



1 John Chapter Two

- I. 1 John 1:1-2:17 - God is Light and Christ is Love (continues/concludes)
- I.b 1 John 1:5-2:14 - Walking in the Light (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Two

The letter did not have chapters and verses when John wrote it and the start of this chapter concludes John's remarks about Christian sinners. Having commented on those who claim not to sin, he now gives encouragement in the first two verses to those who recognise that they do still sin. Believers should thank God that Jesus is there as an intercessor when they do still sin. John goes on to show the knowledge and true love of God.

In the next section of this chapter, John deals with fraternal love, which is the natural outworking for those who have the love of Christ within them. Although John is giving the message that has always been known through original teaching, he also states that it is a new message, for there is renewal in God's love as it shines into the darkness.

John then gives a list of exhortations to believers, addressing them as children, young men and fathers, which may refer to the maturity of believers in their walk of faith. It certainly does not exclude women from the teaching.

John then moves on to give warnings, firstly against the seduction of the world and then instructs his readers to be wary of the antichrist, not just the devil, for they are in danger from all those that oppose the work of God. Although some believers will be tempted by what these people are offering, they only have to know that they have the power of the Holy Spirit and the teachings of Christ in their hearts, which will always protect them while they abide with God.

The chapter then ends just as a new section of the letter commences, in which John speaks of believers as being the true children of God.

I.b.ii 1 John 2:1-6 - Jesus Christ in Everyday Life

The light that God sheds on daily living comes through his Son: <<***This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all***>> (1 John 1:5).

¹ My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

1 John 2:1

My dear children. John's way of addressing his readers, which he uses on six other occasions, see v.12, v.28, 1 John 3:7, 3:18, 4:4 and 5:21, exemplifies the love which he genuinely holds for his readers as an elder statesman within the church community. It also denotes them as being born of God through their acceptance of the Gospel: <<***He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God***>> (John 1:10-13). Paul speaks of them as they would be treated by God as their heavenly Father: <<***For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children***>> (1 Thessalonians 2:11).

Will not sin. All people sin in this life. Even though the hearts of believers are changed through their relationship with Christ, they still wage war with their sinful nature and are likely to slip back to worldly ways if they do not hold on to the teaching they have received, such as that which John **writes** to them here.

But if. This is the final if statement of six used by John in this portion of the letter. They are written in pairs, where three give rise to false deductions that someone might make following on to the statement that God is light. The other three are used to show what will happen to those who hold on to the truth in faith. As stated, they come in pairs and this one is paired with: <<***If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives***>> (1 John 1:10), which shows the foolishness of self-delusion, which is to deny the truth.

Jesus is an advocate, i.e. **one who speaks**, by taking up the cause of believers in the presence of God the Father. If he were not there to mediate with the Father, their sin would bring swift but fair judgment upon them. Paul speaks of Christ in his role as the intercessor: <<***For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus***>> (1 Timothy 2:5), and Hebrews 8:1 refers to him as high priest, whose role would have been to intercede on behalf of God's chosen people: <<***The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven***>>. The term advocate, Greek *parakletos* is used in several translations and is normally a term used for the Holy Spirit along with other terms like Comforter or Counsellor: <<***When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about***>>.

me>> (John 15:26). Once again, this gives us a clear indication of how the apostles understood the deity of both Christ and the Spirit, yet knew there was only one God: <<**Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one**>> (Deuteronomy 6:4). The difference is perhaps that although the Holy Spirit does intercede for us in our prayers he also helps us to intercede for ourselves: <<**In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express**>> (Romans 8:26).

Speaks to the father. The proper place for an advocate is with the Judge. Therefore Christ resides in heaven. Although he does not plead the innocence of those on trial for they are all guilty; it is his own righteousness that he pleads in order to secure the release of believers from the punishment they should all face. For his righteousness unto death has bought righteousness for all who turn to God through him. With a righteous advocate before a righteous God, there will only ever be one outcome - a righteous judgement, whichever way the hammer falls. Jesus has a unique relationship with the Father, a bond closer than any human can imagine. The unity they share in the Godhead can be seen in the language of Jesus' prayer in John Chapter 17, which shows that such a unity of will exists between Jesus and the Father, so Jesus is aware that whatever he asks of the Father will indeed be granted to him. And what he asks for is forgiveness of repentant sinners. And it will be granted.

Another key reason for him to be there is that while he was on earth: <<**The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth**>> (John 1:14). By returning to the Father, Jesus enabled the Spirit to come, who now dwells not just 'among us' as Jesus did, but within believers.

² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

1 John 2:2

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins is often translated as propitiation, Greek *hilasmos*, here meaning 'a sacrifice that bears God's wrath and turns it to favour'. Just as Jesus' death has effected purification, cleansing and forgiveness of sin, so now, John asserts, it atones for a believer's sin. It removes sin so that they may continue in fellowship with God. Sin is a blot on the light, and it must be removed. All the images used to speak of Jesus' death remind the readers of this letter that they have fellowship with God on the basis of Christ's atoning work on their behalf. Otherwise they would remain in the realm of darkness, impurity and sin. However, Christ's death removes the guilt and washes away the impurity that comes from sin.

Jesus' blood propitiated or satisfied God's wrath, so that his holiness was not compromised in forgiving sinners. Some scholars have argued that the word propitiation should be translated expiation, the wiping away of sin, but the word cannot be restricted to the wiping away of sins as it also refers to the satisfaction or appeasement of God's wrath, turning it to favour. God's righteous anger needed to be appeased before sin could be forgiven and God,

in his love, sent his Son, who offered himself willingly in order to satisfy God's holy anger against sin. In this way, God demonstrated his righteousness, which refers particularly to his holiness and justice.

As the only perfect atonement sacrifice for sin, Jesus permanently turns away God's wrath from those who come to him through Christ: <<*This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins*>> (1 John 4:10).

For the sins of the whole world does not mean that every person will be saved, for John is clear that forgiveness of sins comes only to those who repent and believe the Gospel: <<*Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son*>> (John 3:18), <<*I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life*>> (John 5:24), <<*This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother*>> (1 John 3:10), and: <<*He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life*>> (1 John 5:12).

