

# 1 John

Sermon preached by Phil Kayser at DCC on 01-31-2021

The first words of this book remind us a lot of the first words of John's Gospel. And right out of the chute, John is confronting the Jewish heretics that had created havoc with his Jewish congregations. Written the same year that 1 Peter was written (AD 65), John's congregations were facing the same Jewish persecutions that Peter's were. And they were facing the same apostasy, and the same heretics that Peter's were. Proto-Talmudists, Proto-Gnostics, Docetists, Ebionites, and other heretics had mixed enough truth in with the error that it was creating confusion in the church. And John writes all three of his epistles to combat these false teachers and to try to establish some antithesis within the church once again. The biggest challenges that are emphasized in this epistle are lack of holiness, lack of love, and lack of good doctrine. It's very interesting that he picks those three things as his tests of what constitutes true Christianity. And to get a feel for the brilliant way that John does this, it might be good to appreciate the structure of the book.

## Interweaving structures of the book

Now, I will hasten to say that many commentaries don't think the book has any structure. The NIV Application Commentary says, "DISCOVERING A RECOGNIZABLE pattern or structure of thought in 1 John has proven impossible."<sup>1</sup> And it documents numerous previous attempts to find structure that have all come under legitimate criticism. I have read quite a few written critiques of those earlier attempts. But as I have pointed out in the past, when Western thinkers can't find structure, it's probably because they are looking for a *Western* structure rather than a Hebrew structure. And that is definitely the case here. This is yet another book that was structured as a Hebrew chiasm. And three recent authors have demonstrated that. Once you see it, it jumps out at you. This is not a forced structure.

But this is also one of those rare and curious times when all the other attempted structures are also true or at least partially true. And the reason is that 1 John is almost as complex in its intertwined structuring as the book of Revelation is. The more I study it, the more amazed I am. What I have found remarkable is that when those other proposed structures are put within the chiasm that I have placed in your outlines, all of a sudden most criticisms rendered against them evaporate. Let me go through each theory. Though incomplete by itself, I think each theory contributes something to the meaning of this book.

First, there is a logical linear structure that moves from God revealing Himself in the first verses to cut through all the heresies that John attacks in the body and to emerge in the last

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<sup>1</sup> Gary M. Burge, Letters of John, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 42.

verses with a series of “we know... we know... we know” statements that leave Christians with absolute certainties. Just because there are tons of heretics does not make everything up for grabs. If you take the Sola Scriptura approach of 1 John seriously, then we too can come to an “I know” certainty about the foundational elements of Christianity. And the whole linear structure that I. Howard Marshall and others have discerned is a beautiful answer to the confusion that heretics had brought. Of course, that structure does not in any way contradict the chiasmic structure. As I have pointed out in previous books, most chiasms have some sort of linear forward development as well.

Likewise, there is a neat two-fold division of the book. Raymond Brown says that the book clearly divides into two parts - and that’s the end of it. Of course, he has had a lot of legitimate criticism that point to other patterns that he does not recognize. But I have found that the main criticisms of him evaporate when you realize that every chiasm divides into two parts. It’s not either/or; it’s both/and.

Likewise, the mystifying Greek structures that Robert Longacre, Keir Hansford, and Simon Patterson have discerned, but which have made no sense to some scholars, all of a sudden make perfect sense when they are seen within the chiasm. These are micro-structures. Though they can’t explain the flow of the book as a whole, they do help to explain the divisions within the book.

And then lastly, older scholars like Robert Law,<sup>2</sup> saw a spiraling repetition of themes. They too have come under criticism. But those criticisms can be resolved in the same way. And before we get to the chiasm, let me briefly explain the spiraling structure that Robert Law came up with in 1913, and that others have refined. And I don’t think you will find this wasted information. The book really does have a series of cycles going on. And when you see all of these things interwoven, it highlights the inspiration of this marvelous book.

The spiral theory divides 1 John into three sections (or what Law calls “three cycles”), each of which has three tests.<sup>3</sup> Morecraft likens this to a spiral staircase with three stories and three steps between each story, with the staircase getting tighter and tighter the higher it goes (or the closer to the end of the book that it goes). I tried to draw this for your outlines, but finally gave up, because I’m not a very good artist. So you will just have to imagine it in your minds.

