesh has no effect in the other - his spiritual life. Therefore, immorality and all other acts that are ungodly in the eyes of the Christian are acceptable. Verses 18-19 reinforce this opinion as they warn against "antichrists."

15: This verse is interpreted by verse 16. "The world" is "world order" or "world culture" in this context. And in this context John defines it as, "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life..." The world is not the permanent residence of the faithful and believing. Though many Gnostics saw the opportunity to indulge in all of this without effect, Christians are prohibited from slipping into this trap.

In fact, John says quite clearly that those who love the garbage of the world do not have the love of God in them. Our destiny is not the kingdoms of the world or the things in it, but in the Kingdom of God and what is there. That is where our love should be focused on and emanate from. Jesus made the point, "... for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Matthew 6:21

So spending all of one's treasure in lust for the things of the world makes it clear that one's heart is there and not on the Lord. So God's love, and all that it means as well as its focus, cannot be in a person's heart who is enticed by all the world's lusts and goods. Likewise Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." Matthew 6:24

17: "The world is passing away" is a simple truth for the believer. One day it will be gone. If one has planted his feet solely in the world for his life, he will also pass away.

2:18-19,

18: "Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. 19: They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us."

18: "The last hour" is a phrase only used here in the New Testament. I believe Martin Vincent has a good grasp on John's use of this phrase. He writes,

"... On John's use of ὥρα *hour*, as marking a *critical* season, see: John 2:4; 4:21; 4:23; 5:25; 5:28; 7:30; 8:20; 11:23; 11:27; 16:2; 16:4; 6:25; 16:32. The dominant sense of the expression *last days*, in the New Testament, is that of a period of suffering and struggle preceding a divine victory. See Acts 2:17; James 5:3; 1 Peter 1:20. Hence the phrase here does not refer to the end of the world, but to the period preceding a crisis in the advance of Christ's kingdom, a changeful and troublous period, marked by the appearance of "many antichrists."<sup>13</sup>

Many "have appeared"- a reference to the Gnostic teachers who seek to distract believers from faith in Jesus to faith in themselves. This, John says, is an indication that the "last hour" has come. Unknowingly, John is correct, but he didn't realize that this "last hour" would encompass centuries ahead and even enclose our time. If indeed the "last hour" is the season of these attacks and heresies occurring until the end of the world as Vincent surmises, then the description is accurate.

"Antichrist" is a phrase that has been misapplied to an end time powerful individual who purports to be Christ but is an agent of the evil one. Though it does fit, it is not the Biblical definition that calls this individual "the man of lawlessness" (II Thessalonians 2:3). This description of "lawlessness" also fits the Gnostics as well. But John's point is that there are those who now stand against all that Jesus did and why, substituting their own "plan of salvation" in opposition to Christ's purpose. Thus, they are "antichrists." Only in this epistle and in II John 1:7 is the phrase "antichrist" used and that is because John is applying in the

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<sup>13</sup> Vincent's Word Studies, E-sword online. The Word Studies in the New Testament by Marvin R. Vincent (1834-1922) was first published in 1887 in four volumes.

contest of the gnostic heresy. II John 1:7-11 says,

"7: For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the *antichrist*. 8: Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. 9: Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. 10: If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; 11: for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds."

This ought to be a clear indication of whom John is referring.

19: A verse that baffles most commentators<sup>14</sup> because they do not grasp the historical context of John's epistle and its importance therein. Very simply, these teachers were at one time part of the believing body but got swept up in the fascination of the growing Jewish mysticism that came to be known as Gnosticism. With this understanding, the verse makes perfect sense as does the next section concluding the chapter.

2:20-25,

20: "But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. 21: I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth. 22: Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. 23: Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also. 24: As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. 25: This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life.

20: "The Holy One" is, in all likelihood Jesus Himself. This phrase is used eight times in the New Testament and every time it describes Jesus. The "anointing" from Him is the Holy Spirit as this is in accordance with John's gospel<sup>15</sup> regarding

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<sup>14</sup> The gobble-de-gook explanations of John Gill, and many other commentators is both misleading and, for the most part, just sad.

<sup>15</sup> John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7, 13.

Jesus sending the helper to guide them into all truth. Because of this "anointing" they all know. John uses the word "Chrisma" for "anointing" indicating a spiritual touch, where the word "lipos" is the anointing oil used in ceremonies.

So, what is it that they know due to this anointing?

21: What they know is the truth and also they recognize what a lie is in contrast to the truth.

