

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY:

1 JOHN

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PREFACE

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Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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Duncan Heaster

1 JOHN CHAPTER 1

1:1 *That which existed from the beginning, which we have heard-* The Gospels are transcripts of the version of the Gospel taught by e.g. John. The converts learnt or probably memorized the Gospels, and then after their baptisms, the preacher followed up with them by visits and letters. This is what John is doing in his letters, written to the 'Johannine community', the house churches converted as a result of hearing or reading his version of the Gospel which we have in the gospel according to John. It's therefore to be expected that the letters of John are going to build on his Gospel, and allude back to it constantly.

The prologue of 1 Jn. is an example of this; it is a conscious allusion to and clarification of that of Jn. 1. Consider the following links:

In the beginning was the word

The word was with God

In [the word] was life

The life was the light of men

What was from the beginning

The eternal life which was with

[Gk. in the presence of] God

The word of life

God is light

The light shines in darkness	In Him there is no darkness at all
The word became flesh	Seen, touched, handled by the apostles
And dwelt amongst us	
and was manifested to us	This life was manifested
We beheld his glory	What we looked at
Of his fullness we have all received	The fellowship which we have is with
Through Jesus Christ	the Father and with his son
The only Son of God	Jesus Christ

You will note that the parallel for "the word" of Jn. 1 is 'the life' in 1 Jn. 1, the life which Jesus lived, the type of life which is lived by the Father in Heaven, and the life which was manifested in resurrection that it might be further manifested by the preaching of the disciples. That word was made flesh (Jn. 1:14) in the sense that this life was revealed to us in the life and death of Jesus. So the word becoming flesh has nothing to do with a pre-existent Jesus physically coming down from Heaven and being born of Mary. It could well be that the evident links between the prologue to John's Gospel and the prologue to his epistle are because he is correcting a misunderstanding that had arisen about the prologue to his Gospel. 1 Jn. 1:2 spells it out clearly- it was the impersonal "eternal life" which was "with the Father", and it was this which "became flesh" in a form that had been personally touched and handled by John in the personal, resurrected body of the Lord Jesus. And perhaps it is in the context of incipient trinitarianism that John warns that those who deny that Jesus was "in the flesh" are actually antiChrist.

John begins his first letter with an elaborate prologue. Raymond Brown comments: "Many commentators observe that a Prologue is an extraordinary beginning for an epistle since it violates all the standards of letter format". This 'violation' appears typical of how Scripture so often appears to 'violate' contemporary usages of language. [Raymond Brown, *The Epistles of John* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1982) p. 176].

The perfect unity within the Lord Jesus, between the person He portrayed and who He really was, is reflected in much New Testament language concerning Him. Thus "life" in 1 Jn. 1:1,2 is personified as Jesus; He was the life (Jn. 11:25; 14:6; 1 Jn. 5:20). The person whom people knew, saw and touched in first century Palestine was the essence of the eternal life, the life God lives, and the life we by grace will eternally live. He wasn't acting human; He was human, genuinely human, and yet that human life which He lived was the ultimate and inner life of the Spirit.

"The beginning" is a term used in John's letters with reference to the beginning of the Lord's ministry, or to the beginning of a believer's conversion. See on Jn. 1:1 *In the beginning*. Seeing His ministry and life is to be ours, there's an appropriacy in this double usage; His beginning becomes the beginning for each believer when they begin believing in Him. He is "the beginning [s.w.] of the [new] creation of God" (Rev. 3:14). John writes of the commandment and message which his converts had "in the beginning"- clearly referring to the beginning of their conversion, when they first began to hear the message of the Lord Jesus (1 Jn. 2:7,24; 3:11; 2 Jn. 5,6). John mentions that the "fathers", the older converts, knew Him from the beginning (1 Jn. 2:13,14); this may simply mean that they had known Jesus as a person, from the beginning of His ministry.

“Which we have heard” is an idea often used in John's Gospel about those who heard the historical Jesus, perhaps with special application to how they first heard Jesus in the incidents recorded at the "beginning" of His ministry in Jn. 1.

Which we have seen with our eyes- A reference to the transfiguration? Their eyes were there "opened" to see Jesus in glory (Mt. 9:30). It is John's Gospel more than the others which records believers 'seeing' the historical Jesus, both literally and in the figurative sense of 'understanding'.

Which we saw and our hands handled- The two Greek words for 'seeing' are different; they had literally seen and also perceived. The Lord had promised that the Comforter would enable them to have His presence ever in their hearts, as really as if He were physically present. John is saying that he not only had literally seen the resurrected Lord, referring to the 'seeing' of the risen Lord and the way they responded to His invitation to handle Him (Mk. 16:14; Lk. 24:39); but had also experienced the "I will see you again" promised in the gift of the Comforter. Note the chronological progression- from first 'hearing' Him at the 'beginning' of His ministry and the 'beginning' of their path with Him; to seeing with their eyes at the transfiguration and throughout His ministry; to seeing and handling Him after His resurrection.

Concerning the word of life- The apostles had seen and known the physical, historical Jesus. They had known Him 'from the beginning'. But 'Jesus' was one of the most common male names in first century Palestine. What was unique about Jesus of Nazareth was the word about Him, the *logos*, the essence, the inner ideas of that Jesus; and His life, lived out in the manifestation of a sinless character. This was the essence of that man, and it was this which the apostles were preaching and fellowshiping in with their converts.

1:2 *The life was manifested-* This is not talking about the Lord Jesus personally, but about His life. His life, sinless and totally Godly as it was, was the life of God. That life, those principles, existed with God and in God; but that life, spirit, essence, *logos* of God was manifested in the person of the historical Jesus who came into existence as a fetus in Mary's womb. It was this life which the apostles were 'declaring'. Therefore verse 5 says that it was "the message" which the apostles were declaring. The message was the life- the life lived by Jesus of Nazareth, seeing it was the life of God. For although human by nature, the Lord Jesus was of perfectly God-like character and personality. "The life was manifested" in the sense that the Lord Jesus "manifested [s.w.] Your Name unto the" apostles (Jn. 17:6). God's Name was declared to Moses in terms of His characteristics and personality; this was the life of Jesus, and it is "the eternal life", the kind of life we shall live for ever, and which we can begin to live now. For in this sense, in John's terms, we 'have eternal life'. Not that we shall never die, but in that we can now live His life, the kind of life we will live in His Kingdom, the essence of the kind of life He lived and lives.

And we have seen and testify and declare to you the life- I suggest there is a chronological progression here. The apostles had 'seen' the life lived by the Lord Jesus, a perfect life, the essence of the life which is with God; they had preached / testified it to the people who had been baptized and were now in the group to whom John was writing; and now he was 'declaring it' to them, *apaggello* meaning 'to show again'. The basis for his pastoral work with this group was to declare again to them the way of life which was in Jesus Christ. The essence of John's preaching and pastoral teaching was the life of the Lord Jesus. This is why such a large proportion of the New Testament is taken up with the Gospel records.

The eternal life, which existed with the Father- John's Gospel is full of reference to the gift of eternal life being available now; not that the recipients shall never die, but in that by living His life, we are living the life we shall eternally live in the Kingdom, and shall resume living that life at resurrection. "Which existed with the Father" is an unhelpful rendering. The

life was *pros* the Father, and the idea is of being with or towards the Father. Thus the prodigal son decided to come 'to [*pros*] his father' (Lk. 15:18,20). The life lived by the Lord Jesus was inclined towards the Father, it was a life lived with God. Notice it was not the literal person of Jesus which is in view here. Rather is John talking about the life, the essence of God which was lived out in perfection in the sinless character of Jesus. There is no hint here at the personal pre-existence of the Lord Jesus. It was the life, not Jesus personally, which was *pros* the Father. We now can come *pros* the Father (Jn. 14:6, AV "cometh unto the Father"); so being *pros* the Father doesn't require that we are personally located in Heaven, nor is it language which can only be used about the Lord Jesus. Paul likewise speaks of himself as being *pros* the Father in prayer- whilst here on earth (Eph. 3:18).

And was manifested to us- It was the life of God which was manifested to the disciples through Jesus; they had received the gift of eternal life as promised by the Lord. They had received it by seeing it manifested in the Lord personally, and accepting the gift of His spirit, whereby His life / spirit would live within them. It was not any pre-existent Jesus who was manifested to them, but an actual life lived in a person. What was manifested was what they in turn declared to others (:3); and they declared the life and message and personality of Jesus, rather than His literal body.

It was so hard for the Jewish mind to conceive that a man walking down a dusty Galilee street was the awesome God of Sinai manifested in flesh. And it's hard for us too. This is why the whole struggle over the trinity has come about; people just can't find the faith to believe that a real man could have been the just as real perfect Son of God. It's our same struggle when we come to consider the cross; that a body hanging there, covered with blood, spittle, dirt and flies, an image as palatable as a hunk of meat hanging in a butcher's shop... was and is the salvation of the world, the real and ultimate way of escape for us from the guilt of our iniquity. The life the Lord Jesus lived was 'the sort of life that was in the Father's presence' (1 Jn. 1:2 Gk.). The sort of life God Almighty lives, the feelings and thoughts He has, were the life and feelings and thoughts and words and deeds of the man Jesus. This has to be reflected upon deeply before we grasp the huge import which this has. That a Man who walked home each day along the same dusty streets of Nazareth was in fact living the sort of life that was and is the life of God in Heaven.

John calls Jesus "the eternal life" (1 Jn. 1:2). The life that He lived was the quality of life which we will eternally live in the Kingdom. The personality of Jesus was the living quintessence of all that He preached- as it should be with the living witness which our lives make. To preach "Christ" was and is therefore to preach "the things concerning the Kingdom of God", because that Kingdom will be all about the manifestation of the man Christ Jesus (Acts 8:5 cp. 12). So, Jesus was "the word" in the sense that He epitomized the Gospel. This is why James 1:18 says that we are born again by the word of the Gospel, and 1 Pet. 1:23 says that the word who begets is the Lord Jesus.

1:3- see on Mt. 28:10; Jn. 3:32; Jn. 20:18; Acts 4:20.

What we have seen and heard, we declare to you also, so that you may also have fellowship with us. Yes, and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ- The Lord Jesus is called "the life, the eternal life, which existed with the Father, and was manifested unto us" (:3). In this lies the importance of a Christ-centred life and mind; *He is the definition of eternal life*. This is what eternity will be like, John is saying: life lived as the Lord lived and lives, the eternal life is a knowing of the Father and Son, a relationship with them (Jn. 17:3). Eternal life isn't defined in terms of sitting under a fig tree in a perfect climate watching the animals living happily together (although we are invited to believe that by God's grace this *will* be a part of our Kingdom experience). It is the life of Christ our Lord; and that's why one of His titles is "the life, the eternal life". He shewed us what eternal

life will be about, and invites us to begin that experience, however imperfectly, even now (cp. Hos. 6:3 RV). And it is in this sense alone that "we may know that we have (now) eternal life" (1 Jn. 5:13).

John exalts in the fact they touched and saw "the word of life"; the Lord Jesus personally was and is the voice of God's word. When John writes that "that which we have seen and heard we declare unto you", he doesn't mean to say that he is simply giving a transcript of the Lord's spoken words. He is telling men about the person of Jesus, the man he personally knew, and in doing this he was declaring God's essential *logos* / word to them. If the very being of the Lord Jesus was the expression of God's word, it is little to be marvelled at that the cross, being as it is the crystallization of all He was and is, should be in an even more intense sense the voice of God to us. And the same process of the word becoming flesh must be seen in us too.

There are different levels of fellowship; as we actually know from our own observed experience. There are some we are 'in fellowship' with whom we don't feel so close to as others. John says that he wanted to declare to them the depths of the understanding of Christ, "that you may also have fellowship with us" (1 Jn. 1:3), even though they were already technically 'in fellowship'. And so it is with our communal life. A close binding together in the depths and heights of the Lord Jesus leads to ever higher experiences of fellowship. It may be that there are even different levels of fellowship between men and God. Thus God's original intention was that His presence in the Angel should go up to Canaan in the midst of Israel; but because of their weakness, He went in front of them, somewhat separate from them (Ex. 33:2,3). Likewise the glory of God progressively distanced itself from the temple and people of God in Ezekiel's time. The basis of our fellowship, both with the Father and His people, is the life and living of the Lord Jesus. It is not a set of theological tenets *per se*. It is common experience of living His life, sharing His spirit. We sense this fellowship intuitively with others who live and have it, and if we later discover that we have points of difference over some matters of interpretation, this cannot take away from our connection together in the spirit of Christ. And conversely, sharing simply the same theological tenets is no guarantee of itself that fellowship shall be experienced.

Fellowship with each other is predicated upon fellowship with the Father. To deny fellowship to another is therefore to say something about their fellowship with the Father and Son. To break fellowship with His children is likewise to break fellowship with Him, as developed in chapter 4. It is therefore utterly fundamental to our fellowship with the Father to be open in fellowship to all His children, all who are in His Son. If we have His spirit within us, this will happen naturally; we just have to ensure that denominational laws and the fear of what others think of us doesn't lead us to go against the Spirit and deny the experience of unity in the Spirit which is naturally created.

There appears a contrast between 'us' and 'you'. What 'we' see, 'we' declare to 'you'. The 'we' may refer to John and some elders, or even the original disciples, wishing to share their experience of life and fellowship with the Lord with John's converts.

1:4 *And these things we write, that your joy may be made full*- John saw himself as manifesting to his brethren what the Lord Jesus had manifested to him. John records how the Lord had said: "I have said this to you... that your joy may be fulfilled" (Jn. 15:11), but he then says of himself that "We are writing these things so that your joy may be fulfilled" (1 Jn. 1:4 RV). He saw himself as the face and mouth of Jesus to his brethren; and so are all of us who are in Christ. He wanted them to receive the spirit of Christ, the Comforter, so that their joy might be filled up by having His spirit of joy. Perhaps John felt that his converts were lacking in the spirit, and wanted them to be filled with it as he was.

Note how John repeats his Lord's use of various terms, e.g. "little children"; and how here he

appropriates the Lord's phrase "that your joy may be complete" (Jn. 16:24; 17:13) to the way *he* spoke (1 Jn. 1:4). These are just a tiny fraction of the examples possible. We are to speak, think and feel as He did; to *be* as He was and is; to be brethren in Him.

1:5 *And this is the message which we have heard from him and announce to you: That God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all-* There is a negative attached to all truths; if something is true, then therefore other things or ways of life are not true. There are several Bible passages which bring out this dualism.

"God is light	and in Him there is no darkness" (1 Jn. 1:5)
"God is faithful	and there is no unrighteousness in him" (Dt. 32:4)
"God is righteous	and there is no unrighteousness in him" (Ps. 92:16)

It is therefore quite valid to understand that a set of true teachings by their very nature give rise to a set of untrue ones, to be rejected. But more personally relevant for each one of us, each truth we perceive leads to not only things we should do, but things we should not.

The references to light and darkness further allude to the prologue of John's Gospel. The word "was God", and was the light which shone in the darkness of the Jewish world, to which the Jewish world would not come because they preferred the darkness. John's converts were Jews, and the temptation to return to Judaism, or compromise with it, was strong. He therefore presents the light of Christ as being effectively the light of God, and compromise with the darkness was by nature impossible.

"In Him is no darkness" might sound obvious- until we appreciate that the gods could cheat and lie, commit evil, adultery, deceive etc. They were seen as human but on a larger scale. There is an absolute standard of truth and righteousness in the one true God. The Gnostics effectively created gods in man's own image.

1:6 *If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in the darkness, we lie and not do the truth-* The immediate readership of this letter were up against Gnostics and others arguing that sin was not important. John's apparent zero tolerance of sin is not saying that we don't sin; rather is he arguing against those who "say" or teach that sin isn't important. Knowledge was what was supposedly needed, rather than righteous personal behaviour. Indeed, the mere possession of knowledge was thought to justify and excuse sin.

As noted on :5, the allusion to the light and darkness of the prologue in John 1 suggests John is warning against fellowship with the darkness of Judaism, which had rejected the light of Christ. The darkness will later be defined as walking in hatred of our brother (2:11). Jewish attitudes to the Lord Jesus and His Jewish followers were indeed a hatred of their brethren. To walk in the darkness of Judaism was therefore to walk in the darkness of hatred of our brethren. There could be no association with any such darkness, if they had the spirit of Christ.

John writes of *doing* the Truth (Jn. 3:20,21; 1 Jn. 1:6)- the truth is a title used for the Lord in John's Gospel, but the knowledge of Him must be 'done'. He and His *logos* cannot be known purely in the abstract, but must be lived. For He is "the life". The Lord Jesus was "the Truth" in His life example as well as in His teaching. This tendency to apparently 'know' the Lord Jesus on a purely abstract level is a serious temptation in this internet age.

1:7 *But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin-*

Fellowship with God (:6) involves fellowship with one another (:7). The vertical bond affects our horizontal bond with others. It is an automatic experience, not predicated upon any human document, unity agreement or authority from a church decision. Our fellowship with God is a constant experience, and so therefore is the fellowship with others which it creates. Those who continually walk out of fellowship with their brethren need to ask how secure is their vertical bond with the Father. Walking in the light means having our sins cleansed as we walk. It doesn't mean walking without sin. Perhaps John alludes to the teaching he records in Jn. 3:20,21, that the believer comes to the light so that his sins might be revealed. To him, not to God, for God sees them anyway: "Every one that does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, in case his works should be reprov'd. But he that does the truth comes to the light, that his works may be revealed". And in the context of John 3, the light is that of the crucified Lord Jesus, lifted up on a pole as a burning torch is on a piece of wood to give light. To walk in the light therefore doesn't mean to walk without sin, but to walk in the light of the Lord's death on the cross, which reveals our sins. This explains the link here in 1 Jn. 1:7 with how walking in the light is having the Lord's blood [shed on the cross] cleansing us from our sins. The Lord in Jn. 13:10 had likewise taught that our walk does require regular cleansing after the washing of baptism: "He who has bathed / been cleansed does not need to wash, except for his feet".

To walk "in the light" means to be open and up front about our walk with Him, in His Son, whom He has appointed the light of our lives. The tendency for these Jewish Christians was to maintain synagogue attendance, with all its social benefits, whilst being secret Christians. John's Gospel has demonstrated how there were many like this during the Lord's ministry, who either returned to the Jewish world or 'came out' for the Lord, as Joseph and Nicodemus did. Walking in the light is not the same as living without sin; for it is those who walk in the light who are in an ongoing sense cleansed from all sin by the Lord's blood. Rather does it refer to a life lived and oriented around the person of the Lord Jesus, the light which the prologue of John 1 says came into the darkness, and was Him, His *logos*, the essence of Him as He was amongst men. If we live in this orientation, a life lived *pros* the Father (see on :2), then "all sin" that we commit is dealt with on account of our association with the Lord and His blood. This is not to say that sin is of no moment, but that our focus is to be upon living His life, walking in the light of Him, rather than seeking to avoid sin or endlessly badger Him to forgive it.

The blood of Jesus cleanses us, in the present tense, from all our sins; the Lord Jesus loves us and frees us from our sins by His blood (1 Jn. 1:7; Rev. 1:5). The cross is ongoing. It is on this basis that we experience fellowship with each other, that fellowship naturally arises between those who are walking in the light of His life and experiencing their sin dealt with in this way. Fellowship is an experience which arises from these things; it is not created by an agreement to a common set of theological propositions. Even when such propositions are agreed between individuals, severe tensions still occur between them and many do not walk together who are basically theologically agreed. But fellowship as presented here is something which arises naturally and involuntarily. To consciously refuse a brother fellowship is to imply that he is in the darkness, and that the blood of Jesus Christ is not cleansing him from sin. Like it or not, to do so is a serious judgment of him, even if that is denied in words.