However, Jesus' sacrifice is offered and made available to everyone in the whole world, not just to John and his current readers, as confirmed by the prophet: <<*And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the survivors whom the Lord calls*>> (Joel 2:32). This means it is every tribe and nation, in every generation, that Jesus is reaching out to with the hope of salvation being offered to those who respond, as John confirms elsewhere: <<*After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands*>> (Revelation 7:9).

³ We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.

1 John 2:3

It is not uncommon for disciples of Christ to sometimes wonder about their own salvation. A common thought might be, 'Do I really know God?', or 'am I really saved?' What John is offering in this verse is a litmus test. Obedience, although not perfect obedience in most cases, is the manifestation or evidence of knowledge of God. Those who willingly obey God's call on their lives know God and have answered the call, even if they do continue to sin from time to time!

We know that. Assurance of salvation is possible but should not simply be taken for granted and neglected. John's fellow apostle wrote: <<*Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*>> (2 Peter 1:10-11), where the 'things' he calls on his readers to do are: <<*For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge;*

and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love>> (2 Peter 1:5-7).

This letter, too, gives numerous means of self-diagnosis: *<<But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin>> (1 John 1:7), <<We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death>> (1 John 3:14), <<We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit>> (1 John 4:13), and: <<This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands>> (1 John 5:2).*

Here the test is ethical: ‘do professing Christians have a changed life and obey the Lord’s commands?’ Obedience to God does not bring about justification, which comes by faith alone, but obedience as a pattern of life does give evidence that one has been born again and has the genuine faith. Jesus requires this as a test of friendship: *<<You are my friends if you do what I command>> (John 15:14).*

Believers must avoid the notion of cheap grace. Cheap grace means living as though God ignores or condones sin. But forgiveness means that sin is real, and must be dealt with. It cannot be ignored, because God does not ignore it. The denial of sin is not grace; it is a lie. Cheap grace means living without the demand of obedience upon a repentant sinner. It requires obedience to God’s will in order to receive the grace of the Cross.

In the 21st Century it is quite common for people to ‘do their own thing’. For many people there is often no real sense of right or wrong in daily life, providing it does not involve outright criminality. A popular song at funerals is Frank Sinatra’s ‘My way’. It was an attitude that was seen in Israel, at a time when the nation lurched from one crisis to another: *<<In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes>> (Judges 17:6 KJV).* There is a king who requires obedience and for those who remain faithful to him there are rewards in this life and there will be future rewards in the next that are beyond human imagination: *<<However, as it is written: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him”>> (1 Corinthians 2:9).*

To come to know him involves a personal relationship with God that transforms practical behaviour. It is the personal relationship that marks out a person’s faith as being genuine. It also demonstrates a clear difference between Christianity and any other faith, since the time God stopped speaking to his people as recorded in the OT Scriptures. Before that time there was some hope for those who came to God through the Law of Moses but too few could do so.

This verse and the following three link back to the previous chapter where John wrote: *<<But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin>> (1 John 1:7),* as recently noted. The converse of v.3 also applies in that, if believers fail to obey his commands, they have not really come to know Christ at all. Sadly, believers too frequently fail to grasp what they really have

in Christ. They know of Christ but do not truly come to know him, and that is why they fail to obey his commands. However, they still boast as if they do know him and are in fellowship with him, often simply because they attend church every week. This boasting recalls the words of Paul: <<Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God; if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth – you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who brag about the law, do you dishonour God by breaking the law? As it is written: “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you”>> (Romans 2:17-24). This is the very attitude that John is speaking against. Refer to the series commentary on Romans Chapter Two for a discussion on Paul’s words.

⁴ The man who says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

1 John 2:4

I know him. It is not just head knowledge that is required but the faith to fully submit one’s whole self to the will of God that is required: <<You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder>> (James 2:19). The question is not ‘how do I get this knowledge of God’, but ‘what does knowledge of God look like?’ or ‘how does it express itself?’

The idea that knowledge of God expresses itself in obedience has its roots in the OT. The prophets especially spoke of knowing God, although more often they rebuked the people for not knowing God: : <<Eli’s sons were wicked men; they had no regard for the Lord>> (1 Samuel 2:12), <<But if they do not listen, they will perish by the sword and die without knowledge>> (Job 36:12), <<The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner’s manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand>> (Isaiah 1:3), <<Therefore my people will go into exile for lack of understanding; their men of rank will die of hunger and their masses will be parched with thirst>> (Isaiah 5:13), and: <<“You live in the midst of deception; in their deceit they refuse to acknowledge me,” declares the Lord>> (Jeremiah 9:6). The lack of knowledge of God does not imply intellectual inadequacy in comprehending God. Rather it points to a moral failure, to a lack of faithfulness and obedience. Those who know God live according to the way that God prescribes. Knowing God is understood in personal, intimate and relational terms. If a person claims to know and love God but does not give themselves completely over to his will, their claim is hollow and false. Those who do know God have their character, behaviour, indeed, their whole lives shaped by his grace, love, righteousness and truth. In fact, God’s truth is viewed as something that is active, indwelling and powerful, something that shapes the person in whom it dwells. Obviously, then, those

who have God's truth within them, and who truly know God, will themselves manifest God's character.

But does not do what he commands. Paul has clearly encountered similar people and warns of them: <<*They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good*>> (Titus 1:16).

Obedience is not following a set of rules, or going to church on a Sunday, or reading a bible chapter each day. It is an outworking that comes from knowing and being in relationship with the only true and living God. Those who do not have that fundamental relationship do not have the truth of God's Word in their heart, i.e. the truth is not in him, and therefore cannot truly know God, they simply know of God. This is self-deception, and John labels such a person as a liar.

⁵ But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him:

1 John 2:5

If anyone obeys his word. This is not a condition of faith but a characteristic of it. The answer to the question 'What does God want of us?' is the response, 'Obedience to God's commands'. This may seem vague but is deliberate. Christians are not given directions, but direction. That direction can be summarised as 'walking in the light'; as striving to conform their character to that of God. What CS Lewis wrote in another context fits here: "We might think that God wanted simply obedience to a set of rules; whereas He really wants people of a particular sort". And the sort of people that God wants are those who hope to conform themselves to the very character of God. The obedience that God wants is not simply a response because he tells them what to do but a change of heart that makes them want to do the same things he wants, in the same way he wants them doing. He could have built robots to simply do his bidding, but they could never have been programmed to come to an intellectual or emotional understanding that makes them want to do his bidding.