22: Again a very significant truth underscoring John's context. It is specifically the Gnostics he refers to when stating that there are those who deny that Jesus is the Christ. Some commentators make it general as a reference to those who believe He was a great teacher but not from God. Others say it refers to the failure of the Jews to recognize Jesus as the Christ in spite of the prophets. Some admit that many religious sects will not recognize the divinity of Christ and deny Him and so on. All this would be fine IF THAT WHAT HE WAS TALKING ABOUT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ENTIRE LETTER. But it is not. Lord help us! As one person put it, "Interpreting a text without the context is nothing more than a pretext."<sup>16</sup>

The "antichrist" is the one who denies the Father and the Son. Remember the "Father," to the Gnostics, is the supreme spiritual essence of goodness, light and purity. But not the creator. John has made it clear that Jesus is with the Father AND is the creator. This is total disagreement with Gnostic theology.

23: In order to be in unity with the truth here has to be an acknowledgement that the Father and the Son are to be identified together. Not the "Son" as the "Christ" alone, but as Jesus. The Gnostic doctrine is that the man Jesus was the host for the "Christ" who was indeed from the "Father" but no more than a shell in whom the spirit of the "Christ" indwelt at the baptism of Jesus and departed at his death.

24: The "beginning" here is the initial proclamation of the gospel message they all heard. It is to "abide" in them. "Abide" here is the simple word "men-oh" meaning to "remain," or "stay." Our word "abode" is from the same root in the English and means a place of residence. This would fit very well here. Allow the Word to reside in us. Make ourselves its home. When we do this we will also find that we are in the home of both the Son and the Father.

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<sup>16</sup> See comment on 2:26.

25: to cap this off, John makes the clear proclamation that "eternal life" is gained through this path and through no other path. As Jesus Himself said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." (John 14:6) It is worth noting that John's gospel also makes the Gnostic doctrines spurious.

2:26-29,

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

26: Well, here it is. John is writing to them concerning those who are trying to deceive them. In fact, he used the aorist active indicative (past tense) to indicative that all he had written so far was for this purpose.<sup>17</sup> Well, who could that possibly be? A rhetorical question to be sure and the answer, especially by elimination of everything and everyone else, ought to be clear by now. Is it traditional Jewish legalism (the Judaisers)? No because, unlike Paul who made it clear about his attacks on these false teachers, John makes no such case. Is it the Greco/Roman pantheon of gods and goddesses and their mythology? Is it the influence of far Eastern religion and philosophy? Is it the polytheism of the Egyptians? The astrology of the Persians? Are any of these trying to "deceive" the believers? No, they couldn't because there is no focus on Christ. When you boil it all down the residue that remains is solely the growing threat and present impact of the Docetic/Gnostic infiltration.

27: John repeats the same point he made in verses 20 and 24. There is need for any other teaching about who Jesus is and how eternal life is obtained. This does not mean that "teachers" of the truth are unnecessary as some claim. That would eliminate the teachings of John himself as he writes. Those who claim this nonsense purport that all their doctrines are by the "anointing of the Holy Spirit" and say all sorts of stupid things using this verse as their justification. Some even use this to justify evil acts because "God told them to do it."

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<sup>17</sup> This would include the "we" passages in chapter one.

They are to "abide" in His teaching which is the truth, not in some esoteric nonsense such these false teachers claim as the truth.

28: John, like the early church anticipated the soon return of Jesus. Yet, since this heresy is still evident in many religions today, he is still on point. We are to "abide" in Him alone so that at His appearance He will find a single focus and dedication in our hearts. Anything else will cause us to be ashamed. Further, we will not be confident in our relationship to Him if we are "playing the harlot."<sup>18</sup>

29: The meaning of John here is a little vague, and this verse may well belong at the beginning of the next chapter. On the one hand, it may help to translate the Greek word "di-kai-ohs" (righteous) as "just," a less popular but legitimate translation and fits in better with the immediate context. He will be "just" with all when He appears is easier than He will be "righteous." On the other hand, as one member of the study group suggested, knowing that He is righteous and emulating that righteousness demonstrates that one is indeed His offspring.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See: Leviticus 20:5; Ezekiel 16:41.

<sup>19</sup> Greg Shmidt

## JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

### CHAPTER THREE

Comment: In this section of John's epistle, he goes on the attack with the specific goal of demonstrating the difference between those who are truly in God's family and those who are not - and why. He will deliberately separate the two and it will be obvious to the reader.

One of the things that make some of John's statements difficult to understand is that he, unlike some of the other apostles, does not explain himself or define what he means by what he says. This may simply be due to the fact that over time, his teaching in Asia Minor, along with that of previous apostles such as Timothy, Paul, Priscilla, Aquila, and Apollos had made clear the reality - that for those in Christ there is no condemnation nor recognition of sin at all. Jesus eradicated it on the cross.

In discussing some of the passages in this chapter, we must make some assumptions about what he means in what he says. We will do our best to be faithful to the text and the understanding these apostles had about these matters.

3:1-3,

1: "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2: Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. 3: And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."