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

"If we say... we deceive ourselves" refers to our own self talk. Although these were the teachings of false teachers, John's concern is that firstly, these were the thoughts within the minds of those teachers: "ourselves we lead astray" (Gk.). We are not to deceive ourselves; rather, the truth is to be "in us". The focus is upon what goes on deep within us, in our hearts and self talk. And this was the psychological root of the false teaching John is combatting-

men teaching that we have arrived at a state of sinlessness. That error is not unknown in some extreme versions of holiness theology; and some proponents of it have then been exposed as themselves living in serious sin. "We have no sin" was the false teaching- and elsewhere in John's writings 'to have sin' means to be guilty of sin (Jn. 9:41; 15:22,24; 19:11). The modern equivalent may be the idea that a Christian is never to feel guilt because of sin, we are supposed to buy the narrative that we are awesome people and the guilt for sin is all on others, not on us.

This attitude of "we have no sin" could have arisen from incipient Gnosticism, but it more likely refers [at least initially] to the attitude of Judaism, to legalistic self-righteousness in the Jewish world which was ever tempting the converts to whom John was writing. To do the truth is to walk in the light (:6), but walking in the light doesn't mean being without sin; rather it refers to a life focused upon the light of the Lord's life, in which our "all sin" is dealt with by the Lord (:7). To have "the truth" in us may well refer to the abiding presence of the Lord Jesus, "the truth", through the "Spirit of truth", the Comforter. The Comforter convicts the world of sin, and surely convicts us too. The presence of the Spirit within a believing heart doesn't mean that the person doesn't sin, but rather that they become conscious of sin, and the cleansing process can therefore begin.

1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness-

To "confess" means literally "to say the same thing, to agree with". We agree with God's view of our sins, the view seen in the light of the Lord's cross. To refuse to see ourselves as sinners is therefore to call God a liar (:10). Repentance needs to be verbalized- it must be "confessed", which implies a verbal or written statement of the issues. It's like praying or Bible reading out loud; it makes our minds think not quite so fast. We need to get to grips with all the aspects of our sin. We must face it, in all the ugliness of what we have done. The idea of cleansing from sin differs slightly from forgiveness; we need to be not only forgiven but cleansed so that we do not repeat them. This is the work of the Spirit, which is what sanctifies or cleanses us; there is a major connection between sanctification [cleansing] and the work of the Holy Spirit given to each believer (Rom. 15:16; 1 Cor. 6:11; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2). And yet we are cleansed by the Lord's blood (:7), and by His *logos* or word (Jn. 15:3). Our sanctification is by both "the blood of the covenant" and "the spirit of grace" (Heb. 10:29). These are all terms referring to the same thing. The Lord Jesus, as the sum of His personality, was His word made flesh; His blood, His Spirit, the light of His life, personality, spoken words and actions, His biography... all these things are summarized in His Spirit, which is given to us. As noted on :8, it is the Spirit of truth which abides in us and convicts of sin, and yet also sanctifies.

1:10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us- It is the indwelling of "the truth" which convicts and then sanctifies / cleanses from the sin which it convicts (see on :8,9). I suggest it is not 'the Bible' which is in view here; it is not every word of that inspired book, including the Chronicles genealogies, which will convict of sin. If 'the Bible' were referred to then surely we would read 'the Scriptures', or at least, some other word apart from *logos* would be used. The *logos* of God is clearly defined in John's Gospel as His Son, and likewise here in :1. It is the indwelling of the Lord Jesus, by His Spirit (see on :9), which both convicts of sin and cleanses from that sin. Those who claimed to be without sin had not received the Lord's spirit, and were "none of His" therefore, as Paul puts it in Rom. 8:9- even if they claimed membership in some form of the Christian community.

Our experience of life, the way God works through our failures, almost overruling even (it seems to me) the *kinds* of sins we commit and their outcome, is all intended to bring us to

an increasing realization of our own sinfulness. The more God's *logos* abides in us, the more we will know our sinfulness. Thus Paul speaks as if when Corinth are more obedient, he will reveal further to them the extent of their weakness (2 Cor. 10:6). On a racial level, it could be argued that over history, God has progressively revealed the sinfulness of man to him. Thus the early records of Israel's history in Egypt and in the wilderness contain very little direct criticism of them. But the prophets reveal that they were corrupt even then, taking the idols of Egypt with them through the Red Sea (Ez. 20). But then in the New Testament, Stephen brings together several such prophetic mentions, combining them to produce a stunning description of Israel's ecclesial apostasy, which culminated in their rejection of the Son of God.

To just have an attitude that we haven't sinned, is read by God as stating that He is a liar- even though we would never dream of saying this. If we don't believe Him, we likewise "make him a liar", we slander or falsely accuse Him, because we call His witness to us in the Spirit / Comforter a lie (1 Jn. 5:10). We may recoil at this language. But it is so- to deny our sinfulness, to disbelieve what God says about it, is to slander God and resist the conviction of His Spirit.

1 JOHN CHAPTER 2

2:1 *My little children, these things write I to you, so you may not sin. And if anyone sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous-* Advice how not to sin cannot simply be 'keep the commandments' which follows in :3,4. It could be argued that a spirit of obedience to Divine commandments leads us to progressively greater strength against sin. But I suggest on :3,18 that this is a plural of majesty referring to the one great, new commandment- to love as the Lord loved us on the cross. A total focus upon living like this will be the strength to generally not sin in life. But John accepts we will not fully get there- and in this case, we do have an advocate with the Father.

As explained on 1:8-10, John was teaching that if we are focused on the light of the Lord Jesus and have the Comforter abiding within us, then "all [our] sin" is dealt with in the Lord Jesus. But this is not to say that we will not sin; indeed, it is the presence of the "truth", the "spirit of truth", the Comforter within us which convicts us of sin. And now he alludes to the same thing, saying that we have a *parakletos* with the Father, the Lord Jesus, "the righteous", and we are counted as in Him, His righteousness imputed to us. The Comforter refers to the Spirit of Christ within us which means that we have the Lord's presence with us to more than compensate for His physical absence. The same Lord who is within us convicting us of sin is the same Lord who is now in Heaven to obtain our total forgiveness. This way of thinking and being means that we will find the power not to sin. "These things" John has just written at the end of chapter 1 are the way not to sin; to not as it were worry about avoiding sin, but rather to positively focus upon the presence of the Lord within us, allowing Him to convict us of our sin and deal with it in His own way.

The Comforter passages assure us that we need no mediator because the Father Himself loves us, and the spirit of His Son is within us so that we can directly relate to Him as the Son did and does with the Father. The later NT passages concerning prayer and mediation therefore speak largely in the context of prayer for forgiveness and salvation (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 7:25; 1 Jn. 2:1). This is what the Lord's mediation / advocacy for us achieves, rather than acting as a constant go-between for us with the Father in the context of our regular prayers for other things.

It has been argued that the Greek word for "advocate" is only rarely used for an advocate or lawyer. Rather is it usually used for a friend who appears in court giving a good character reference for the accused, or simply pleading with the judge for mitigation in view of the pathetic situation of the accused or guilty. The Lord Jesus is here presented as our friend- as well as, elsewhere, our legal advocate and the judge Himself.

2:2- see on 2 Cor. 5:19.

And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world- As discussed above, "our sins" are essentially our failure to keep the "commandment[s]" of loving as the Lord loved us.

As noted on :1, the passages concerning the Lord as our mediator are all in the context of Him asking for our forgiveness, as the High Priest sought Israel's forgiveness on the day of Atonement. On the cross He was there the propitiation for our sins, and yet He is that now, each time we sin (1 Jn. 2:1; 4:10). The cross is ongoing, in essence. The simple fact is that the Lord Jesus died as the antitype of the guilt offering. He died to take away guilt... and he or she who truly believes that has no need to transfer or discharge their guilt in these ways. The guilt of our iniquity was laid upon the Lord Jesus upon the cross, He there was the expiation of our sins (1 Jn. 2:2)... we don't have to vainly try to transfer it onto anyone else, or use any other way of dealing with that guilt, e.g. through repressing it deep within ourselves.

The sins of the whole [Jewish] world are potentially dealt with in the Lord. If only individuals would accept Him, then their problem with sin is resolved. In this lies the imperative to take this amazing message to the whole world.

2:3 *And hereby we truly know that we truly know him: If we keep his commandments-* The idea is not that we are faced with scores of commandments from the Lord, and if we manage to keep them, then we are in a state of knowing or having relationship with the Father and Son. For that was exactly where the Mosaic system failed to be of use to men. Paul is at pains in Romans 1-8 to point out that law, as in *any* legal code, cannot lead to justification. We note that keeping commandments [plural] is paralleled in John with keeping His singular *logos* or commandment [singular]. "His commandments" and "the [singular] commandment" are paralleled in 2 Jn. 6. The plural commandments may be the Hebrew plural of majesty, referring to one specific commandment. And the commandment in view is to love each other, as He loved us, and as His entire *logos* of being is our example: "And this is his commandment, That we should believe on [Gk. 'into'] the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment" (1 Jn. 3:23). We believe into the Name of Jesus when we are baptized into His Name. We "love one another" perhaps specifically by keeping the *agape*, the love feast, the breaking of bread, with one another. If we refuse to break bread with any of our brethren, then we cannot have a good conscience. I am not saying that simply being baptized and breaking bread can save anyone. For the commandment is to love as the Lord loved us unto death, rather than merely pass bread and wine.

Understanding "the commandments" and the singular commandment / word as loving one another would explain why in the context of the appeals to 'keep' them, we read of receiving the love of the Father and Son. For we love our brother in receipt of His love. His love and our love are connected in that if we do not love our brother, we do not know His love. To know /be in relationship with Him requires us to keep the great commandment of loving our brother as the Lord loved us, unto death. If our self-examination reveals that we do love, then we can have a good conscience, knowing we have kept His commandment[s], and are thus assured of 'being there'.

The Lord states clearly that He has left us one commandment- to love one another as He loved us (Jn. 13:34; 15:12; 1 Jn. 4:21; 5:2). The plural "commandments" may be a reflection of the Hebraism whereby the plural is used to emphasize the greatness and cardinal value of one singular thing, the plural of majesty. This is perhaps confirmed by Jn. 15:17: "These things [plural] I command you: That you love one another". Love of each other was the great 'thing'. To love should not be grievous; if we are walking in the light of His endless love. Therefore "This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another" (1 Jn. 3:23). The commandment to love as He loved us is only capable of understanding and fulfilment if we have believed into the Name of the Lord Jesus, and experienced that love, having God's love shed abroad in our hearts by the Spirit we receive after believing into Him (Rom. 5:5).

2:4 He that says: I know him, and does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him- As noted on :3 and :5, the "commandments" is a plural of majesty referring to the one great commandment, to love our brother as the Lord loved us. If we do not, then any profession to "know Him" / have a relationship with Him is hollow. Indeed, we are 'liars', "the truth" of the light of the Lord Jesus, "the spirit of truth", is not in our hearts. I suggested on Jn. 8:44 that the "liar" who committed the first murder was Cain, and not any personal Satan figure. Cain is set up as representative of all who hate their brother (3:12). To lie, in this context, is to claim to know God and hold "His truth", but to not love our brother. The ultimate lie, therefore, is not to respond to the cross in love: "If a man says, I love God, and hates his fellow believers, he is a liar. For he that does not love his fellow believers whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 Jn. 4:20). Sadly these terms, truth, lies, keeping commandments etc., have been applied to knowing theoretical, propositional truth regarding theology- and the entire point has [conveniently] been missed. And it is a misplaced focus on those very things which has led to hatred of brethren.

2:5 But who keeps his word, in him truly has the love of God been perfected. Hereby we know that we are in him- As noted on :3, the singular "word" is parallel with plural "commandments", which I suggest is the plural of majesty referring to the great commandment, to love one another as the Lord loved us. If we keep the 'word' of loving our brother, then God's love has been perfected in us, it has achieved its end result- that we should love as He loved us. And this is our confidence that we are in Him. If self-examination reveals that we do harbour hatred in our heart for our brethren- we really need to urgently do something about it. To love as the Lord loved us in His death may seem an impossible level to aim for, let alone achieve. But John speaks as if we can confidently know that we are in Him because we know we keep that word / new commandment. This is typical of John's black and white, binary approach. We sin, but we do not continue in sin. We are obedient to the new commandment, but we still sin in failing to fully obey it (:1,2). And yet we can be confident that we are in the light and not in the darkness. We conclude that we are asked to live a life dominated by this word of the new commandment, even though perfectionism is not in view, and there will be ample failures which require forgiveness. And we can, according to John, confidently examine ourselves and perceive that indeed, this is the abiding credo of our living and thinking- despite failure.

We can read this as meaning that the love of God is "in" the person who keeps God's word. Verse 4 has just spoken of how God's truth is to be "in" us. The final ultimate truth is therefore the love of God- that God will save me, and I am a sinner.

2:6- see on Mt. 14:29.

He that says he abides in him, ought also to walk even as he walked- "Ought" is not the same as 'must'. The idea is that if we abide in Him, we "ought" or are constrained to walk as He walked.

The reference is to loving as He loved us, which is the "new commandment" of the next verses. We abide in Him insofar as He abides in us, through the gift of the Spirit permitted by us to operate in our hearts. We cannot claim to experience this if we do not love as He loved us. For the love principle will affect our entire "walk" in daily living and thinking. But failure is anticipated all through John's reasoning (1:8-10; 2:1,2). It's as if he is stressing that perfectionism is not in view; but all the same, despite our sin, we can be confident that we are living in love. But as discussed on :5, his idea is that we can 'walk' in love, as Christ loved us, having this as the overall spirit of our lives (Eph. 5:2; walking lovingly is not making your brother stumble, Rom. 14:15). 2 Jn. 6 is clear in connecting 'walk' with the life of love, walking *after* the commandment[s] to love as He loved us, walking a life which is 'after' that principle, having that love as the guiding principle we are following: "this is love, that we should walk *after* His commandments. This is the commandment, even as you heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it". Repeatedly the Old Testament spoke of loving God as 'walking in His commandments' ("walk in all His ways... love Him", Dt. 10:12; 11:22; 19:9; 30:16; Josh. 22:5; Mic. 6:8). These frequent exhortations are no call for utter perfectionism. They mean that our walk, our overall direction of life, is to be in love of God.

John speaks of Jesus as "that one" in the Greek text of 1 Jn. 2:6; 3:5,7,16; 4:17. I.H. Marshall comments: "Christians were so used to talking about Jesus that 'that One' was a self-evident term". Too often I hear fellow believers talking about their faith in terms of "I believe that... I do not believe that...". Maybe I'm being hypercritical, but surely it ought to be a case of believing *in* the things of the personal Jesus, rather than 'believing *that*...'. For example. I believe *in* Jesus returning to the earth, rather than 'I believe that Jesus will return'. It's so absolutely vital to see and believe in the Lord Jesus as a person, rather than merely a set of doctrine / teaching *about* Him.

2:7 Beloved, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard- The singular "commandment" is the "commandments" referred to earlier in this section; the plural of majesty being used to refer to the one great commandment, to love as the Lord loved us. This was "new" in that it could only have been true after the advent of the Lord. And it is that commandment which in another sense is "old" or 'original' in that this was the imperative from "the beginning" of the Lord's ministry (see on Jn. 1:1 for the reference of "the beginning"). The "commandment" was imperative in the whole encounter with the Lord. He was love made flesh, and His whole being demanded and still demands that from all who encounter Him. Love, in this "new" sense, is thereby predicated upon knowing Him; Christian love is therefore of an altogether different order from any secular version of 'love'. The idea of an old commandment being new may be another way of expressing the idea of how we can attain a second naivety, a meeting of Jesus 'again for the first time'. For John now repeats that "new" commandment (:8).

2:8- see on 1 Jn. 3:18.

But now, 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 already shines- John is

repeating the "new commandment", which was "new" in that it was to love *as the Lord loved us unto death*. I suggested on :7 that the idea of an old commandment becoming new suggested that there was a "newness" to this commandment; it keeps coming new. And so John can write of giving the new commandment which had in fact already been given in that it was imperative in the example of the Lord Jesus. Living by that new commandment was "the truth" which was in the Lord and comes to be "the truth" in us; it is the final "truth" by which a believer lives. All attempts to read "the truth" here as referring to some set of doctrinal, intellectually-apprehended truths has totally missed the point, putting head over heart to a point where the approach is not at all 'true'. It is true "in" us in that the spirit of truth, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, dwells within us.

The allusion to the prologue of John 1 invites us to interpret "the darkness" as that of the Jewish world. And that was "passing away" as AD70 approached. The true light was that of the personality and personal spirit of the Lord Jesus. That was shining, and the darkness had not overcome it, and was in fact now passing away. :17 has the same reference when we read of "the world" passing away; the Jewish world is in view, as often in John's Gospel and letters.

But darkness is defined in :9,11 as living without love for your brother. The darkness is passing away, in that we are emerging from the loveless life into life lived according to the principle of loving as the Lord loved us, unto death. Just as John keeps stressing that we are imperfect in attaining this, we continue sinning (1:8-10; 2:1,2), so here he likewise accepts that we are still in partial darkness, that darkness is passing away, and we are moving towards the perfect light of living and loving as the Lord loved us. Paul uses the same idea in 1 Cor. 13, again in the context of love- we see in a mirror which is partially darkened, "through a glass darkly, but then face to face". In the context of his appeal for love, I take that as meaning that we have not yet reached the level of total love which was seen in the Lord Jesus. The darkness of the world [a common Bible theme] is therefore in that they are not merely intellectually ignorant, but have never known the love of Christ. The death of the Lord Jesus was the ultimate light, and this occurred in the midst of thick darkness (Mk. 15:33). If we have an evil eye, a mean spirit, towards our brother- then darkness is within us (Mt. 6:23). Again, darkness is lack of love. Being cast out into utter darkness is therefore an appropriate punishment for the rejected (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; 2 Pet. 2:17; Jude 13- a repeated emphasis), because they lived in the darkness of unlove.

"The true light" is the light that reveals truth. That truth has been explained so far in the letter as walking in the light of the cross, convicted of sin, confessing sin, seeing our sin as God does, and being cleansed of our sins by the blood shed on the cross. If we walk in the light of the cross, we can't hate our brother. If we continue hating our brother, we are not walking in the light of the cross. We can't see the Lord there and experience His ongoing forgiveness in our walk / daily life... and hate our brother. We're not seeing that light if we hate...

2:9 He that says he is in the light and hates his brother, he remains in the darkness- The darkness, as explained on :8 refers in the first context to the darkness of the Jewish world. Nobody who claimed to have left Judaism and entered Christ was legitimate if they hated their brother, whilst claiming to be in the light of the Lord Jesus. For walking in His light axiomatically means that we walk in love, and hatred of our brother is not possible in the light of Him properly perceived. The hatred of brothers refers to the Jewish hatred of their brother the Lord Jesus, and of all that were in Him. The initial reference of this hatred of brethren refers to Jewish Christians who

were collaborating with the synagogue persecution of Christians. And clearly there were plenty of such agents within the early Jewish Christian communities, false Jewish brethren who crept in to the early churches. Paul's letters contain many allusions to this major problem (Gal. 2:4 etc.).

There is fair emphasis that the rejected saints will be cast into darkness (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Jude 13). Yet darkness is a common symbol of the world (Eph. 5:11; 6:12; Col. 1:13; 1 Thess. 5:5; 1 Pet. 2:9). And those amongst us who won't love their brother are already in darkness, self-condemned even before the day arrives (1 Jn. 2:9,11).

2:10 *He that loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no occasion of stumbling in him-* Abiding in the light of the Lord Jesus means we will not hate our brother. The Greek here means that before us, there will be no stumblingblock. It is interpersonal conflict within the church, and indeed with those outside of it, which is the most common cause of spiritual stumbling. But if we have sold our souls for love, living in the light of the Lord Jesus, then we will not stumble. The allusion is to how the Lord had spoken of how walking in the daytime means we will not trip over as we are illuminated by "the light of this world" (Jn. 1:9). This refers to the Lord Jesus, the light of the world. Walking in the light of His presence through the Comforter means that we will have no chance to stumble, because love for others is the dominant spirit of our lives.