God's love is truly made complete in him. This love is not only a feeling but also an ethical response, i.e. obeys his word. As with genuine faith, there is always a practical response to demonstrate the true heart of a believer.

How we know we are in him. Any one that is truly in Christ will demonstrate it through their fruit: <<*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law*>> (Galatians 5:22-23).

The church leader James wrote: <<*You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?*>> (James 2:20). In the same way, claiming to know God without any clear, concrete outworking of that knowledge is equally useless. This outworking may express itself in various ways including prayer, praise, worship, service to others and demonstrations of love for a neighbour. Jesus demonstrated his obedience by giving himself to God's will and dying on the Cross: <<*"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done"*>> (Luke 22:42).

It is interesting also to note what John is not saying here. He does not say the more obedient a disciple is, the more God's love will be displayed. It is not a faith that operates by degrees or gives rewards for effort and achievement. John does not criticise believers for 'not doing enough', but is showing the natural outworking for true obedience to God, even though humans are naturally flawed in their thinking and actions. King David tried to be faithful to God even though he knew he was still a sinner, especially in terms of his affair with Bathsheba, then his subsequent role in having her husband Uriah killed, but God forgave him and it was said of God that: <<*He testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do'*>> (Acts 13:22b). God does not look at the outward person but at the heart, where he looks for compatibility with his own heart: <<*But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the Lord's command*>> (1 Samuel 13:14), and: <<*Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding*>> (Jeremiah 3:15).

⁶ Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

1 John 2:6

Walk as Jesus did, which is the way that led to the Cross. Believers need not and cannot repeat Christ's unique saving death, but they can mirror his faith, love, piety, obedience, and self-sacrifice, and this pattern of life will give greater assurance that: <<*we are in him*>> (v.5). Jesus will always remain the perfect example, which should always be held up as the ultimate example of obedience and sacrifice for the Father's will: <<*Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these*>> (John 5:19-20), and: <<*"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father"*>> (John 10:14-18). The point is not that believers are expected to manifest perfect obedience in all that they do. Rather they are to reflect on their lives, asking whether their thoughts, words and deeds show that their primary, in fact, only allegiance is to the God who is light.

I.b.iii 1 John 2:7-11 - The Primacy of Love

John's focus shifts to the command to love and the challenge of living out the Gospel message in a world where darkness (v.8-9 and v.11), and the evil one (vv.13-14), seem to dominate.

It is easy to lose touch with the basics of knowing the God who includes love as a key personal attribute: <<*Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love*>> (1 John 4:8).

A believer's response to God is a personal matter, although it has to be recognised that Jesus' atoning death and the teaching that preceded it calls for an obedience to love others. Jesus' death not only provided the example of love, it also created the community in which that love is to be practised and expressed.

⁷ Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard.

1 John 2:7

Dear friends is also translated as 'my dear friends' and 'brethren' showing the degree of fraternal love that is on display in John's heart and mind as he writes to these people. John, as a hand-picked apostle of Jesus, had a remarkable pedigree and testimony but he, like the other NT writers, displays genuine love and humility that naturally sits with all good church leaders throughout the ages, for they know they are but faithful servants of God.

Jesus confirmed the greatest of God's commandments: <<*Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments"*>> (Matthew 22:34-40). He also renewed these teachings, so they also constitute a new command: <<"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another">> (John 13:34-35). It is what the apostles have known since the beginning: <<*This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another*>> (1 John 3:11), <<*And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another*>> (2 John 5).

The old commands, both of which are commanded in the OT: <<*Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord*>> (Leviticus 19:18), and: <<*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength*>> (Deuteronomy 6:5), are in essence about a believer's love for God and love for all others. They have not been superseded by this new teaching, simply reinforced, for the term is not so much old but familiar. What was new about Jesus' command was that he was creating a new community in and through which that love could be fully expressed. That community is a place where such love can be learned and practised, but it must never be limited to being expressed solely within the confinements of that community. It was always intended that the love of God should be shared with all of mankind; something the church cannot do behind closed doors, or even behind open doors!

⁸ Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.

1 John 2:8

The darkness is passing. The age to come has not yet fully arrived: <<*Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is*>> (1 John 3:2), but it is progressively advancing in this world, for the true light is already shining.

God's people can reflect his light by embracing the new command to love which, as already stated, is simply restating what has always been in God's heart since the beginning.

⁹ Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. ¹⁰ Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. ¹¹ But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.

1 John 2:9-11

John had earlier demonstrated the impossibility of living within two spheres, light and darkness. Now he is showing the same impossibility of living within the community that Christ has established and yet not loving all the members of that community. To love everyone does not necessarily mean that a believer likes everyone's character or that he should seek to spend a lot of his time in their company. It is about being there for them in times of need, as well as to help each other grow in the grace and love of the God they all serve.

Nothing in him to make him stumble. The true believer is protected from the traps and snares that can bring the unwary down. Here, that is demonstrated through the believer's love for his brother or sister. David concurs with John and shows the blessing of being in this position: <<*Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble*>> (Psalm 119:165). The Lord's brother shows that it is not necessarily unbelief that will make someone stumble from time to time: <<*We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check*>> (James 3:2). However, the prophet confirms that the Messiah, who would be manifested in Jesus, would cause unbelievers to stumble: <<*The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread, and he will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare*>> (Isaiah 8:13-14), this was confirmed by Jesus and Peter, who both quoted from Isaiah.

Hates his brother. John often writes in black-and-white terms for emphasis, e.g. light vs. darkness, truth vs. lies. The term hate used by the Jews did not always reflect the emotions that the word conjures up today. This can be seen in Scripture: <<*Then Samson's wife threw herself on him, sobbing, "You hate me!*

You don't really love me. You've given my people a riddle, but you haven't told me the answer." "I haven't even explained it to my father or mother," he replied, "so why should I explain it to you?">> (Judges 14:16), <<"I have loved you," says the Lord. "But you ask, 'How have you loved us?' "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" the Lord says. "Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals">> (Malachi 1:2-3), and even the words of Jesus: <<If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters – yes, even his own life – he cannot be my disciple>> (Luke 14:26), where it more a case of loving less or not treating them with the love they deserve, which is what John is calling for here. Paul provides a summary statement: <<Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good>> (Romans 12:9).

The call not to hate is not limited just to those within a fellowship but also relates to those who may have left, even if their presence had been disruptive to the community. Believers are called to forgive and to love. It is God's responsibility and role to judge.