1: The context tells us that John, in now using the pronouns "us" and "we," is speaking of those who are of the same understanding and faith as he is. In his gospel he writes a similar truth,

"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who 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

This statement corresponds exactly with what he has been writing in this epistle. The same is true of the next phrase, "For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him." In his gospel he wrote, "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him." John 1:10

This "knowing" is not informational, but personal or intimate, as in a family. Many "knew" of Him, but had no relationship with Him.

2-3: As God's children here on earth in our physical bodies, it is hard for John to imagine what form and essence we will have at Christ's return. It will not be flesh and blood or he could have said so. For John, it is a mystery except for the fact that we will be like Him. We will see Him as He will appear. For now, he is not seen and the heavenly realm is invisible to our physical eyes.

On the other hand Paul, in I Corinthians 15:35-49 speaks of this event and gives more information. But for John, fixing one's hope on Jesus and this concluding event to history "purifies" himself just as he is pure. The word "pure" is a derivation of the word "hag-ee-ohs" most often translated "holy" and means separated to God and His service. In focusing on this hope it helps keep the believer bonded to Christ and not distracted from Him by deceivers.

3:4-10,

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

This passage cause some to wonder about what John is thinking about or saying and why. Let's see if we can get a grip on it. First, John in verses 4-10 deals

specifically with the issue of sin. The Gnostic doctrine and teachers deny that sin is of any consequence because they deny the legitimacy of a law created by an inferior god. Thus they ignore the entire issue and promote a physical life unencumbered by guilt or condemnation. For some this leads to immorality and a life of dissipation and profligacy. So John goes after this matter full tilt.

As a preface to what follows, my opinion is that John's goal is to heavily slap the Gnostic doctrine and its teachers in the face for the deception they introduce regarding sin and the mission of Jesus to take it away as an act of God's grace and mercy. Their denial of this is proof they are deceivers and not of God.

4: In this verse, John is direct, clear and adamant that those who sin are breaking the law, and this would be God's law, not some world rules or ruling authority. It is a direct contrast to those who are "pure" in verse 3. Sin is the violation of God's law, period. So, in dismissing the law as the Gnostics have done, they claim sinlessness and that is a deception that must be avoided. The only true sinless people are those who have placed their faith in Christ, their sins taken away (John 1:29) and are focused on Him for their purity or holiness.

5-6: Not only that but John is clear that Jesus came to take away sin by the sacrifice of Himself on behalf of all mankind, past, present and future as John has already explained.<sup>20</sup> To dismiss His work as irrelevant is an insult to the grace and love of God.

In Jesus Himself there is no sin<sup>21</sup> and by inference therefore, those who abide in Him no sin is attributed.<sup>22</sup> But those who freely continue in sin, disregarding the condemnation of sin under the law, and then dismiss Jesus' sacrifice prove by these actions that they are not of Him.

7-8: It is important to note the warning, "Let no man deceive you." (A reprise of 2:29 - see comments there.) John is writing to again warn them about those who are attempting to deceive them. The sin issue is one of those topics in which these teachers are attempting to deceive them and John attacks this deception directly.

The word "practices" is "poi-own" a general verb, and a present participle meaning a continuing present action. The word itself is based in the idea of "doing",

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<sup>20</sup> Also John 1:29

<sup>21</sup> John 7:18; Hebrews 4:15.

<sup>22</sup> Another way this is understood is having or not having a disposition to sin or a desire to sin. In the forensic sense, believers do "sin." But it is not a habitual and sought after goal. "Spiritually" in Christ, all sin is non-existent.

"producing", "making", "performing" and the like, and has a lot of possible meanings depending on the context. The translation "practice" in the NASB is adequate. The idea is that a person who is set on living righteously as Jesus is righteous demonstrates that he is righteous indeed. But those who "practice" committing sin without compunction are not of God, but are of the "Devil," as John says.

The root meaning of "Devil" "diabolos" is to "throw through" or "throw against." It is understood as one who seeks to "throw someone off the correct path" or "deceive" as well as to bring charges against someone or "accuse" someone. The Devil, who has sinned from the "beginning," (in this case - creation) is likened to those who follow in his footsteps. His goal is to entice people to do so. Gnostic doctrines support this lawlessness and sin and they teach there is no consequence for such conduct and so, no need of a savior. So, they participate in the works of the Devil.

But John makes it clear that only through Jesus sin is eradicated and thus the works of the Devil are destroyed for those who have faith in Christ.

9-10: An awkward and difficult phrase at first glance. However, we must include the entire immediate context from verse 5 onward to at least get some idea of John's thinking. John, a Jewish writer does what is done so often in the Scriptures, and that is to present a series of parallelisms or contrasts that help explain his intent.