2:11 *But he that hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he goes, because the darkness has blinded his eyes-* This is true in general terms, but the initial context refers to those who were ostensibly within the Christian community, but who were walking in the darkness of Judaism, with its agenda of hatred toward the Lord Jesus and all His brethren. The great commandment is to love as the Lord loved us; if we do not live according to this then we are not in the light of the Lord Jesus. We will have no certain sense that we are indeed on a journey toward the Kingdom, we will not know where we go, and shall wander lost in life. A healed blind man who wilfully returns to his blindness is a tragic picture indeed.

2:12 *I write to you little children, because your sins are forgiven you, for his name's sake-* The references here and in :13 to children, young men and fathers must be understood in the light of the triple commission to Peter, recorded by John as ultimately applying to us all, to care for the lambs and sheep (Jn. 21:15-17). The little ones would refer to recent converts, who were rejoicing in the implication of baptism into the Lord's Name, by which there sins were forgiven. For there is a clear link between baptism and forgiveness. John is writing to these three groups because he sees the triple commission to Peter about caring for the lambs and sheep as applying to him too. He felt he too had betrayed the Lord, and that His commission here was relevant to him and all in Him. This of course is very far from the Catholic interpretation of Peter's unique role.

2:13 *I write to you fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you little children, because you know the Father-* See on :12. The "fathers", the older ones, were those who were the "sheep" and not "lambs", those who had had longer experience in Christ, and who had known Him "from the beginning", a term often used in John for the beginning of the Lord's ministry (see on Jn. 1:1). The younger ones are commended for overcoming "the evil one", initially a reference to the 'satan' of Jewish opposition to the Lord. They therefore loved their brethren and were not guilty of hating them by being part of the Jewish world's persecution program of the

Christians. Knowing the Son, whose manifestation had been "from the beginning" of His ministry, is parallel with knowing the Father. To see / know / have relationship with the Son is to know / see the Father, as often declared in John's Gospel and letters.

2:14 *I have written to you fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning-* This repeats what is said in :13, perhaps to emphasize that spiritual maturity is in having known the Lord Jesus many years and continuing in that relationship with Him

I have written to you young men, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one- These new converts had overcome the Jewish Satan or "wicked one" trying to especially subvert young converts, both in years and spiritual maturity, just as it had tried to subvert the disciples during the Lord's ministry (Mt. 13:19 the wicked one catches away the word sown in the hearts of new converts). The Lord clearly described the Jewish world as the evil one in Jn. 3:19; 7:7; 17:15. Their strength was because the *logos* of God, the Lord Jesus, abode in them. Whilst we should love and meditate upon the Scriptures, this is not the reference of God's *logos* in John. The prologues to both the Gospel and the letters make it clear that the reference is to the Lord Jesus. It was the Lord personally who overcame the Jewish world (Jn. 16:33). His victory is counted to all believers in Him; the parallel is between "the evil one" and "the world", rather than to any superhuman personal being called 'satan'. The allusion in this verse is also to the prologue to the Gospel, where we read that the darkness of the Jewish world had not overcome the light (Jn. 1:5). Those in the light, in whom the *logos*, the spirit of the Lord Jesus, abides, had overcome the darkness of their world. The parallel with :13 is perhaps to show that they had not overcome the world in their own strength, but through the Lord's indwelling.

2:15 *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him-* "In the world" is the very phrase used of how the Lord was in the Jewish world, but rejected by it (Jn. 1:10; 9:5; 13:1; 16:33; 17:11-13). There could be no compromise between the Jewish world and the Christian; for the Jews hated the Christians, and to be part with them was to be involved in hating ones' Christian brother. And in this case, the love of the Father would not be in them.

2:16 *For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vain glory of life, is not of the Father but is of the world-* The initial reference was to how the Jewish world was full of these things. The Pharisees were covetous (Lk. 16:14), and the Jewish religion was big business; the religious leaders were the wealthiest people in Palestine. The Sadducees had no belief in an afterlife, and were totally hedonistic. This is why later in Revelation, John will later describe the Jewish system as "Babylon", obsessed with wealth and pride, drunk with the blood of the Christian prophets and martyrs. In Jn. 8:44 the Lord had characterized the Jewish world as doing the lusts of their father; these various lusts are summarized as the lust of the [Jewish] world which was in process of passing away as AD70 approached (:17).

John speaks of how we are tempted by "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vain glory of life", alluding to the very things which were Adam and Eve's temptation in Eden. Adam is set up in Scripture as 'everyman'; on almost every page of the Bible there are allusions back to him. Thus Jezebel's provocation of Ahab to sin is presented in the same terms as that of Adam and Eve; Israel "like Adam have transgressed the covenant" (Hos. 6:7). Paul sensed that as the serpent deceived Eve

by his subtilty, so the minds of the Corinthian Christians were being deceived by false reasoning (2 Cor. 11:3 = Gen. 3:13). The sinner chooses or accepts the words of the "tongue of the subtle" (Job 15:5 – the same word is used about the serpent in Gen. 3:1). The frequent command: "You shall not covet" (Ex. 20:17 etc.) uses the same Hebrew word translated "desire" when we read of how Eve "desired" the fruit (Gen. 3:6); yet Israel "desired" the wrong fruit (Is. 1:29). In all these allusions [and they exist in almost every chapter of the Bible] we are being shown how human sin is a repetition in essence of that of our first parents. The insistent emphasis is that we should rise above and *not* be like them.

2:17 *And the world passes away and the lust of it, but he that does the will of God abides for ever*- The Jewish world was fast passing away as AD70 approached. The various lusts of :16 refer to those of the Jewish world; its lust for pride and wealth would all come to an end in the destruction to come. Jn. 9:31 has used the same words in describing the Lord Jesus personally as the one who "does the will of God". But all who are in Him are likewise born of God's will (Jn. 1:13). The Lord is presented in opposition to the Jewish world; just as He is in the prologue of John 1. If ever a man stood with His back to the world, it was the Lord and the Jewish world. But He is the one who "abides for ever", whereas the Jewish world passed away. He "abides for ever" in the sense that the gift of His Spirit, the Comforter, would "abide for ever" with His followers (Jn. 14:16). The Jewish idea that God would "abide for ever" in the Jerusalem temple came to an end when that world passed away (1 Kings 8:13); the eternal abiding was by the spirit of the Lord Jesus in a spiritual temple of believing persons.

2:18 *Little children, it is the last hour*- This may not necessarily mean that John is expecting the Lord's return imminently, although Paul certainly writes as if he did. And I have elsewhere suggested this is because we are to live in the spirit of expectancy for the Lord's return imminently. But the "hour" which John's Gospel repeatedly mentions is the hour of the Lord's death, which the Lord lived His life expecting and anticipating. So John's idea may be that as the Lord faced His cross, so the faithful community were to realize that they were to meet the crisis of declension, false teaching and persecution in the same spirit in which He faced and anticipated the cross. The next verse (:19) will go on to allude to Judas going out into the night and betraying the Lord at "the last hour". And John sees the parallel in some of his converts going back out into the darkness of Judaism, just as Judas had done; indeed he considers that this is the sign that truly they were in "the last hour" (:19). They were not expecting it, it had come, for them. We too are to face our crises knowing we are fellowshiping the Lord's cross and passion experiences.

This is why John's writings like to use the word "overcome". Although it is the last hour for us, the time to fellowship the Lord's final sufferings, He "overcame" on the cross and even during the "last hour" in the upper room before He actually died ("I have overcome the [Jewish] world", Jn. 16:33; "the Lion of the tribe of Judah has prevailed [s.w. overcome] to open the book", Rev. 5:5, "conquering [s.w. overcome] and to conquer" Rev. 6:2). And we likewise have already overcome the wicked one, the system pressing in upon us which may even slay us (1 Jn. 2:13,14 "you have overcome the wicked one", the Jewish world, "you have overcome them", the agents of the Jewish system, 1 Jn. 4:4). We overcome by our faith in Jesus, faith that His overcoming means our overcoming ("whatever is begotten of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith... who is he that overcomes the world, but he that believes that Jesus is the Son of God" 1 Jn. 5:4,5).

And yet in the short term, the Lord was apparently overcome by the Jewish world, in that they slew Him. But it was truly a case of the magnificent defeat; through their temporary 'overcoming' of Him in death, He overcame them. And likewise with us. The beast 'overcomes and kills' the saints temporarily (Rev. 11:7; 13:7); but "they overcame him by the blood of the lamb" (Rev. 12:11) and 'got victory over [s.w. 'overcome'] the beast' (Rev. 15:2), because "the Lamb shall overcome them" (Rev. 17:14). The repeated promises in the opening letters of Revelation to "him that overcomes" are fulfilled in that the Lord overcame. Their faith in His overcoming means that they overcome finally. They are counted as the Lord Jesus, and His overcoming is theirs; so that "He that overcomes shall inherit all things; and... he shall be my son" (Rev. 21:7), i.e. shall be counted as the Son of God. We overcome because "you are of God", i.e. born of God, His sons just as the Lord was His Son (1 Jn. 4:4). Therefore "whoever is born of God overcomes the world" (1 Jn. 5:4) in that we are counted as God's only begotten, victorious son.

The events of the Lord's passion are constantly alluded to in John's letters, just as his gospel record is really an account of the Lord's final week with an extended introduction. A significant amount of the gospel is about the Lord's last week. In his letters, John appeals constantly for love of our brethren as the way to overcome. This must be seen in the context of his recording "the new commandment... [to] love one another as I have loved you" in the death of the cross. All John's appeals to love have this in mind. Likewise his many references to the Comforter and the gift of the Spirit are obviously allusive to the Lord's promise of the Comforter in the upper room discourse. John's references to the need to keep the commandment, at times expressed with the Hebraic plural of majesty "commandments", all clearly allude to the new commandment. 1 Jn. 2:7-10 is the most explicit: "I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard. But now, 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 [of living in the same kind of love-to-the-end as the Lord showed on the cross] already shines. He that says he is in the light and hates his brother, he remains in the darkness.

He that loves his brother abides in the light". 1 Jn. 3:23,24 likewise: "this is His commandment: that we should... love one another, even as He gave us commandment. And he that keeps His commandments abides in Him". Note how plural "commandments" and singular "commandment" are parallel, as in Jn. 15:17 "These things I command you, so that you may love one another", the singular commandment. Likewise 2 Jn. 5,6: "not as though I write a new commandment, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another. And this is love, that we should walk after His commandments. This is the commandment, even as you heard from the beginning". The beginning of the Gospel is the love of Christ in dying on the cross, and our need to respond to that in loving as He loved us.

And as you heard that antichrist comes- This would presumably be a reference to the "man of sin" prophecy in 2 Thess. 2. The coming of that individual was to be pressaged by the arising of individuals in his spirit, apparently in the "temple of God", the church.

Even now have there arisen many antichrists. Whereby we know that it is the last hour- These antichrists are those of :19, the "they" who entered the Christian community but were never really "of" it. This surely refers to the Judaist infiltrators of the early church (Gal. 2:4). In John's immediate context, these people were "anti" Christ both in the sense of being against Him, and of false appearing like Him. They

were part of the singular "antichrist" system which John felt was to arise in "the last hour". We wonder if he has in view the uprising of a system of evil just before the Lord's coming, of the kind he prophesied about in Revelation. It could even be that John's epistles were written after Revelation, and it is to that document he refers in writing that they have "heard" about the coming of antichrist. The beasts, whore, false prophet etc. are all capable of application to the Jewish system destroyed in AD70, and this was the "synagogue of satan" which the opening letters of Revelation begin by talking about. This is not to say that Revelation does not have other and specifically 'last days' fulfillments.

John may have in mind 2 Thess. 2, as the source from which they had heard about the coming of antichrist. This envisages a specific individual, similar to Judas, arising from within the community of believers and being enthroned in "the temple". I have noted on that chapter the possible fulfillments of this "man of sin" in a Jewish context. The 'revealing' of the "man of sin" would then connect with the 'revealing' of the specific antichrists (:19).

2:19- see on Mk. 14:68; Lk. 22:31; Jude 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 revealed, that all these are not of us- This is the language of the Lord in Jn. 17, that we are in but not of the world. Here, the contrary is also true; some can be in the church at some point, but not 'of it'. Clearly John has in mind the Lord's teaching he recorded in Jn. 8:35, that the son remains always in the household, but the servant / slave doesn't: "And the servant does not stay in the house for ever. The son stays forever". The allusion is also to Judas going out into the night to betray the Lord. As noted on :18, the antichrists have some similarities with "the man of sin", who as "the son of perdition" is also based upon Judas. There was a conscious campaign of infiltration of the church by Judaist false brethren (Gal. 2:4). According to many of Paul's letters, they enjoyed fair success in destabilizing the churches Paul founded. But in the community John had founded and is writing to, they "went out from us". Their exit revealed them for who they were. The implication is that those who wilfully leave the community of the body of Christ are effectively leaving Him. It is likewise no less a sin to exclude members of that body from association with it. 3:9,10 use the same word in saying that the revealing of the sons of God and those of "the devil" [the Jewish system] is in whether they love or hate. Going out from the community of believers is not abiding in love. Their exit revealed them; and the revelation is in whether we love or hate (3:9,10). The argument seems to be that anyone who breaks fellowship with the body of Christ is declaring themselves outside of the body- a similar logic used by Paul in 1 Corinthians. The break from the body of true believers is of itself the evidence that they are not "of" the body, and that they are not living in love for their brethren as their Lord loved them. "That they might be revealed" has the sense of 'in order that they might be revealed'. The idea is that God arranged this as the supreme sign of who is fake and who is true. Because the context of John's letter is a concern with true and false teaching. And in practical terms, those who are fake leave of their own accord over the long term of church life, and their lack of love is the litmus indicator of their apostacy.

"All these are not of us" can be rendered "they were not all of us" (AV), and this makes the reference to the Lord's words about Judas even clearer. He said that "not all" of them were cleansed because of Judas being the one amongst the "all" who would betray Him (Jn. 13:10,18).

2:20 *And you have an anointing from the Holy One and you know all these things*- The grammar here means that the "anointing" is the thing anointed with, as it were the oil used in the anointing. But literally, it means 'a Christ-ing', for "Christ" means 'anointed'. The reference is to the Spirit. John in his gospel has recorded how the Lord promised the gift of the Comforter, to the point that the disciples would feel His personal presence as if He were physically present as He had been in the brief years of His ministry. Note that John applies this allusion to the Comforter to "you", his converts, who had not met the Lord. The promise of the Comforter was therefore not just to the original disciples but "for ever", to all subsequent believers. This presence of the Spirit was effectively the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ personally in their hearts. And by this "you know all these things", referring to their knowledge of the Judas-like individuals who had entered their community and then gone out from them- presumably, because they "knew" them. Perhaps the allusion is to how the Lord through His spirit "knew from the beginning" those such as Judas who didn't sincerely believe and should betray Him (Jn. 6:64). His spirit had been given to the believers; the "anointing" was the means by which He abode within them and taught them "all things" (:27), and He abides in His people by His Spirit (3:24; 4:13; Jn. 14:17). The "things" immediately in view here are about the Judaist plot to infiltrate the fledgling churches. Paul had the same revealed knowledge, but seems to have been less successful in stamping it out than John was in his community.

We read in :20,27 that we have each been anointed. The idea of anointing was to signal the initiation of someone. I'd therefore be inclined to see this as alluding to baptism; when we become in Christ, in the anointed, then as 2 Cor. 1:21 says, we too are anointed in a sense by the gift of the Spirit. We're given a specific mission and purpose. "The anointing that you received" would therefore refer to our commissioning at baptism and the empowerment of the Spirit to achieve it. The Comforter passages are in the specific context of promising empowerment in obeying the great commission of preaching the Lord to all nations. And it is that same commission which is in view here. It seems to imply a one time act of being anointed / commissioned / inaugurated for service. Baptism isn't therefore merely an initiation into a community; it's a specific commissioning for active service, in ways which are unique to us. We do well to bring this point out to those we prepare for baptism. The words for 'anointing' are unique to 1 John but they occur in the LXX to describe the anointing / initiation of the priests, and of the tabernacle / dwelling place of God (e.g. Ex. 29:7; 35:14,28). John sees us as the dwelling place / tabernacle of the Father. There is some historical evidence that candidates for baptism in the early church were anointed with oil. References- uninspired of course, just for historical interest- are Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, 7.1,2; and various references in the 'Didascalia', the Acts of Judas Thomas, and the Pseudo-Clementine epistles. It could be that in the house ecclesias to whom John was writing, there was already this practice in place, and the initial readers would've understood this clearly. Paul, writing to a different audience, uses a different figure when he speaks of being "sealed with that holy spirit of promise". We are after all baptized into the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So the anointing which we've received would in my view refer back to our baptism. It was the initiation of us into service, just as the priests and tabernacle parts were anointed. The question we must each sort out is, what are our specific talents, our gifts, the potential uses for which the Father and Son intend us, the paths of service they potentially mapped out for us and initiated us for at our immersions?

2:21 *I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it! And because no lie is of the truth*- I have suggested that "truth" in John's

Gospel refers not simply to abstract "truth" in a general sense, or in terms of correct interpretation; but specifically to the Lord Jesus as "the truth". This statement that they know the Lord Jesus ["the truth"] then leads in naturally to the warning in :22 that there are those who deny the Lord Jesus. Such a "lie" cannot be part of those who are "of the truth", of the Lord Jesus. Those who were stating untruths about the Lord were therefore not to be considered Christian. They knew the truth in that they knew the Lord Jesus, and could therefore discern that the false teachers were not teaching correctly about Him. This is the context both before and after this verse.

2:22 Who is the liar but he that denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist: he that denies the Father and the Son- The antichrist has been defined in our notes on :18 as Judaist infiltrators to the fledgling church. They were denying that the Lord was the Messiah, the Christ, the anointed one. But the faithful had received the anointing (:1), the presence of the Christ within, as real as He was once amongst His people "in the flesh". By denying Him as the anointed one, they were declaring themselves not to be of Him, to not have received His Spirit, and those who had received it could see clearly that they were not His. They were denying the Son, as Peter had, but without repentance. And for all Judaism's much vaunted focus upon God, they were denying the Father by denying His Son.

We deny Jesus is the Christ if we don't preach Him (Mt. 10:33). As explained on :20, the context here is of having been anointed with the commission to preach Christ to the world. It follows that if we really believe that Jesus was not just Jesus of Nazareth but the Christ of God, therefore we won't deny Him but will preach Him. This is why there is connection between confessing Jesus as Christ and preaching Him (Jn. 9:22; Acts 18:5; Phil. 2:11).

2:23- see on Mt. 10:32.

Whoever denies the Son, the same has not the Father. He that confesses the Son has the Father also- The Judaists were arguing that they were loyal to the Father, but His Son was not the Christ / Messiah. And yet they thereby were denying the Father, and did not 'have' the Father. "The Son" had to be 'confessed'. This is a theme of John's Gospel; that some claimed to believe in the Son, but would not "confess" Him for fear of the Jewish world around them (Jn. 12:42), seeing that any who "confessed" Jesus as Christ were excluded from the synagogue system (Jn. 9:22 s.w.). John the Baptist is held up as an example to be followed of confessing and not denying the Lord (Jn. 1:20); and Joseph and Nicodemus are presented as parade examples of Jews who progressed from secret faith to open confession. Confession of the Lord is essential for final salvation; denial of Him before men results in His denial of us (Mt. 10:32,33). The infiltrators would not openly confess the Son, and therefore remained in the synagogue system; but they were thereby effectively denying the Son, and yet they claimed some association with the church, appearing to be "of us" (:19).

It was of course known to the entire church that their early leader Peter had denied his Lord. Denial of the Son therefore cannot refer to temporary failure, such as caving in to Saul / Paul's torturing of Christians to deny the Messiahship and Divine Sonship of Jesus. It surely refers to those who lived lives denying Him, despite having once known Him. For the whole idea of 'denying' the Son does allude to Peter's denials, and the sense clearly is that they are consciously lying by denying the Son when they do in fact know Him. Again we have yet more comfort that despite temporary failure, and the ongoing experience of sin, we can be confident that we are walking in love.

