

1, 2, 3 John



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1, 2, 3 JOHN

A Study

By

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A Study in Truth, Love, and Light



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Scripture quotations from the NIV.

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Introduction to 1, 2, and 3 John

The three short letters of John are among the most personal, pastoral, and penetrating writings in the New Testament. Though brief, they carry the weight of a lifetime of walking with Jesus. By the time John wrote these letters, he was the last living apostle — the elder statesman of the early church — and his concern was not for institutions or structures, but for the hearts and lives of God’s people.

If you read these letters slowly, you’ll notice something remarkable: John doesn’t waste a single word. He circles around a few central themes — love, truth, obedience, discernment, and the reality of Jesus Christ come in the flesh — and he presses them into the lives of believers with the tenderness of a father and the clarity of a seasoned shepherd.

In 1 John, he lays out the foundations of Christian life:

- God is light
- God is love
- Jesus Christ has come in the flesh
- Those who belong to Him walk in truth, love, and obedience

He contrasts light and darkness, truth and lies, love and hate, Christ and antichrist — not to frighten us, but to anchor us. He wants us to know who we are, what we have in Christ, and how to live with confidence in a world filled with spiritual counterfeits.

In 2 John, he narrows the focus. The letter is addressed to a “chosen lady,” and John warns her about deceivers who deny that Jesus came in the flesh. The message is simple: love one another, walk in the truth, and do not give false teachers a foothold. It is a reminder that love is never naïve — it is discerning, protective, and rooted in truth.

In 3 John, the lens narrows even further. John writes to Gaius, a faithful servant who shows hospitality to traveling missionaries. He also exposes Diotrephes, a man who “loves to be first” and refuses to welcome the brothers. The contrast is sharp: humble service versus self-important control. John urges us to imitate what is good, not what is evil.

Taken together, these three letters form a single pastoral heartbeat. They call us to a life shaped by the love of God, grounded in the truth of Christ, and lived out in obedience, discernment, and genuine community. They remind us that the Christian life is not complicated — but it is costly, relational, and deeply rooted in the character of God Himself.

My hope is that as you walk through these letters, you will hear the voice of the Elder Apostle speaking across the centuries, urging you to remain in Christ, to love one another, and to walk in the truth with confidence and joy.

1 John

Chapter 1

The Word of Life

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.”

1John 1;1

John has a way of telling the story of Jesus from a lofty, heavenly vantage point, and this passage is certainly one of those moments. His Gospel begins in a similar way (see John 1:1–4), forming a perfect parallel. In Revelation, his perspective is so elevated that many readers struggle to follow it. Here in this short letter, however, John sets forth two simple and profound truths: first, that Jesus is the Messiah, the Anointed One of God; and second, that John himself is an eyewitness—an apostle who lived and walked with Jesus for over three years, fully qualified to testify about Him.

In verse 1, John emphasizes that he saw Jesus with his own eyes, touched Him with his own hands, and heard Him with his own ears. He now proclaims this Jesus as the Word of Life, the One who was with God and who *was* God from the very beginning—“a beginning that predates time itself,” as you wrote.

If we were to put John’s point in modern American terms, he might be saying: *“Listen up—I know what I’m talking about.”* The humor works, but I’ve softened it slightly for flow.

In verse 2, John goes further. The Word of Life truly appeared, and John was there to witness it. This eternal life, which came from the Father, is now proclaimed so that we may share in fellowship with John, with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. Our entry into this fellowship, John says, makes his joy complete. The word *fellowship* translates the Greek *koinōnia*, meaning “association, community, communion, joint participation.” This participation is not only relational but purposeful, for we cannot separate the Person of Christ from the purpose of the Father. John’s joy is complete because the proclamation of the Word of Life draws us into shared relationship and shared purpose with God and with one another.

This concludes the introduction. The proclamation itself awaits us in the next section.

Come Into the Light

“This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.” (V.5)

Having introduced his theme, John now begins the first major section of the letter (1:5–2:14). Its foundation is the declaration that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness whatsoever. Throughout his Gospel, John uses “light” to signify the presence of Jesus and “darkness” to signify His absence. Keeping this in mind helps us understand the contrasts that follow.

If we claim fellowship with God yet walk in darkness, John says, “we lie and do not live out the truth.” If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin.

The point is simple: fellowship with God is impossible apart from His presence, and His presence is light. We cannot be in fellowship with Him until our sins have been forgiven through the sacrifice of Christ.