Whoever loves his brother. All disciples are called to love their fellow believers, their neighbour and their enemy. All these are commandments from God and yet sometimes it seems hard for this to be achieved in reality. People come in all shapes and sizes, different habits and attributes, some of which clash with other people. Disciples are called to see beyond the outward person and look to the heart as God does. Knowing that God loves someone should be sufficient for a believer to love them too; in reality it is not easy. Neither was the Cross. John calls on his readership to love one another, although there was a time in his life when he and his brother James were less than charitable, being chastised by their Lord for their attitude toward their neighbour: <<As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village>> (Luke 9:51-54). On that occasion John was given a lesson on true grace, which he now teaches to those whom he is writing to. Grace is a lesson for all generations.

In the context of his letter, what John is probably asking is: 'who truly manifests the love for their brothers and sisters that Jesus commanded, those who have left the fellowship or those who have remained?'

Darkness has blinded him. In contrast to light, darkness and blindness in Scripture often represent rejecting God's truth and persisting in sin: <<Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?" Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains">> (John 9:39-41), <<For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: "He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their

hearts, nor turn – and I would heal them”>> (John 12:39-40), and: <<The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God>> (2 Corinthians 4:4).

The central role of love in the Christian life is clearly demonstrated in John’s writing, for he was a man who lived out his faith rather than just talking it up. What he shows his readers is that love must be the distinguishing mark of Jesus’ disciples, with his new command taking its point of departure from the Mosaic commands to love the Lord with all one’s powers and to love one’s neighbour as oneself, but Jesus’ own love and teaching deepen and transform these commands. Jesus has taught love for one’s enemies: <<*You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect*>> (Matthew 5:43-48). The command to love one’s neighbour was not new; the newness was found in loving one another as Jesus had loved his disciples. In light of Jesus’ subsequent death: <<*as I have loved you*>> (John 13:34b), implies a love that is even willing to lay down one’s life for another. This too was confirmed by Jesus: <<*Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends*>> (John 15:13).

I.b.iv 1 John 2:12-14 - The Confidence of God’s People

The style of John’s writing shows that he knows his message is greater than the sinister realities against which he warns. The method of emphatic, repeated direct address points to John’s strong feelings and determination to bring assurance to his readers. He expresses his confidence in the role of the Father and the Word of God in their lives.

Some commentators view dear children, young men, and fathers as symbolising the stages of spiritual maturity in a Christian’s life. Others think ‘dear children’ refers to all of John’s readers, while ‘fathers’ refers to longer serving believers and ‘young men’ to those newer in the faith. The use of young men and fathers does not restrict this teaching to males only. It can be taken in cultural terms or simply seen as generic, but both the teachings of Jesus and God’s creative power clearly show there is no difference between male and female in kingdom terms.

The text in the following three verses is displayed as if it were given in the form of a quote but, just as many churches today may reaffirm their commitment by way of proclaiming a liturgy or creed, John is reaffirming what they had learned from the beginning of their faith as a way to remind them of who they are and just how far they have come in their walk of faith.

¹² I write to you, dear children,
because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.

1 John 2:12

Dear children could represent all believers, for they have received forgiveness, or it could be those new to the faith, who have most recently received their salvation by turning to God through Christ. It does not matter which way this is interpreted for the outcome is the same: <<**No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest**>> (Hebrews 8:11). It is a wise and secure child that truly knows his Father and obeys his will.

Forgiven. John's readership, throughout the generations, would only have received forgiveness if they had truly repented of their sins and turned to God through Christ. It is an entry requirement to becoming part of the family of God.

Your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. John is also taking into account that his readers have repented of their sins and have accepted Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour. In Jewish thinking, name represented the whole character and attributes of a person. Therefore, on account of his name can be read 'for the sake of who he is and what he has accomplished'.

His name could refer to either God the Father for the forgiveness of saints brings glory and honour to his name. Alternatively, it could equally apply to Christ for their forgiveness comes because of the redemption price paid by Christ, whose name should be equally honoured for that. The latter was probably intended.

13 I write to you, fathers,
because you have known him who is from the beginning.
I write to you, young men,
because you have overcome the evil one.
I write to you, dear children,
because you have known the Father.

1 John 2:13

You have known him. Although John is addressing this statement to those addressed as fathers, it does not imply that these are older men who had personally witnessed Jesus in his earthly ministry. They know him through their personal relationship that comes through their complete faith and trust in him. Paul is a prime example of a man who discovered the true knowledge of God in Christ: <<**What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ**>> (Philippians 3:8). Those who have this personal relational knowledge of Christ are more than ready to give up what the world offers for the sake of knowing Christ, just as Paul and so many others did.

It was customary for Jews to refer to their elders as fathers as a matter of respect, for it was thought that generally wisdom and knowledge came with age and experience. Older men usually expected and received due respect. It is right to respect those who have been in the church longer, although they need to know that they do not have a monopoly on wisdom, experience or spiritual gifts, as was

shown in the story of Job: <<So Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite said: “I am young in years, and you are old; that is why I was fearful, not daring to tell you what I know. I thought, ‘Age should speak; advanced years should teach wisdom.’ But it is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that gives him understanding. It is not only the old who are wise, not only the aged who understand what is right>> (Job 32:6-9).

Who is from the beginning. Again, John is most likely referring to Christ’s pre-existence compared with the original creation of the cosmos.

Overcome the evil one. Jesus overcame Satan on the Cross and those that have come to faith in Christ have nothing to fear if they remain in Christ. However, no human has the power to match the devil on their own. John addresses this section to the young men, which could be either age related, or newer but not novice Christians, where both groups would have the vitality for battle against evil, and against the lure of the world that has such a strong hold on so many people. Their vitality comes from the strength of Christ that is bonded to them in their faith. The prophet speaks wise words as a warning over such young men as these: <<Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint>> (Isaiah 40:31).

Paul had written on the subject of spiritual warfare: <<For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms>> (Ephesians 6:12), which is similar to what John writes here. It does not imply that God has abandoned the world to the evil forces and certainly not that they are more powerful than he is. In fact, John here writes in the past tense for the outcome of the battle is assured: <<victory rests with the Lord>> (Proverbs 21:31b), and Paul provides the answer to the outcome of the spiritual warfare he speaks of: <<But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ>> (1 Corinthians 15:57).

