

No Darkness At All

A Commentary On The Letters Of John

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To The Good Shepherd

This short commentary on three of the pre-eminent letters of the New Testament can be read as a Bible study aid or as a devotional. Truly John, the Beloved Disciple, knew much about his Lord and his Friend Jesus that we need to take in, learn, and live. John's philosophy of the faith is at the same time simple, encouraging and challenging.

CHAPTER ONE

1JOHN 1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life;

1JOHN 1:2 (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)

1JOHN 1:3 That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

1JOHN 1:4 And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

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There is no witness like an eye witness. John was a part of the innermost circle. Along with his brother James and Peter he had seen all of Jesus that there was to see on this earth. And later he saw more when he saw and wrote the Revelation. He was with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration. He laid his head on Jesus' chest at the last supper. He was the first man to arrive at the empty tomb. He outlived all of the original twelve to die at past 100 years of age. He was the foremost eyewitness to the ministry of Jesus Christ.

John had indeed handled the risen Jesus. He was well aware that Jesus had been since the beginning of the universe. He was well aware that Jesus himself was in himself Eternal Life. He had fellowship with this risen Christ and he wanted his "children" to enjoy the same fellowship. He also wanted his "children" to experience the full joy of

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this fellowship with the Risen Jesus Christ. These were the reasons he was writing this general letter to be circulated among the various fellowships of Christian believers and copied and circulated some more.

1JOHN 1:5 This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

Love and Light. These are John's themes. He rides them for all they are worth. Yet he never exhausts their full meaning. Not only does he declare that God is light, but he restates it from the negative extreme so that we will understand: in God there is no darkness at all, none whatsoever. Anytime that we are tempted to attribute darkness to God we must remember John's word who knew him best. There is no darkness at all in God. He is pure light and nothing but light.

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Some may say that they have experienced God as darkness; they may even quote the Old Testament. But the full revelation of God as seen by the primary eye witness is nothing but pure unadulterated Light. Blazing, glorious, intense, pure Light. Anything or anybody who contradicts this is in error; they are wrong, mistaken and misled. This should be emblazoned in the memory and consciousness of every Christian believer. If it is, the believer will never stray far from the truth about God.

1JOHN 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

Now John begins to meddle in our lives, in our actions and attitudes. He is not shy to do this and he will continue to meddle throughout this letter. Our lives have to line up with the Light that we know. Since Jesus

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IS light and does not merely have light, it is a personal situation, it is based in relationship. We cannot escape it.

1JOHN 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 Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

The whole thing is our walk, our day in and day out walk, with Jesus on the personal level. It is not rules; it is not morals; it is not social convention; it is not what is politically correct. If you walk, live, according to these things, you might be taken for a “decent person,” but you will not be in fellowship with God.

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

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We all have sin in our lives including believing Christians. For the regenerate, born again, Christian there is the life long struggle between what Paul calls the “old man” and the “new man.” But God has provided the way out.

1JOHN 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

This is one of the most significant verses in the Bible. We must confess our sins to be forgiven and cleansed. This does not mean that we get saved and unsaved periodically. It merely means that we need to keep “short accounts” with God. But the heart of this amazing verse is about God being “faithful and just.” We have sin and God knows this even without our telling him, confessing it.

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A just God could only condemn us. What is God faithful to? Theologians call this the “Covenant of Redemption.” It is a mutual solemn agreement between God the Father and God the Son. God is a covenant making, covenant keeping God. He NEVER breaks covenant. A covenant is a solemn agreement between two persons. Humans tend to break their covenants. God cannot; it is not in his nature. The Father and the Son made a covenant; the Father would adopt us back into fellowship with him and the Son would come to earth and pay the price, sacrifice, that is required for sin. This way God can be faithful in forgiving AND in justice. This is the Covenant of Redemption. When we accept the Covenant of Redemption, we then have a covenant with God known as the Covenant of Salvation. God the Father is “faithful” to the Covenant of Redemption that he has with God the Son and we are redeemed. He then forgives us and cleanses us. We not only need forgiveness on a daily basis but we also need to be cleansed so that

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we no longer feel dirty because of our sin nature and our sin acts. We get all this from God freely because we believe and enter into the Covenant of Salvation. After we repent the first time, we enter into the state of Grace and are forgiven all of our sins past, present and future. But we have to continue to confess our sins so that we can grow and be forgiven of particular sins and be cleansed. This is the very best deal in the universe. Praise God for it!

1JOHN 1:10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Again John reminds us that we are never totally without sin in this life. What a wonderful thing it will be in the afterlife and resurrection to be free of the old struggle against sin.