Try to imagine the first story of the building (or of the book) as illustrating what it means to have fellowship with the God of light who brings us into His kingdom of light. The staircase

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<sup>2</sup> See Robert Law, *The Tests of Life: A Study of the First Epistle of St. John* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1913). Also available as ebook here [https://smile.amazon.com/Tests-Life-study-Epistle-lectures-ebook/dp/B07WJ6GFX9/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?dchild=1&keywords=%22Robert+law%22+%221+John%22&qid=1611687412&sr=8-1](https://smile.amazon.com/Tests-Life-study-Epistle-lectures-ebook/dp/B07WJ6GFX9/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=%22Robert+law%22+%221+John%22&qid=1611687412&sr=8-1)

<sup>3</sup> Robert Law sees the first cycle as chapters 1:5-2:28, the second cycle as 2:29-4:6, and the third cycle as 4:7-5:21.

that goes from the first floor to the second floor has three steps, and each of those steps are the tests of whether that profession to have this fellowship is authentic or not. Can you really say that you have fellowship with the God of light when you are committed to walking in darkness? No. Keep in mind that John is dealing with false believers and true believers and false teachers and true teachers. And both sets of people *claim* to be in fellowship with the Father. So he is giving three tests by which their claims to fellowship with the Father can be evaluated. There are the tests of righteousness, love, and correct belief. The false believers and teachers failed all three tests. And so John's conclusion is that they are not in fellowship with the Father. Don't buy into their ideas that they have special knowledge that will lead you into closer gnostic fellowship with the Father. If they fail these three tests they are fake.

The next cycle (or second floor) focuses on what it means to be true or false sons and daughters of God. So this goes beyond having fellowship into being *related* to God as sons and daughters. What does the nature of true sonship look like? And the three steps on this portion of the staircase are exactly the same three tests - the tests of righteousness, love, and correct belief. Again, the false believers demonstrate that they have never been born of God and are therefore not true children. Only the elect pass these three tests of righteousness, love, and correct belief. If your life is not being changed in those three ways, you do not have a family resemblance. So that is the second third of the book.

The last cycle (or third floor, if you prefer) focuses on how to have *assurance* of our salvation, fellowship, and sonship. It's focused on assurance. And the three steps on the staircase of assurance are exactly the same three tests - the tests of righteousness, love, and correct belief. These things give witness - powerful witness that brings us comfort and assurance.

And I think that structure explains a lot. Authors like Simon Patterson have pointed out that it doesn't explain everything.<sup>4</sup> But I think it is beautiful when seen within the chiasmic structure. All of these structures interweave with each other. They all have their own purpose. And I debated which structure to use in order to show the overall flow of the book. I almost went with Robert Law's, because I love its explanatory power and simplicity.

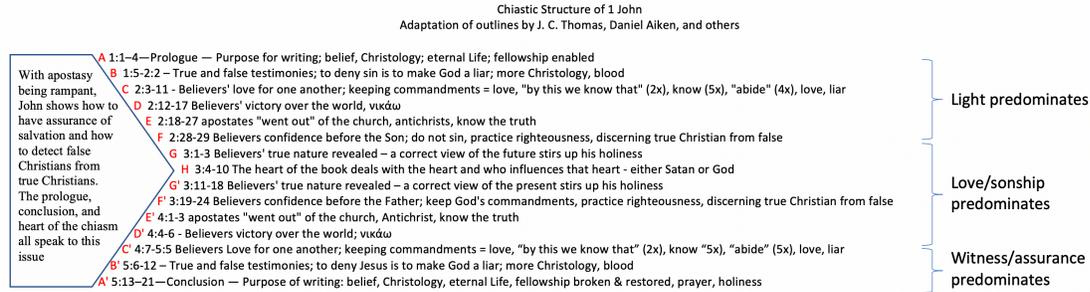
But since so few people know about the chiasmic structure of the book, I decided to use that in my overview this morning. As we go through each of the parallel points of the chiasm, hopefully you will see how it logically points to the center of the book, which is the heart of the book. John will show that the heart of the matter is the matter of the heart - a heart influenced by either God or Satan. It's out of a transformed heart that we will automatically see righteousness, love, and true belief begin to flow. Without a new heart, there can be no true Christianity. Without a new heart, the linear progress of this book makes no sense.

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<sup>4</sup> For Simon Patterson's analysis of current views of the book see <https://greekandhebrew.files.wordpress.com/2010/06/simon-patterson-independent-study-b612.pdf>

Without a new heart transformed by the Spirit we will not gain assurance of salvation. All of these themes link together at the center. And hopefully I can adequately explain that.