In 5-10, the contrasts are:

Sin	-	Righteousness,
The Devil	-	The Son of God
Those who practice sin	-	Those who do not
Those who do not practice righteousness	-	Those who do
Those who belong to the Devil	-	Those who do not.
Those who are children of the Devil	-	Those born of God
Those who do not love the brethren	-	Those who do
Those who abide in death	-	Those who abide in life (vs.15)

In verse 5 there is no sin in Jesus and he came to take away all sin and in Him there is no sin. He is of God. For those who place their faith in Christ as their Lord and

Savior are born of God. They, like Jesus, become children of God.<sup>23</sup> As such, God's "seed" indwells them. This "seed" is the Holy Spirit of God.<sup>24</sup> Thus they have been changed from desiring to sin to desiring to be righteous as he is righteous. He can no longer desire to wallow in sin and unrighteousness because the "seed" of God is in him. This slaps the face of the Gnostic teachers who, by indulging in sin or denying its reality, prove they are of the Devil. Thus their deception is obvious proving they are not of God. Verse 10 testifies to this.

At the end of verse 10, John makes the statement that the one who does not love his brother is of the Devil. He pursues this theme in 3:10-18 and 4:20-21. There must have been a noticeable attitude of hatred by the Gnostic adherents as well as orthodox Jews toward those who had placed their faith in Christ. A belittling and demeaning attitude perhaps, as one who detests another, and John was not amused.

For the word "love" throughout the epistle, John uses a form of the root word "agape." This word normally represents care, affection, and sacrificial benevolence toward others. "Phileo", often thought of as "brotherly love" also includes love of things and ideas whereas "agape" normally only includes relationships with people. However, John uses "agape" in 2:15, "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

3:11-15,

Note: It appears that John is getting more heated as he writes as we get into the following few verses. He sets up a virulent contrast between "evil hatred" and "righteous love" even calling those who hate their brothers "murderers" in verse 15.

11-15:

11: "For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; 12: not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous. 13: Do not be surprised,

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<sup>23</sup> Note the similarity here to John 1:12-13. Also, the phrase, "born of God" occurs in I John 2:29; 4:7; 5:1; 5:4; 5:18.

<sup>24</sup> John 3:6-8; I Peter 1:23; Romans 8:16-17; I John 4:13.

brethren, if the world hates you. 14: We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. 15: Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.<sup>25</sup>

11-13: Here, "the beginning" is the teaching ministry of Christ even though the context includes the Cain and Abel illustration. There is no teaching about loving one another in Genesis. This comes from Jesus' words recorded in John 13:34-35. The point is that evil hates righteousness. We see this in our world and nation today. It has been a reality since the creation. Thus, a believer in Christ should not be surprised if he or she is hated.

But this begs the question, "What is going on among the people to whom he is writing that causes John to address this subject so strongly?" There has to be some sort of antagonism from those who hold themselves superior to others because they have "ascended" to the true spiritual level others have failed to achieve. There may be condescension by some who think themselves above the rest. Or, perhaps it is something John reflects on as he recalls the hatred of the Pharisees toward Jesus.

Still, we see a growing hatred of Christians world-wide, even in the U.S.A.

14: A true love of those who are Christ's is a sign of having passed out of death into life. Loving those who are His, is tantamount to loving Jesus Himself. In John 16:27 Jesus said, "...for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father." And in I John 2:10 we read, "The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him." Those who do not love Jesus, or those who are His, abide in death.

15: Here John gets even more direct and specific about his intent. Those that hate their brother are murderers. Jesus had said, "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court..." (Matthew 5:21-22)

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<sup>25</sup> This may reflect Matthew 5:21-22, or even perhaps Leviticus 19:16-18.

3:16-18,

16: "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 17: But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18: Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth."

16: The truth of our love for those who are our brothers and sisters in Christ is demonstrated even to the extent of laying down our lives for them as Christ did for us. It is a family matter now, Christ as our brother as well as our Lord and Savior understanding that we are also God's children.

17: We can only speculate what prompts John to include this in his epistle. Apparently, there is some lack of care for those less fortunate among the brethren to whom he is writing. Since this is a circular epistle, it may be a problem endemic in most of the congregations. Paul noted this as well.<sup>26</sup> Self-centeredness is one of the most, (if not the most) problematic matters since day one.

It is difficult to see love for one another when one believer who has the resources withholds them from a brother or sister who has little or none and is in need. Talking about love - is cheap - doing something to help is what matters. Jesus demonstrated true love for mankind when He went to the cross on our behalf.<sup>27</sup>

18: The address, "Little children" at this point could indicate several different things. Our study group saw a shift in John's approach to his readers here after a harsh judgmental section. This endearing phrase is used by John seven times in this epistle.<sup>28</sup> There is no question that John is appealing to them to pay attention to him. As an elder in the church, he may be addressing the entire readership in general, or actual newer and more immature believers, or just the believers themselves in the midst of a mixed assembly.

Regardless, he has softened his tone and his point is clear. Our love for needy brethren ought to be shown by deeds to help them - if one has the resources to do so - not just by words of comfort or a promise "to pray for them."