CHAPTER TWO

1JOHN 2:1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

John casts Jesus as our advocate, our defense attorney before the Father. But Jesus has advantages that a mortal defense attorney does not have. Jesus has himself the eternal favor of the Father and can put our sins on his account which has been paid once and for all forever. It is like a judge who has a son who is infinitely rich. This judge gives large fines to those who come

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before him. All are found guilty, but the Son Advocate pays them all.

1JOHN 2:2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

John also casts Jesus as our propitiation. Propitiation makes peace and overcomes distrust and animosity. Jesus does this for us because he is the spotless Lamb of God and God himself.

1JOHN 2:3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

1JOHN 2:4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

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If we truly love God, we will act like it. As the old saying goes, “words are cheap.”

1JOHN 2:5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

The love of God can only be full grown and truly Godlike if we keep his word, act like his sons and daughters, have the family resemblance to our heavenly Father. This is how love is “perfected.” This is the primary reason that we remain in the earthly life as long as we do. Other things like good works and accomplishments are merely by products.

1JOHN 2:6 He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

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Sometimes this is taken as the impossible part. How can we possibly walk as Jesus walked? After all, he was God; he is God. Even in his human mortal form before the resurrection he was still fully human and fully divine. So how can we walk as he walked? How can our lives be good and holy like his was? We can walk like he walked BECAUSE he did it for us. He was the first human being that walked totally pleasing to the heavenly Father. So he did it for us. But that is not all. He also enables us to do what we cannot do through the power of his Spirit in our lives. “Christ lives in us and the life we live in the flesh we live by the faith of the Son of God.” (Galatians 2: 20) He does it again and again IN us. Of course we stumble, but he never gives up on us. Once we are in the family, we are in forever.

1JOHN 2:7 Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old

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commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning.

1JOHN 2:8 Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.

The old commandment and the new commandment are the same: walk in the light and love one another. This is the simplicity of the gospel life.

1JOHN 2:9 He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.

1JOHN 2:10 He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.

1JOHN 2:11 But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and

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knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.

Here John repeats himself. It is a simple matter. If you are a son or daughter of the heavenly Father and, therefore, a younger sister or brother of Jesus, you will love and not hate your brothers and sisters. Your actions must bear out your family relationship. If you stumble at this, you must get up and keep trying to allow him to help you until you get it right. You cannot resign from the family and you cannot quit improving. These are not an option and in the long run it is easier to be reconciled to these two simple inescapable forever facts. It takes more energy and time to attempt unsuccessfully to deny them than it does to persevere in them. Once we make up our hearts and minds on this, we are less apt to stumble; we are committed.

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1JOHN 2:12 I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.

1JOHN 2:13 I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father.

1JOHN 2:14 I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.

This is another key passage in John's letters. John loves repetition. He loves it because children need to hear things multiple times for them to sink in. John was the last surviving father of the ancient church. He was indeed "Papa John." He speaks to four

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categories of maturity among Christians; infants (tekna – Greek), children (padia – Greek), young men (and women), and fathers (mature believers.) He speaks of having already told them some things and of telling them again in this letter. Perhaps the time before was in person; this is a general letter to believers everywhere. He tells the infants that they are aware that their sins are forgiven. He tells the children that they know that God is their Father. He told the young men (youth) that they have the word in them which gives them strength so that they can overcome the evil one (the wiles of the devil.) He tells the young men (youth) again that they have overcome the wiles of the devil. In both the past and the present he tells the fathers, the mature, that they know that God “is from the beginning.” This order is most logical. The first two things we learn in the gospel is that we are forgiven and that God is our Father. The youth need the Word to make them strong or they will fall into many carnal temptations. These are

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easy to understand. But why does he say what he does to the mature? They know that God is from the beginning? The unmistakable trait of the spiritually mature Christian believer is that he or she understands that God is not a captive of time and that he has been in charge all along. When we can live believing this, we are mature. This is important.

1JOHN 2:15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

1JOHN 2:16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

There are only three categories in which we can be snared by the world.

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The lust of the flesh is named first. Our actual flesh hungers for certain things like food, sex and creature comforts. A certain amount of this is healthy and normal, but when it gets out of bounds, abnormal, it is not healthy. Also there are certain conditions which a believer must observe concerning these urgings like being in a covenant state of marriage before indulging in sex. This is largely ignored these days which shows just how far church members have strayed from God. A certain amount of food is healthy, but gluttony is not. Drink is needed to sustain life. A person can go 40 days without food but only three days without water. However alcohol is usually destructive to a healthy life style.