## Overview of the book, taking the parallel sections of the chiasm together.



For each of the three major sections of the book, John outlines three tests that can show whether we are walking in the light, are truly God's children, and whether our witness is true: 1) the test of obedience, 2) the test of love, and 3) the test of truth. There are other micro-chiasms, couplets, triplets, and other Hebrew interweaving structures. This makes 1 John almost as complex as Revelation, and it is no wonder that commentators have been long stymied with finding the structure of the book.

## The two A sections: Purpose for writing, belief, Christology, eternal life, fellowship (1:1-4; 5:13-21)

The first A section confronts the Jewish heresies that denied who Jesus was. It confronts the Ebionite heresy, the Docetist heresy, the Gnostic heresy, and the false teachers who denied that the Messiah had even come. Look at verses 1-3:

1John 1:1 That which was from the beginning [and the Greek is clear that in any beginning to have been begun, this Word of God was already there and preexisting - so it is already indicating the Deity of Jesus. But he goes on to talk about His humanity], which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— [No Docetist could say that - Docetists said that Jesus just appeared to be human, but He really wasn't human. He was purely divine. They believed that divinity and the material world can't mix. Docetists, like Gnostics, sought to escape from the nitty gritty material of our existence and into a higher plane. But John highlights the physical. Verse 2] 2 the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— [So, contrary to Modalism, the Word was with the Father and thus was a different Person from the Father. Verse 3] 3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

It is the inspired revelation that John is writing that is key to true fellowship - not the gnostic secrets of the heretics. And all of these heretics were trying to lure Christians into getting in on something cool (secret knowledge and cool experiences with God) that the ordinary Christian couldn't have. But in order to get in on it, you had to be initiated into their secrets; secrets you couldn't get from the Bible. And this book annihilates all those first century heresies in these first few verses and throughout the book.

I can't get into all the theology of this incredible section, but John will hammer home that you can't have the Father without having an orthodox view of the Son. If you have a false Christ, you have a false Father. For people to think that Muslims and Jews can get saved

while rejecting the Son they have to be utterly blind to the book of 1 John. No one comes to the Father except through Jesus.

And so the first A section and the second A section both deal with Christology. In fact, chapter 5:13 said that this was one of the reasons for writing the book - to give them faith in who Jesus is. "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God." The only way we can have that knowledge and that assurance is through the written Word. So he writes this book.

Well, in chapter 1:4 he points out that this accurate doctrinal information not only produces true faith but also produces true joy. "And these things we write to you that your joy may be full." In describing these recurring tests of authentic Christianity John is not trying to rob them of joy. He is trying to give them full joy and point out that true joy can only be had by Christ uniting us to the Father.

So those two A sections form the prologue and conclusion. Both deal with the purpose statements for writing the book. Both deal with Christology, how to have eternal life, and how true fellowship with the Father is entered and/or broken. Our fellowship starts with the Revelation of the Father through the Son to the apostles and written down in the Bible. And the book ends with the "We know... We know... We know" certainties that result from a faith based on the Bible. I wish I could park on the two A's. They are marvelous bookends. They anchor the whole book in a Sola Scriptura certainty.

### **The two B sections: true and false testimonies; to deny Jesus is to make God a liar; Christology, and blood atonement (1:5-2:2; 5:6-12)**

The two B sections move the argument one step forward. It's not enough to *claim* to know Christ and God. At least some of the heretics claimed that. But John contrasts false testimonies with true testimonies and makes it clear that if we reject the doctrine of Christ that he has taught, we are liars and have made God a liar. Them's fighting words, but when you face heretics, you must fight; you must testify against them. John is not modeling a nice-get-along-with-everyone Christianity.

And how does God testify? Well, the Father reveals Himself through the Son. And the Son reveals all things to the apostles (verse 5), and the apostles reveal that complete message in their writings (chapter 2:1. The second B section does the same. It says, "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater, for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son." Both sections refine our Christology and both deal with the nature of Christ's atonement and both build upon the doctrine of Sola Scriptura. This objective revelation of the Bible precedes the inner illumination of the Holy Spirit and helps us to test all claims to inner illumination. That's why he frames the inner experience of illumination with the objective Sola Scriptura testimony of God in the A and B sections.

Let's briefly look at chapter 1:5-10. This section decimates both of two extremes that John was opposing when it comes to ethics. One extreme was perfectionism - the claim to be without sin (a characteristic of not just Pharisaism, but of a couple of other Jewish cults).