2:24 *As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also shall abide in the Son and in the Father-* John strongly links belief in Christ as the Son of God with a life of true love. They had heard from "the beginning" of their contact with the Gospel that Christ was the Son of God; and yet also the need to love one another. The "message" which they had heard from the beginning was that Christ was the Son of God (1 Jn. 2:24); and yet it was also that we should love one another (1 Jn. 3:11). Encounter with Him, living in the light of His personal example and the receipt of His spirit / mind, results in love. This is why in the context of teaching the need for love, John warns against false teaching regarding the nature of the Lord as Son of God (1 Jn. 2:22,23; 4:1-4; 2 Jn. 7-11). "The word... from the beginning" was the *logos* of Christ, the essence of Him and His spirit, which was love unto death (Jn. 1:1-3); and yet in John's letters, the word from the beginning was that we should love each other (1 Jn. 2:7; 3:11). This is the essence of belief in the Lord: love for each other. "This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another" (3:23). "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loves him that begat loves him also that is begotten of him" [i.e. your brother]. "If we love one another, God dwells in us... whoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him" (4:12,15). But why is there this link between love, and belief in Jesus of Nazareth being the begotten Son of God? Theologically, it could be said that if we accept Him as God's Son, then we must likewise accept all God's other sons, begotten as they are by His Spirit. But practically, are we not being taught to see the *pure wonder* of the way in which *Almighty God had a Son* and gave that Son, so freely and so painfully, for us...? The *pure wonder* of God having a Son of our nature, a child and then a man who showed us the essence of God displayed in human flesh and temptation; and then giving Him to us... If we see this, we will naturally show love to our brethren. So it isn't just a case of thinking yes, we believe the Lord was Son of God, not God the Son- and period. No. There's infinitely more to it than this. This faith and understanding can tear down every barrier between men, and provide the inspiration for a life of true, self-sacrificial love. The true *wonder* of it all simply must be meditated upon. That God's very own son should begin so small, as an ovum, "a single fertilized egg barely visible to the naked eye, an egg that would divide and redivide until a fetus took shape, enlarging cell by cell inside a nervous teenager".

The Lord speaks of us abiding in His word (Jn. 8:31) and yet also of His word abiding in us, and us abiding in Him (Jn. 15:7). That *logos* is not the whole Bible, but the *logos* of Him, the essence of His personality, recorded words, character and, in a word, His spirit. That word abiding in us may indeed refer in the first instance to the illiterate new Christian converts reciting over and over in their minds the Gospel accounts. In all situations they were to have the 'word of Jesus' hovering in their minds. To abide in Christ was and is to have His word abiding in us; but not just His recorded words. The very essence of Him should be the spirit which takes over our entire life and thinking. Paul's evident familiarity with the Lord's words is an example of how one of our brethren lived this out in practice. We have to ask how frequently in the daily grind the words and person of the Master come to mind, how close they are to the surface in our subconscious... for this is the essence of Christianity. It's not so much a question of consciously memorizing His words, but so loving Him that quite naturally His words and being are never far from our consciousness, and frequently come out in our thinking and words. No wonder it seems the early church made new converts memorize the Gospels. And perhaps too 1

Jn. 3:9 has similar reference- the seed of God [the Gospel- of John- which the converts had first heard] must abide in the convert, so that he or she doesn't [continue in] sin. The continual meditation upon the Lord's words and person as we have them in the Gospels will have the same effect upon us. *This* is the real way to overcome sin and to achieve genuine spiritual mindedness, to know the mind of Christ; in this way the Lord Jesus abides in us by His Spirit (1 Jn. 3:24). Abiding in the word of Christ, His words abiding in us, abiding in love, abiding in the Father and Son, the Spirit and anointing abiding in us (1 Jn. 4:16) are all parallel ideas.

But we are to "let" or allow His *logos* / Spirit abide in us. It is not just a matter of psychological steel will to recite His words to ourselves. We are to allow Him to fill us with His Spirit, to make His abode or dwelling with us.

2:25 *And this is the promise which he promised us- everlasting life-* The promise of eternal life in John's gospel refers to the present give of the eternal life right now; it is a reference to the spirit of the life of Jesus which is given into us now. It is "eternal" in that this is the kind of life and spirit which we shall eternally live, resuming living it seamlessly at the resurrection of the body.

2:26 *These things have I written to you concerning those that would lead you astray-* The reference has been to the Jewish infiltrators of the churches (Gal. 2:4), teaching that the Lord was not in fact "Christ". "Lead you astray" is the term used in the Olivet prophecy of how false Christs [cp. "antichrist"] would lead many astray, and this would be a sign of the last day approaching (Mt. 24:24). AD70 was clearly approaching as John wrote this; and we wonder whether there will be a similar collapse of faith due to infiltrators in the last days before His return. Mt. 24:24 predicted the success of these people; they would "lead many astray", and John is clearly up against this problem.

2:27 *And as for you, the anointing which you received of him abides in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you all things and is true and is no lie and even as it taught you, so you are to abide in him-* As noted on :1, the anointing refers to the gift of the Spirit, of the Christ in them and with them. The Comforter passages had explained that one role of the Comforter would be to replace the personal presence of the Lord on earth as their teaching Rabbi (see on Jn. 14:18). In this sense they needed no human teacher. And all those who have received the Comforter will likewise not be at the mercy of teachers within the church system they are involved with. The abiding of the Lord in us is through His spirit (3:24; 4:13; Jn. 14:17). The function of this is to actively teach us. This is the way to avoid being led astray by false teaching. What is taught, that which we hear and read, must be compared against the spirit of Christ within us. And we will soon sense what is right and wrong; not of our own natural intuition, but in comparison with His spirit within us. This is the sense behind Jn. 7:17: "If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know of this teaching, whether it is of God, or I speak from myself". The will of God is to believe on who He sent; and this belief will result in the gift of the Lord's Spirit. This is why the most simple, illiterate folk who are filled with the Spirit can so easily detect false teaching about their Lord.

"You do not need any man to teach you" alludes to the promise of the Spirit within the new covenant, which applies now to all who have entered that covenant by baptism into Jesus: "They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them" (Jer. 31:31-34). Those who have the Spirit will not be endlessly listening to this or that teacher for teaching. They are led by their own Spirit-filled relationship with God through His word.

Eph. 4:21 AV says that we are "taught by Him". The Lord "began to do and teach" things (Acts 1:1), and continues. Multiple times this word is used of the Lord's teaching people in His ministry. And that now continues. He teaches us. And He specifically says He will give us the Comforter, His teaching Spirit, to effect this. The Comforter will teach us "all things", and the "all things" are the things about Jesus (Jn. 14:26). 1 Jn. 2:27 alludes to this, saying that the anointing we have received "teaches you all things" and abides within us, in our hearts, so that we don't need any man to teach us. And any human teacher we do listen to must be judged against this teaching from the Comforter. This is why any man who does God's will through the Spirit will intuitively know if a human teaching ["doctrine", same word as 'teaching'] is of God or not (Jn. 7:17). Whoever leaves the teaching of Christ doesn't have God (2 Jn. 9). These Johannine passages use the same word for "teach" which we have in Eph. 4:21. . Paul himself says the same when he claims that he was taught the Gospel by none other than Jesus Christ and not by man (Gal. 1:12). Heb. 8:11 may have the same idea- under the new covenant, which includes the gift of the Spirit, men shall not teach their brother to "know the Lord" because all shall know Him through His direct teaching. We see here the active nature of the Lord's work now, teaching as well as mediating, forgiving and seeking to guide our life path towards eternity with Him. He teaches us, and Paul says that thus we "learned Christ" (Eph. 4:20). He teaches us about Himself. And there's nothing better than reading the Gospel records with the Lord Himself explaining Himself to us, as an individual tutor. We are taught "Christ" (:20), or "according to the truth which is in ['which consists in'] Jesus". Those lessons, that learning, is of the final truth- which is "Christ" Himself, "Jesus". Knowing Him, being in relationship with Him, is "the truth", as John's writings make clear. Understanding these things makes us review the passages which speak of our having received a teaching / doctrine [s.w.], and needing to remain faithful to it. At first blush we may assume this teaching is from the person who taught us the Gospel. But perhaps the idea is rather than this teaching was given us by the Lord Jesus: "That form of teaching that was delivered to you... the teaching that you learned [from Jesus directly?...] holding fast the faithful word he has been taught [by Jesus?...] abide in the teaching of Christ" (Rom. 6:17; 16:17; Tit. 1:9; 2 Jn. 9). Once we are secure in this relationship, we will not be blown about by every wind of human teaching / doctrine. We will be able to easily discern teachings.

2:28- see on Lk. 6:46.

And now, little children, abide in him- The appeal was to abide in Him by letting Him abide in them by the Spirit (3:24; 4:13; Jn. 14:17). There is an element of our permitting Him to dwell in us; being possessed by the Spirit does not remove our freewill in allowing Him to be a guest within us.

That, when he shall be manifested, we may have boldness and not be ashamed before him at his coming- The "boldness" at the day of judgment is only possible if we have the "eternal life" within us now, having received and having lived the spirit of the life of Jesus in our mortal life. To forsake that Spirit would leave them naked and thereby ashamed before Him.

"Before him" is literally 'from before Him'. After the rejected start to perceive the reality of rejection, there will be an ashamed slinking away from the judgment. It would appear that the wicked will argue back in protest against their rejection at the judgment ("When saw we thee?... Thou art an hard man"), and will desperately try to find acceptance. All this has to be reconciled with the silent dejection and grim

acceptance of the 'goats'. 1 Jn. 2:28 speaks of them as being "ashamed from before him at his coming", the Greek suggesting the idea of slinking away in shame, after the pattern of Israel being *carried away* into captivity (2 Kings 17:6,11,23,33- Heb. 'to denude, make naked'). Another foretaste of this was in the way the condemned world of Noah's time [the flood was a clear type of the final judgment] were to 'pine away / languish' (Gen. 6:17; 7:21- AV "die"). The wicked will melt away from the Lord's presence (Ps. 68:2). Rejected Israel are described as being "ashamed away" (Joel 1:12)- the same idea. This is the idea behind Heb. 12:15 RVmg: "...man that falleth back from the grace of God". What they did in this life in slinking away from the reality of pure grace back to Judaism will be what is worked out in their condemnation experience. Note that Jesus Himself will be likewise ashamed of His unworthy followers (Lk. 9:26); there will be a mutuality in the natural distancing between the two parties. This is the scene of Rev. 16:15- the rejected being made naked in shame. This slinking back in shame will fulfil the prophecies of Is. 1:24,29 and Jer. 2:35,36, which speak of the rejected being made ashamed, becoming ashamed, of their idols; which is all that legalistic obedience amounts to. They will be made ashamed by the judgment process. Thus we have the picture of them initially arguing with Jesus, growing less and less forcible, giving way to a pleading with tears for a change of mind, finally followed by a silent slinking away in shame. There seems a certain similarity between this and how the combined Gospel records imply that men initially mocked Jesus on the cross, and then eventually slipped away in silence (Heb. 6:6). Adam attempted to hide from God's presence, the Hebrew implying 'to drawn oneself back'. Judas went away (Gk. he retired away) to try to hang himself, once he knew his condemnation (Mt. 27:3-5). See on Mt. 27:5. Speechlessness is a characteristic of the rejected (Mt. 22:12); the brothers slunk away from Joseph's physical presence (Gen. 45:4), as the rejected will.

1 Jn. 2:28 speaks of our being able to have "boldness" at the day of judgment; but the Greek *parresia* means literally 'a saying of all'. This free telling of all will be when we list our sins to the Lord; and yet, in the greatest paradox, this will be our confidence before Him. That 'freedom of speech' in His presence will be the sign that we are accepted; and yet the freedom of speech begins with our free confession to Him of our unworthiness.

The 'manifestation' of the Lord is paralleled here with His *parousia* or second coming. But John has used this word of how the life and person of the Lord is manifested to believers in Him through the Spirit (1:2; 3:8) as He was manifested in His life (Jn. 1:31; 2:11 etc.), just as His physical life and presence was manifested at His literal resurrection (Jn. 21:1,14). The Comforter enables us to experience the Lord's presence just as real as He was physically present with men during His ministry. This is not at all to devalue His second, literal coming; but the essence of His manifestation is already experienced by those who have His Spirit.

2:29 *If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone also that does righteousness is begotten of him-* This is in the context of discerning false teachers. The New Testament always associates false teaching with false behaviour; for by fruits a tree is known. Hardly ever is abstract false teaching mentioned, genuine misunderstanding of Bible verses and so forth. Always the false teachers are known by their immoral fruits. The litmus test as to whether a person is "of Him" is whether they do righteousness, as He is righteous. "You know..." is the way to discern. The spirit of Christ within us will feel an intuitive disjunction with those who lack that

same Spirit. We are begotten of Him through receipt of the Spirit (Jn. 3:3-5). The key issue in false teachers is that they are not born again by the Spirit, and their lack of personal righteousness reflects that. The parallel in 1 Jn. 4:7 says that loving our brother is proof we are born of God. The lack of righteousness in view here is therefore in practice, a lack of brotherly love. Likewise 3:10 parallels not loving our brother with not doing righteousness.

But "you know" is an imperative, i.e. "you must / ought to know / recognize...". The idea may also be that the audience are being commanded to accept that whoever acts ["does"] like the Father is of the Father; whoever bears good fruit is in the vine. There was the equal danger of refusing good living brethren because of some theological foible or from guilt by association. To recognize God's begotten children is a duty, a binding imperative; lest church life become a mere social club comprised of our own ethnic and cultural circle. The basis of fellowship in practice is being together in God's family, and showing His characteristics. It is certainly not merely an on paper theological agreement.

1 JOHN CHAPTER 3

3:1 Look what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God. And we are! For this cause the world does not know us, because it did not know Him- This continues the theme of 2:29, that we have become God's children by being born again through receipt of the Spirit at water baptism (Jn. 3:3-5). This is all of His grace, His love. And our response is to be in love. The idea of the Jewish world not knowing us because they do not know God [for all their talk about monotheism] alludes to the prologue to the gospel of John. The world did not know the Lord Jesus in the sense that they did not accept the message that was in Him (Jn. 1:10); but those who did receive Him were given power by the Spirit to become God's children (Jn. 1:12,13). Those in Christ would be persecuted by the Jewish world as He was, because they did not know the Father (Jn. 16:3). The Jewish world did not know or recognize / have relationship with God's children, because they did not know God. But rejection by those around us, even in the name of God and their religion, should never take away from the wonder that we really are His children, begotten by the Spirit.

3:2 Beloved, now are we children of God; and it is not yet revealed what we shall be. We know that, when He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him- The same Greek word is used in Heb. 2:17 of how the Lord in His life and death was "made like His brothers". Here we read that finally, we shall be "made like" Him. His experiences of life, of our humanity, brought Him into identity with us- so that we might reach final identity with Him. Our identity with the Lord is not complete and total, despite all the very exalted language John uses for our current status in Christ. The promise that we shall be made like Him at His return is a great comfort when we ponder the question of how far we shall be changed. For if our nature alone shall be changed, and spiritually we shall be left as we are, then we feel the burden of knowing that our characters are not as transformed as they ought to be. Yet if character is going to be changed overmuch, we personally shall not be saved, but turned into someone whom we are not. Yet in the end, we do need to be changed to be "like Him". More thoughts about this on 1 Cor. 15:51,52.

For we shall see Him even as He is- This 'seeing' of God in His Son was and is possible in this life; for whoever has 'seen' the Son has seen the Father (Jn. 14:9). Especially was the essence of the Father and Son upon the cross, and 'seeing' / perceiving Him there leads to a transformed life. And yet He will be manifested / appear [AV] at the Lord's return; and through seeing Him as He truly is, we will be transformed into an existence like Him. Yes, our natures will be changed in a twinkling of an eye. But have you ever asked *how* this will happen, putting meaning into words? John says that it will be through our 'seeing' of Jesus in that actual and new way which we will then. Seeing Him fully as He is will mean that our very natures are changed; and this is exactly what is going on now in a moral sense as we see the essence of Him manifested in His life, in the cross and in the manifestation of His life now through His resurrection. As noted on 2 Cor 3:18, even now we are changed from glory to glory, the more we perceive Him. Our change will not therefore simply be at the flick of a switch, as it were, in some mechanical way. The change will indeed be instantaneous, but will be predicated upon our mental perception of Him as He is in the fullness of His moral and personal glory.

The idea of being able to "see" God must be understood in the context of how John uses the word "see". It carries not only the idea of physical vision, but also of believing and understanding. If we can't love our brother, another human being who on some level we *can* comprehend; how then can we love God, who in this life we cannot comprehend (1 Jn. 4:12,20)? Yet John says that ultimately, we will see God (1 Jn. 3:2). Perhaps the implication is that seeing God in our brother and loving him, having a relationship with him, is the prelude to seeing God Himself and relating with Him eternally.

3:3 And everyone that has this hope purifies himself, even as He is pure- The purification or cleansing is by the Spirit; 'purify' and 'pure' are from the same word translated "Holy" as in "Holy Spirit". The function of the Holy Spirit is to purify / cleanse us. Our purifying of ourselves according to His purity is impossible in our own strength; it can only be achieved by allowing His spirit to purify us towards His own purity. As noted on Jn. 15:2, the Father cleanses or purifies us through the work of the Spirit. This process comes to its final term when we are made completely "pure" in the change of nature and total personality envisaged in :1,2.

3:4 Everyone that keeps on committing sin commits lawlessness, for sin is lawlessness- The Judaist false teachers were characterized by personal sinfulness, living in sin (see on 2:29). In fact, for all their much vaunted attention to the Jewish law, they were lawless. The "keeps on committing..." is in contrast to the ongoing process of purification by the work of the Spirit we have just read of in :3.

3:5- see on Mk. 15:20.

And you know that he was manifested to take away sins; because in him is no sin- Or as stated in :3, "He is pure", and we are being purified toward the complete reflection of His sinlessness. His work of taking away sins therefore is ongoing. It was achieved in one sense

by His death, but that death released the Spirit (Jn. 7:39) which is as water of purification, washing and transforming us from sin. The language here could suggest that in His atoning death, 'He' was manifested. There God set forth Jesus in His blood, for all to see and respond to (Rom. 3:25 Gk.). There the real essence of Jesus was publicly shown forth. And there we come to know what love is (1 Jn. 3:16).

3:6 Whoever abides in him does not keep on in sin. Whoever keeps on in sin has not seen him, nor truly knows him- The true knowledge / seeing / relationship with Him has to have an impact upon us. If we abide in Him, if the whole sphere of our living and thinking is Him, then His Spirit abides in us (3:24; 4:13; Jn. 14:17). And this will indeed transform us. Intellectual knowledge of itself does not cleanse from sin; the knowledge in view is clearly the Hebraic idea of relationship with. John stresses how he had 'seen' the Lord's crucifixion (Jn. 19:35), and he later says that anyone who has truly 'seen' Jesus will not commit sin (1 Jn. 3:6). Holding the vision of Him there as He was, really 'seeing' and perceiving Him and continuing in relationship with that crucified Lord, will hold us back from sinning. This is the power of the cross.

3:7 My little children, let no one lead you astray. He that does righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous- John repeats the warning noted on 2:29, that the false teachers who were leading them astray could be told by their fruit and lack of righteousness. And the teachers criticized by the Judaist infiltrators could be told as true because they were righteous as the Lord is righteous. Those who have His Spirit will be able to intuitively tell who is righteous, because they have the same spirit.

3:8 He that keeps on in sin is of the Devil. For the Devil sins from the beginning. To this end was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the Devil- The Biblical 'devil', the false accuser, is indeed a parable for 'sin'. But it also often refers to sin manifested in an individual or system. The system immediately in view here is the Jewish world. The false teachers, the Judaist infiltrators, were sinful people in their personal lives, without the fruits of righteousness, and without love for their Christian brethren. They wilfully continued in that life, and were untransformed by the Spirit, which they resisted being filled with. I suggest that here and even in Revelation, John portrays the whole Jewish world as the false accuser, the devil; the great adversary or satan to the cause of Christ, as we see historically exemplified in the book of Acts. The Lord clearly called the Jewish opposition to Him the children "of the devil" (Jn. 8:44), in contrast to those born again in Him, who are here called the sons of God (3:1). These Judaist infiltrators (Gal. 2:4 etc.) were "of the devil" in that they were part of the larger Judaist system.