The lust of the eyes is next. What we see, we often want whether it is another person or some possession. The eye gate is very powerful and along with the lust of the flesh can lead us far away from God. Pornography is the prime example of this.

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The pride of life moves everything up to another level. It is this that helps us to believe that we are better than others. It is this that motivates us to be successful at the expense of everything else including the friendship of others. A Christian version is the pride of pastoring a bigger church than someone else.

They work together to snare us. Eve lost on all three counts. Jesus won on all three.

In the garden Eve (Genesis 3) saw that the forbidden fruit was good to eat (flesh), pleasant to look at (eyes), and she was told by Satan that it would make her wise (pride); it would make her like God. In one sense it did make her like God; she and Adam were able to tell the difference between good and evil but they were not capable of choosing the good. They were no longer innocent.

In the temptation in the wilderness (Luke 4) Jesus defeated Satan in all three areas. He

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would not turn the stones into bread (flesh). He would not worship Satan for all the kingdoms of the world (eyes). He would not throw himself off the roof of the temple in order to be recognized as the Messiah (pride). In the end, however, he got everything.

If we allow Jesus to do in us what he did in his own body, we will win also.

1JOHN 2:17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

John wants us to understand that the rewards of this life are temporary, but the rewards in eternity are the greatest form of permanency.

1JOHN 2:18 Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist

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shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.

1JOHN 2:19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

The subject of the antichrist is often a volatile one among Christian believers. Usually the very word “antichrist” brings up concepts regarding the return of Jesus and the “endtime.” The antichrist is the one who will come just before the “great tribulation” and rule the world. Jesus will kill him at his return and set up his one thousand year physical reign on earth. But we must not limit our understanding to that last one. John says clearly here that there are already many antichrists in the world. This reference is to the first century of the Christian church

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since John died physically near the year 100 A.D. John calls this the “last time” yet it has been 2,000 years since John wrote this and the Second Coming has not occurred yet. Obviously God’s idea of time is not the same as ours. If there were many antichrists then there have probably been antichrists in the world all along. There are, no doubt, many antichrists in the world today. Perhaps instead of worrying about the tribulation and waiting on the “rapture” to rescue us, we should pray and witness to as many people as possible so that they will not be antichrists.

John says something else here that is very interesting and that should not be forgotten. He says that the antichrists of his day were once part of the Christian fellowship and they left this fellowship to proclaim an antigospel. We should also be on the lookout for these preachers and warn everyone we know.

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1JOHN 2:20 But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.

1JOHN 2:21 I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.

We can trust the presence of God within us as believers. The Holy Spirit is inside the believer. Jesus sent Him to us and sends Him to each of us when we believe in Jesus. We need to stay attuned to God and trust the inner witness. When a teaching or ministry seems wrong to us, we should go to the scriptures and ask godly brothers and sisters how they understand this situation. Once we know the truth of Jesus, we are actually capable of holding to it without the guidance of some “great man.”

1JOHN 2:22 Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is

antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.

1JOHN 2:23 Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.

John says that an antichrist is one who denies that God has come in the flesh; an antichrist denies the incarnation of the Son as Jesus Christ. This denies not only the Son himself but also the Father who sent him. This is John's definition of an antichrist, not a political figure.

1JOHN 2:24 Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.

1JOHN 2:25 And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.

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Our eternal life is sealed the moment we receive Jesus as Savior by faith. It is settled then. All we have to do, with God's help, is not depart from this truth. We live in a day when something is always being touted as "new and better." It's the new washing detergent; it is better. It is no longer that old inferior stuff that they have been selling us all along. Anything old is inferior. We cannot let this apply to the gospel; it is old and it is eternally new and fresh to us who believe.

1JOHN 2:26 These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.

1JOHN 2:27 But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

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John stresses again that the inner presence of the Spirit of Christ is enough to keep us straight. It is strong enough to keep us from being seduced. If a person is seduced, he or she is led astray to participate in something that is wrong. The Holy Spirit is capable of protecting us from this. The fellowship of other believers is very helpful, strengthening and encouraging. But the Holy Spirit alone is enough, especially if He is all that you have. You can survive as a believer alone for as long as it takes to see others converted to join you. If you live for Jesus, they will want to know what you have.

1JOHN 2:28 And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.

1JOHN 2:29 If ye know that he is righteous,

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ye know that every one that doeth
righteousness is born of him.

The end event is our appearance before
Jesus Himself at his return. The believer will
not be judged as worthy of Hell at that time.
The believer “passed from death into life” at
the point of conversion. The appearance
before Jesus at his return will result in either
confidence or shame before him depending
on whether we have done righteous deeds as
he expects us to do.