The other extreme was antinomianism - the claim that sinning is OK (the characteristic of at least one form of Jewish gnosticism). And you know what? These heretical teachings that started in the first century continued in the next three centuries. But look at how he deals with these two heretical teachings. Beginning to read at verse 5:

1John 1:5 This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. [And here comes the test:] 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

So even that paragraph is addressing both extremes. If you claim to be in fellowship with God, but walk in the darkness of sin, you lie. On the other hand, walking in the light does not mean you have no sin. In fact, what does a bright light bulb do? It exposes filth you didn't even know was there. It shows cobwebs, dust bunnies, dirt particles, lint, and other things we would not have otherwise noticed. And that makes us sweep and vacuum. In the same way, when we walk in the light, we immediately confess and come into agreement with God's spotlight and we don't justify the sin. We rejoice that we can see clearly to get rid of sin. We put it under the blood. So that is the balance between the two extremes.

In verses 8-10 he deals with both extremes again:

1John 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

These verses are so important for not misunderstanding verses later in the book that say that the one born of God does not sin (or a better translation - does not keep on sinning, or live in sin as a perpetual habit). Here he clarifies that you lie if you claim to have no sin. I've actually had Christians tell me that they have not sinned in several decades. I told them that their claim was a lie and therefore a sin according to this verse. If you are truly walking in the light, it will progressively reveal more and more sin the closer to the light you get. But true Christians immediately repent of those sins and are cleansed from those sins and become more holy because they are attracted to the light. They will not walk in the darkness (which means covering up our sins) and instead walk in the light (which means exposing our sins before God). And lest we get overwhelmed and discouraged when our sins are exposed by the light, he says in the first two verses of chapter 2:

1John 2:1 My little children, these things I write 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 the whole world.

Let's dig into those verses. John says that one of the purposes for writing this book was to help us to stop sinning the same sins. And if you have a sin-addiction that you are trying to break, this is a book to read over and over again, and memorize, and meditate upon. It has a powerful sanctifying influence upon us. That's one of it's purposes - to keep you from sinning. And wow - this book does indeed bring both comfort and the fear of God. God used this book to grow me up a lot.

Second, John says, “And if anyone sins [OK, you won’t be perfect, and if anyone sins], we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” As Daniel Aiken<sup>5</sup> and others point out, the “if anyone” is modified by the preceding clause and the following “we.” Jesus is not an Advocate (or Lawyer) for Satan and his demons or for the non-elect. He is an Advocate for the “we,” and if anyone one of the elect (if anyone of the “we”) sins, it does not jeopardize their relationship to God. Christ will always stand as our Advocate and Helper (another translation of Paraklete). And though we are not perfectly righteous, He is the righteous One that we are united to and who pleads our case.

He goes on and says that He Himself is also the *propitiation*. Propitiation means that God’s wrath is completely removed from us. Again, this can only apply to the elect since in John’s Gospel he says, “he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36). God’s wrath always remains on those who are seen by God as outside of Christ.

So why does John say, “He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world”? Heretical Universalists say it means that everyone (including Satan) will be saved. They correctly say that if the wrath is removed then there will be no punishment. But they mis-define the word “world” and say that no one will end up in hell. Well, that contradicts passages that speak of people being lost in hell for all eternity.

And the answer to Universalists is actually quite simple. Who is the audience? Like Peter, John was an apostle to the Jews. His audience was made up of Jewish Christians. Jews had a tendency to think that salvation could only come to Jews - and that was certainly what a number of Jewish heretics claimed. That was the debate in Acts 15, wasn’t it? They claimed that you had to get circumcised and become a Jew to get saved. Let me read Acts 15:1. These heretics said, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” But John insists that it isn’t only Jews who will be saved; Gentiles will be saved as well. So one of the seven meanings of the word “world” in the dictionary is Gentile as opposed to Jew - Israel and the world. This is the way Paul used the word in Romans 11 and many other passages. And so the second B section applies this redemption of Christ’s blood to anyone who believes. It’s the same idea.