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<sup>26</sup> Note: I Corinthians 11:20-22

<sup>27</sup> Romans 5:8

<sup>28</sup> 2:1; 2:12; 2:28; 3:7; 3:18; 4:4; 5:21.

3:19-24,

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

19-20: The context is important here depending on where the term "by this" belongs. It is more likely to refer to what he has just said rather than to what follows. There, the context is faith in Christ and love for one another. If so, it is the love of the brothers and sisters in Christ and deeds done on behalf of those who are needy that demonstrate we are of the truth.

Thus, this assures our hearts before Him regardless of what we may feel in our heart is condemning to ourselves. Most Christians have this sense of guilt when something is thought said or done that is not appropriate to the Christian person they strive to be. In spite of this, we can be assured that God does not count our weakness against us because He knows all things. He both knows we are His and understands our weakness and the reasons for them and does not condemn us.<sup>29</sup> Others who claim to be Christian do not do this, but despise and detest those who do not adopt their view.

21-23: Whether we feel condemnation from our heart for whatever reason, or feel no condemnation at all, we have confidence before God and can come to Him and receive from Him what we ask because we keep His commandment to believe in the name of His son Jesus Christ and love one another. The commandments spoken of here are not from the law, nor is keeping them a matter of works. Verse 23 makes this clear.

Another point. In contrast to other religions and some of Christianity, faith is not, "we initiate some action and God responds." That is paganism. Throw a sacrifice on the altar so the rain gods will send rain. Or, send in your offering and God will

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<sup>29</sup> Romans 8:1-8 which speaks to the Gnostic heresy as well.

bless you. Etc. No, faith is God initiating the action and us responding." In John's teaching, our abiding in Christ who loved us and gave His life for us now prompts the response to do likewise for our brothers as needed.

24: John 15:1-13 reflects much of what John says in these verses. Abiding in Jesus is based on faith in Him and love for the brethren. John repeats the final phrase of the verse in 4:13. This is also reminiscent of Romans 8:9-17.

This verse is a good transition into the next passage./

## JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE

### CHAPTER FOUR

4:1-3,

1: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2: By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; 3: and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world."

1: Here, John reprises one of his main themes.<sup>30</sup> Here, it is the truth that Jesus is the Christ and did come in the flesh as the Christ.

The word "spirit" here (un-capitalized) means "breath" and suggests the inner source or core of where it comes from whether it be from God or not. The scripture calls this the heart (or motive) of speech (or "confession" - verse 3) power by some claiming to be of God but are not. To be clear, John is not saying that just because someone says, "Yeah, I believe that Jesus was a real fleshly human being" means that he is a believer - or of God. But what he believes or says in that regard is indeed a truth that God would support.

2-3: So what is the test to find out whether the "spirit" is from God or not? There is wise counsel in verse 1. Due to many false prophets everywhere, what they say and why they say it needs to be tested against the truth of the gospel, in this case specifically that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, something the Gnostics deny. For them, Jesus is the shell for the Christ, yes, but not the "Christ" Himself. Jesus was not the "Christ" but only a fleshly host whose body was discarded at the crucifixion when He died while the Christ spirit returned to God.

Then he goes back and takes up what he said in 2:18, "Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour." And in II John 1:7 he reiterates this theme, "For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the "deceiver" and the "antichrist" making verse 3 self-explanatory.

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<sup>30</sup> See: Introduction page 3, paragraph 4 for the four main emphases.

4:4-6,

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

4: What a great and encouraging verse. Because we are from God, and His Spirit is in us, and we are His, we have "overcome the world," particularly those who "anti-Christ." God's Spirit is greater than any worldly power or doctrine. Jesus makes this statement in John 16:33, "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."<sup>31</sup>

Once again the endearing appellation, "little children" is used and John is once again appealing to those who will hear Him to believe what he is saying to them.

5. "They" are the false prophets John opposes. They are "from the world." That means that "they" teach the religious and doctrinal foundations created by men, not God, and then claim them to be spiritual truths from God. The world listens to all of them. We see this in abundance today. Millions following the teachings of men and philosophies, religious or not, created by men over the ages.<sup>32</sup>

6: But those who listen to the apostolic teaching from God know the difference between truth and error. So we, who have His Spirit and His truth stand apart and above all of this and have overcome any influence of these persuasive teachers.

4:7-13,

7: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8: The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9: By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so

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<sup>31</sup> In most of his quotations of the Lord, he quotes from his own gospel account.

<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately, this is true even in the "Christian" church as well. Everything permeated by the ideas of men who are blindly followed by billions of people today.

that we might live through Him. 10: In this 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 also ought to love one another. 12: No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. 13: By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit."

7: Another major theme for John - the importance of loving and caring for each other in the body of Christ - is highlighted here. In times of oppression, persecution and, in this case, the influx of false teaching into the body is the time to come together in unified support of one another and mutual encouragement. This love for the brethren demonstrates that these people are of God.