GOSPEL OF JOHN 5:24 Verily, verily, I
say unto you, He that heareth my word, and
believeth on him that sent me, hath
everlasting life, and shall not come into
condemnation; but is passed from death unto
life.

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CHAPTER THREE

1JOHN 3:1 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

1JOHN 3:2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

1JOHN 3:3 And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

What an excellent passage! What total agreement with the words of Paul. We are adopted back into the family of God. We have that family resemblance to God Himself. Of course, those who are not in the family do not really know or understand us. They do not know or understand the head of the family, Father God, or our older brother, God the Son, or the Holy Spirit who seems to perform many mothering functions in the Godhead. We are born of the Spirit. And there is the exciting prospective that when Jesus does come back, we will already be much like him. The transformation, for those then living, and the resurrection, for those who have died, into their new eternal bodies will be the last step in the change. Then we will be able to see Him as he already is although hidden from our physical sight at the present. Believing this and clinging to it is what makes us pure in heart, not trying by self-effort to be good. We need for this to really sink into our minds and hearts.

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1JOHN 3:4 Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.

1JOHN 3:5 And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.

1JOHN 3:6 Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.

1JOHN 3:7 Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.

The law of Moses was added to the faith of Abraham in order to show us that we cannot keep the law in our own strength.

Nonetheless, the definition of sin is in the breaking of the ten commandments. This will never change. But God sent Jesus to take away our sins on the cross; he had no sin of his own to pay for. All we have to do

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to avoid sin is to abide, live, in Jesus. He has to be our whole life. When we are deeply involved in relationship with him, we have no tendency to sin. We think and act like he does. Yes, this does not happen all at once, but we should be growing in it. When we fail, we go back to chapter 1:9.

1JOHN 3:8 He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

To continue in sin merely shows who we are following.

Another key passage in this amazing short letter is the second half of 3:8. Jesus' entire mission on earth was to destroy the works of the devil. This is no small victory. It means everything to us who were permanently

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trapped in the devil's ways until Jesus came and did his work.

1JOHN 3:9 Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

1JOHN 3:10 In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

Another summary of what he is telling us. Yet we must keep in mind that it is habitual sin that shows we are following the devil. Habitual means that we practice it as we do a habit; continually and permanently.

1JOHN 3:11 For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

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Our love for each other is the primary sign that we are following Jesus.

1JOHN 3:12 Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.

Cain was the first murderer and it was his only brother that he killed. This was the result of his parents taking the entire race into sin and it only took one generation to manifest as the worst sin that anyone can commit against his brother, to murder him. There is a difference between murder and slaying in the scriptures. In this life a soldier may have to kill his enemy if the enemy is following an evil leader; this is not murder. But to kill another individual out of hate or selfishness is murder.

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1JOHN 3:13 Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.

Unbelievers will hate all the children of the Father. It is only natural to them.

1JOHN 3:14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

Just as he said in his gospel, the evidence that we have already passed from death into life is our manifest love for our brothers.

1JOHN 3:15 Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

1JOHN 3:16 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.

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Here are the two extremes that prove the point. Hate leads to murder. Hate is, in fact, murder in the mind. Anyone who murders does not have eternal life living in him. It is not a matter of morals. It is a matter of having eternal life inside or not. Jesus did the exact opposite of murder; he laid down his own life for us, his brothers. If we have eternal life within us, we should be willing to do the same. This does not only mean in the physical sense. For instance, men are told by Paul to love our wives as Christ loved the church by giving his life for her. (Eph. 5:25) Many husbands will tell you that they would “take a bullet” to defend their wife. But how often does that “opportunity” come? Will they lay down their wants and preferences for her? Will they take her shopping instead of watching the game? Many men say that they work all the time so that they can provide for their wife and children. But the truth is that they would

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rather work all the time than to give of themselves at home with their family. Granted it takes money to take care of a family but many children suffer today from not having a father with whom they can relate.

1JOHN 3:17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

Another proof of our brotherly love, is by giving of our money and material goods to others. Remember John wants to see results. This is easier when we seek to become giving persons instead of trying to give when it is needed. God is a giver. He gave his only Son for us. No one is more precious to God than Jesus and he gave Jesus even knowing how he would be treated. That is not “natural.” We could not do that no

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matter how “good” we are because only God is truly good. But with the nurturing power of the Holy Spirit within us we can seek to move in the direction of God and become giving persons. The reason it is more blessed to give than to receive is because when you really get into it, you are more blessed when you give. There is not only a return on your investment that God provides but also the satisfaction of knowing that what you have given far outweighs the sacrifice of parting with some of your resources.