I write to you dear children masks the meaning of John’s letter to some extent for it was written in the aorist tense. He is therefore linking what he writes here to the earlier statement that they had been forgiven through the actions of Christ and therefore their knowledge of the Father comes through their knowledge of Jesus as the Christ.

You have known the Father. Anyone who knows the Son knows the Father. It is worth repeating the conversation between Philip and Jesus: <<Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work>> (John 14:8-10).

John has a realistic view of what that victory implies. Already he has made it clear that it does not mean the Christian lives without sin in this life. Victory is not found in moral perfection, but in having the discernment to know the way to life and to walk in it. Now his readers need to be admonished to take what

was an initial choice and make it a continued commitment. Again, the metaphor of the path is appropriate, for victory is not a plateau that is attained but a path on which they have set out and on which they continue to walk.

14 I write to you, fathers,
because you have known him who is from the beginning.
I write to you, young men,
because you are strong,
and the word of God lives in you,
and you have overcome the evil one.

1 John 2:14

Because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you. If these literally are young men then it may refer to physical strength but the idea of them being relatively recent converts, who are mature enough to be fervent in their new found faith, and in receipt of the strength that comes naturally to those when they first come to faith, then grows with their maturity from children to young men. The latter idea also seems to fit with the idea of the Word living in them, although this really should be a reality for all believers - it is the reason why this series is called 'The Word Is Alive'!

In summary, then, this section demonstrates the same pastoral concern for building up the congregation that has been seen before. By reminding them of who they are and what they have been given, John assures his readers that they can be confident that they know God. Each statement of v.14 describes the believer's standing in salvation: as children of God, they are strong, they have God's word abiding in them and they have overcome the evil one. But these are not simply abstract truths or creedal assertions. The author's point is twofold: Firstly, we can have confidence with God because God is not capricious or fickle, arbitrarily tinkering with the truth or changing the grounds on which he is to be known. Secondly, this same, faithful God is not alien and distant, but knowable; knowable to all believers, knowable to the individual, in the love of Christ. What God revealed in Christ was not a new side of the divine character, but the confirmation of the love and forgiveness that have always characterised God's actions.

What John writes is not new to his readers. But it serves a useful function to lay it all out again, to spell out exactly what constitutes the 'way of life'. By so doing, John prepares his readers for the warnings that follow in vv.15-17. If they have chosen the way of life, the way of forgiveness and knowledge of God, they must continue in their commitment to it. For there is no other truth and no other way, except the love of the world, and that way is incompatible with the love of God.

I.c 1 John 2:15-17 - Do Not Love the World

The love of the Father implants a desire to break with idolisation of the world. Although this present passage does not provide rules and regulations, it does make plain the incompatibility of love for the world and love for God.

¹⁵ Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

1 John 2:15

John virtually rewrites this verse in the next chapter, with the exception that it looks more at an outworking of faith: <<*If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?*>> (1 John 3:17).

To understand this verse, it is necessary to understand what John means by world, Greek kosmos. In his own writing he sometimes uses it as a term to describe God's creation, the place where all humans live. This was seen as very good by God at creation. It can also be used to describe all the people of the world, whom God certainly loves as will be discussed in a moment. The bible does not teach that believers should abstain from living in the communities of the world. If they did they would not be able to share the Gospel truth with anyone! The love of the world that John is speaking against are all of those aspects that oppose God, those which turn a believer's attention away from God towards idolatry or to anything that may cause harm to a neighbour. All the things, in fact, which fail to reveal the truth, righteousness and justice of God.

Therefore, do not love the world should not be read as an utter rejection of the world: <<*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*>> (John 3:16). Rather, John warns against devotion to a world system that is opposed to God: <<*Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out*>> (John 12:31), <<*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will*>> (Romans 12:2), <<*You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God*>> (James 4:4), and: <<*We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one*>> (1 John 5:19). God did not send his Son to save the world only to see it returned to the way it was before he came, dark and without hope.

Love of the Father probably carries a double meaning, referring both to the love God has for his people and the love they have for him. The former generates the latter: <<*Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins*>> (1 John 4:7-10).

The human heart is too narrow to hold both a true love of the world system that opposes God and the necessary and total love a believer should have for God. The first commandment given to Israel at Mount Horeb is that: <<*You shall have no other gods before me*>> (Exodus 20:3). Some forty years later

their leader Joshua reminded them they had a choice: <<But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord>> (Joshua 24:15). Jesus recognised the weakness in the human heart when he said: <<“No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money”>> (Luke 16:13). John is now reminding them that they can have only one loyalty and one allegiance. Again, he is not giving them a new command: <<This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live>> (Deuteronomy 30:19).

¹⁶ For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world.

1 John 2:16

In warning against everything in the world, John does not demonise the whole created order: <<God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning – the sixth day>> (Genesis 1:31). Rather, he gives examples of what the believer should guard against: the cravings, the lust, the boasting. Human desires are part of God’s creation and therefore not inherently evil, but they become twisted when not directed by and toward God.

It should be noted that the Greek word *epithymia* is used for both cravings and lust in this verse.

The cravings of sinful man uses the Greek word *sarkos*, which means flesh. These cravings or lusts are often so called pleasures of the world that are so harmful such as sexual immorality, over indulgence in eating and drinking, or seeking power, wealth, possessions and striving for status, for all the wrong reasons. All these things draw people away from God.

The lust of his eyes is distinguished from the sinful flesh, although many of the sins are usually the same, materialism, wealth and greed. However, people are often drawn to what they see as being desirable that can again be position or possessions and especially sexual immorality as well: <<You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart>> (Matthew 5:27-28). King Solomon gives a strong warning as well: <<Death and Destruction are never satisfied, and neither are the eyes of man>> (Proverbs 27:20). None of these things reveal the insight of God in a person, but are shaped by the world in the sense that John warns against.

Boasting of what he has and does. Believers know that it is God who provides all good things; it is he who gives people their individual gifts and skills. However, even they, and perhaps especially they, fall into the trap of believing what they have accomplished was done by their own ability and they cannot seem to help

themselves but boast of their achievements. This is down to individual pride, or a sense of self-sufficiency and self-reliance. Paul too challenges such people: *<<For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?>>* (1 Corinthians 4:7). Such people often look for the praise of their fellow man rather than looking to God. Some have done so at the cost of their eternal soul: *<<Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God>>* (John 12:42-43).