By the way, Arminians give the same interpretation of the word “world” as Universalists do and that gets them into the similar contradiction. They make the word “world” mean every man, woman, child who has ever existed, and then they are forced to dilute the meaning of the word “propitiation” to deny that God’s wrath is removed from every man, woman, and child. And it takes all of the comfort out of that word. If He is the propitiation for people who will burn in hell, how do I get any comfort for that. It doesn’t say that He is the potential propitiation. He is. The meaning of the word propitiation can’t be diluted. So it is better to take one of the seven dictionary definitions of cosmos so as not to contradict the meaning of propitiation. Every word of this verse is important. And Jew versus Gentile definitely fits. If cosmos meant every single individual in this universe, then everyone

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<sup>5</sup> Daniel L. Akin, 1, 2, 3 John, vol. 38, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 78.

including Satan would be saved. If God's wrath is removed, none can legally ever burn in hell. But remember that John's audience was the same as Peter's - Jewish Christians. OK, enough on that.

## Two C sections: Believers' love for one another; keeping commandments = love, "by this we know that," know, "abide," love, liar (2:3-11; 4:7-5:5)

The two C sections give several further evidences of true Christianity and contrast this with the liars out there - the false teachers and apostates. Both of these C sections affirm that true believers will love God and love one another. And John defines true love as keeping God's commandments. I'll just read the first C section because both of them are so similar. Chapter 2:3.

1John 2:3 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. 6 He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

Wow! What a powerful argument against the antinomianism of today. It's just as powerful now as it was back then. How did Christ walk? By perfectly fulfilling the entire law of the Old Testament. If He had broken even one law, He could not have been our Savior. He had no problem breaking the Pharisee's legalistic man-made Sabbath laws and other man-made laws, but as the Righteous One, He perfectly kept the entire law of God on our behalf. And John points out that just because He died to save us and to take away God's wrath from us does not mean that we can now live any way that we want. If we are truly saved, we will more and more be conformed to Christ the law-keeper. We will walk like He walked. We will keep His commandments just as Jesus kept all His commandments. This is a powerful argument in favor of Theonomy as articulated by Greg Bahnsen and a powerful argument against the so-called theonomy of Joel McDurmon. Jesus upheld the whole law and called out the Pharisees for not giving the death penalty to juvenile delinquents (Matt. 15:3-9) - one of the laws that McDurmon overthrows. John continues in verse 7:

1John 2:7 Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. [In other words, he does not pit the New Testament law against the Old Testament law. They are one and the same.] The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning. 8 Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.

There is a ton of theology in there that we can't get into. But Christ's "new commandment" (which was His command "that you love one another; as I have loved you" - John 13:34) was not a new commandment *as to content*. It was only a new commandment *as to modeling*. Jesus was the first human to perfectly keep the law's definition of love. And imitating *Him* is what is new. And both Jesus and John defines love as keeping God's commandments. Well, John now sets this as a test of true Christianity. The antinomians of that day were not true to this definition of love. They might have talked a lot about love, but it was a false love. Why? Because they picked and chose what laws they would follow. Verse 9:

1John 2:9 He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. 10 He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. 11 But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

John is drawing a sharp antithesis between false believers and true believers. Section by section he is making it harder and harder for the Jewish heretics to successfully claim that they are Christians.

The second C section has almost identical language, but amplifies upon it. It clearly defines love in chapter 5:3 - "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome." With all that Christ has given to us, it should be our delight to please Him by keeping His commandments. With King David, John wants us to say, "Oh, how I love Your law, it is my meditation all the day long." And with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we have all the power that we need to keep His commandments. So both sections are pressing home the tests of love and righteousness. Those are the evidences that we are walking in the kingdom of light.

### **The two D sections: Believers' victory over the world, νικάω (2:12-17; 4:4-6)**

Well, we come next to the two D sections. Chapter 2:12-17 is one of the sections that is messed up with all other attempts to outline the book. This is one of the key arguments against the previous attempts to show structure. Those structures cannot account for this section. It just doesn't fit into their outlines. But it runs perfectly parallel to the second D section of this chiasm. Both deal with the victory of the believer over the world, the flesh, and the devil. And what encouraging verses these are. True Christians do not stay down when we have been knocked down by the world, the flesh, or the devil. We get back up and fight in the sure conviction that we have the victory in Jesus Christ who is in us. Chapter 2:12.

12 I write to you, little children, Because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.

That's where the Christian walk begins, isn't it? Sins forgiven; slate washed clean; a new beginning. But verses 13-17 indicate that every believer needs to mature beyond childhood into spiritual adulthood. I can't get into the details of the meaning, but at least the growth principle should be obvious.

13 I write to you, fathers, Because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, Because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, Because you have known the Father. 14 I have written to you, fathers, Because you have known Him who is 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 wicked one.