John acknowledges that believers may stray into darkness at times. He does not suggest that every misstep ejects us from fellowship. Instead, he points us to the way back into the light—confession.

Confession and Cleansing

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (V. 9)

John is clear: claiming to be without sin is self-deception. But there is no need to carry guilt or shame, for God has provided a covenant promise. When we confess—when we acknowledge our sins before Him—He forgives and purifies. This is the heart of Christian assurance.

Chapter 2

Our Advocate and Our Assurance

“My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”

1 John 2:1–2

At the beginning of chapter 2, John circles back to what he said at the end of chapter 1 about the forgiveness of sins. But here he adds a new angle. Instead of simply reminding us that God is faithful to forgive when we acknowledge our sins — “faithful” being a covenant term — John now tells us *how* this forgiveness is accomplished. It is because we have an **advocate**, Jesus Christ.

John also speaks as the Elder, opening with “my dear children.” As the last living apostle, his writings carry the weight of a spiritual father addressing his community with truth, grace, and deep affection. His desire is that we should not sin, which is why he has been contrasting light and darkness so clearly. Yet knowing that we all stumble, he reassures us that all will be well because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. That is always a comfort to me — I don’t know about you — because I am certainly prone to stumbling.

John also tells us that Jesus has paved the way not only for *our* sins to be forgiven, but for the sins of the whole world. Sometimes we forget this. We know Jesus has forgiven our past sins, and we share this good news with others, but then we stumble again and suddenly act as though our new sin is somehow outside the scope of His grace. I’ve watched many faithful believers struggle with this. If that’s ever our plight, John’s words in verse 2 are a lifeline.

Knowing Him and Keeping His Commands

“We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. Whoever says, ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.”

1 John 2:3–6

I sometimes read with interest — and occasionally with sadness — when people insist that Christians never need to do anything because “there are no conditions in the New Covenant.” They seem to suggest that since grace is free, we accept it once and then we’re set for life with no obligation to live in any particular way. Most of the time I assume they’re simply wording things poorly. But sometimes it becomes clear that they misunderstand the Christian walk entirely.

John leaves no room for confusion here. We are to obey the commands Jesus gave us. In fact, Jesus Himself commanded that we teach others to obey Him (Matthew 28:18–20).

The standard for this obedience is simple and profound: **live as Jesus lived**. How did He live?

- He loved His neighbor.
- He served others, putting their interests ahead of His own.
- He proclaimed the Good News.
- He loved the Father and placed the Father’s will above His own.
- He loved His brothers and sisters.

John is clear: if we claim to live in Him, we must live as He did. If we are unwilling to do so, we may have a serious problem.

John will continue developing this theme, and we’ll follow him where he leads next.

Love and Hate; Light and Dark

“Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one... Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness...”

1 John 2:7–11

Here John gives another comparison and contrast — love and hate, light and darkness. If we are in Christ, we must love our brothers and sisters. If we claim to be in Christ yet harbor hatred toward them, then we are not in Christ. That’s John’s point in plain terms.

You’ll recall from the previous section that John said we must live as Jesus lived (2:3–6). Where in the Gospels do we ever see Jesus hating anyone? Nowhere. Even when He delivered the seven woes to the Pharisees, His heart was grieved for them (Matthew 23:37 ff.). When you reduce the Christian faith to its simplest form — and I’m a fan of doing that — it comes down to this: **love God; love your neighbor**. There’s no room for hate in that formula.

Our brother may irritate us. He may let us down. He may be every bit as imperfect as we are. But we are to love him anyway — just as he is to love us

anyway — just as Jesus loves all of us anyway. Love means putting the interests of the other person ahead of our own.

Let me add an observation: how much damage has been done to the Gospel by people who call themselves Christians yet fail to demonstrate His love? How many thousands have said “no” to Christ because of believers who show hatred instead of grace? How many have left the faith because of this behavior in the church? Those who hate rather than love may fool many people, but they cannot fool God. I would respectfully suggest they repent — and do so quickly.

Eight Present-Tense Realities of the Believer

This next passage is remarkable. For years I skimmed past it because it functions as a transition between John’s opening section and the deeper material that follows. But one day it hit me: *Wow*.

In 1:1–2:11, John has been contrasting light and darkness, truth and falsehood, showing his readers who is and who is not in Christ. Now he pauses to tell them **why** he is writing — and the reasons are astonishing.