8: But again, there seems to be some lack of love by some of the people to whom John is addressing his epistle. So much so, that he brings this up several times throughout his letter, especially in chapter three.<sup>33</sup>

One of the most quoted statements in the Bible is, "God is love." This belies the continual doubt and confusion over the nature of God that sees God as the source of evil and the cause of all the pain, horror and destruction in the world for some "higher purpose." The constant questions about "Why did God allow this or not stop that?" are signs of the confusion and distrust of God by so many Christians due to them being taught that God is, "In control" so all evil is to be attributed to Him.<sup>34</sup>

9-11: John gives an example as to the extent we should love our brothers and sisters in Christ. God sent Jesus to the world so that we might have life through faith in Him. This is the demonstration of God's love for us. Paul says it this way in Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." And of course, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

Verse 11 becomes self-explanatory.

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<sup>33</sup> 2:15; 3:10; 3:11; 3:14; 3:16; 3:17; 3:18; 3:23; 4:7-12; 4:20-21.

<sup>34</sup> To refute and clarify these issues please see my work on my web-site: [www.bibleclassroom.org](http://www.bibleclassroom.org) under "Bible Studies," "topical studies" - The Problem of Evil.

12-13: John concludes this point by saying that though no one has seen God, the demonstration of love for one another is evidence of His presence and nature. In that way, we see God visa-vie through the love we have for one another. It is in exercising love for one another that we know we abide in Him and that His Spirit has been truly given to us.

4:14-15,

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

14-15: John reiterates his central theme. He throws it once again in the face of the Gnostic teachers and false prophets he has called "antichrists." He restates clearly that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Son of the true and highest God and those that believe and confess this abide in God and God in Him. Paul wrote, "Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus is accursed'; and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit." (I Corinthians 12:3)

Those who contradict this apostolic truth are not of God. Period.

4:16-19,

16: "We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. 17: By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. 18: There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. 19: We love, because He first loved us."

16: I appreciate the inference by John that it took some time for him and others to come to know that they are loved by God. This is crucial for the believer and will eliminate all the negative thoughts and doubts many believers have about this.

For the Christian Jew to believe that God loves him unconditionally with no regard for his sin or weakness would be near impossible. After a life where the law is

drilled into him including the need to offer sacrifices for his sin - a religious mandate following a thousand years of ingrained teaching and practice is not easy to ignore. Then, Jesus applied the law to the thoughts and intents of the heart making it impossible to be righteous before God. The Gnostics handled it by dismissing the entire law and most of the Old Testament as irrelevant in light of the teaching of "The Christ Spirit" who enlightens every person who engages in the intellectual ascension to the true spiritual realm. But John vehemently states this was accomplished by Jesus on the cross who is indeed the true Christ. So it is understandable why, with John, and most Jews a considerable amount of time was needed to come to belief in this truth. Even many Christians today without a Jewish background struggle with this.

John essentially repeats the essence of verses 7 and 8 but with a different point to make. Those verses say, 7: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8: The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love."

The emphasis on "God is love" is important because it divides those who are His and are filled with His love for others from those who feel they are better and superior to others and thus look down on them with contempt or some other unloving attitude.

17: The growth of love for others in our lives gives us confidence that we are His and thus we need not fear the day of judgment. In His gospel John quotes Jesus as saying, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life." (5:24)

"As He is..." The context reflects the loving nature of God for mankind. We are like Him in the world.

18: The specific "fear" John speaks of is the possibility of punishment in the day of judgment. But perfect love, God's love, casts out all fear. The one who fears this does not have the full confidence of God's love for them.

19: One of the critical places a Christian needs to arrive at is the place where he or she actually knows, believes and grasps that God actually loves them unconditionally, without reservation or vacillation and without any sense of the weakness, failings, doubts or sins of the individual believer. Far too many

Christians do not actually have this confidence in their hearts and are filled with anxiety, fear, confusion, uncertainty, discouragement and defeat because they have not and do not "measure-up" to a standard they believe must be achieved in order to please God. Thus, they are unable to love others as their focus is on their own miserable situation.<sup>35</sup> So their effectiveness for the Kingdom of God is negligible.

But the real issue in being effective and a loving Christian is knowing, without a doubt, that they are loved by God with no standard to achieve at all. In asking hundreds of believers (who would all nod their heads and say, "Yes, God loves me") the question, "How does God feel about you right now?" over 80% answer something like, "He isn't very happy with me right now," or, "I have a lot to do (or a long way to go) so He will be happy with me." So believers can mouth the right words, but down deep may not actually believe them.

But John is clear. We love because He first loved us. We need to get the message that this is true.

4: 20-21,

20: If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21: And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also."