The purpose of the Lord's work and death was to unloose [NEV "destroy"] the works which "the devil" trusted in; the works of legal obedience which were characteristic of Judaism. Eph. 2:14 uses the same word for how the Lord unloosed the wall of partition enforced by the Jewish law. And the word is used about unloosing the law of Moses (Jn. 5:18; 7:23; see on Jn. 10:35). The need not to break or unloose the Law was a common Rabbinical saying found

often in the Talmud. It was through the Lord's removal of this works-based legal system that He removed our sins (:5).

3:9- see on 1 Jn. 2:24.

Whoever is begotten of God does not keep on in sin, because his seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on in sin, because he is begotten of God- The seed of God is His Son, the Lord Jesus, born by the Spirit. This is a huge Bible theme. The seed of God also begets us as God's children (Jn. 3:3-5). The begetting of God's only begotten Son refers also to us in outline principle. So long as we remain God's begotten children, the Spirit will work within us to purify us against sin (see on :3). We will not continue in sin as the Judaists did; we will be transformed; see on 2:1. But as is made clear in 1:10, the work of the Spirit is to reveal sin to us, to convict us, and also to cleanse us from it. That is a process; so this teaching does not mean that at any point in time, we are without sin. We are a work in progress, and even then, we shall have to be "made like Him" (see on :2).

3:10 *In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the Devil. Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he that does not love his brother-* The allusion is to the Lord's words in Jn. 8:44, where the children of the devil clearly refer to the Jewish leadership. The doing of righteousness is epitomized in loving our brother, which is presented as the one great commandment which is imperative in the very person of the Lord. To walk in His light is to become like Him, bit by bit. The Judaist infiltrators were controlled by the "devil" of the Jewish system. They did not love their Christian brethren but worked against them; and they did not love God's only begotten Son.

3:11 *For this is the message which you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another-* The message pronounced from the beginning of the Lord's ministry (see on Jn. 1:1 for this definition of "the beginning" in John) was, in a word, love. From the beginning of His ministry, the Lord's very being pronounced His love for the world, and supremely for the Father. This is the essence of the Lord Jesus; the imperative is ever in any encounter with Him to love as He loved, to the death of the cross for others.

3:12 *Not as Cain, who was of the evil one, who killed his brother. And why did he kill him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous-* The allusion to Jn. 8:44 continues (see on :10). The hatred of Cain for Abel is used in Jn. 8:44 as typical of the Jewish hatred for the Lord Jesus. As Abel's sacrificial obedience provoked an awareness in Cain of his own evil works, so with the Jewish darkness around the Lord. Cain's evil works do not refer to his vegetable sacrifice, but to the fact that his conscience of his unrecorded "evil works" was prodded by the observation of Abel's righteousness. The Lord in John's gospel explained that the darkness hates the light (the Lord Himself and those in Him, who are "the light of the world" as He is); and this is because their works are exposed as evil by the light. This is another way of saying that their consciences are prodded by the very existence of the light.

And therefore they hate the light and want to destroy, obscure or extinguish it. The world hates all those who testify of its evil (Jn. 7:7). It is too simplistic to say that Cain killed Abel, as the Lord was killed by the Jews, just because of jealousy. Rather is the reason because the goodness of the righteous exposed the evil deeds of the wicked, simply by reason of their being righteous.

3:13- see on Jn. 5:28.

Marvel not brothers if the world hates you- As explained on :12, it is the unconscious exposure of others' sin by our example which will lead to hatred. The Jewish converts were apparently surprised that the Jewish religious world would hate them. John is explaining that such hatred is completely to be expected. But in this very context, John warns about *some brethren* who hate their brethren, and who thereby abide in darkness (1 Jn. 3:15; 4:20). John's simple logic is evident: if you hate your brother, you're in the world, you've put yourself into darkness, you've condemned yourself. The place of the rejected believers is in the ranks of the world- nowhere else.

3:14 *We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. He that does not love abides in death-* Again, the litmus test of the Lord's indwelling through the Spirit is if we love our brethren in Christ. If we have received the promised gift of eternal life, which is the life and spirit of the Lord Jesus, then we shall not hate our brethren. For He loves them. If we have His spirit, His mind, His love- then so shall we. John implies that we should be able to enquire of ourselves as to whether we love our brothers, and to find a clear answer. Harry Whittaker was fond of seeing the *agape*, the love feast, the breaking of bread, as implied in references to showing *agape* to our brethren. That is indeed one implication, and those who refuse to break bread with their brethren can hardly claim to have *agape* for them. But much more is implied- for the *agape* of the new commandment is to love unto death as the Lord did, passionately wishing salvation for all our brethren.

Having eternal life and passing out of death is spoken of in Jn. 5:24, where it is predicated upon hearing the Lord's word: "He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life". To hear the word of Christ and believe the Gospel of God *must* issue, if it is valid and credible, in something practical- loving our brethren. It is only John who records the Lord speaking of "my word" [*logos*]. To hear Christ's word or *logos* is not merely to believe that the Bible was written by Divine inspiration, or to intellectually assent to doctrinal truth; it is to discern *Him*, to know Him as a person in truth. And this simply has to lead to loving the brethren. This is the real result of knowing / being in relationship with the Lord.

3:15- see on Mt. 5:22.

Whoever hates his brothers is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him- The allusion to Cain and Jn. 8:44 is continued; he was "the murderer from the

beginning", the archetypical murderer. The Lord of course taught that hate is tantamount to murder. But the great murder in view was the Jewish murder of the Lord (Mt. 22:7; Acts 7:52). "Eternal life" in John's Gospel is a present gift, received now and abiding in our hearts, "in him"; the life of the Lord Jesus, His spirit, the ability to live now as we shall eternally. This cannot abide in us if we hate our brother. For murder is related to death; and we have life abiding in us. The Greek for "hate" carries the idea of 'to detest'; we must ask ourselves if we detest any of our brethren. It seems apparent that many cannot answer that question very well.

"Eternal life" should be read as referring more to the *quality* of that life, rather than its eternal duration being the fundamental construct behind our conception of the Kingdom. This is how the phrase "eternal life" seems to be used in John's letters (1 Jn. 1:1-3; 2:24,25; 3:15; 5:11,13). We must not be like the rich young man who desperately asked: "What must *I do* that *I* may have *eternal life*?", as if he saw having eternal life as the ultimate possession to get under his own belt. Notice how our Lord's reply described 'having eternal life' as 'entering into life', 'having treasure in heaven', 'entering the Kingdom of God', rather than personally possessing eternal life (Mt. 19:16-23).

3:16 *Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers-* The message from the beginning of the Lord's ministry was of love, in that the light of His person was an imperative to love unto death. But the supreme definition of love was given in His life; that enables the new commandment to be real, to love as He loved us, unto death.

The same *must* which led Him to His passion (see on Mk. 14:49; Lk. 2:49) is the very same compulsion which "behoves" us to preach that passion which we have witnessed and benefited from. In His ministry, He had taught that we *must* be born again, and in the same discourse spoke of how He *must* be lifted up in crucifixion (Jn. 3:7,14). His cross, His will to die in the way He did, must be our inspiration. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and *we ought* to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:16). We must carry the cross if we are to know His salvation. Yet we can be caught up in the spirit of a world which seeks obsessively to save its life rather than give up life. Through popping pills, exercise, healthy living... we can seek to extend our days. We use insurance to seek to cushion us against the harder knocks of life. We seek our lives to be as free as possible from hard work. And none of these things is wrong in themselves. It is quite right that we should make use of these things in the Lord's service. But we can be caught up in the spirit of life and thinking of which they are part, and *this* is the danger. For the spirit and desire that gave rise to them is that which is exactly the opposite of the sense of *must* which the Lord possessed. He knew that He *must* suffer, He *must* crucify His flesh. And so *must* we. This is a solemn and eternal compulsion. Yet we live in a world which believes that we *must not* suffer anything negative, and we *must* seek to save our lives rather than give them out for others. If we are to show the love of God to the world, this will primarily (but not exclusively) be in terms of our spiritual help towards them, rather than a social gospel. Our response to God's love in Christ will also be expressed by laying down our lives "for the *brethren*". The next verse helps define this as material, practical help (1 Jn. 3:16,17).

3:17 But whosoever has the world's goods and sees his brothers in need, and shuts up his compassion from him, how does the love of God abide in him?- The Lord Jesus personally, His word, His *logos*, the love of God, the Spirit... are all referring to the same thing. The indwelling of the Spirit of Christ means that we shall love as He loved. If we do not show love in practice, then quite clearly His Spirit, which has love as its essence, is not within us. We cannot claim to have His Spirit in a purely intellectual sense; and our lives not show love. I have argued throughout John's Gospel and epistles that "the world" usually refers to the Jewish world; and on 2:16 that the Judaist movement was wealthy. The false teachers of Rev. 3:17 were increased with goods and had need of nothing. They had the goods of the [Jewish] world; but refused to help needy Christians. For they were after all just infiltrators into the Christian churches (Gal. 2:4) and wouldn't want to 'waste' any money helping their poor.

The principles arising from the first century context which John wrote in do of course apply to us in any age. The early church was the parade example of giving to brothers in need (Acts 2:45; 4:35; 6:3 s.w.). The psychology of being mean is well expressed here; we see / notice the need, but close up our hearts lest we make an emotional response from the "bowels" [Gk.]. Emotion and pity are therefore quite normal motivations for generosity, and we should not close them down lest we be left out of pocket.

3:18 Little children, let us not love in word, nor with the tongue, but in deed and truth- Every religion and indeed every person on earth talks of "love". But John has radically redefined love as being what is done motivated by the "new commandment", to love as the Lord loved us unto death. This is the love which is not in theory or spoken about in pious language, but the love which is reality and which is "truth" in the sense that the Lord Jesus was "the truth". The word [*logos*] is to be made flesh (Jn. 1:14); that seems the idea here. The word of love, the love as the Lord loved, is not to remain as mere language, but to become deed and reality.

The commandment to love, as Christ loved us, is made new "as it is made true" (1 Jn. 2:8 Gk.) both in the person of Jesus, and in all who are truly in Him. This means that the principles we receive in theory are to become 'truth' in us as they were in the Lord; they are to become applied in the very person and fabric of our beings, and not remain merely part of our shadow selves. It is truth that makes us pure (1 Pet. 1:22,23), good deeds are produced by truth (1 Jn. 3:18). No amount of correct theory can make us pure; surely the reference is to the life of transparency to God, of 'truth' in the sense that there is no divide between our inner convictions and our actual lives. Then will come true in us the connection which John perceives between truth and love (1 Jn. 3:19).

3:19 Hereby shall we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before him- "The truth" as often in John refers to the Lord, who is "the truth". The "Him" before whom we assure our hearts at the last day is the Lord; "the truth". The extent to which we are intended to be Christ-centred is reflected in how John speaks of Him as "the truth". Indeed, He appears to refer to the Name of Jesus with the same sensitivity with which a Jew would refer to the Name of God, and uses a similarly wide range of titles for Him. John seems to use

aletheia, 'the truth', as a kind of periphrasis for "Jesus"; *en aletheia*, in the truth, appears to match Paul's *en kyrio* ['in the Lord'] or *en christo* ['in Christ']. John refers to missionaries being sent out "for the sake of the name", when the other records say that they were sent out in the name of Jesus. The exalted Name of Jesus was therefore, to John, 'the truth'; the person of Jesus, which the Name encapsulates, is to be the deciding, central truth in the life of the believer.

We can know whether we are living in love; and if we are, then we come to judgment day with stable hearts. All those who uphold exclusive policies against fellowshipping their brethren need to ponder long and hard what they are doing, and whether they can face the Lord in that day with an assured heart... as they see brethren they have excluded entering His Kingdom. If we have a good conscience that we have lived in love, then we shall assure, or calm down, our fluttering hearts before Him at the last day. To live in love, with the spirit of the Lord Jesus, is to live the eternal life, the kind of life we shall eternally live. If we know we are living in love, we shall be assured when we meet Him that we shall seamlessly continue that life.

3:20 *Because if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things-* The preceding verse has spoken of being able to assure our hearts before the Lord at judgment day, if we have lived in love. The context here in :20 therefore specifically refers to the question of whether or not we can say we live in love. If it does, then God is greater than our various feelings of bad conscience concerning those we do not love. He knows all things- if we know we have not lived in love, then this will be symptomatic of yet more sins, which He knows all about. The same Greek words for "knows all things" are used about the Lord Jesus knowing all things that are in men (Jn. 2:24).

3:21- see on Lk. 6:46.

Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have boldness toward God- As noted on :19,20, the context here is specific to the question of whether we know that we live in love toward the Lord's brethren or not. John assumes that we can in fact know the answer to this question, and that our heart reliably reveals whether or not we are living in love. The "boldness" is the 'assurance of heart' at the last day which we shall have if we know we have lived in love (:19). But we can have that boldness right now; we can come in prayer boldly before the throne of grace, and boldly enter the holiest (Heb. 4:16; 10:19). This is why John's thought goes on from the day of judgment to our standing in prayer now before the Father and Son (:22). Because our attitude toward them now in prayer shall be our attitude at the last day. Through the ministry of the Comforter, we are now in the Lord's presence, we have His presence just as really as when He lived amongst men in Palestine.

3:22 *And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments, and do the things that are pleasing in His sight-* As shown on :21, the thought has developed from having love for each giving us boldness before the Father and Son in the day of judgment, to now being bold and confident in prayer before them now. Because our attitude toward them now in prayer shall be our attitude at the last day. The theme of being confident because we live in love is also continued. The "commandments" in view are I suggest a plural of majesty,

referring to the one great commandment- to love as He loved us. Indeed the next verse (:23) rather makes this clear. See on 2:3. And this is 'to do the things pleasing to God', a phrase lifted directly from Jn. 8:29 "I do always those things that please Him". So effectively, we shall have our prayers answered, we can have boldness in prayer, if we obey the commandment to love ["because we keep his commandments"], which is to live as He lived, loving as He loved ["and do the things that are pleasing in His sight"]. And this fits perfectly with the context of the preceding verses- that we can have boldness before the same Father and Son, if we live in love.

3:23- see on Jn. 17:11.

And this is His commandment: that we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, even as He gave us commandment- The plural "commandments" of :22 are the singular commandment, to love as He loved because we have believed into His Name. See on :22 and 2:3. If we "believe in the name of... Jesus Christ", then we will love one another. To believe the name and to love each other are "his commandment" - singular. They are one and the same thing. This is how direct is the link between truly believing in the name of Jesus, and loving each other. One cannot truly believe in Him, in all that He was, all that He stood and died for, and all that He is... and not articulate this in some form of love for the brotherhood. Belief in Him can never therefore be a purely intellectual matter of mastering certain doctrines. Belief in Him is to love one another; one cannot believe in Him, truly encounter Him and accept Him, and not live in love.

3:24- see on 1 Jn. 2:24.

And he that keeps His commandments abides in Him and He in him. And hereby we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He gave us- As noted on :23 and 2:3, the "commandments" here refer effectively to the one great commandment, to love as He loved us. To have His Spirit abiding in us is parallel in effect to living in the spirit of love as He loved us. The indwelling of the Spirit is therefore connected to our living in love. The Lord's spirit could be summarized in that word, "love". Into our hard hearts there comes His heart, His spirit into our spirit, His word / *logos* / essence of being into ours. And the most essential spirit of Jesus was love for the Lord's people, unto death for our salvation. Here then is real help and hope for those who have been so bruised by life that they feel they can never love. And indeed, who can seriously think that in their own strength, they could love as Christ loved us, unto the death of the cross? The fact is, we have been given His spirit, and this is how He abides in us; and He abides in us if we keep His commandment to love. It's not that we get the Spirit as a reward, as it were, for being loving. We are given the Spirit when we are baptized, when we first believe. It is the empowerment to keep the great commandment of love. For His spirit in the end is the spirit of His love, in a word. "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5). Hence we read of "the love of the Spirit" (Rom. 15:30); and love is *the* singular fruit of, or brought forth by, the Spirit.

1 JOHN CHAPTER 4

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-* In John's Gospel and letters, the defining feature of true believers and teachers is that they have received the spirit of the Lord Jesus, the Comforter. The authenticity of teachers / "prophets" was to be demonstrated according to whether they had the fruits of the Spirit, which are summarized in love for our brethren as the Lord loved us unto death. This is the test of the spirits.

There were other tests of these prophets- if they didn't accept that Jesus was Lord, they didn't have the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3). If they held false teaching about whether Jesus came in the flesh, and walked in hatred of the other Christians, they also were to be rejected (1 Jn. 4:1-10). When Paul says that God and the Holy Spirit witness to the truth of what he is writing, he is presumably referring to how those with the gift of discerning spirits had tested and approved what he was saying (Rom. 1:9; 9:1 cp. 2 Cor. 11:31; Gal. 1:20; 1 Tim. 2:7). What all this means is that as soon as a genuine New Testament prophet gave a prophecy, it was *immediately* recognized as such, because all these methods of 'testing the spirit' had been followed. This, by the way, explains the very 'dogmatic' and self-assured tone of some of the writers. They insist that their commands have God's authority (1 Thess. 4:2; 2 Thess. 2:15), and therefore must be obeyed (2 Thess. 3:14). They can insist that what they are saying is actually the will and command of the Lord (1 Cor. 14:37); and their inspired preaching was "of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:13). These claims would have come over as arrogant and baseless- unless there had indeed been the process of confirmation of their words explained above. The writers can ask for their letters to be read at the gatherings of the early church- which initially would have been based around the synagogue practice of reading from the Old Testament Scriptures. Their writings were clearly accepted on a par with those writings- as soon as they were issued (1 Thess. 5:27; Col. 4:16; Rev. 1:3). The testings of the various claims to Holy Spirit inspiration are to be found in Gal. 1, 1 Cor. 14 etc. But the letters of John, written at the end of the New Testament period, have the most warnings about the need to test the various claims of Holy Spirit inspiration- understandably, as John was writing towards the end of the period when inspired writings were being given (1 Jn. 4:2,3; 5:6; 2 Jn. 7). See on 1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Tim. 5:18.

4:2 *Hereby do you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ came in the flesh is of God-* The Judaist infiltrators claimed to have the Spirit, as the true Christians did. For being without the spirit of Christ makes a man "none of His". So exactly what "spirit" they claimed to have needed to be tested. People here are called 'spirits' because of the close identification between a person and their 'spirit'. True Christians would have the spirit of Christ at their core and would thereby be personally, openly identified with Him. John's Gospel has spoken of the difference between claiming faith in Christ, and confessing or professing Him before men. The cross elicited open and total confession of Him before men. John the Baptist is presented as an example of a man who confessed and did not deny the Lord (Jn. 1:20), and Joseph and Nicodemus are presented as examples of men who went from secret faith to the open confession required of a true Christian. Many Jewish 'believers' refused to confess Jesus as Christ because the penalty for such confession was exclusion from the synagogue system and the Jewish world (Jn. 9:22; 12:42); see on 2:23.

So firstly, a person filled with the spirit of Christ, the Messiah, would actually confess Jesus as Christ, as Messiah. The Judaist infiltrators would not openly confess Him in this way. But they must confess that He "came in the flesh". They had to openly accept that Jesus was a real person; for already incipient ideas of Docetism ['seeming'] and Gnosticism were being advocated by the Jews as a way of clouding the whole issue- that a man born of Mary was Son of God and Messiah, having a perfect character, and now risen, was able to share His spirit with believers in Him. I demonstrated in [*The Real Christ*](#) that much false teaching about the nature of the Lord began with Jewish attempts to cloud the true Christian teaching about the Lord; and these attempts later morphed by further extension into the absurdities of Trinitarian doctrine.