“I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name...” 1 John 2:12–14

Do you see it? The power of this passage is not the “who” but the **why**. Let’s restructure the list:

If you are in Christ, John is writing to you **because**...

1. Your sins have been forgiven on account of His name.
2. You know Him who is from the beginning.
3. You have overcome the evil one.
4. You know the Father.
5. You know Him who is from the beginning.
6. You are strong.
7. The Word of God lives in you.
8. You have overcome the evil one.

Notice the tense. These are present or past realities — not future possibilities. John is not saying, “One day you might overcome.” He is saying, “You *have* overcome.”

As for the “who”: John addresses “dear children,” “fathers,” and “young men.” “Dear children” is his inclusive term for the whole believing community. “Fathers” can refer to literal fathers or to heads of households — and in Scripture, what is true of

the father is often true of the household. “Young men” refers to future heads of households — the next generation of leaders.

In John’s day, a “household of one” was virtually unheard of, so these categories naturally encompass the entire believing community. The list, then, applies to all who are in Christ.

There is repetition here. Statements 2 and 5 are the same, but one follows a reference to the Son and the other to the Father — a reminder that knowing one means knowing the other. Statements 3 and 8 are also repeated, both addressed to young men. These future leaders — the ones who will bear the spiritual battles ahead — receive extra encouragement: they are strong, the Word lives in them, and they have overcome the evil one.

I imagine this was a great comfort to John’s “young men” in his day, just as it should be to us in ours. And it prepares us for the deeper material John is about to unfold.

About This World

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

1 John 2:15–17

Now that John has reminded us who we are and what the realities of life in Christ look like, he turns our attention to the world around us. He’s not talking about the natural world — mountains, oceans, sunsets. He’s talking about the **world of mankind**: the impulses, values, and priorities of human society.

When we say we live in a “dog-eat-dog world,” that’s closer to what John means. He’s warning us not to love the world’s system or anything in it. If we do, we have a spiritual problem.

The “lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” are often described as the three major categories of sin. They don’t come from God; they come from the world. And if you think about it, so much of what people chase has more to do with impressing others than anything else.

Why are we driven by career advancement? Why do we need so much stuff? Why is the living room fancier than the bedrooms? Why the fancy car instead of the economy car? Must I spend \$100 on a tie? Why do we want what someone else has?

Our knee-jerk answer might be “sin,” but John goes deeper: **this comes from the world**. Jesus nailed it when He said we “prefer the praise of men.”

In the end, this world and its desires will pass away, but the love of God endures forever. Jesus showed us a life lived for the love of God — and that’s where our love should be. Some say we’re here to fix the world, but that’s a mistake. We were never commanded to fix the world. The world is passing away. We were commanded to share the love of God through Jesus Christ so that people might be saved *from* the world’s fate.

A Warning

Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.

1 John 2:18–19

So far, John has reminded us of the supremacy of Jesus Christ, contrasted light and darkness, and shown us who we are in Christ. He has warned us not to love the world. Now he takes us to the front lines of a spiritual battlefield. Suddenly, we see why he has taken such care to show us who we are — and who *they* are.

This is the first time the word “antichrist” appears in Scripture. It refers to someone who is against or in place of the Messiah. John says twice that “this is the last hour,” which is interesting when you consider how many today insist there must be more hours to come.

Whoever these antichrists were, they had been hanging around the community but eventually went rogue. As John puts it, “they did not really belong to us.” They were never in the light.

But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist—denying the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

1 John 2:20–23

Now John gives more detail: these rogues deny that Jesus is the Messiah. That is a bald-faced lie, and no one in the truth would ever say such a thing. Anyone who denies the Son does not have the Father. They are antichrist — and there are many of them.

As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he promised us—eternal life.

1 John 2:24–25

Here is the warning: **hold on to what you know about Jesus Christ.** If you do, you will remain in Him and inherit eternal life. Do not listen to the rogues. This is why I said John has taken us to the front lines. This is a spiritual war, and the antichrists will try to pry you away from the truth. Resist them.

I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.

1 John 2:26–27

John invokes the anointing of the Holy Spirit to encourage us to remain in Christ. Yes, there are those who try to lead us astray. Yes, this can sound frightening. In the movies, innocent victims are lured into evil by irresistible forces. But take heart! You and I have far greater firepower — the indwelling Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Godhead. If we stay focused on our relationship with the Lord and take our battles to Him, there isn't even a contest. "Greater is He who is in me than he who is in the world."