20-21: So then, according to John, in order to love our brother, we must first love God. And to first love God, we must believe that He loves us. And to believe he loves us, we must look to the cross of His son Jesus and remember that it is God's love for the world that He sent His son to die for us. Anything less is diminishing what God and Jesus did for us and an insult to its magnitude and the truth encompassing such a gracious act.

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<sup>35</sup> Another major source of "fear" is the fear of "losing" or "not having." This "losing" fear includes a huge list of things such as money, a job, a family member, one's health or life, one's possessions, one's reputation, one's position in their social strata, time, opportunity, hope and so on; or "not having" what others have whether it be any of the things above or a plethora of things. Most of these things are temporal and physical. God's love for us ought to alleviate much of this knowing that in whatever happens we are in His hands and that we need not worry so much.

**JOHN'S FIRST EPISTLE**  
**CHAPTER FIVE**

5:1-5,

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

1: There is no reason for John to keep repeating this theme except that he is confronting the teachings that claim what he is saying is invalid and not the truth.

First, he makes it clear that the physical man Jesus is indeed the Christ<sup>36</sup> and the Son of God. The Gnostics, who believe that all material and flesh is evil and corrupt, do not accept that Jesus can, in His human form, be the Christ. John repeatedly refutes this because that makes His death on the cross and the shedding of His blood on our behalf meaningless.

Second, those who love the Father loves the one born of him. This would not be Jesus but all those who are God's children as noted in verse two. (The word "child" is supplied by the translator.) "...the *one* born of Him" is better and clearer.

2-3: There are two possible ways of understanding what John is saying here. First, we know that the Gnostics dismissed the Law and commandments of God and the sin that occurs when they are violated. Here, John appears to give them validity, not as a means of salvation or righteousness, but because they are of God himself. No believer deliberately sets out to practice violating God's commandments, and, as Hebrews points out, they are written on our hearts becoming a part of our conscience.<sup>37</sup> So John may well be speaking of keeping the commandments as a demonstration of love for God and others. But he makes it clear that it is our faith

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<sup>36</sup> "The Christ" is the Messiah, God's anointed king, as promised of all through the prophets from the time of David onward. This One will be on the throne forever and rule the world with justice and peace. A reference to God's anointed (Messiah) can be found in Psalm 2:2.

<sup>37</sup> Hebrews 10:16-22

that "overcomes the world" not commandment keeping. Second, John may be simply reiterating his point about the new commandment by Jesus to love one another.

4-5: John reiterates 4:4, "You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world." The overcoming is accomplished by faith. This would be faith in Jesus as the Christ, the true Son of God.

5:6-8,

6: This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. 7: For there are three that testify: 8: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.

6-8: There are two ways we can understand what John is intending to say. Again, he does not explain himself, so we must rely on his purpose in writing. The first is that, in keeping with John's insistence that Jesus, in the flesh, is the Christ, John states that He was born the "Christ" at birth. Water and blood would accompany a physical birth. Thus "the Christ" was a physical being named "Jesus" at birth, not a host for the Christ spirit entering Him at baptism.

The second opinion is that "water" either refers to His birth or to His baptism and the "blood" to the cross. The weakness here is that both of these ideas would fit right into Gnostic doctrine as they would agree whole heartedly with both. Of course they would interpret this as the "Christ" entering Jesus the man at baptism and that at His death, departing to heaven.

The statement in verse 5 has me leaning toward the first option because it is critical that belief that Jesus, the man, is the Son of the true God" is paramount. So a birth reference would support this. Further, in chapter three of his gospel John reports on the discussion of Jesus with Nicodemus. Here is the pertinent section (John 3:3-6),

3: "Jesus answered and said to him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.' 4: Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?' 5: Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I

say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6: That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

Despite those who teach that "born of water" is baptism in verse 5, the corresponding and parallel statement in verse 6 makes it clear that Jesus is speaking of being born of the flesh. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that John is using "water" in verses 6-8 here as physical birth. And since he couples this with the conjunction "and blood," we can draw this conclusion.

In referring to the Spirit, who is the "truth" as "testifying" to this, John may be reiterating several references to this already stated. Here are those statements,

I John 4:2-3, 2: "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; 3: and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world."

I John 4:6, "We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error."

I John 4:13, "By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit."

5:9-13,

9: "If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for the testimony of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son. 10: The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. 11: And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12: He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life."

9-12: John begins to nail down his argument and in so doing, put those nails into the casket of the Gnostic teachers and what they are teaching. He simply contrasts the "testimony" of men with that of God. The word "testimony" means to give a witness or a report. Whatever "men" may say about the "Christ, "salvation" "sin" the "Law" or anything else in their persuasive way, God's testimony stands firmly against anything that would distort the truth that Jesus is the Son of God, the true Christ come in the flesh, and that eternal life is in Him alone.<sup>38</sup> So, through belief in this "testimony" from God, and in the One who is the savior, eternal life is assured.