It is always sad to see this in the church. Someone often starts out by being committed to the work they do. They achieve all sorts of good things and are raised up by the praise they receive from their brothers and sisters. After a while the person starts to crave for the status and accolades and they start to do even more work, not because it is God's will but because they will be viewed well by the church.

¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

1 John 2:17

The world and its desires pass away. Its appearance of permanence is deceptive. History is not an endless cycle but is speeding toward a conclusion willed by God: *<<All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shrivelled figs from the fig tree>>* (Isaiah 34:4), *<<The day of the Lord is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head>>* (Obadiah 15), *<<Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the Lord's wrath. In the fire of his jealousy the whole world will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live in the earth>>* (Zephaniah 1:18), *<<The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name>>* (Zechariah 14:9), *<<Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire,>>* says the Lord Almighty. *"Not a root or a branch will be left to them">>* (Malachi 4:1), and: *<<Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come>>* (Matthew 24:42).

King Solomon wrote a poetic refrain describing the passing of the world and its desires that would fit with John's thinking: *<<Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them" – before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain; when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim; when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; when men rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint; when men are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags himself along and desire no*

longer is stirred. Then man goes to his eternal home and mourners go about the streets>> (Ecclesiastes 12:1-5). What has become of all the pomp and pleasure of those who are now in the grave and face only eternal damnation for their soul?

Lives forever. God is not a created being. He has always existed and always will. Augustine, in a sermon on this text wrote: ‘Hold fast to Christ. For you, he became temporal, so that you might partake of eternity’ (Homilies on the First Epistle of John 2.10). Just as those who believe in Christ will live forever alongside God it is also comforting to know that his Word will also endure: <<**Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away**>> (Matthew 24:35, Mark 13:31 and Luke 21:33).

II. 1 John 2:18-3:10 - Overcoming Antichrist by Confession of the Son

John sketches details of the challenges Christians face and how these may be surmounted. The primary challenge in this section of the letter, which believers will face, is that of the false pretenders who seem to make attractive offers but which are false promises that can lead only to destruction. John also makes a call for them to hold on to what they have so they will remain true children of God.

II.a 1 John 2:18-27 - Warning Against Antichrists

The existence of the antichrist (v.18), and those trying to deceive Christians (v.26), is alarming. But John is confident that they can find the resources to remain strong in Christ (v.29). Jesus had commanded his disciples to: <<**Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing”**>> (John 15:4-5). Those who remain attached to Christ will persevere until the end.



This artist’s impression of the devil is probably way off the mark. If he truly looked like that everyone would identify him for what he is and avoid him like the plague. However, Scripture shows us that he is far more subtle and cunning than to portray himself in this way. In the same way, the false teachers that John speaks of will sound plausible in most of

what they teach. Their doctrine may not seem too different to that of the truth but if studied carefully the subterfuge can be uncovered. If the gullible are taken in by what they say they can be led away from the truth and fed increasingly different ‘truths’ until their lives a full of guiding fictions. Things they believe to be true and right to do, but which are eternally devastating for them and for many others as well. That is why John uses the strong term antichrist rather than the more familiar term false teacher or false prophet found elsewhere. Paul calls them wolves to also point out the devastating effect they can have: <<**I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to**

draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears>> (Acts 20:29-31).

¹⁸ Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.

1 John 2:18

Dear children. Again, some commentators believe John has new believers in mind who might be more susceptible to be drawn away to the world, whereas others believe he uses this term to denote all believers, calling them his children as he is their elder and pastor, their spiritual but not their true father. Paul held a similar position with his church congregations: *<<Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel>> (1 Corinthians 4:15).*

The term the last hour is not intended to suggest the finality of all things but a time when God's salvation plan is brought to fruition: *<<In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and peoples will stream to it>> (Micah 4:1); something Peter confirmed at Pentecost when he quoted from Joel 2:28 <<In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams>> (Acts 2:17).* Paul confirms this to be his understanding as well: *<<These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come>> (1 Corinthians 10:11).*

The last hour began with the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth: *<<In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe>> (Hebrews 1:1-2); and was confirmed with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, as recently commented on.*

It is also the last hour in that the coming of the Messiah, long predicted in the OT, has now occurred. His saving death and resurrection have been accomplished, and now the work of the Holy Spirit in building the church is a key event in the history of salvation that needs to occur before the Christ of God returns to claim his inheritance, God's earthly kingdom and all the people who have bound themselves to him in faith. His Second Coming could occur at any time and those who believe in him are called to be prepared for that momentous day. This current period is called 'the Church Age' by many scholars and is also known as the 'now but not yet' of the Kingdom of God. It will mark the conclusion of Daniel's Seventy 'Sevens': *<<After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed>> (Daniel 9:26).*

When the Second Coming of Christ does occur, then a new age, the final eternal age will have occurred. An age in which God has promised the faithful that: **<<He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away>>** (Revelation 21:4). For people like these antichrists, but also for every other person who has not accepted Christ, will face a different outcome: **<<But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death>>** (Revelation 21:8).

Broadly, an **antichrist**: **<<is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ>>** (v.22b). More specifically, John understands such a person to be a human representative of the evil one of whom Jesus spoke: **<<My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one>>** (John 17:15). They can also be people who are only interested in themselves.

Many antichrists refers to all the people who are doing the devil's bidding and not God's will. Jesus had spoken of their appearance: **<<For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect – if that were possible>>** (Matthew 24:24). These were the forerunners of the dissolution of the great Jewish state, nation and faith as it was formerly known. Here, John gives a prophetic warning lest they achieve the same with the Christian faith, however unlikely that may seem. The Church of Christ will endure although there will be many casualties as parts of the body are drawn away by these great pretenders of the faith and their brother atheists.

The antichrist is only mentioned with this name in the NT by John as here, in v.22, and: **<<This is how you can recognise the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world>>** (1 John 4:3). John will refer to him again in his second epistle: **<<Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist>>** (2 John 7).

Although he does not use the term antichrist, it is likely that Paul speaks of the same evil force, preferring to refer to 'the Man of Lawlessness' and his deceivers: **<<Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow**

with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendour of his coming. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved>> (2 Thessalonians 2:1-10).

¹⁹ They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.