One more thought before we move on. All those stories — *The Exorcist*, *The Omen*, and so on — they freak people out, which is why they make so much money. Fear becomes a distraction. Meanwhile, John gives us a simple way to discern who the liars and antichrists are — simple enough for a third grader. And he gives us a simple way to defeat the lie — stand on the truth of the Word of God and reject the lie outright.

Sometimes I wonder if the myths, legends, and horror stories are part of the lie themselves — designed to keep us afraid so we never bring our superior firepower to bear. Hmm... do you think we need a healthy relationship with the Lord? I do.

Continue in Him

“And now, dear children, continue in him...”

1 John 2:28–29

Sometimes I sit back and think about everything involved in following our Lord, and it can feel overwhelming. Who He is, what He is, His love for us, His call to us — all the implications of these things — wow.

I don't want to mess this up.

Oh, I'm confident in forgiveness. I know He is loving and merciful and not waiting for a “gotcha” moment. That's not it. I just don't want to grieve Him or let Him down. John seems to sense this. After taking us through all these amazing truths and the reality of spiritual warfare, he steps back and writes these two verses — almost as if he were reading my mind. What do we do now? John's answer: **continue in Him**.

Keep living in Christ's image. Keep doing what He taught. Keep following the Father's purpose. Don't get distracted. We know He is righteous, so we know that everyone who does what is right has been born of Him. And by “right,” John means doing the things Jesus would do.

Jesus is the Model. But when those around us follow His model, they become examples for us as well — guides when we're confused.

Once again, the answer is simple, even if not always easy. Yes, dear reader, let's continue in Him.

Chapter 3

Children of God

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

1 John 3:1–3

This is one of those texts you need to read slowly, prayerfully, and let it sink in. While we were dead in our sinful rebellion, God loved us so much that He went to extraordinary lengths to redeem us. Once reborn, we are now His children. There are moments when we may not feel like it, but when God looks at us, He sees His own children. What more is there to say?

None of us can fully appreciate what that entails. It's like being asked what heaven is like. People quote certain biblical passages and act as though they know all, but they're quoting non-literal descriptions that give hints, not details. Human language simply cannot contain the vocabulary to describe what no one has ever seen or reported directly. We have no frame of reference for it.

The same is true of being children of God. Much remains "hidden" because there is no vocabulary to convey the full meaning. But when we see Jesus Christ face-to-face, we will see all. What a glorious hope! It is only natural for us to respond by setting aside the old life and striving to be pure as He is pure, according to His leading.

Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.

1 John 3:4–6

John highlights the point about purity. To disregard everything He has done for us and remain in the old ways is inconceivable. This doesn't mean we'll never struggle or make mistakes, and it doesn't mean we suddenly become perfect. Jesus came to take away sin, not to catch us messing up. John is contrasting the follower of Christ with the one who rejects Him. He's not talking about a believer who had a bad day.

Before we move on, what jumps out at you here?

For me, it's this: God's love is amazing, boundless, and beyond comprehension — and the implications of being His children go far beyond anything we can grasp in our current state. Our hope for eternal life is assured and far more glorious than we've ever imagined.

Doing What Is Right

“Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray...”

1 John 3:7–10

This is an interesting way to begin any discussion: Don't let anyone lead you astray. Many will try. They may appeal to pride, vanity, greed, lust, or even our intellect with clever arguments. But have you ever asked why they bother? John gives the reason: they are sinful, of the devil, and doing the devil's work. The devil has been in rebellion since the beginning and is looking for allies — or at least to separate us from Christ. In Christ, we are part of His work, and His work is to destroy the works of the devil. That makes us a threat, so of course there will be opposition.

Within this context, doing what is right means following Jesus Christ. Doing what is sinful means rejecting Him and trying to lead His followers astray. Straightforward enough. But then John throws us a curve that leads into the next section: doing right means loving one another; doing wrong means failing to love.

Wait — I thought doing right meant following Jesus, and doing wrong meant not following Him. Where did this love stuff come from?

Simple answer: if we do not love one another as He loved us, then we cannot possibly be following Jesus Christ, because loving one another is exactly where He is leading us.

What We Have Heard from the Beginning

“For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another...” 1 John 3:11–15

We've heard this message from the beginning: love one another. A quick look through Christian blogs shows that everyone writes about this sooner or later. Why does it take so long to sink in?