The idea of "Christ comes..." cannot be pressed to support any idea of pre-existence. It was a standard Jewish phrase to refer to the arrival of the Messiah (so used in Mt. 24:5; Jn. 4:25; 7:27,31,41,42; 11:27). So the idea would be that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah who should "come"; and He came as an actual human being, "in the flesh". He was the manifestation of God "in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16). Already Judaism was beginning to suggest that Messiah was just some abstract, idealistic personification rather than a literal person. That idea is popular in reform Judaism to this day.

There is another possibility. The Lord had promised that despite His physical departure, He would "come" to the disciples, in that the gift of His Spirit in their hearts would make His presence as real [and moreso] as when He was literally with them (Jn. 14:18). His 'coming' to His people was therefore through His Spirit indwelling their flesh. The very same Greek words are used when Paul explains that the life of the risen Jesus, His Spirit, is made manifest "in our mortal flesh" right now (see on 2 Cor. 4:11). The Spirit gift would be given to "all flesh" (Acts 2:17 s.w.). Hence Paul could say that "Christ lives in me... in the flesh" (Gal. 2:20). In this case, the "spirit", the person claiming to have the Spirit, would confess that the spirit of the Lord Jesus had entered them, their "flesh".

4:3- see on Jn. 12:42.

And every spirit that does not confess that Jesus came in the flesh is not of God, and they are proved to be of the antichrist; of whom you have heard that it comes, and now is already in the world- "Of God" suggests 'born of God'. The believer is born "of the Spirit", not of the will of man but "of God" (Jn. 1:13; 3:5). There were false claims of Spirit possession in the first century; as I have noted on 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy [regarding the claims made in Ephesus]. The Judaist infiltrators claimed to have the spirit of Christ, and even did false miracles to support their claims, in Corinth they were talking in glossolalia, "mumbo jumbo", and falsely claiming this was the gift of tongues / languages. Those who had been truly born again, of the Spirit, would openly confess the Lord Jesus as Messiah, as a real person "in the flesh". By refusing to do so, they demonstrated that they were "antichrist", the fake, imitation Christ. "You have heard that it comes" must refer to the Lord's predictions that there would be false Christs. These false versions of Messiah refer to the ideas being pushed in the Jewish world and spread into the churches by the Judaist infiltrators. They were specifically entering the [Jewish] world.

4:4 *You are of God, little children, and have overcome them. Because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world-* By being born of God by the Spirit (Jn. 1:13; 3:5), what was in them (the Spirit) was greater than the supposed 'spirit' in the Jewish world. The believers were "little children" of God, having been born of Him

by the Spirit. The Spirit is personified ["he"] not because the Holy Spirit is a personal being, but because the presence of the Spirit would be as real for the believers as if the Lord were physically present with them as a person.

John makes such a fuss about believing that the Lord Jesus came in the flesh because he wants his brethren to have the same Spirit that was in Jesus dwelling in *their* flesh (1 Jn. 4:2,4). He wants them to see that being human, being in the flesh, is no barrier for God to dwell in. As He was in the world, so are we to be in the world (1 Jn. 4:17 Gk.). *This* is why it's so important to understand that the Lord Jesus was genuinely human.

John's writings like to use the word "overcome". Although it is the last hour for us, the time to fellowship the Lord's final sufferings, He "overcame" on the cross and even during the "last hour" in the upper room before He actually died ("I have overcome the [Jewish] world", Jn. 16:33; "the Lion of the tribe of Judah has prevailed [s.w. overcome] to open the book", Rev. 5:5, "conquering [s.w. overcome] and to conquer" Rev. 6:2). And we likewise have already overcome the wicked one, the system pressing in upon us which may even slay us (1 Jn. 2:13,14 "you have overcome the wicked one", the Jewish world, "you have overcome them", the agents of the Jewish system, 1 Jn. 4:4). We overcome by our faith in Jesus, faith that His overcoming means our overcoming ("whatever is begotten of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith... who is he that overcomes the world, but he that believes that Jesus is the Son of God" 1 Jn. 5:4,5). And yet in the short term, the Lord was apparently overcome by the Jewish world, in that they slew Him. But it was truly a case of the magnificent defeat; through their temporary 'overcoming' of Him in death, He overcame them. And likewise with us. The beast 'overcomes and kills' the saints temporarily (Rev. 11:7; 13:7); but "they overcame him by the blood of the lamb" (Rev. 12:11) and 'got victory over [s.w. 'overcome'] the beast' (Rev. 15:2), because "the Lamb shall overcome them" (Rev. 17:14). The repeated promises in the opening letters of Revelation to "him that overcomes" are fulfilled in that the Lord overcame. Their faith in His overcoming means that they overcome finally. They are counted as the Lord Jesus, and His overcoming is theirs; so that "He that overcomes shall inherit all things; and... he shall be my son" (Rev. 21:7), i.e. shall be counted as the Son of God. We overcome because "you are of God", i.e. born of God, His sons just as the Lord was His Son (1 Jn. 4:4). Therefore "whoever is born of God overcomes the world" (1 Jn. 5:4) in that we are counted as God's only begotten, victorious son.

4:5 They are of the world. Therefore speak they of the world and the world hears them- The world of the first century didn't generally hear the Jewish false teachers; but the Jewish world did. This confirms that we are correct in viewing "the world" here as the Jewish world. The message of these people, their teaching / 'speaking', was of the Jewish world, and therefore attractive to the Jewish world.

4:6 We are of God. He that 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- Being "of God", born of Him by the Spirit (Jn. 1:13; 3:5), is presented as being in opposition to being "of the [Jewish] world". John himself was a Jew and was not at all personally anti-Jewish; but he clearly presents the world of Judaism, with their conscious denial of Jesus as Messiah, as being absolutely opposed to the things of God. Those who were not born of God by the Spirit would not "hear" the teaching of John and his team. Yet they surely had the Spirit; to refuse their teaching, which they had been taught by the

Comforter, was another proof that these hearers were not "of God". There is an intuitive bonding between all who have the Lord's spirit. Those who were out of step with the teaching of spirit-filled teachers like John were thereby discernible as of "the spirit of error". "Error" is more 'deceit' in the Greek, the same word used of the spirit of deceit which the Lord would send upon the Jewish world (2 Thess. 2:11; see note there).

4:7 Beloved, let us love one another. For love is of God, and everyone that loves is begotten of God and knows God- Another proof of having been born of God through the Spirit (Jn. 1:13; 3:5) is whether we love one another. The love in view is not of a secular nature; but the love of the new commandment, to love as the Lord loved us, unto death on a cross. To be born "of God" is to have the love which is "of God", the love which came to its ultimate term in the gift of His Son for the sins of the world (Jn. 3:16). Although John's audience were all born of God, they still had to be exhorted to "love one another". The love between us is not as it were imposed by the Spirit against our will; the work of the Spirit requires our willing partnership. Knowing God means living in the sacrificial love of the Father and Son. Clearly we do not 'know' God simply by perceiving the correct theologies about Him and placing a mental tick of agreement against them.

4:8- see on Jn. 3:3.

He that does not love, does not know God. For God is love- As noted on :8, to know God in the Hebraic sense of having a relationship with Him will issue in love- His unique, self-sacrificial love which led to the events of the cross as their acme. To 'see' or 'know' both the Father and Son is to become like them; beholding their glory results in the glory of their person and Name shining off from our faces (see on 2 Cor. 3:18). So a litmus test of false brethren is whether or not they have love. And so often those who appear the most conservative in their teaching totally fail the *agape* test.

To experience God is to know Him. So often the Hebrew prophets speak of 'knowing God' as meaning 'to experience God'. Because God is love, to love is to know God. Quite simply, how deeply we have loved [and I am speaking of 'love' in its Biblical sense] is how deeply we have known God- and vice versa. And that love is worked out in the very earthliness and worldliness of human life in practice.

4:9 Herein was the love of God manifested to us, in that God has sent His only Son into the world that we might live through him- The allusion is again to Jn. 3:16. The manifestation of God's love was in the cross. He was "manifest [s.w.] to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb. 9:26). "He was manifested to take away our sins" (1 Jn. 3:5), which He did through death on the cross. He was "manifest [s.w.] in these last times for you" in that He was the sacrificial Passover lamb without blemish (1 Pet. 1:19,20). We live through Him in that He gives to us the gift of His life, His spirit, the kind of thinking He thinks and life He lives, breathing it into every open heart through the gift of the Comforter. As the Father sent the Son into the world, so we are sent into the world in obedience to the great commission (Jn. 17:18). Our mission likewise is to manifest His love and to give others the gift of His life, acting as a channel for the movement and gift of His life / Spirit. The life He has given us is ongoing, and starts now. That is the force really of the aorist subjunctive behind "that we might live". We were dead in sins, but were then given life (Eph. 2:1). The gift of God's son was not simply so that we might have a card to play by which we escape the consequences of death; but rather are we given life now, life in Him, which by its nature and quality is eternal, and shall be eternally resumed in our experience at the resurrection. It is life motivated by His love for us on the cross; in this sense His death

gave us life, and His spirit is given by His death. We live lives of love, the spirit filled life, because His death inspired that (Rom. 5:5).

4:10 *Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins-* The love of the Father and Son is not "love" as the world understands it; but the love of the cross, which was "the propitiation for our sins", that men might be eternally forgiven and saved. One dimension of that love is that it totally takes the initiative; it is not a kind, positive response to those perceived to have loved us. It is the initiative of dying for ones' enemies, in the hope they shall come over to your side- as Romans 5 expresses it. The Judaism which John was up against had much to say of their boasts to "love God"; but it is not our love of Him which is to be the focus, but His love of us whilst we were sinners, and His supreme gift of His Son for our sins and weaknesses, rather than to complement our supposed righteousness.

John seems to purposefully make the point that the Lord *was sent* [as a one time act in the past] "to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 Jn. 4:10). In His blood covered body, He was the place of propitiation, the blood-sprinkled mercy seat (s.w. "mercy seat" Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:5). And yet: "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: for He *is* [right now, each time we sin] the propitiation for our sins" (1 Jn. 2:1,2 s.w.). In obtaining forgiveness for us He in some way goes through again the essence of His sacrifice. It is too simplistic to say that we repent, and God forgives. He does, but only on the basis of Christ's atoning act that must come ever before Him in the granting of forgiveness. The Mosaic offerings of blood "before Yahweh" all pointed forward to this fact. Awful as His actual physical sufferings were 2000 years ago, we should not separate them from the work He came to do- of obtaining our redemption. He worked this work in His life, on the cross, and continues it until this day. The daily morning and evening sacrifice had to be of a first year lamb without blemish- the identical specification for the Passover lamb. His death on the cross at Passover was the same as His daily life of sacrifice.

We note that the sending of His Son to die for us was because God loved us. It is therefore simply not the case that God as it were hated us, but Jesus made Him love us. He loved us from the start.

4:11 *Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another-* The allusion is clearly to Jn. 3:16; God "so" loved the world in that He gave His Son. He loved the world "so", in this way, that He gave His son. Typical of John's letters, we have here the practical interpretation of the well known phrases in the Gospel of John. This sets the standard so high. For the love of God toward us is not "love" as the world understands it, but the love of utter, total self-sacrifice expressed on the cross (:10). It is with that love that we "ought to love one another". Anything which may damage the path to salvation of the other must not be done; and every effort and sacrifice is to be made to help others on the path toward salvation. For "ought", see on :12.

4:12 *No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us-* The allusion is to the prologue of John's Gospel; we have not seen God, but the Son has revealed Him in who He was (Jn. 1:18). And thereby we who have seen the Son have seen / understood / believe in the Father for all the Father is.

"Seen" is *theaomai*, from whence "theater". It is not the word used in Jn. 1:18, and so John is interpreting that passage more specifically in the context of people going off to wrong religious views. God is not theater, mere religion, a show that we go to see in theater at the weekends. The mentality of church life is often no different

to that of going to the theater at the weekend- dressing up the same way, conscious of the image we cut with other attenders, and certainly going for coffee with others in the pub or cafe before or after the show. John's audience were very familiar with 'theater' and would immediately have seen the idea. 'Seeing' Him is not possible physically and literally, but we see Him through His Son and specifically through the cross. The immediate context may be John's answer to those who claimed they had received some mystical revelation of God, and had 'seen' Him, perhaps at a shrine or hill top or other holy place; and on that basis, they loved Him. John is saying that nobody has had such meetings with God, you don't go somewhere to see Him, there is no sacred space or holy place where you go to get a view of Him; but we 'see' God in His essence in the love shown to man through the cross. And what we do see is our brethren (:20). It is them we are to get on and love, rather than going to some shrine to supposedly 'see' God. Our response to the love of the cross is to love others, and not just be satisfied with claiming to personally love God. This scenario in its essence is not dissimilar to some claims of postmodernism in our age. When probed about God, many will claim they personally know God on the basis of vaguely defined private 'meetings' with Him, and have a private relationship with Him; claiming 'spiritual not religious'. John's message is that this is not ultimately true. For relationship with Him is reflected in our relationship with His children. And we meet Him, or He meets us, in the cross, which is a public reality to which all are invited. The allusion to John's Gospel here is to Jn. 1:18 "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son... he has made Him known". The making known of God by the Son was through the cross.

"If we love one another..." is a conditional clause, implying that not all within the "we" did "love one another", and of course nudging "us" all towards greater love for one another. Although John speaks in black and white terms of category throughout his letters, he constantly builds in hints that he accepts we can be in the "light", confident of salvation by grace, although we also sin (1 Jn. 1:8-10; 2:1,2). He comments in 1 Jn. 2 that the darkness is passing away for us, and the true light of Christ's love is growing stronger. But he defines the darkness as unlove, failure to love our brethren. He accepts that we still have that darkness, but it is decreasing. But by category, we are "in the light". And here too we have the tacit acceptance that we do not love as we ought, in the light of the cross. And so likewise in :11 "we ought also to love one another"; "we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" as the Lord did for us (1 Jn. 3:16). Because the Lord washed our feet, in an act which looked ahead to His servant like death on the cross, "you also *ought* to wash one another's feet" (Jn. 13:14) as the lowest slave. We "ought" implies we are not fully compliant. For who can perceive the love of the cross, and claim to have responded adequately? Paul had the same sense in Eph. 5:28; as the Lord died for us, "so *ought* men to love their wives as their own bodies". In these passages, "ought" is the word for debt. We have a debt which is huge and can never be repaid, according to the Lord's parables (Mt. 18:28,30; Lk. 7:41).

The abiding of the Father within believers is through the indwelling of the Spirit in our hearts (3:24). The litmus proof of that is that we will love one another within the believing community; for we are to love as the Lord loved us and died for us to save us.

The idea of "perfected" is of an ongoing process. John writes often in absolute terms, according to our status "in Christ"; as if it is simply so that those who know the Father therefore automatically live in and with the kind of love exhibited by Him in Christ. But we know from observed experience that this is a process and doesn't

happen instantaneously; even Paul felt he had not yet been "perfected" (Phil. 3:12 s.w.). Love, the love unto the death of a cross, is developed and "perfected" in us; this results in the Christian community being "perfected" into a profound unity, unseen in any other human social relationship (Jn. 17:23 s.w.). Our life paths are therefore directed towards the development of that love; and when our lives are over and the next we know we stand before the Lord at the judgment, our love should have been perfected, matured and developed to such a point that we assure our fluttering hearts before Him and find boldness there. We shall then have reached the point the Lord did, who was "perfected" until the very point when He died- for that was the ultimate term and maturity of the process of love being "perfected" in a person (Heb. 2:10; 5:9; 7:28). We note from His example and path that whilst the process of 'perfecting' is still in operation, we may be not fully mature, but lack of full maturity is not sinful. For the Lord never sinned. It is the Spirit which 'perfects' us, until on death we can be spoken of as being amongst the spirits of just men who were perfected (Heb. 12:23). It is by keeping the word of the Lord Jesus ever before us that this love is perfected in us (2:5).

4:13 *Hereby we know that we abide in him and He in us, because He has given us of his Spirit-* This complements the statement in :12 that we know He abides in us if we live in love. The presence of the Spirit will produce love, the love of Christ, which is the cardinal feature of His entire Spirit. The Spirit is a gift, given- and not cultivated by our own steel willed effort or felicity in Biblical exposition. The Spirit was given when the Lord was glorified (Jn. 7:39); there is a specific gift given to each believer at the time of water baptism. And the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Spirit (Rom. 5:5). In the context of :12, God abides in us if we know His love. Which is supremely showcased on the cross.

4:14 *And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world-* This continues to comment on the result of the gift of the Spirit (:13), which was given through the cross, and perhaps John himself had literally "seen" the crucifixion and the outflow of blood and water [representing the gift of the Spirit]. Jn. 19:35 says as much: "blood and water came out of his side. And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth". But John says that "we have seen...". We all as it were have beheld the cross just as John did literally. For it was the Comforter who would "testify" of the Lord, "and you also shall testify" (Jn. 15:26,27; 1 Jn. 5:6). The power to witness is given in the strength of the Spirit we are given; otherwise shy individuals somehow find the power to bear major witness, circumstances are arranged whereby the most reserved of us have meetings with others who are searching for the truth of Christ we have encountered and can share with them. John and his fellow apostles had testified of what they had seen, in the preaching which the Gospel of John is a transcript of (s.w. Jn. 3:11; 19:25; 21:24; Rev. 1:2). John sees himself as following the example of the Gentile Samaritan woman, who 'testified' that the Lord was the saviour of the world (Jn. 4:39,42 s.w.).

"Saviour of the world" may at first blush appear a statement and belief that was harmless. But we must appreciate that this very term was exclusively used of Caesar. "The world" was effectively the Roman empire, and within the cult of emperor, the "saviour of the world" was Caesar, and this term could not be applied to anyone else. It was thereby to proclaim that "there is another king, one Jesus", another Emperor with another, eternal, Kingdom / Empire. The apparent reality of the surrounding empire was in fact transient and soon to be overthrown, indeed it had already been

superceded and shown to be a pathetic fake compared with the ultimate truth of the Lord Jesus and His Kingdom. It is no less radical for us today, in the world of postmodernism, to declare that there is only One Saviour, and there is salvation in no other. John's writings, Revelation especially, are full of such deconstructions of the cult of empire- to the point that his writings would have been banned as illegal material. And the counter-cultural spirit of true Christianity is no less radical today.

4:15 *Whoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God-* As noted on :2 and :3, confession was required, not just secret 'belief'; and such confession meant being put out of the synagogues and thereby out of the Jewish world / society. Therefore many 'believed' but would not "confess" (Jn. 9:22; 12:42); see on 2:23. God's abiding in a person is through the Spirit (:13). And yet the Comforter passages promise that the indwelling spirit will empower our witness or confession. This therefore is another evidence of having received the Spirit; that we shall testify, in the power of the Spirit. The false teachers and infiltrators didn't do so; and were not therefore "of God" and their claims to Spirit possession were false. The abiding of God in the believer is through the Spirit. But the receipt of this is predicated upon confessing Jesus as Son of God. I take that 'confession' to therefore refer to water baptism, through which the gift of the Spirit is given.

There is a repeated Biblical theme that the believer's relationship with the Father is essentially *mutual*. For example, we dwell in God (Ps. 90:1), and He dwells in us (1 Cor. 3:16). And here too: "God abides in him and he in God". We work out our salvation, and God in response works in us both to will and to work (Phil. 2:12,13 RV). This is the mutuality which arises from the Spirit.

4:16- see on 1 Jn. 2:24.

And we know and have believed the love which God has toward us. God is love, and he that abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him- The love God has toward us is supremely in the gift of His Son to die for us (Jn. 3:16). This love is an essential part of God, and for Him to abide in us and we in Him means living in the sphere of self-sacrificial love, with that love touching every part of our thinking and doing. And this is empowered by the action of the Spirit within us, which is the means through which He abides in us and we in Him (:13). This speaks of nothing less than a complete psychological takeover of the natural spirit and personality. If we are open to it, we shall be filled with "the fruit of the Spirit", which is finally just one thing- love, in its various manifestations.