1 John 2:19

John's readers had recently seen people leave the church, they went out from us. Although they outwardly belonged to the church, their departure revealed that they did not really belong of us; that is, they did not have genuine faith. If they had been committed members of the church, belonged to us, that is, if they had been genuine followers of Jesus, they would have remained faithful in their walk with John and his companions. This does not apply to people who have simply moved to another committed fellowship.

Those that went out from us may well have included those of whom Luke writes: <<*Some men came down from Judæa to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved"*>> (Acts 15:1). These are generally accepted to have been Christians from a Pharisaic background who went down from Jerusalem to try to Judaize Christians, which was the primary reason for calling the Jerusalem Council, but their motives may have been darker than that. Either way they were overruled by the church in Jerusalem. Similarly, it could also be those who tricked the Galatians into turning away from the true faith: <<*You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?*>> (Galatians 3:1-2).

This implies that those who are truly saved will never abandon Christ, for they will be kept by his grace: <<*To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen*>> (Jude 24-25).

But their going showed that there was probably divine purpose behind the departure of this group, and it is known that: <<*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose*>> (Romans 8:28).

²⁰ But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.

1 John 2:20

An anointing from the Holy One probably means being regenerated by the Holy Spirit, with the Holy One most likely referring to a gift from the Godhead rather than from one of the three persons, although it was a title given to Jesus by a demon: <<“*What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God!*”>> (Mark 1:24). In the OT, physical anointing with oil was commonly used to specifically separate people for God’s service: <<*After you put these clothes on your brother Aaron and his sons, anoint and ordain them. Consecrate them so they may serve me as priests*>> (Exodus 28:41), and: <<*So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power. Samuel then went to Ramah*>> (1 Samuel 16:13). This was an outward sign of the inward transforming and empowering work of the Holy Spirit: <<*The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners*>> (Isaiah 61:1), and: <<*Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come*>> (2 Corinthians 1:21-22).

Their anointing puts them in a secure position, providing they stay close to God in good times as well as bad. Peter had offered a similar warning to his churches that John has been doing in this section, along with a similar solution to overcome the problem: <<*Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen*>> (2 Peter 3:17-18).

²¹ I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth.

1 John 2:21

Because you do know it. John is not writing anything these people had not been taught before but is reminding them of its relevance, truth and authenticity. Many of the NT writers wrote ‘reminders’ in this format: <<*I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me*>> (Romans 15:15), <<*Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you*>> (Philippians 3:1), <<*Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking*>> (2 Peter 3:1), and: <<*Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe*>> (Jude 5).

No lie comes from the truth refers to the Gospel truth these churches have received from the apostles. Because they know it to be the truth and that any falsehood would negate it as truth, these believers will be able to discern what

they should do. Those who are grounded in biblical truth are in a strong position to repel any attacks that come upon that truth.

²² Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist – he denies the Father and the Son.

1 John 2:22

Who is the liar? John clearly describes the antichrist as he who denies that Jesus is the Christ and who denies the Father and the Son. That Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God is one of the best attested facts known to mankind, for it has been attested to on earth, from heaven and from hell, with his death and resurrection witnessed by hundreds of people. The apostles, who were eye witnesses of the truth, were prepared to die proclaiming that truth; would they have so willingly suffered and died for a known lie or deception?

18.02 Some see this as a simplistic statement that the Christian community acknowledge Jesus as the Christ and those described as the antichrist deny him. They then assert that John is referring to the Jews who failed to accept Jesus as their long-awaited Messiah. This seems too simplistic and narrow. For one thing, it would not explain how these people came to be part of a fellowship in the first place, if they were Jews who denied Jesus as the Christ. They must have believed something, or pretended to at least, but was their knowledge a revelation from Christ or just some fanciful notion in their own mind? Also, what were they accepting and what were they denying? It seems not so much that they denied that Christ came, taught many great things, performed miraculous signs and wonders, and was killed for doing so. It seems to be more that they did not accept the full and true identity that goes beyond someone who came to mediate between believers and God, and to eventually rule his kingdom. It is the failure to accept the truth that the Father and the Son are one, of the same essence. Any teaching that denies the full account of Christ or adds more to it than was there in the first place, is not holding to the truth, and is to be considered to be a heretic.

The world's religions do not constitute many paths to the one God, for all except the Christian faith refuse to confess that Jesus is God's Son.

²³ No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

1 John 2:23

John wants to make a clear distinction between the faithful believers who have stayed within the fellowship and those false believers who have departed. Again, their denial of Christ is a denial of his full role and not just aspects of who he is or what he did. Accepting Jesus entails holding a true understanding of him, and his atoning and intercessory work. It also requires believers to accept all his teaching and commands. It requires a believer to acknowledge both that he mediates salvation and *how* he mediates that same salvation.

The very real danger facing John's church and the church today is to water down and ignore the realities of human sinfulness and God's demand. And this

happens in many ways. It happens when the Gospel is turned into a panacæa for the problems, big and small, that believers and indeed mankind all face, and the sum and substance of the Gospel becomes a promise for a better life defined on human terms. It happens when the church preaches only what God generously gives to them and not what God also expects of them. It can happen when people label as being acceptable what the Scriptures label as intolerable: injustice, unkindness, intolerance, immorality, hatred, greed, selfishness, and so on. And it happens when alternative ways to knowing God, whether in other religions or movements, such as the New Age movement, are condoned as acceptable ways of salvation. It is not the church or Christian believers who claim they have the sole right to salvation but it came from the mouth of the Lord himself and it was faithfully recorded for everyone else by an eyewitness, the one who wrote this letter as will be demonstrated shortly.

No one who denies the Son has the Father. Elsewhere John writes: <<*Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son*>> (John 3:18). Those who do not believe and trust in Christ have neither a positive nor a neutral standing before God. They stand condemned already before God for their sins because they have not trusted God's solution for guilt, the only Son of God. This verse also refutes the assertion that a sincere person following any religion can have eternal life with God.

Whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also. Jesus takes it a stage further by confirming that all those who choose to follow him will actually have access to the Father: <<*Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"*>> (John 14:6), because: <<*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved*>> (Acts 4:12). John confirms this later in his letter: <<*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life*>> (1 John 5:13).

²⁴ See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father.

1 John 2:24

What you have heard from the beginning. That is the Gospel brought to them by the apostles and other true teachers of the faith, which is the original and authentic saving message of Christ's atoning sacrifice for sin, along with his conquest over death and hell.