John takes us to Cain and Abel — an interesting choice. Cain murdered his brother because his actions were evil and Abel's were righteous. Jealousy, hatred, resentment — all of it fueled by evil. I'm not sure Perry Mason or DCI Barnaby would frame it that way, but John does.

John's point is that evil will oppose the righteous. Then he brings the story into the present: do not be surprised if the world hates you.

I'm always amazed when Christians act shocked that certain elements in society oppose us. What's surprising about that? The world opposed the prophets, opposed Jesus, opposed the early church, and has opposed believers throughout history. This isn't new. It's not a sign the end is near — it's a sign we're in the last age, just as John said.

We must love one another because we have passed from death to life. We must love because God first loved us, and He loves our brother as well. How will the world know we are in Christ? Because we love one another. Will the world hate that? Yes. But many will also be drawn to it, because once you separate individuals from the society around them, they want what we have in Christ.

Loving one another spreads the Gospel and accomplishes God's purpose.

Love Is Active

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

1 John 3:16–18

Here we come to an amazing text about love. Christian love is not abstract; it is active. John gives us the model: Jesus laid down His life for us. In the same way, we are to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. This may not require physical death, but it will certainly require setting aside our own interests to serve others. John gives a practical example: if we have material resources and see a brother or sister in need, how can we withhold help? That is not love. The same applies to emotional needs, spiritual needs, or any circumstance in which we have what another lacks.

Loving one another means putting others first — in thought, in deed, and in truth. This is what it means to follow Jesus Christ.

Do You Really Know for Sure?

“This is how we know that we belong to the truth...”

1 John 3:19–24

Chapter 3 ends with assurance: we can know for sure where we stand with God. But John's answer is not the one most people give. We know by the Spirit within us.

Yes — that Spirit. The one many say they “can’t hear.” The one some are waiting for until “it” decides to move. That Spirit.

John says we notice whether our hearts condemn us. Today we might say we “feel convicted.” When that happens, we seek forgiveness and adjust our behavior. When our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God. John ties this directly to the Spirit’s work in us.

Over the years, many have told me about their “active prayer lives,” yet also say they never notice the Spirit working. That tells me something is off. Seeking His presence is how we discern the Spirit within us. John links the two:

“Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask...”

And here is verse 22 in full:

“...because we keep his commands and do what pleases him.”

We receive what we ask because we keep His commands and do what pleases Him. Asking and receiving are always within the context of His will, not ours. So, can you really know for sure where you stand with God? YES. Seek His presence, and you’ll find out.

Chapter 4

Test the Spirits

Dear friends, 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. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

1 John 4:1–3

Oh my word — what a timely text. Chapter 3 ended by saying we can know Jesus lives in us because of the Spirit He gave us. Now John takes the next step:

How do we tell who is right and who is not?

Simple: **test the spirits.**

At first that might sound a little creepy, but it isn't. It's actually very straightforward. Does a teacher or commentator acknowledge that Jesus Christ came in the flesh? Do they acknowledge Him at all? If they do, they are from God. If they don't, they are not from God. John says they are antichrist.

If that's the case, should we consider them reliable sources of spiritual insight? Well... you can decide that one.

You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

1 John 4:4–6

John finishes the thought by reminding us that we have already overcome the spirit of antichrist because the Holy Spirit within us is far greater. False teachers speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. But the world will not generally listen to us — they simply can't fathom what we're talking about. So let's not be surprised.

I've spoken with many Christians who fear being tricked or led astray. I always tell them: **you won't be tricked if you have a strong relationship with Christ.** That's exactly what John is saying. It's simple to tell the difference. When you were little, your parents probably told you to "consider the source." Same principle here. I

wouldn't recommend taking spiritual advice from an atheist, nor Bible instruction from a non-believer.

This Is Love

“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God...”

1 John 4:7–10

Now we enter the central core of this letter — and of Christian theology. Everything John has said so far leads to this. Without this section, the rest of Christian doctrine collapses. This is the one thing against which the gates of Hell cannot stand.

The key sentence is the last one: **God loved us**. He loved us while we were lost, while we were not loving Him at all. He loved us so much that He sent Jesus to die for us. Yes, John has already said this, but he repeats it because it is the core of everything else.