1JOHN 3:18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

1JOHN 3:19 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

1JOHN 3:20 For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

1JOHN 3:21 Beloved, if our heart condemn

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us not, then have we confidence toward God.

1JOHN 3:22 And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

There are few statements in scripture that reveal God's knowledge of how we are "wired up" than these five verses. After all, it is God who made us. If we love in deed and not only in words, certain things happen within us. If we do right, then our conscience is strengthened and we feel good about ourselves, and rightfully so. If we do not do right, our conscience does not feel so good. However, so we don't allow this to be a repeating loop – sad conscience therefore more inaction on positive actions which leads to more sad conscience etc., etc. – God has given us a way out. We are reminded that God is greater than our conscience and

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able to restore it because he knows that deep down we want to do better. Then we are out of the loop and on our way to good things again. Of course, if deep down we do not want better, this doesn't work. What a deal! If we win, we win; if we lose, we win because of the all-knowing grace of God. Nevertheless, it is better to do things which are pleasing to him and have that confidence which comes with it. Another by product of going in the proper direction is answered prayers whereby our needs are met abundantly. It is a good thing to read over these verses a lot.

1JOHN 3:23 And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.

This is another form of the Golden Rule.
Believe in Jesus which is to love God and

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love one another. He told us to do this. This is John's grand theme.

1JOHN 3:24 And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

John has shown us repeatedly in these first three chapters of this letter how to get out of trouble with God starting with 1:9. We can always go back to that. But then he shows us the better way. Live with God and you will be assured that he actually lives inside of you. He lives there because the Holy Spirit has moved in to stay. If we are living where we should live, then our actions will confirm our faith and we will be confident of who we really are, sons and daughters of the Most High God.

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CHAPTER FOUR

1JOHN 4:1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

1JOHN 4:2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

1JOHN 4:3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

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At this point perhaps we should consider what a “spirit” is that he is talking about. We know that there are demon spirits who are actually spiritual entities that sometimes must be dealt with in this world. But there are also beliefs and attitudes, many of which are propagated by these beings, which can lead us astray and poison our faith. Truth and falsehood revolves around one very simple concept; is Jesus of Nazareth God himself come to this world in the flesh? Ungodly spirits and beliefs will not admit to this. So John calls them the spirit of antichrist; the spirit that is against Christ. Simple. He explains that such antichrists are not found exclusively just prior to the return of Christ. They have been at work since the beginning of the Christian faith. It is not enough to say that Jesus was a good man, a great teacher or a great prophet. Such accolades actually insult Jesus. He was either God made flesh or he was crazy. He is either a resurrected man who is also God or it is all a myth. Those are the only options

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opened to us. Once we make up our mind that he is God in the flesh forever everything else falls into place. We have what they like to call a new “world view.”

1JOHN 4:4 Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

If we understand that the Holy Spirit within the regenerate believer is greater than any other power in the world, we understand that we can overcome any fear that threatens us. And, in the end, all resistance will have to “bow the knee” to Jesus.

1JOHN 4:5 They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.

1JOHN 4:6 We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth

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not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth,
and the spirit of error.

We speak according to our world view. The world view of the Christian and the non-Christian are diametrically opposed. They are exactly opposite. The world believes in winning any way they can, like most politicians. The Christian is bound to winning through God's truth and love.

1JOHN 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

1JOHN 4:8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

Some have asked that if God is love is the reverse true, is love also God. To answer this we need to clarify several issues. In the first place God is a Person while love is an

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attribute of his Person. So love by itself is not actually God, but God is so powerful and so full of love that John can say that God is love. In the second place there are several words in the Greek language which John wrote this letter in that mean "love." There is brotherly love; there is romantic love; there is affection; there is God's love, agape (a - gop - pay.) The kind of love which is the essence of God is agape love. Agape love gives without expecting any return. Only God can love like this and he can enable us to love in the same way.

1JOHN 4:9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

The proof of God's love in this world is the incarnation of the second Person of the

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Trinity as a man who came here to show us the Father.

1JOHN 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.

Agape love is not defined by our love for God. This kind of love can only be defined by the fact that God sent Jesus to us and that he sent Jesus for the purpose of suffering and dying to pay for our sins. This is the ultimate definition of God and his love.

1JOHN 4:11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

1JOHN 4:12 No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

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Here is a primary reason that we should act like the children of God. For the present God is invisible. Christian believers cannot see him; unbelievers cannot see him. It is his will for believers to make him visible through the display of their Christian love. This is why John places the “no man hath seen God at any time” phrase between two statements about loving one another.