The fact the Lord Jesus didn't pre-exist as a person needs some meditation. The kind of thoughts that come to us as we stand alone at night, gazing into the sky. It seems evident that there must have been some kind of previous creation(s), e.g. for the creation of the Angels. God existed from infinity, and yet only 2,000 years ago did He have His only and His *begotten* Son. And that Son was a human being in order to save humans- only a few million of us (if that), who lived in a 6,000 year time span. In the spectre of infinite time and space, this is wondrous. That the Only Son of God should die for a very few of us here, we who crawled on the surface of this tiny planet for such a fleeting moment of time. He died so that God could work out our salvation; and the love of God for us is likened to a young man marrying a virgin (Is. 62:5). Almighty God, who existed from eternity, is likened to a first timer, with all the intensity and joyful expectation and lack of disillusion. And more than this. The Jesus who didn't pre-exist but was like me, died for *me*, in the shameful way that He did. Our hearts and minds, with all their powers, are in the boundless prospect lost. His pure *love* for us, His condescension, should mean that we also ought to reach out into

the lives of all men, never thinking they are beneath us or too insignificant or distant from us. No wonder 1 Jn. 4:15,16 describes believing that Jesus is the Son of God as believing the love that God has to us.

4:17 - see on 1 Cor. 15:10; 1 Jn. 4:4.

In this way is love made perfect with us, so that we may have boldness in the day of judgment- As discussed above, the love of God through the cross, and the Lord's love there, is to motivate us to love others with that same love. This is the work of 'perfecting' or 'developing towards an end'. This however doesn't mean that we will respond by reaching the level of love that the Lord had. The darkness of unlove is still "passing", we are not totally dominated by the Lord's love. But His love in dying for us can perfect our faith that He wants to save us, and so the end result of His love on the cross is that we can be confident of acceptance as we come before Him at the day of judgment. And so we will not live in fear of rejection by Him, because fear is associated with condemnation. Belief in His love means that we are assured of acceptance and therefore not being condemned.

In the grace of Christ, we can have a certain "boldness" in prayer (Heb. 4:16); but we will have "boldness in the day of judgment" (1 Jn. 4:17) in the sense that the attitude we have in prayer now and the experience of the Lord we know now will be that we have in the day of judgment. If He is no more than a black box in our brain we call 'God' or 'Jesus', if for all our Christianity we haven't known Him, so it will be then as we face Him.

The connection is with how Jn. 14:2,3 taught that through the gift of the Comforter, we can be with the Lord "where I am", or "as he is", where He was and is in His relationship with the Father. He prayed for this in John 17; that His relationship with the Father might be ours. And this is effected by the gift of the Comforter, as often noted on John 14-16.

As explained on :12, the work of the Spirit is to perfect or develop our characters towards an ever deeper love, approximating progressively closer to the love of the Lord for us on the cross. By the end of our lives we will have reached the maturity of love intended for us, and thereby we shall be confident in the day of judgment. We shall know that we have the spirit of Christ, which in simplest essence is love like His love; and in this sense, we will have received the eternal life, the spirit of living as He lived, and we can confidently expect to resume living that eternal life through the process of resurrection and glorification.

Because as he is, even so are we in this world- There is a major theme in the NT: that we are living the life of Christ, and thereby His life becomes ours. In this sense we have and live the eternal life. "As he is, so are we in this world"; we will be persecuted as He was persecuted (Jn. 15:20); we fellowship His sufferings, being made conformable to the image of His death, and thereby will fellowship His glory (1 Pet. 4:13; Phil. 3:10; 2 Cor. 1:7). Paul had this idea ever before him: "It is now my joy to suffer for you; for the sake of Christ's body, the church, I am completing what still remains for Christ to suffer in my own person" (Col. 1:24 REB).

4:18 *There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; because fear has punishment-* If we reach the level of love intended for us, then we will have no fear at the day of judgment, but rather "boldness" (:17) and assured hearts (see on 3:19). John writes in such black and white terms, but this does not mean he expects perfectionism. He freely recognizes that we will continue to sin (1 Jn. 1:8-10; 2:1,2). He writes of how we are "in the light", and yet the darkness of unlove is still 'passing' and we are not fully in the light (1 Jn. 2:8). And so despite our imperfection, we can still live "in

love", walking after or toward the commandment of loving as Jesus loved us (2 Jn. 6), and therefore have "no fear" because of God's perfect love toward us.

Murderers often reveal that their psychological motivation was not merely hatred, but often fear- fear of what that person might do, or who they might show them up to be. Fear, therefore, is at the root of all lack of love and respect for our brethren. We fear the poor image of ourselves which they reveal by their actions or examples; and so slander and hatred of them in the heart [Biblical murder] develops. If only we can cast away this kind of fear, then love will take its place; for perfect love comes when fear has been cast out (1 Jn. 4:18). The Greek for 'drive out' is that used in Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30 to describe how the wicked are driven out into darkness at the last day. If we now in this life can cast out or condemn our own fear of rejection, then we will not live in fear... because fear has, or is, its own condemnation (1 Jn. 4:18 Gk.). If we are still consumed by fear, in whatever way, in this life- then this, according to John's logic, appears to be a sign that we will not be accepted in the last day. Fear as a purely nervous reaction is not what he is speaking of. Rather is it the crippling moral fear of which we have spoken.

We are saved by grace, already, we are elevated to the heights of heavenly places on account of being in Christ. A perfect love casts out fear (1 Jn. 4:16,18), fear is associated with bondage rather than the freedom of sonship which we enjoy (Rom. 8:15). Yet all this can in no way erase the very clear teaching of many other passages: that we ought to fear God, really fear Him. What's the resolution of all this? It may be that *ideally*, we are called to live a life without any fear in the sense of *phobos*- in the same way as we are asked to be perfect, even as God is (Mt. 5:48). Yet the reality is that we are not perfect. And perhaps in a similar way, we are invited to live a life without *phobos*, but in reality, it is necessary to have it if we truly realize our weak position. We ought to be able to say with confidence that should Christ come now, we will by grace continue to be in His Kingdom. Yet in the same way as we always assume a future, so we inevitably look ahead to the possibility of our *future* apostasy; as we grow spiritually, there is an altogether finer appreciation of the purity of God's righteousness. The risk of rejection, the sense of the future we may miss, and the faint grasp of the gap between God's righteousness and our present moral achievement, will *inevitably* provoke a sense of fear in every serious believer. And yet fearing God, unlike fear on a human level, is a motivating and creative fear. Our fear of and yet confidence with God is a strange synthesis.

Psychologists suggest that there is something within the human psyche that needs to fear, that wants to fear. Just look at the huge success of terror stories, movies, images, Stephen King novels; and the way that the media realizes that their global audience laps up fear and sensationalism about terror. One common thread throughout all the pagan forerunners of the 'personal Satan' idea is that the pagan concepts all involved the generation of fear and terror. True Christianity aims to "cast out" such fear through its revelation of the ultimate love of God (1 Jn. 4:18). So many control systems have played upon fear of the Devil – to bring children into subdued obedience, flocks into submission to pastors, etc. It's now high time to realize that this is not how the true God works. "For fear has torment" (1 Jn. 4:18), and this is exactly what true understanding of the cross of Christ saves us from. God isn't a psychological manipulator, and He doesn't coax us into submission through fear. And yet it could be said that humanity is increasingly addicted to fear. People may mock fearing a Loch Ness monster, werewolves, funny sounds at night... but they still buy

in big time to fearing a personal Devil. There's something in us that wants to fear something; that just loves the popular idea of a personal Satan. This is why it's hard to budge this mentality.

And he that fears is not made perfect in love- The connection is with 1 Jn. 2:5, where for the man who keeps the new commandment to love as the Lord loved us, "in him the love of God has truly been perfected". The idea of 'perfection' is that the Lord's love in dying for us has worked its intended process to full term; it has done its work, in that we love others with that same crucifixion love with which we have been loved. When that process comes to its ultimate term, we will have no fear of any kind. And yet here again we have an obvious challenge, in that none of us has yet perfectly responded to it. Just as the darkness of unlove is "passing" but is not fully passed. This, then, is a window onto the nature of our eternal existence in the Kingdom. Then, the Lord's love will have worked its intended work. And we shall then fully love as we have been loved. 1 Cor. 13, the classic poem about love, has the same idea. Despite the ideal, we see through a glass darkly, still with some of the darkness of unlove obscuring our vision. But then, face to face.

4:19 *We love, because He first loved us-* The love in view is the love unto death of the cross, the "new commandment". The 'first love' He showed us was in the death of the cross; and it was this death which enabled Him to give His life spirit to us in the gift of the Spirit (Jn. 7:39) which provokes love within us (Rom. 5:5) because love to the end was the dominant aspect of His Spirit. Again we are reminded that this "love" is the love that takes the initiative, in dying for others whilst they are yet alienated from us- rather than being kind and generous to those we perceive as having first been that to us. Love elicits love, as is seen from the response of infants to those who show love to them. And the supreme display of God's love is in the cross. But to love God means to love His children (:20).

4:20 *If a man says, I love God, and hates his fellow believers, he is a liar-* Again the allusion is to Jn 8:44, where the Jewish opposition is likened to Cain, the first liar and murderer. His first lie was in relation to his covering his hatred for his brother. This exactly fits the Judaist infiltrators; their religion had slain their brother, the Lord Jesus, and they were out to slay His brethren. Yet they were trying to hide that fact by slipping into the churches as false brethren (Gal. 2:4). The "liar" is the antichrist, which in John's first context was the Jewish system (see on 2:22).

For he that does not love his fellow believers whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen- These Judaists, for all their talk about 'loving God' [a very Jewish monotheistic term], in fact did not love Him because they did not love His children. We cannot literally see God, but we can 'see' Him insofar as we 'see' His Son. For the Son alone has fully 'seen' the Father (Jn. 6:46). To love the Father is to have His Spirit abiding in us, which elicits sacrificial love for His children, our fellow believers. Any hatred of those begotten by His Spirit therefore reveals that we lack His Spirit, and do not love Him.

Our attitude to others is simply so eternally important. John's writings are characterized by seeing everything in terms of dualism, black and white, good and evil. He describes those who do not love their brethren as having not seen God, as not being a child of God. Martin Hengel has observed: "How one behaves towards a Christian brother at one's own front door is the deciding factor over faith and unbelief, life or death, light and darkness". John demonstrates with piercing logic that hating our brother means that we hate our God. But it is so easy to adopt the position

of the man whom John sets up. We can even think that our love of God is articulated in a hating of our brother, for the sake of God's Truth. It is relatively easy to love God, apparently, anyway. But it's hard to love all our brethren. And yet this means that a *true* unfeigned love of God is not quite so natural and easy as we think. 1 Jn. 5:1-3 make it clear that it is axiomatic within loving God that we love all His children. If we don't love them, we don't love Him. So if we think that loving God is easy, think again. Think who He really *is*, of the inclusive and saving and seeking grace which is so central to His character, and the imperative which there is within it to be like Him.

Biblically, it's impossible to have a relationship with God without relating with His children. This point is hammered home by John, writing as he was to ecclesias riven with factionism and accusation. The result of believing that Christ laid down His life for us, is that we lay down our lives for our brethren (3:16). All believers are the children of God. If we love God, we will love His children (5:1,2). God and His children, the believers, are inseparable. And yet within our human nature is the tendency to try to make a distinction between them. John was fully aware of this: "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also" (4:20,21). Loving our brother is therefore the litmus test as to whether we are "of God", whether we have "passed from death unto life" (3:10,14). It is simply impossible to claim to love God but politely disregard His children. It's not that we must love God *and also* our brother. If we love God we will love our brother, by loving our brother we love God. These things are axiomatic. The intimacy this implies between the Father and His sons is so deep. As those "in Christ", all that is true of the Son of God, Jesus our Lord, becomes true of us. We share His relationship with the Father.

4:21- see on Lk. 10:28.

And this commandment have we from him, that he who loves God, loves his fellow believers also- The "commandment" is to love our brethren as He has loved us on the cross (Jn. 13:34). Here the implications of that are unpacked further. That love of our fellow believers is part and parcel of our love of God, as noted extensively on :20. John keeps on repeating the same things from different angles and slightly playing with the words- in a desperate attempt to get us all to perceive the utterly fundamental importance of love for all our fellow believers.

1 JOHN CHAPTER 5

5:1 - see on Jn. 3:3; 8:42.

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God; and whoever loves Him that begat, loves him also that is begotten of Him- The language of "begotten of" implies the initiative was with the begetter. The begetting is through the Spirit, which becomes effective by water baptism and acceptance of Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah / Son of God (Jn. 3:3-5). So I would read this as meaning that belief in Jesus as the Christ precedes the begetting of the Spirit. And yet admittedly the grammar he can be read as meaning that the begetting of God (by the Spirit) results in our belief in Jesus as Christ. Whatever, He is the prime mover in our spiritual begetting; and we are the objects of the begetting, rather than the prime movers in it. Being God's begotten children makes us brethren of His only begotten Son. We have a natural love for the

Father who begot us; and yet we cannot love God, vertically, as it were, without horizontally loving those others begotten by Him. For His Spirit has worked in many other lives apart from our own, bringing even the most difficult and awkward of our brethren to be likewise God's begotten children. And as explained throughout chapter 4, we cannot claim to have love for God if we don't love His children.

Chapter 4 began this whole section with guidance as to how to spot false teachers. The appeal is not made to compare their teaching against Scripture; perhaps because the converts were largely illiterate and without access to the scrolls of the Old Testament, and the New Testament was hardly in circulation. The questions to be asked were, and still are: Does this person have the spirit of Christ? Have they clearly been born again? Do they love all God's children? Do they confess openly their faith in Jesus as Christ? Do they hate their brother? For false teaching is far more than genuinely misunderstanding some Bible verses. It is more essentially a way of life.

5:2 Hereby we know that we love the children of God: when we love God and do His commandments- As noted on :3 and elsewhere, I suggest that "His commandments" refer to the one great commandment, to love God's children as the Lord loved them, unto death on a cross. This is why 'doing' or 'keeping' the commandments is always associated in John with love, often love of God. For as he has been at pains to extensively point out in chapter 4, love of God and of His children are interrelated. "This is how we know..." (GNB) and similar language elsewhere suggests that although John so often speaks in absolute terms of our living in love and in the "eternal life", he recognizes that there are going to be major doubts within us as to whether we really have reached that level of love. John by all means seeks to comfort and encourage. He looks at the equation of loving God and loving His children from the perspective of asking us to enquire whether we love God.

Or the Greek could simply mean that loving God and do His commandment[s] to love as the Lord loved is the same as loving God's children.

5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous- The plural "commandments" is a reference to the one great commandment- to love our fellow believers as the Lord loved us in dying for us (Jn. 13:34). I have elsewhere suggested that the plural "commandments" is a plural of majesty, referring to the one great commandment: to love our brethren as the Lord loved us. And that fits the context here; for keeping that commandment "is the love of God". God's love and our love for our brethren are mutual and reciprocal experiences.

The Lord's commandments are "not grievous"; it is not that we have been given a whole set of detailed regulations similar to the 613 given by Moses. It is not hard to be obedient to His commandments, 1 Jn. 5:3 implies. The Lord states clearly that He has left us one commandment- to love one another as He loved us (Jn. 13:34; 15:12; 1 Jn. 4:21; 5:2). The plural "commandments" may be a reflection of the Hebraism whereby the plural is used to emphasize the greatness and cardinal value of one singular thing, the plural of majesty. This is perhaps confirmed by Jn. 15:17: "These things[plural] I command you: That you love one another". Love of each other was the great 'thing'. To love should not be grievous; if we are walking in the light of His endless love. Therefore "This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another" (1 Jn. 3:23). The commandment to love as He loved us is only capable of understanding and fulfilment if we have believed into the Name of the Lord Jesus, and experienced that love, having God's

love shed abroad in our hearts by the Spirit we receive after believing into Him (Rom. 5:5). This alone is what makes self-sacrificial love "not grievous", not "heavy" and burdensome as the commandments of Judaism were (Mt. 23:4,23 s.w.). The apparent ease of achievement is because we have been "begotten of God" (:4), which is by acceptance of the gift of the Spirit (Jn. 3:3-5).

5:4 For whatever is begotten of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith- As noted on :1, the language implies that the begetting of God is something done to us, something received rather than of our own volition. It is the birth of the Spirit (Jn. 3:3-5). The language of 'overcoming' is used elsewhere in John about the overcoming of the Judaist false teachers and infiltrators (see on 2:13,14; 4:4), just as the Lord overcame the Jewish world (Jn. 16:33). The overcoming of that world was on account of faith in the Father and Son. Again we see pointed up a colossal conflict between the Jewish and world and those in the Lord Jesus.

"Whatever" uses the neuter rather than the male gender to describe all believers. Most contemporary writers would likely have used the male gender here. The New Testament is in fact sensitive to the gender issue.

5:5 And who is he that overcomes the world, but he that believes that Jesus is the Son of God- The "faith" spoken of in :4 is now defined as faith that Jesus is the Son of God; the confession of which led to being cast out of the synagogue and active persecution from the Jewish world (Jn. 9:22). This faith was both what provoked the opposition of the world, and what overcame that opposition. The Lord Jesus was the one who had overcome the world (Jn. 16:33); perhaps the implication is that whoever believes that He is God's Son, and thereby identifies with Him, will have His overcoming of the world counted to them. His spirit becomes theirs, so that His overcoming is also theirs in practice and not simply counted to them by grace.

5:6 This is he that came by water and blood, Jesus Christ. Not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood- The Lord Jesus "came" that the in water and blood flowing from His side represented the gift of Spirit; for by this He 'comes' to us (Jn. 14:18). He still testifies by three things- His Spirit [making alive the believer], the water [baptism cleansing us] and the blood [atoning for our sins]. The choice of 'three' things doesn't refer to a trinity- rather is it the principle of Dt. 19:15, requiring two or three witnesses. The water and blood are mentioned together, and then the Spirit is added; as if "two or three". And note how inanimate things are spoken of as giving witness (Gen. 31:45-48; Dt. 31:28)- the three that bear witness don't refer necessarily to three persons, as the trinity wrongly states. Those things which the Lord enabled, witnessed through us today, provide the witness to the fact that He 'came' in the past and 'comes' to us today, in the sense that He 'comes' to us through the gift of the Spirit (Jn. 14:18). "Not with the water only" may be a reminder that water baptism alone will not save; we must be born of water and spirit (Jn. 3:3-5).

The witness of the Lord and of His disciple were one and the same. The witness on earth was a reflection of that in Heaven (1 Jn. 5:6,7).

5:7 And it is the Spirit that testifies, because the Spirit is the truth- This is included in :6 in some manuscripts. The water and blood are joined by the Spirit as a witness. John began in 4:1 writing of how to tell whether a teacher was a genuine Christian, but he moves on to discuss how we personally can be assured that we are of God. The Comforter was given to empower individual Christian witness (Jn. 15:26,27). If we perceive that our witness to the Lord is empowered and backed up the action of the Spirit, we know that we are of God and have truly received the Spirit by which He abides in us. The outflow of water and blood from the Lord's pierced

side spoke of the gift of the Spirit towards His followers; for the Spirit was given because He was glorified (Jn. 7:39). John himself was an example of this; for having made his testimony about the outflow of water and blood, he adds: "And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe" (Jn. 19:35). This testimony was by the Spirit gift, for the Comforter testified and the disciples also testified; their testimony / witness was the witness of the Spirit (Jn. 15:26,27). Thus John there linked together the water, blood and the testimony of the Spirit. "The Spirit is truth" is a clear reference to the Comforter gift as "the spirit of truth" (Jn. 16:13). In 4:6 John has spoken of discerning "the spirit of truth" and "the spirit of error"; all true Christians had "the spirit of truth", and the Judaist infiltrators with their false claims of Spirit gifts had "the spirit of error".

5:8 For there are three who testify, the spirit and the water and the blood; and the three agree in one- As noted on :7, this alludes to how John personally had recorded the testimony of spirit, water and blood in his account of the crucifixion and the outflow of water and blood from the Lord (Jn. 19:34,35).