How could God love us so much? Because **God is love**. And because God is love, we are to love one another. Nobody can do this unless God is in them. Loving one another as God loved us runs counter to every teaching of this world and every natural human inclination. Therefore, if a person does not love, it is because God is not in them.

More Love

“Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another...” 1 John

4:11–12

John continues the same thought. The pattern is simple:

1. God loved us while we were still sinners.
2. God sent His Son to die for our sins.
3. We responded to the Gospel and loved God.
4. God loves our brothers and sisters.
5. Therefore, we love them too.

John adds one more step: **no one has ever seen God**. Why mention that? Because if we love one another, God's love becomes visible in us. His love is made complete — not because God lacks anything, but because His love is expressed through His people.

This is the observable evidence of God's existence.

People often say, “If only we had proof.” John says we do: **God’s love at work in the Body of Christ**. If we lived this out consistently, the world would see the clearest evidence of God imaginable.

Let me leave you with a question: is it a coincidence that our culture has corrupted the word “love” to mean almost anything except Godly love? Something to think about.

Never fear — there’s still more love coming...

God Is Love

“God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them...”

1 John 4:16b–18

This short text is deceptively deep. “God is love” — that part is easy. Then John says that whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. Love and God are inseparable.

Here comes the curve: because God and love are inseparable, living in love makes love complete in us and gives us confidence on the day of judgment. Then John finishes:

“In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love...”

Did you catch that? If we live in love, we live in God, and God lives in us. Jesus did not fear death — He knew exactly where He was going. When we live in love, we have no fear of judgment.

When a person dies, the next step is judgment. Whether you believe we go immediately or sleep until that day, judgment is next. And here’s the reality: There are two sets of books.

- The **Book of Life**
- The **Books of Deeds**

If your name is in the Book of Life, that’s it — you’re in. If not, the Books of Deeds are opened, and you are judged by your deeds. You don’t want to be in that line. If you are in Christ, your sins are gone — as far as the east is from the west. There is no sin to discuss. Your appearance at judgment is a welcoming ceremony. That’s why perfect love drives out fear.

We Love Because He First Loved Us

“We love because he first loved us...”

1 John 4:19–21

This sums it all up. God loved us so much that He sent His Son to die for us. If God loves us, and we love God, then we must love our brother or sister. John says this is a command — end of discussion.

Some might ask, “How can I be commanded to love? I don’t feel anything.” But biblical love is not about emotion. John uses the Greek word *agapaō* — God’s love. It is about **attitude**, not emotion.

To love your brother or sister means:

- put their interests ahead of your own
- meet their needs before your own
- set aside your hurts to help them
- act for their good even when inconvenient

This is the attitude that makes the Body of Christ possible. If we approach the church as our personal playground or a place to feel important, the Body will divide. But if we approach it with Godly love, the Body becomes the most amazing thing this side of heaven.

Can we do it? Yes — through Christ who strengthens us. It begins with a commitment to follow Jesus and continues when we are more satisfied in His presence than anywhere else. Need help? Seek Him. Follow where He leads. You’ll know what to do.

Chapter 5

Keep His Commands

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

1 John 5:1–5

As we begin the final chapter of John's letter, he continues the theme he's been emphasizing for dozens of verses: we must love God and love one another. But in verse 2 he throws us a curve:

"This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands."

Loving God? No one argues with that. Carrying out His commands? That's where people often hesitate.

Yet God's commands are simple: **love God, love one another, and make disciples**. That last one is where many get stuck. But it isn't something I made up — it's Jesus' final command:

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations..." Matthew 28:18–20

How can we say we love God but refuse to share His love with others? How can we say we love others but withhold the very message that brings life? That wouldn't make sense.

When we share the Gospel and someone comes to Christ, they become our brother or sister. Will we stand by and watch them struggle, or will we help them grow? Which choice demonstrates love?

John says God's commands aren't burdensome because **everyone born of God overcomes the world**. What holds us back from making disciples? Fear of rejection? Fear of looking odd? Fear of not knowing all the answers? These are worldly fears — not God's thoughts. Jesus wasn't afraid of rejection or embarrassment. Why should we be?

Carrying out God's commands isn't burdensome — it's a joy. I can tell you from experience that there is no greater joy than seeing someone you've mentored grow in their faith and step up to serve God out of love.

Have and Have Nots

"This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ..."

1 John 5:6–12

This is an interesting text. John warned earlier about antichrists — the Gnostics who denied that Jesus came in the flesh. He takes aim at them again by appealing to the testimony of three witnesses.