13: To be clear, once again, John is saying to those who do believe in the name of the Son of God that they have eternal life. That name is Jesus, and carries with it the power and authority to imbue eternal life even to the dead.

5:14-17,

14: "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15: And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him. 16: If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. 17: All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death."

14-15: John is the only writer that states this premise here and in the words of Jesus in his gospel account. Taken alone, these two verses may be the most difficult to come to grips within the epistle if not the entire Bible. In that case, I do not know what exactly John is trying to impart here. We have similar statements in his gospel account. Reproduced below are: 9:31, 14:11-14, 15:7 and 16:22-24. Each of these quotations have close similarities to John and his refutation of Gnostic teachings.

9:31: "We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He hears him." (The Jews speaking)

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<sup>38</sup> Note verse 20.

14:11-14: "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves. 12: Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father. 13: Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14: "If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it."

Jesus' statements here would refute the Gnostic heresy. Remember, John's gospel is also directed at the threatening invasion of Gnostic heresy as is evident in chapter 1 that has a close resemblance to this epistle.

John 15:7, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."

Very similar to John's statements in this epistle. Note: 2:24; 3:24; 4:16; II John 1:2 and 1:9.

John 16:22-24, 22: "Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you. 23: "In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. 24: "Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full."

The difficulty many have is that we do not experience such answers every time we pray and ask the Lord for something that is a deep seated prayer for someone we care about and we are sincere, not seeking just for ourselves. And, John does not explain what to think if these requests are not answered.

In our text in I John verse 14 he sets a condition, namely, that we ask "according to His will." The challenge here is knowing exactly what that is in each case. Sermons, books, and all sorts of devotional or prayer "guides" attempt to explain how to know this or how to go about getting one's prayers answered, but frankly, they all fall short in my opinion.

So I and our study group are going to present here some other ways to grasp this problem. It is our opinion that in this part of John's epistle that he is being specific and not general and that to see these verses without the surrounding contexts, both immediate and larger, one will be as confused as I have mentioned. Let's look at

this "specific" request a little closer.

16-17: In verses 16-17 he continues the theme of "asking" God - in this case for God to grant life to one whose sin does not lead to death. Remember in the original text there were no verse or chapter divisions. So the previous and following text is not interrupted but flows along. So here the request is for "life" for a brother who has committed a sin not leading to death and, John promises, God will grant that request. But in the case of a sin leading to death, no request should be made for life for this one as it is apparently not God's will for this to be granted. It is generally understood that the sin leading to death is total rejection of God's Son as the only Savior.

This understanding would be consistent with John's message to the assemblies (or communities) to whom he is writing. The Gnostic teachers and adherents have rejected the God of scripture and Jesus His son as the means of salvation for mankind. This is the sin leading to death. But there are many who are still open to and hopeful for the truth. For these, prayer may be made and God will answer it. Those who keep wondering what "the will of God is" might remember that it is His will "that none shall perish but that all will come to repentance and eternal life. This is first and foremost."<sup>39</sup> So, it could well be that this is John's focus. Noting the other similar quotes from his gospel above, we propose this understanding.

Does this help? I am not sure, but it is a difficult passage. Then we have verse 18 that also causes us to wonder.

5:18,

18: "We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him."

This is not as difficult as the previous verses in my mind. Let's look at it going backwards. The evil one does not have any power or authority over those who are born of God and cannot cling to, fasten himself to, or pull one away into his clutches.<sup>40</sup> This doesn't mean the evil one cannot attempt to tempt, persuade, or

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<sup>39</sup> See: Matthew 18:14; Luke 13:3-5; John 3:16; II Peter 3:9

<sup>40</sup> Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand." John 10:27-28

strike fear into a true believer who may believe his lies. Since the sins of those born of God are eradicated forever, there are no grounds upon which the evil one can assert the power of death over the one born of God.

Thus, from God's point of view there is no sin. The cross took care of that matter once and forever. So any accusation by the evil one is dismissed and given no credence by God. But from our point of view we see all sorts of sins, weakness, failures, disobedience, and the like but they are not germane to the view God takes. In fact, it is because we are weak and failures that God's grace and power are more greatly magnified. Paul wrote,

"And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me."

II Corinthians 12:9

"For indeed He was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives because of the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, yet we will live with Him because of the power of God directed toward you."

II Corinthians 13:4

"Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Romans 7:24-25a

5:19-21,

19: "We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. 20: And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. 21: Little children, guard yourselves from idols.

19: Premise: We know the whole world ("cosmos" indicating the population of the world) is in the power of the evil one.<sup>41</sup>

20: But we also know that both the truth and eternal life are in Jesus Christ. This transcends anything that the evil one can do to us through the agency of man.

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<sup>41</sup> See: John 12:31; 16:11; II Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:1-2, 5:15-16, 6:11-12

21: An obscure and abrupt verse that appears to indicate that the conclusion of John's epistle is missing.

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY AND CREDITS**

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