1John 2:15 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. 16 For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

A couple branches of heretics were conforming to the world and excusing sin in the name of grace. But they were showing how anti-Christ they were when they were satisfied with the *opposite* of what Christ had died to achieve. Christ did not die to make us lawless and comfortable in our bondage. He guaranteed us victory because we are indwelt by the very power of God. The second D section (chapter 4:4-6) says,

1John 4:4 You are of God, little children, and have overcome them [notice that victory begins to happen even with little children - again, not because of their strength, but because of the strength of the Christ who indwells them - "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them], because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. 5 They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. 6 We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Your identity is not with any of the political parties. Your identity in all that you do is with Christ and with Christ's kingdom.

### **The two E sections: apostates "went out" of the church, Antichrist, they already know the truth (2:18-27; 4:1-3)**

The two E sections sharpen this contrast between the true teaching of Jesus (the anointed one - which is what Christus means) and the false teachings of the anti-Anointed - the anti-christuses. And I want you to notice that every one of these Judaistic heretics was defined by John as an antichrist. There is not just one antichrist. There were many. And notice that those antichrist's were living in John's day - in the last hour or moment before war would come and seal their doom. To make the last hour the last 2000 years (as so many Amillennialists and Premillennialists do) is ridiculous. We are not looking forward to an Antichrist - the spirit of antichrist had already come in the first century - the time of the Great Apostasy. In the book of Revelation we saw that it was actually the last hour for Satan as well. His binding was soon to be accomplished. His demons would hang around for thousands of years, but Satan himself would be bound. Chapter 2:18.

1John 2:18 Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. 19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

Notice that these former church members did not lose their salvation. They were of us in the sense that they were members of the visible church, but they were not of us in the sense that they were never in the invisible church. You see, just as Paul said that not all Israel was true Israel in the Old Testament, not all in the church were in the true church (the invisible church of God's elect). For if they had been of us as the elect they would not have gone out of us (as the church). But God allowed them to leave the visible church to make it crystal clear that none of them were of us. This ought to scare the daylights out of the thousands of Christians who have bailed from the visible church.

These former members of John's churches would later spawn all kinds of heresies that would plague the church for the next few centuries - apocalyptic writers, Docetists, Ebionites, Talmudists, and Gnostics. They all claimed to be anointed by the Holy Spirit - which is what Christus means - anointing. Every religion has subjective experiences. That's

not what makes you a Christian. In fact, you are an anti-christus if you claim the Holy Spirit's anointing but fail the three tests.

Each one of these groups denied Sola Scriptura and claimed to have special secrets and special knowledge that you couldn't get from the Bible. John will assure his church members that they don't need to know the secrets of the antichrists since they have a chrism that opens their eyes to know everything they need to know *from the Bible*. Verse 20:

1John 2:20 But you have an anointing (α χρῖσμα) from the Holy One, and you know all things. 21 I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth.

The phrase "the truth" refers to the Bible. They know that the Bible is and nothing can be added to it. This whole section has been grossly misinterpreted by some cults to say that Christians don't need to read the Bible because they have the Holy Spirit. But would the Holy Spirit really lead us away from His precious Word that He delivered to us? No. In any case, these modern claims are self-contradictory. I had one teacher claim that you didn't need the Bible, but he referred to this portion of the Bible to support His heresy. And I asked him, "if Christians don't need to read the Bible, why are you trying to prove your viewpoint by reading from this portion of the Bible?" And they say that we don't need to be members of the church (ignoring the previous section). And they say that no one needs teachers, contradicting themselves by *teaching* them this false doctrine. I mean, even the apostle was teaching them and writing to them, showing that they need some teaching and they need *this* Scripture.

So what is going on? What was going on was that the false teachers promised them special knowledge that was not in the Bible (the anchor point of the A and B sections of the chiasm). John assured them that they had a complete deposit (all things) in the Scriptures. And the anointing by the Holy Spirit enabled any believers to understand the Bible without specialized gnostic insights.