People today often debate what "water and blood" mean. For our purposes, here's the short version:

- **The Spirit** testifies that Jesus is from the Father.
 - **The water** refers to His baptism — a physical act requiring a physical body.
 - **The blood** refers to His crucifixion — again, requiring a physical body.
- A spirit cannot be baptized or nailed to a cross. John is affirming the incarnation. These three witnesses continue today:
- The Spirit testifies.
 - Baptism testifies.
 - Communion testifies.

Together they form a threefold witness — exactly what the Law required. John then makes his point:

We accept human testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

1 John 5:9–11

People will believe all sorts of human theories about Jesus — including theories that deny He ever existed. But the difference between life and death is whether we accept God's testimony.

Then John drops the bottom line:

“Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

1 John 5:12

Let that sink in.

Outside of Christ there is only doom. Inside Christ there is life.

This is why making disciples matters so much. But we must share His love with grace, not threats. Many have been driven away by harsh warnings. Love opens doors that fear slams shut.

His Will

“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.”

1 John 5:13–15

These verses assure us of two wonderful truths:

1. We have eternal life.
2. God hears and answers prayer — when we ask according to His will.

The idea that we can tack on “in Jesus’ name” like a magic formula misses the point. Jesus’ promises about prayer were always given in the context of doing God’s will.

Our prayers outside God’s will aren’t guaranteed answers because God is about His purposes, not ours.

So, what is always within God’s will?

- Saving the lost
- Making disciples
- Advancing His Kingdom
- Strengthening His people

Prayers in these areas are powerful — sometimes frighteningly so.

We must pray bold prayers, big prayers, kingdom-focused prayers. Not “make my life easier” prayers, but “advance Your purpose” prayers.

Watch what He does with those.

Thrill-Packed Ending

If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death.

There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that you should pray about that. All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.

1 John 5:16–17

These verses seem to come out of nowhere. What is John talking about? If a brother sins, pray for him and God will give him life — unless it's a sin that leads to death. But isn't death the price of all sin?

John is distinguishing between:

- **a believer who stumbles**, and
- **an antichrist who rejects Christ entirely.**

The “sin that leads to death” is the deliberate, persistent denial that Jesus came in the flesh — the very teaching John has been fighting throughout the letter. That's why he doesn't tell us to pray for that.

We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the One who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them. We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We know also 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 by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

1 John 5:18–20

John now summarizes the Christian life:

- A follower of Jesus does not continue in the old ways.
- Jesus keeps us safe from the evil one.
- The whole world lies under the evil one's control — which is why John warned us not to love the world.
- Jesus has given us understanding so we can know who is true — and who is not.

This explains why worldly arguments seem brilliant to the world and foolish to believers — and why the Gospel seems foolish to the world but glorious to us.

John ends with a simple reminder: **keep away from idols.**

And with that, the letter closes.

But the excitement isn't over — John wrote two more letters.

2 John

A Curious Letter

It begins by addressing a “chosen lady,” though no name is given. Over the years, many have speculated about her identity, but since the text doesn’t say, we’ll leave it at that. The first six verses sound much like *1 John*, but verse 7 introduces the real purpose of the letter—a warning.

John is warning the lady about **antichrist**. As in the previous letter, he describes antichrist as one who “does not acknowledge that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.”

“Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them. Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work.”

2 John 8–11

This is a stern warning indeed. John seems to be telling the lady that if we allow ourselves to be deceived by these antichrists, we risk losing what we have in Christ. Some may disagree, but that’s how I read it. You might recall John’s teaching about “sins that lead to death” versus “sins that do not lead to death.” However one explains this passage, John is clearly describing the danger of being deceived into a “sin that leads to death.” He even says we must not welcome such individuals into our homes, lest we share in their wicked work.

You don’t see warnings like this often in the New Testament. Apparently, these antichrists pose a clear and present danger to believers through their ability to deceive. It’s interesting that John ends the letter by saying he has more to say but prefers to speak in person—he seems ready to do some disciplining.

In *1 John*, we were assured that by the Spirit within us we can overcome the “spirit of antichrist.” What I take from this is that mature believers should have no trouble identifying antichrist, but those less mature might be vulnerable. John doesn’t say that outright, but it seems likely.

So, what do we do with that?