Christian love should make an impression. It should make an impression primarily on unbelievers so that they will want in on it. This is not complicated. We do not need tedious theological arguments to convince unbelievers to want Jesus in their lives. All we need to do is demonstrate Christian love in front of them. We do this, of course, by loving them, but primarily loving each other in front of them. God gives us the easier task of loving each other in order to win the unbeliever. As we grow in love, we can love the unlovable more effectively.

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1JOHN 4:13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

Experientially believers are aware of being joined to God because they sense the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit within them. The proper and most important response to this Presence is to allow the Holy Spirit to energize our love for others.

1JOHN 4:14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

1JOHN 4:15 Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

Our testimony to everyone is that Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh and that he is

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Savior and lord. Sometimes the initial reaction to this from unbelievers is that they are offended. Instead of trying to placate them or explain away the incarnation we should stand our ground. By doing this we give the Holy Spirit himself something special to work with in this visible dimension. He will use our testimony to convince unbelievers of their need for the eternal saving God-Man.

1JOHN 4:16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

1JOHN 4:17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

This indwelling Spirit who is Love Himself gives us several advantages. As our love in

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him and for him matures, we become more and more aware that when he appears to judge the world, we will not be bashful or ashamed but bold to believe that we are his worthy and trusted servants. If ever we will need boldness in this regard, it will be then.

1JOHN 4:18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

Mature love also expels fear. People are plagued with all sorts of fears. The root of all fear is the fear of death and eternal judgment by God. When the root fear is removed by the presence and working of mature love within us, the other fears are also stripped of their power over us. What a wonderful freedom!

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1JOHN 4:19 We love him, because he first loved us.

We could not start the love process; we were too deep into the dark hole of fear and hate. But he could start the process and he did. As we are aware of his love, we are set free to love in return.

1JOHN 4:20 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?

1JOHN 4:21 And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

Again a reiteration; truth and love go hand in hand. If we love, we are living in the

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truth. If we live in the truth, we will love.
This is always John's theme.

CHAPTER FIVE

1JOHN 5:1 Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.

1JOHN 5:2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.

1JOHN 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.

The commandments of Moses were not only hard to keep, they were impossible to keep. The ten commandments, which are the summary of the law of Moses, are

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impossible to keep. They were a temporary addition to the covenant of Grace struck by God with Abraham. The Mosaic law was given by God just to show us that we could not keep them. They are our “schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.” (Gal. 3: 24-25) But Jesus’ commandments, even though they are more demanding, are not grievous and not hard to keep. They are more demanding because they involve not only deeds but the thoughts and intents of our heart. For instance, Jesus said that to be angry with your brother without cause is tantamount to killing. (Mt. 5:22) But they are not difficult to keep because Jesus kept them for us by living a perfect life and dying for our sins and coming back to a new and more powerful life both as God and as a man. And he gives us the Holy Spirit to empower us to keep the commandments. All we need to do is to consent habitually to this help.

1JOHN 5:4 For whatsoever is born of God

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overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

1JOHN 5:5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

The old hymn proclaims “Faith is the Victory.” This is a well known truth to the church. While Paul seems to excel in defining faith, John excels in defining the object of our faith. A safety rope is only as good as the rock it is tied to. Paul tells us things like “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1) John tells us that God is our Rock and that when we are born of God we can overcome the temptations and trials of the world because of our relationship to our Father. This is the source of our faith.

1JOHN 5:6 This is he that came by water

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and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.

Over the centuries this reference to water has been interpreted in several ways. Perhaps more than one of them is valid. The first water that every person encounters is the water that is released at birth. This attests to the fact that Jesus was born of Mary just as every human is born. The next water in Jesus' life was the water of baptism. Jesus compelled John the Baptist to baptize him in order that all righteousness would be fulfilled even though Jesus had no sins to be cleansed. But he was careful to follow our trail in life very closely. The final water could be the water that came from Jesus' side when the soldier pierced his side while he was on the cross. This can be seen as a water of cleansing and also of a

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cleansing of the sin of Adam and Eve since Eve was removed from the side of man from the identical place where the water came forth from Jesus. All of these water references liken Jesus to us in our humanity.

The blood of Jesus was necessary to cleanse us from our sin. It was long ago established that “without the shedding of blood there is no remission” of sin. (Hebrews 9:22) Therefore, we are cleansed by the water and the blood.

1JOHN 5:7 For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.