Now you might think this is not relevant to us. But we still have modern Gnostics who do similar things. The modern Christian gnostics are the ones who say that you need a PhD and a specialized hermeneutic to understand the Bible. They will hand you a Liberation Theology hermeneutic and say that is the key to understanding the Bible; or a Feminist hermeneutic; or an LBGTQ hermeneutic; or a Critical Race hermeneutic. Evangelicals have their own gnostic secret hermeneutics, without which you cannot understand the Bible. Meredith Kline had his own weird hermeneutic imposed on the Bible. So do Dispensationalists and Full Preterists. And John says you don't need any of that. You go to the Bible alone - yes, even for hermeneutics, as I pointed out last week. And if you are truly anointed by the Holy Spirit, you know that the Bible has all that you need for life and godliness. When these apostates denied the Biblical doctrine of Jesus based on their supposed revelations, they were showing that their teachings were lies. Verse 22:

1John 2:22 Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. 23 Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

These Jewish teachers pretended to have the Father, but if they rejected the Father's Son, they have obviously rejected the Father. Verse 24:

1John 2:24 Therefore 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 And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life.

So John is not talking about them knowing something mystical and new. He is talking about the doctrines that have been passed on to them and that came from the written Scriptures. Verse 26:

1John 2:26 These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. 27 But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.

Is he arguing that it is just them and the Holy Spirit and no one needs to teach them the Bible? No. If was saying that, he would have just contradicted himself by teaching them and giving them another portion of the Bible. No, John is referring to the false teachers who want to teach them supposed truths that the Holy Spirit has not given in the Bible. The Holy Spirit will only lead them to Biblical truth, and He will lead them into all Biblical truth. That this is true can be seen from the parallel passage on antichrist and false prophets in the second E section. Chapter 4:1-3.

1John 4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of 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 of God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

Alford correctly states that the “plurality of spirits, are to be explained by the fact that both the Spirit of Truth and the spirit of error speak by the spirits of men who are their organs.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, they were to reject the false prophets who failed the three tests and to receive the true prophets (like John) who passed those tests during those last days of the Old Covenant. You don't just reject the prophecies; you reject the prophets themselves because they are false prophets. So John is warning these Christians to test between the true and false prophets around them. If people had prophecy, it was either from Satan or from God. And it is important to realize that demons can give people prophetic abilities. That was always true. But this spirit of antichrist was a first century phenomenon that was especially manifested in these Jewish heresies. The context was the days leading up to the last hour of the Old Covenant.

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<sup>6</sup> Henry Alford, *Alford's Greek Testament: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Guardian Press, 1976), 483.

## The two F sections: Believers confidence before the Father/Son; keep God's commandments, practice righteousness, discerning true Christian from false (2:28-29; 3:19-24)

But we come next to the two F sections that deal with assurance of salvation. After everything that John has said, some of these Christians might have wondered if they were true believers. In years past I sometimes wondered if I was a true believer after reading these chapters. The tests he has given so far are pretty convicting. None of us will 100% match up. John has said that true Christianity is tested by whether we have righteousness, love, and true doctrine. Well, which one of us is perfect in those three areas? But John will be showing in these two sections that it is an issue of direction, not perfection. If you are perpetually living in sin, perpetually lacking love to the brethren, and uncaring about the truth, that's a bad sign. But if you are on the pathway to more righteousness, more love, and more consistent doctrine, that's a good sign.

So both sections deal with a believer's confidence - the only difference being that in one section it is confidence before the Father and the other section it is confidence before the Son. Both reiterate the importance of keeping God's commandments, practicing righteousness, and putting on discernment. Starting at chapter 2:28.

1John 2:28 And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. 29 If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.

And throughout this book you will be seeing this constant balance between a scary challenge and an immediate encouragement that our confidence is in Christ. The challenge is to get us to quit sinning and to put a bit of the fear of God into us. The encouragement is to show how that is only possible in Christ - so that we don't look at ourselves; we look at Christ. We see exactly the same balance in the second F section. Look at chapter 3:19.

1John 3:19 And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. [Notice this constant emphasis of assurance of salvation - how do we know that we are not fake Christians? Verse 20.] 20 For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. 21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. 22 And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. 23 And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.

So there is that back and forth balance again - a challenge that we must be holy and must be loving, and then an assurance to look to Jesus for our confidence as we keep pressing into our upward calling. Verse 24.

1John 3:24 Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

So there's yet another way we can have assurance - by the indwelling Holy Spirit. But does the Spirit give assurance to those who are rebelling? No. Quite the opposite. He takes away our assurance because He doesn't want the elect comfortable in their sin. Instead, He gives assurance to those who (despite falling into sin) love God's commandments and keep

getting up when they are knocked down, and keep pursuing the pathway of righteousness. That's who he gives assurance to.

## The two G sections: Believers' true nature revealed in the present/future (3:1-3; 11-18)

And before we get to the heart of the book that gets to the heart of the matter, he makes one more contrast that shows how a believer's true nature is revealed. In the first section it is revealed in the future. Chapter 3:1.