Beholding the cross and the water and blood that flowed from it, John struggled with the inadequacy of human language: "He that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true" (Jn. 19:35). Years later he described himself, in allusion to this, as he "who bare record [in the past tense] of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:2). He had earlier commented here that the Spirit, water and blood of the cross bore witness. John seems to be saying that the Lord's final death which he had witnessed was the word of God, the testimony of Jesus Christ. And in Rev. 1:2 (see note there) he is saying that as he had been a faithful witness to this, so now he would be of that further revelation he had now seen in the Apocalypse.

5:9 If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater. For the witness of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son- "The witness of men" refers in the context (see on :7 and :8) to the account of John and others about the outflow of water and blood from the Lord, an account or witness that was testified by the Spirit, which backed up the testimony of the disciples (Jn. 15:26,27). And although those who had believed John's gospel record had received that witness, the greater witness was that of God, the witness of the Spirit within the believers (:10). God's testimony concerning His Son was not just in the words of those who had visibly, personally witnessed the Lord's death and the outflow of water and blood which symbolized the gift of the Spirit. The greater witness was in the fact that that gift of the Spirit within the believer also testified within them (:10). This was the more essential witness which God had testified of His Son. For it was the Comforter who would make that witness, confirming the faith initially exhibited in the crucifixion record (Jn. 15:26,27).

This experience of an acceptive mutuality between God and man is surely at the very core of our spirituality; it should be part of an inner spiritual shell that nothing, *nothing* can shake: aggression from our brethren, disillusion with other Christians, persecution from the world, painful personal relationships... Israel were to give their hand to God, and His hand in turn would give them a heart to follow Him further (2 Chron. 30:8 cp. 12 A.V.mg.). "This is the witness of God... He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness *in himself*... the (i.e. this) witness of God is greater" than that of men (1 Jn. 5:9,10). The ultimate proof that the Truth is the Truth is not in the

witness of men- be they archaeologists, scientists, good friends or who. The real witness of God is deep in yourself. "Taste and see, that the Lord is good" (Ps. 34:8) is the most powerful appeal. John is using a legal word for "witness". There is, of course, something intentionally contradictory here. For a witness must be independent of yourself. You can't really be a valid witness to yourself. But the Lord said that He was a witness of Himself, and this witness was valid (Jn. 8:14-18). We, too, John is saying, can be a valid witness to ourselves that our faith is genuine. Our personal experience of the Lord Jesus *is* valid. Paul proves the resurrection of Jesus by saying that "he has risen indeed" exactly because he (Paul) has seen the risen Lord (1 Cor. 15). This is the kind of 'evidence' we tend to fight shy of. But our personal experience of the Lord Jesus *is* a valid prop to our faith, according to the passages considered.

5:10- see on 1 Jn. 1:10.

He that believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself. He that does not believe God has made Him a liar; because he has not believed in the witness that God has given concerning His Son- As noted on :9, the witness in ourselves is that of the Spirit, confirming our faith in the word about the cross which we initially heard. The 'liars' are associated with the Judaists (see on 2:22). They refused to believe the witness which God gave of His Son during His ministry through the miracles; and the witness they now refused to believe was the witness of the Comforter, witnessing through the lives of those transformed by the Spirit (Jn. 15:26,27). The internal witness within every believer creates a witness to the world that the Lord is indeed alive, and is the Son of God. To disbelieve that witness is culpable; for every one who comes to faith because of the witness of the spirit of Christ in a believer, there are many who see the same witness and refuse to believe. This is making God a liar; He has made a witness / legal testimony that His Son is alive and living through those in Him; and those who disbelieve it have placed themselves in the role of judges, and chosen to dismiss His testimony as fraudulent.

We have the witness within ourselves; for the witness is the word and life of Christ, His eternal life, which lives in us (5:10,11). The Lord Jesus didn't witness to His word by giving out bits of paper or teaching a catechism; He was, in person, the constant exhibition of the word He witnessed to. And with us too. I'm not saying don't write books, give out literature, speak words from platforms... but the more essential witness to men is that of our lives, that witness which wells up from the word and life of Christ within us. The way God's word is made flesh can be seen in Hosea. His going and marrying a worthless woman is prefaced with the statement that this was the beginning of the word of the Lord (Hos. 1:2). The command to go and marry her was not so much "the word of the Lord" to Israel as his marriage and example of true love to his wife. Hosea's example in his marriage was the word of the Lord to Israel. He made the word flesh. The Lord did this to perfection, and yet like Hosea we in principle must do the same.

We each have the witness of the Lord's resurrection in ourselves; we are witnesses, both to ourselves and to others, in that the life we live is a witness that He is within us; the testimony of the Spirit is our testimony to the world (Jn. 15:26,27). But a witness in a courtroom isn't expected to argue the case, prove the truth or press for a verdict; but rather to simply report what actually happened in their experience. This is where I personally see little point in 'apologetics'- trying to prove there is a God or that the Bible is true. These are matters of faith in the end. We are called not to apologize for God but rather to be witnesses from ourselves of the work of the Father and Son.

If we are real witnesses, testifiers to the reality of the Lord's death and resurrection, we *must* therefore, by the very nature of our experience, be witnesses of these things to the world. The resurrection is the witness that God has given of His Son. Whoever believes that witness, will have within themselves the witness- they will be witnesses to God's witness. The witness of the Gospel is within ourselves in the sense that it is our Christ-like life which is the essential witness to Him. Hence Peter says that a woman can win her husband to Christ "without the word", i.e. without formal, conscious preaching. Paul parallels his preaching with God 'revealing' Jesus through him (Gal. 1:9).

The souls under the altar cry out (Rev. 6:10). But those men and women of Heb. 11 are then described in Heb. 12:1 as themselves "witnesses". Who they were is their witness, the testimony which is given of them in the court of Heaven and upon which God's judgment is decided. We have the witness in ourselves, and yet it is a witness which is in fact God's witness / record to us (this is the context of 1 Jn. 5:6-11). The Spirit itself bears witness with our Spirit, that we really are the Sons of God (Rom. 8:16); the Holy Spirit testifies, and we also testify (Jn. 15:26,27). In this sense Paul's conscience bore him witness in the Holy Spirit, i.e. his testimony was that of the Spirit (Rom. 9:1). The rejected are witnesses against themselves (Is. 44:9; Mt. 23:31).

We labour and strive in the preaching of the Gospel "because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Saviour of all men" (1 Tim. 4:10 RV). The certainty of our hope is the basis of our witness. "The witness is this, that God gave unto us eternal life... he that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself" (1 Jn. 5:10,11 RV). We will witness from a sense welling up within us, that we have in prospect been given eternal life. If we have ourselves believed that the good news of the Gospel really is good news, we will inevitably share that message. Good news can't be kept to oneself. News of engagement, marriage, child birth... is spread somehow and yet urgently by those affected by the events. Even the most retiring of people can find a way to communicate the good news of their first child or grandchild. Sometimes I find my e-mail clogged up with big attachments of baby photos- from people I scarcely know! But their sense of good news compelled them to make contact with me. And so it will be with us in the round of encounters and conversations which make up our daily lives. We will get the word out, somehow. We will break barriers and boundaries in order to engage people in conversation about the one thing that really and essentially matters to us. And, believe me, passively, beneath the show of casual indifference, people *are* interested. And Bill Hybels claims from surveys that "about 25% of the adults in the US would go to church if a friend would just invite them".

Not believing in God and not believing in His word of the Gospel are paralleled in 1 Jn. 5:10. God is His word. The word "is" God in that God is so identified with His word. David parallels trusting in God and trusting in His word (Ps. 56:3,4).

5:11 *And the witness is this: that God gave to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son-* Our witness is a life lived, the kind of life we shall eternally live in the Kingdom. That life given to us is the life of the Lord Jesus, His Spirit. That life is the life now lived in His Son, within the mind of the exalted Jesus now. The Gospel of the future Kingdom was therefore explained in terms of parables about how life should be lived now; the "eternal life", as John puts it, the Kingdom life, lived in us now. But this life is a gift, the gift of the Lord's spirit, living and thinking as He does; the life which is "in His Son". This is so true to observed experience; that it is not the exposition of doctrinal truths which in itself makes a powerful witness, but rather of the Kingdom

life, the eternal life, the life which was and is in Christ, being lived in human life before the eyes of our fellows.

5:12 *He that has the Son has life. He that does not have the Son of God does not have life-* John is at pains to stress that the gift of life (see on :11) is the life of God's Son. Hence the Greek reads literally "*the* life"- the life of Jesus. There can be no legitimate spiritual life or spirituality outside of Him. And he writes this against the background of the Judaist infiltrators arguing that there was spiritual life to be had from legalistic obedience, even if the Lord's Divine Sonship was denied. The Lord Jesus and His life are intimately connected; "the Son has life in Himself" (Jn. 5:26). To have Him is to have His life. And to 'have' the Son is to 'have' the Father (2 Jn. 9).

5:13- see on Mt. 16:16; Jn. 20:31; 1 Jn. 1:3.

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life- Clearly there were some who had believed into the Name of Jesus, demonstrating it through baptism into that Name, who doubted their salvation, and whether they had in fact received the promise of "eternal life" as a present experience. In this we find John addressing so many of us. John has flung out from discussing how to recognize a true Christian and thereby reject false Christians into the more personal application to ourselves. We who have believed in the Lord have received the gift of His Spirit, His life, which is an eternal life.

5:14- see on Mt. 18:19; Jn. 15:27.

And this is the boldness which we have toward him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us- If His Spirit and life abides within us (see on :13), then His will is within us, and the Spirit teaches us directly, revealing "all truth" to us (Jn. 16:13). This "truth" is here spoken of as knowing His will. As noted on Jn. 15:7, if His Spirit, His *logos* abides in us, then we shall ask what *we* will and receive it. Our spirit is His Spirit; and so we shall perceive better over time what is His will, and our prayers will be for those things. And they shall be answered. This increasingly positive experience of answered prayer, which comes about from progressively knowing His will, is another evidence that we are indeed indwelt by the Lord and can be confident that we have "eternal life", His Spirit; for the context of :13 is encouragement to those who have believed and received the Spirit and yet still have their doubts. The Lord's Comforter discourse said as much- He there taught that answered prayer means that our joy will be full (Jn. 16:24).

Eph. 3:12 uses the same word about our "boldness" in access to God in prayer on account of Christ. The same Greek word is used about our "boldness" in the day of judgment (2:28; 4:17). Our attitude to God in prayer now reflects our general attitude toward Him (3:21; Heb. 10:35). We cannot clothe ourselves in some special spirituality when we come before Him in prayer nor at the day of judgment; who we are in our hearts with Him now is who we are in prayer and who we will be at the last day. We come "boldly [s.w.] before the throne of grace" (Heb. 4:16)- both before God now, and before Him at the last day. Each time we pray to Him, we have a foretaste of the judgment experience- if only we will take prayer seriously enough to perceive it. The word is used about the generally "bold" attitude we can have in witnessing before men in this life; for if we can be bold before the holiest of all, the very judgment presence of God, we can be bold before men right now in our preaching (Phil. 1:20; 2 Cor. 3:12; Acts 2:29; 4:13,31; 28:31), just as the word is used about the "boldness" of the Lord's own preaching which is the pattern for ours (Jn. 7:26; 11:14; 16:29; 18:20).

For as He is and was, so are we to be in this world (4:17). But these are ideals; even Paul had to ask others to pray that he might preach as "boldly" as he ought to (Eph. 6:19). The reality of the judgment seat will likely be somewhat different, with many staggered in unbelief by the Lord's positive recital of all our good deeds.

But we must add a caveat. God indeed answers prayer as a result of the fact that we believe and as a token that we are acceptable before Him. But there are examples of where God answers the prayers of those who don't believe with a full faith, and even of those who later will be condemned (Zacharias; the believers praying for Peter's release; Mt. 7:21-23). The relationship between faith and answered prayer is not so simple as it appears in some passages. God is working with us at a higher level than simply responding to our words as a token of His acceptance of our faith.

5:15 And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we obtain the requests we have asked of him- John has just cited answered prayer as a proof that the Spirit dwells within us, progressively revealing His will so that our prayers are not so much hit and miss but coincide with His will. But there can still be a residual doubt as to whether prayer is being answered as we envisaged and requested. John therefore parallels "He hears us" with 'obtaining the requests we asked'. It is through possessing the Spirit, the Comforter, that we have the Lord 'doing' things in response to what we ask (Jn. 14:13,14; 15:7,16; 16:23-26- all a major emphasis). But the Lord's 'doing' in response may not be articulated in the terms we expected. The request [literally, 'the ask'] asked will be 'done'; but not always as we expect.

5:16 If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask and God will give him life for them that sin not to death- The 'asking' here must be understood in the context of teaching about 'asking' and definitely receiving in :15; it is through possessing the Spirit, the Comforter, that we have the Lord 'doing' things in response to what we ask (Jn. 14:13,14; 15:7,16; 16:23-26- all a major emphasis). For those who sin not unto death, it seems that our prayers definitely can 'work' in recovering them; for this is the Lord's will, and all we ask according to that will shall be granted. This is a phenomenal challenge to our prayerfulness, rather than observing others slipping away and shrugging our shoulders, or politely lamenting it to others. In response to such prayers, God will "give life" to the person prayed for; the life in view is the life lived by and in the Lord Jesus, His life, His Spirit. It is of course true that in some ways, we are ultimately responsible for our own salvation; our brethren can't really help us, if we wilfully chose to rebel against our calling. And yet there is reason to think that up to a certain point, our prayers and pastoral concern for our brethren can save them, whereas without our effort they would not be saved. James 5:15,20 say the same: "...the prayer of faith (uttered by faithful friends) shall save the sick (struck down with sickness as a result of his sin, which seems to have happened in the first century, cp. 1 Cor. 11:30; Acts 5:5) ... and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that you may be healed... he who converts the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins". Behold the power of freewill effort for others: For the sake of our prayers, in some cases sins of others can be forgiven when otherwise they wouldn't be. For the sake of our conversion of our erring brethren, they can be saved from eternal death and have their sins covered. The Lord's prayer says as much- we ask God to forgive us *our* sins; not 'me my sins'. Likewise only once Israel had passed a certain level of sinfulness was Jeremiah told to cease prayer for them (Jer. 7:16 cp. 11:14). Until that point, God seems to have been willing to read Jeremiah's prayer for them as their prayer (his "cry" was seen as theirs). And Ez. 14:14,18 imply the same- Noah, Daniel and Job could have delivered Israel up to a

certain point, but they were *so* hardened in sin at Ezekiel's time that even those men wouldn't have saved a nation which otherwise, for a lower level of sin as it were, they could otherwise have saved. If we have any grain of love in us, we will likewise dedicate ourselves to fervent prayer for our brethren, seeing it does have effect and validity within certain boundaries.

There is a sin unto death. Not concerning this do I say that he should make requests- The allusion is to blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (Mk. 3:29). In the context, John is up against the problem of Judaist infiltrators who falsely claimed to have the Holy Spirit, but who did not openly confess the Lord as Messiah and Son of God, and who were consciously trying to destroy the Christian movement (cp. Gal. 2:4). Paul was up against these same blasphemers of the Spirit in Corinth and Ephesus (as per 1 Timothy). These men were not to be prayed for in the same sense as weak but genuine believers were to be prayed for.

5:17 *All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not unto death-* John urges them to accept that although sin is sin, not all sins lead to death; and the reason they don't is because other believers can pray for the sinners, and they shall receive the gift of life, the Spirit, the life of Jesus, to strengthen them (see on :16). The onus upon us to pray for others is huge.

5:18 *We know that whoever is begotten of God does not keep on in sin; but he that was begotten of God keeps himself, and the evil one touches him not-* The One begotten of God was the Lord Jesus; the "evil one", the devil / satan, both of the flesh and of the systemic Jewish opposition to Him, did not touch Him. The prince of this world had nothing in the Lord (Jn. 14:30), and He was untouched by the temptations of 'the devil' in the wilderness. But all believers have been begotten of God through allowing the Spirit to birth them (Jn. 3:3-5). This active process of the Spirit means that whilst they are still committing sins (1:10 etc.), they do not continue in the life given over to sin, for the Spirit changes and cleanses them. We are kept from falling, but we must also 'keep ourselves'; there must be some willing response from our side. The Spirit does not zap a man and force him to transformation and salvation against that man's will and volition.

5:19 *We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one-* We know that we are born of God because that begetting was of the Spirit (Jn. 3:3-5). The Spirit abiding within us is the proof that we are His. The whole Jewish world [not just the more visible or aggressive parts of it] were in the power of "the evil one", a phrase earlier used about the 'satan' / adversary of the Judaist system of opposition to Christianity (see on 2:13,14; 3:12; 5:18). In the wider application of these words after the first century, we take from this the impression that there are two 'spirits' operating; that of God, the Holy Spirit / spirit of Christ, and that of the world. There is a 'spirit' in and of the age / world where we live, a ghost in the machine, a principle of thought and being which can be summarized as "the flesh", or the Biblical 'devil'.

5:20 *And we know that the Son of God came, and has given us an understanding so that we truly know him that is true; and we are in him that is true, in His Son Jesus Christ-* The coming of the Son of God is through the gift of the Spirit, the Comforter, whereby we feel His presence even more really than when He visibly lived amongst men (Jn. 14:18). John is saying that we can be confident that we have received of His Spirit. We have been given "an understanding", or literally, 'a mind'. The same word is used elsewhere of how the Lord through His Spirit enlightens our mind (Eph. 1:18); the gift of the Spirit envisioned in the new covenant is of God's way being put into

and written in our mind (Heb. 8:10; 10:16), and of "the mind" purified by the Spirit (2 Pet. 3:1). A mindset is given us; we do not develop it solely by our own mental effort. And that mind / disposition is given *so that* we might know / have a relationship with Him that is true. For "the spirit of truth" would "teach you all things" (Jn. 14:26 and see note on 1 Jn 2:27).

This is the true God and eternal life- This whole verse is allusive to Jn. 17:3, which defines the eternal life which we are now given as knowing / being in living relationship with "the true God". John is not saying that the Lord Jesus is "the true God". The allusion to Jn. 17:3 cannot be doubted, and there we have "eternal life" defined as 'knowing the one true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent'.

William Barclay (*New Testament Words*) has a very interesting section on the word *aionios*. He cites examples in contemporary literature where it is used not of indefinite continuance, but simply of that which is beyond time. "To attach eternity to the created was impossible. So He (God) made time as a moving image of eternity... the essence of the word *aionios* is that it is the word of the eternal order as contrasted with the order of this world... the word can be properly applied to no one other than God... the life of God". This helps us understand how 'eternal punishment' is not in fact punishment of unending continuance. And yet eternal punishment is set as the antithesis to eternal life (Mt. 25:46); this itself shows that "eternal" is not to be understood as unending continuance. For the wicked will not be punished for ever- they will die and cease existing. The Lord Jesus *is* eternal life (1 Jn. 5:20); this alone points us to see "eternal life" as more a description, a quality of life, rather than indefinite continuance. Those who "seek for glory, and honour, and immortality" are granted eternal life, as though "eternal life" comprehends all these things for which they seek (Rom. 2:7).

5:21 *Little children, guard yourselves from idols-* Idols were anathema to Judaism. But the temptations to return to Judaism were no more than idols. The statement at first blush is unusual. John's letter uses a very limited vocabulary, and recycles the same word families and ideas. But now, as the last statement of the letter, we have a new word and concept introduced: "idols". We expect the thought to be developed further, but it is not. It seems a new idea is introduced right at the very end, and left hanging. And there is no sign off to the letter. We are left with "idols" as the last word. But this is all intentional. The truth that we now have the eternal life, the spirit and presence of the Lord Jesus, the love of God, the life we shall eternally live, and are thereby assured of salvation... all this is such a wonderful truth that John has kept repeating it from different angles. But with such an ultimate truth in view, he pleads with us not to be distracted from it by anything. Absolutely anything else, be it the Judaism of the first century Jewish world or the materialism of our age, is nothing but a false god, idols, a distraction from the ultimate truth of the cosmos.