1JOHN 5:8 And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

Perhaps this reference to the three witness is most disturbing to believers when doubt is

cast on the authenticity of one of these triplets. The older manuscripts, before the 14th century, do not include the reference to the heavenly three in this instance. This can be seen in the comparison of different versions of the Bible. The King James version includes both sets of three and some other versions do not. It is not that the Triune Godhead does not actually bear witness “in heaven.” It is merely that this phrase may have been added in this passage by a later Roman Catholic copyist. However, the Holy Spirit and the water and the blood do testify as to the saving works of Jesus Christ and the love of God toward us in these acts.

1JOHN 5:9 If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son.

1JOHN 5:10 He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that

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believeth not God hath made him a liar;
because he believeth not the record that God
gave of his Son.

1JOHN 5:11 And this is the record, that God
hath given to us eternal life, and this life is
in his Son.

It is the recorded words of Jesus himself that
assure us of God's love for us and of our
salvation. John wrote this beautifully in his
Gospel at 3:16, "For God so loved the
world, that he gave his only begotten Son,
that whosoever believeth in him should not
perish, but have everlasting life."

1JOHN 5:12 He that hath the Son hath life;
and he that hath not the Son of God hath not
life.

Here is the magnificent simplicity. It is
having the Son within you that guarantees

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life here and in eternity; life is not in a doctrine, not in belonging to any particular organization. It is simply available by inviting the Son inside. It is personal and it is completely effective.

1JOHN 5:13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

John's entire purpose in writing is so that we might believe and have that Life.

1JOHN 5:14 And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

1JOHN 5:15 And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

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John is also very uncomplicated about requests in prayer. God hears and answers prayers that are in line with his will. We do not talk God into anything. We merely line up with him and his will. This may seem complicated to us because we often are not sure of his will. How do we find out his will? We find out his will primarily by reading his book, the Bible. He has spelled out his will as well as his heart in those pages. If we do not read and study the Bible, we cannot hope to discover his will.

What are some examples of this? For instance, we know that it is not God's will that any should miss out on the wonderful gift of salvation. (Matthew 18:14, 2 Peter 3:9, John 3:16) If we persevere in prayer for individuals on this regard, they will be saved.

1JOHN 5:16 If any man see his brother sin a

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sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.

1JOHN 5:17 All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.

Again another difficult verse for the modern day believer. According to John there are certain sins which people, even believers, can commit that can result in their physical death. John says that we should not pray for people who commit these sins as God will surely require their life for these sins.

Compiling a list of such sins would certainly be controversial. Yet John says clearly that all unrighteousness is sin, but not all sins are “unto death.” No one knows Jesus better than John. So it must be true. Cold blooded murder would seem to be such a sin as it is reflected in civil law which is based on Biblical law. The state executes people for

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murder. It would not be a stretch to believe that if the state does not do its duty, God, who is the highest Judge, would carry out this sentence himself. Often murderers are murdered by others; is this not the justice of God? But this does not exhaust the subject.

1JOHN 5:18 We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.

The sense of the original language here is that one who is born of God does not persist in sin. They may occasionally stumble and have to avail themselves of I John 1:9, but they do not persist in sin if they are born of God.

1JOHN 5:19 And we know that we are of

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God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.

John sees that the whole world without Christ is entrenched in wickedness. We should not forget this inescapable fact. We do not withdraw our witness from the world. We are “in the world, but not of the world.”

1JOHN 5:20 And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

We have been given an understanding of how the situation is for believers in the world. Jesus is true. Jesus is life. The world is evil and will remain so until he returns.

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1JOHN 5:21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

It is said that when John was very old, perhaps past 100 years of age, and he was the only one of the original disciples left that they carried him from church to church on a stretcher and all he said over and over was, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.”

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SECOND JOHN

2JOHN 1:1 The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth;

This letter of John is much shorter than the first one. The “elect lady” referred to may have been one particular woman or she may be a particular congregation of believers since the church is seen as the Bride of Christ.

2JOHN 1:2 For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever.
2JOHN 1:3 Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the

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Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

2JOHN 1:4 I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.

John is glad to hear that the children of this “lady” are walking in the truth of the gospel.

2JOHN 1:5 And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another.

2JOHN 1:6 And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.

Again, as always, for John to walk in truth and in love is to do what Jesus tells us to do which is primarily to love one another.

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2JOHN 1:7 For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

John warns the church against deceivers who do not teach this truth. He also assures them that antichrists are already at work in the world.

2JOHN 1:8 Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.

2JOHN 1:9 Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.

The indwelling presence of God guarantees our ability to walk in truth and love. All we

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have to do is will it. God will provide the needed power.

2JOHN 1:10 If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed:
2JOHN 1:11 For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

We are not to welcome anyone to the church that does not preach the gospel that John has taught us.

2JOHN 1:12 Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full.