1John 3:1 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. 3 And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Here he says that even the doctrine of true eschatology drives us to be more and more holy. And if you have an eschatology that removes all motivation toward holiness, then you have a lousy eschatology. The eschatology of the heretics that left John's churches was a pessimistic eschatology that robbed people of faith and hope to do anything. Just read any of the Jewish Apocalyptic writings and you will see the pessimism. It made them passive and hoping for a bailout in the future. Well, that's where most evangelical eschatology is today - it leaves them hopeless and waiting for a rapture; a bailout. Apocalyptic eschatology always leaves people passive and hoping to be bailed out.

But true eschatology stirs up our blood and makes us want to take over the world. Last week I read the result of Paul's optimistic eschatology in 1 Corinthians 15. He comes to exactly the same conclusion that John does in this book. The first word of that concluding verse in 1 Corinthians 15 is "Therefore," and it means that everything he said about eschatology in the previous verses ought to have this result upon us. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." That's what a true eschatology does to you - it energizes you to be more holy. John says, "And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." Do you have a hope that purifies you and spurs you up to holiness? Postmillennialism certainly does. So the first G section shows that a believer's true nature is revealed by his approach to the future. What kind of hope drives you?

Well, the second G section shows that a believer's true nature is revealed by his approach to the present. Does the present also drive us to holiness and love? Chapter 3:11.

1John 3:11 For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, 12 not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous.

1John 3:13 Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. 14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. 15 Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

1John 3:16 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

1John 3:18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

So whether we approach the future or whether we embrace the present, a true believer is going to showcase a transformed life.

## The H section (the heart of the book) - the heart and who influences that heart - either Satan or God (3:4-10)

But it is in the heart of the book that we see where everything flows from. Don't just look at the human teachers (whether good or bad). Look behind those teachers to a heart that is influenced by either Satan or God. Satan will move people toward more and more sin, less and less love, and more and more messed up theology. God will move His elect toward more and more righteousness and love and more consistency in doctrine. And He does it from the inside out; from the heart. As Jesus said, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matt. 15:19). Here's how John words it (beginning to read at 1 John 3:4):

1John 3:4 Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. 5 And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins [that means He was manifested to take away our lawlessness, right?], and in Him there is no sin. 6 Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.

1John 3:7 Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. 8 He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. 9 Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. 10 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.

People are either children of God or children of the devil. They either have an evil heart or a regenerate heart. And you can tell the heart of these teachers by their sin, lack of love, and false teachings. You can tell the heart of the elect by their righteousness, love for the brethren, and their alignment with Christ's purposes - to destroy the works of the devil.

Now, some people get hung up on the words in verse 9 - "Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God." And they look inside and think, "I obviously have sin, so I must not be born of God." They forget 1 John 1:8 and 10, which says that we are liars if we say that we are without sin. Well, let me give you a little Greek lesson here. The phrases "does not sin" and "cannot sin" are in the Greek present tense - a tense that denotes ongoing habitual action. The ESV draws this meaning out *much* better in its translation when it says, "No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God." When you have been given a new heart and God plants the seed of life in your soul, you cannot stay dead to righteousness. It's impossible. You will grow in righteousness. You progressively start saying "No" to sin more and more consistently and you progressively start saying "Yes" to God's commandments more and

more consistently. That all flows from a new heart. And so the heart of the matter is the matter of the heart. A new heart always results in a new life. And the tests of that new life are the presence of increasing righteousness, the presence of increasing love, and the presence of increasing knowledge of the truth. You won't be perfect, but neither will you hide and justify your sin. On the other hand, if you have no interest in growing in righteousness, no interest in loving the brethren, and no interest in theology, that may be an indicator that your heart has not yet been changed.

So you can see why John says that this book was written to help you to stop sinning. It motivates the elect to say, "I don't want to be a false Christian. I want to be like my Father."

And you can also see why he said that he wrote this book to help you to put your faith in Jesus and not in yourself. None of us can be righteous in ourselves. Moment by moment we are driven to Jesus.

And you can also see why he said that he wrote this book so that you might have full joy. Our joy is robbed when we fail the three tests of this book and our joy grows like crazy when we see the evidences of new life within us through those same three tests.

And we have barely scraped the surface of this marvelous book. It yields fruits to righteousness the more we meditate upon it. May each one of us see our joy increase as we fix our eyes on Jesus. Amen.