Remains in you. It is not just the teaching they have received but the Holy Spirit that indwells and guides believers. He will always remain within a believer providing their heart is open to him and he is not expelled through the acceptance of new ideas or new teachings that may seem more attractive than the truth. This can be avoided if a believer maintains a strong, stable and vital, but not static, personal relationship with God. This requires a person to give themselves over to prayer, praise, worship and meditation, especially on the Word.

You also will remain in the Son and in the Father. This would be an answer to Jesus' elegant prayer for all believers who would come to him through the Gospel message and would remain in him: <<*My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me*>> (John 17:20-21).

²⁵ And this is what he promised us – even eternal life.

1 John 2:25

What he has promised. Eternal life in the presence of God the Father is not just fanciful thinking as some critics of the Christian faith would claim for it is based on the promises of God, that were recorded by witnesses who heard the promises being made: <<*“I tell you the truth,” Jesus said to them, “no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life”*>> (Luke 18:29-30), <<*My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand*>> (John 10:27-29), and: <<*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God*>> (Revelation 2:7).

One of the examples given is not recorded by an eye-witness, but one who had carefully researched it by talking to those who did hear the words spoken, and Luke confirms this to be the case: <<*Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word*>> (Luke 1:1-2).

²⁶ I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray.

1 John 2:26

God had said a similar thing through the prophet hundreds of years earlier: <<*I wrote for them the many things of my law, but they regarded them as something alien*>> (Hosea 8:12).

Who are trying to lead you astray. False teachers became a problem from the earliest days of the church and will always be something that believers need to be aware of, which is the purpose of John's warning here. Jesus, Paul and Peter also warn of the dangers these men pose: <<*Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves*>> (Matthew 7:15), again we have the warning given by Paul to the Ephesian elders at Miletus: <<*I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them*>> (Acts 20:29-30), <<*As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may*

command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer>> (1 Timothy 1:3), and: <<But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them – bringing swift destruction on themselves>> (2 Peter 2:1).

²⁷ As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit – just as it has taught you, remain in him.

1 John 2:27

Anointing was something that was used to symbolise setting someone apart for God's service. See comments made on v.20.

That this anointing remains in you implies that Christians have the resources to discern doctrinal error and to give them the strength to resist all that oppose the church. It is worth reflecting on Paul's words on this again: <<**Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come**>> (2 Corinthians 1:21-22).

You do not need anyone to teach you. It is essential that all believers, whether new to the faith or disciples with many years of service behind them, to receive regular, high quality teaching based on Scripture. Even church leaders still need to receive regular teaching from others they respect. John is not disputing that, for by writing this letter, he is obviously teaching them. What John probably means is that they have God's anointing on them, which is sufficient instruction to abide in him: <<**God is exalted in his power. Who is a teacher like him?**>> (Job 36:22), for he teaches infallible truth. They also have no need for any instruction that diverges from the Gospel message, and can dismiss any such human teaching without further thought.

Not counterfeit. Throughout history people have copied all sorts of original things. Highly valued art is one area where counterfeit copies have been made, some have been quite poor copies and some have passed even the most scrupulous examination by experts, only to be found fake later on. That the anointing of believers is not counterfeit but real is essential. As with the example of bogus art, false teaching and false anointing might be difficult to detect unless a believer is bound solidly in their faith to Christ.

II. b. 1 John 2:28-3:10 - Children of God

Having reaffirmed his readers' commitment to the true Son of God, not the Antichrist (vv.18-27), John urges them to strive for the ethical integrity and sense of urgency appropriate to their spiritual identity. If a believer can maintain a vibrant conviction of their own salvation and the joy that rightly brings, they can live in confidence that their relationship with God is working well.

²⁸ And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.

1 John 2:28

Continue in him means to abide in a strong relationship with Jesus, continue to study his Word and believe and implement what Jesus has taught, which is demonstrated by walking in obedience to him. This verse shows that continuing to trust Jesus and obey him is one test to show who are really his disciples. Jesus has said: *<<If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free>>* (John 8:31b-32), and: *<<Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me>>* (John 15:4).

So that. Maintaining one's personal relationship with Christ will prevent straying into doctrine or conduct of which one will be ashamed at his coming.

When he appears, many will lack confidence and will be ashamed before him, because he will come in judgment. That shame does not indicate loss of salvation, for God is still going to judge those that have believed, although he may have some unpleasant truths to say to some who have not been as faithful as they should have been! Those who are shown to be true will not be ashamed, as Paul confirms: *<<When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory>>* (Colossians 3:4). Those who denied him will be ashamed of their unbelief and rejection of him. There are those in the church who may expect to feel ashamed because they did too little to persuade others to join them in their belief. There may even be those who were ashamed to be associated with Jesus in this life for whatever reason, of whom Jesus speaks: *<<If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels>>* (Mark 8:38). What John is saying, however, is that when the time comes the true believer will not need to feel shame and the disbeliever will.

John is not teaching that these believers are in danger of losing their status as children of God or even their eternal salvation, but he is exhorting them to continue in their faith, in order to remain on the path they know to be right.

²⁹ If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him.

1 John 2:29

To know that he is righteous is to have placed one's faith in Christ, not in one's own moral uprightness. Righteousness comes from God and is not something that is achieved in one's own strength or capabilities. It is not a product of good works, but one acquired through faith in Christ alone.

Those who have the privilege to be called as children of God have a responsibility to be righteous, which is not simply an intention or feeling, but is manifested in deed and truth, in the moral quality of a believer's life. It is important to note

that righteous behaviour does not make a person a child of God, i.e. born of him. It is being a child of God that leads a person to living in righteousness. One is the outworking of the other.

Been born of him. Those who have accepted Christ for their salvation are shaped into his likeness in order to be of service to him: <<***For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do***>> (Ephesians 2:10), and: <<***It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption***>> (1 Corinthians 1:30).

The new spiritual nature of a believer is derived from knowing the Lord Jesus Christ. The one who holds fast to the faith they have in Christ, particularly during difficult times and periods of suffering, gives good evidence that he is born from above, from the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ is an everlasting Father. It is a great privilege and dignity to be born of him. Those that are so, are the children of God. It is worth repeating John's words from his Gospel account: <<***Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God***>> (John 1:12).