In *1 John*, much of our discussion centered on **making disciples**. I’ve pointed out that this has several facets. For the disciple-maker, there are two: first, leading the non-believer into relationship with Jesus Christ; second, helping the new believer

grow to maturity so they can make disciples themselves. But there's a third facet—for those not yet mature—to make ourselves available to be led, nurtured, and guided through that growth.

We must remember that Jesus' first command to His disciples was "*Follow Me.*" His last command was "*Go and make disciples.*" Between those two commands were three years of training, teaching, relationship, and learning. They didn't skip from following to leading overnight. Consider Paul: after his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, he didn't jump straight into leadership. He went home to Tarsus and stayed there for several years, likely growing into maturity during that time.

When I was a very young Christian, I was sure that if I ever faced a demonic situation or met the devil himself, I could easily recognize and handle it. Fortunately, God knew better and kept me from such things. Had He not, I would have been consumed by my immaturity and folly. With time, experience, and growth in faith, I'm not so easily deceived as I once was. Even so, John's warning is one I take to heart—and I hope the lady he wrote to, and all of us, will do the same.

3 John

Some Things Never Change

John's last letter — brief, personal, and revealing. He writes to his friend and brother Gaius, a man who seems to have been a leader in the church. Although several men named Gaius appear in the New Testament, it was a common name, so we can't be sure whether this is one of them. What we *can* see is that this Gaius was serving others faithfully and sharing God's love in practical ways. He was hosting a group of missionaries — people he didn't even know personally.

Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. It gave me great joy when some believers came and testified about your faithfulness to the truth, telling how you continue to walk in it. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers and sisters, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love. Please send them on their way in a manner that honors God. It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. We ought therefore to show hospitality to such people so that we may work together for the truth.

3 John 2–8

Gaius is the kind of Christian worth imitating. He serves in love, puts others first, and does the kinds of things we all should be doing. But then another figure appears in the letter...

"I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will not welcome us..."

3 John 9–12

Ah yes — **Diotrephes**. This guy is all too familiar in our time, and apparently they had the same problem in John's day. Did you catch what John said about him? He "loves to be first." That says it all.

Do you know people like that? The ones who must always be important, who can't be inconvenienced, who always have the last word, who must always be in charge? They want to be the bride at every wedding and the corpse at every funeral. No doubt you're reminded of Jesus' words: *"The first will be last, and the last will be first."*

Diotrephes refuses to welcome the Apostle himself, and he even expels others for welcoming the very strangers Gaius has taken in. He spreads malicious nonsense about faithful servants — including John. Perhaps he can't stand it when

someone else receives attention. Maybe we'll never know his exact motivation, but we certainly recognize the type.

John's instruction is simple: **do not imitate what is evil, but what is good.** Who can argue with that?

Finally, John mentions another faithful brother: **Demetrius**. So in this short letter we meet two men who serve well and one who causes trouble. The troublemaker makes the most noise, but the faithful servants make the real difference for the Gospel.

There's a lesson in that for all of us.

A Closing Reflection

As we come to the end of John's three letters, I'm struck by how simple — and how profound — his message really is. John doesn't give us a long list of rules. He doesn't overwhelm us with theological jargon. He doesn't complicate the Christian life. Instead, he brings us back, again and again, to the essentials:

- **Believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came in the flesh.**
- **Walk in the light, not in darkness.**
- **Love one another as God has loved us.**
- **Obey His commands, which are not burdensome.**
- **Discern truth from error, Christ from antichrist.**
- **Remain in Him until He appears.**

John writes like a man who has seen everything — the miracles, the betrayal, the cross, the empty tomb, the birth of the church, the rise of false teachers, the struggles of believers, and the slow, steady spread of the Gospel across the world. After all of that, he tells us that the heart of the Christian life is love — not sentimental love, not shallow love, but the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ and lived out in His people.

If you take nothing else from these letters, take this: **God's love is the defining reality of the Christian life.** It is the source of our confidence, the measure of our obedience, the test of our fellowship, and the power that drives out fear. It is the light that shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John ends his final letter with a simple reminder: "Do not imitate what is evil but what is good." That's as practical as it gets. Follow the example of Gaius, not Diotrephes. Walk in the truth. Love the brothers and sisters. Welcome those who serve the Gospel. Stand firm against deception. And above all, remain in Christ. May these letters encourage you, challenge you, and draw you deeper into the love of God — the love that has been revealed, the love that has redeemed us, and the love that will carry us home.