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John admits that this is a short letter and that he hopes to come to them soon so that he can tell them all that is on his heart.

2JOHN 1:13 The children of thy elect sister greet thee. Amen.

The “elect sister” is probably another similar congregation.

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THIRD JOHN

3JOHN 1:1 The elder unto the wellbeloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth.

This letter is written to a particular person, probably a man, named Gaius. John loves this man.

3JOHN 1:2 Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.

We should consider that John as the Apostle of love only wants the best for his friend and

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that as a man of prayer John prays for these blessings for his friend. John wants his friend to prosper in the same way that his soul prospers. Some ways of prospering are in a strong inner peace, in good health and in material wealth. John seems to think that such things will be the natural outgrowth of prosperity in the soul. This is a valuable insight into what might be termed “holistic” health. If we walk in the truth and love of Jesus, we are likely to reap the rewards of all kinds of prosperity. This has been proven by many believers in many cultures. Prosperity follows spiritual health.

3JOHN 1:3 For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth.

3JOHN 1:4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

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As a spiritual father John is very happy to know that his children are prospering in every way.

3JOHN 1:5 Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers;

Christian believers should not only treat fellow Christians well, but they should treat all people well. This is our work for Jesus on this earth.

3JOHN 1:6 Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well:

3JOHN 1:7 Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles.

3JOHN 1:8 We therefore ought to receive

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such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth.

John encourages Gaius to contribute to traveling ministers to be a help in their ministries.

3JOHN 1:9 I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. 3JOHN 1:10 Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.

Even John had enemies who were jealous of his ministry and said bad things about him in

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order to pull people away from following him.

3JOHN 1:11 Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.

3JOHN 1:12 Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is true.

John also had friendly helpers and he praised them.

3JOHN 1:13 I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee:

3JOHN 1:14 But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to thee. Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name.

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John cut this letter short also because he planned to visit them personally and probably dealt with Diotrephes and encouraged Demetrius.

THE “I AM” STATEMENTS
OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

The I AM statements are unique to John’s Gospel. They are not found in the first three Synoptic Gospels. Above all, these are statement about the Divinity of Jesus Christ. When God gave his name to Moses he said that his name was I AM. In the English language we can say that this means that God is the Primary Being. His existence is primary. He has always been. He is who he is no matter what else happens. If he had never created the universe or anything at all, he would still be complete in Himself. I AM is the first person singular active of the most important verb TO Be.

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EX 3:14 And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.

All of the I AM statements in John are established on God giving this name concerning himself to Moses.

6:35 "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst."

6:41 "I am the bread which came down from heaven."

6:48 "I am the bread of life."

6:51 "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread

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which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh."

Coupled with several unique concepts Jesus not only proclaims that he is in Himself God Almighty, but he also asserts that as God he meets our needs in very unique and important ways. He is our very food. When we partake of him, we partake of eternal life. When we partake of Him, our souls are nourished and enabled to enter into eternal life even while we are in our mortal bodies on this earth. Later, he will give us immortal bodies to live in forever.

8:12 "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

9:5 "I am the light of the world"

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Not only is Jesus our bread he is also light; he is our light. We live and see our way in his light. This, as we have seen, is the central theme of John's first letter.

8:18 "I bear witness to myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness to me."

8:23 He said to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world."

JOH 8:58 Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I AM.

In chapter eight of his Gospel John shows us how Jesus explains that he is from another place, a heavenly place or dimension. Then in verse 58 he says it plainly. He tells them, "before Abraham was, I AM." Abraham was placed in time. There was a time when

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Abraham was not and then he was. Abraham is the father of faith and of the Jewish people and the believing Church. Jesus has always been with the Father. He is not the captive of time as a created being is a captive of time. Jesus is from beyond time. He spent 33 years as one of us. He chooses to inhabit a resurrected body forever. He is one of us. We can identify with him. He has paid the price so that we can forever fellowship with him and with the Father. This I AM statement made the religious leaders of Jesus' day very angry because they did not have the ability to recognize who Jesus was and is.

10:7 "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep."

10:9 "I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture."

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Jesus is the door. His people find God through him. No one comes to God except through Jesus. Jesus is the good shepherd to his human sheep. This is an illusion to the practice in Jesus' time regarding the sheep pen. When the sheep were put away for the night for their own safety, they were put into a small pen. There was no gate or door on this pen. The shepherd himself would lie down across the opening and become himself the gate. This afforded safety and security for the sheep. Not only is Jesus the only way, the only opening, to God he is also the one who provides our security.

10:11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

10:14 "I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me,"

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Being the good shepherd goes with being the door for the sheep.

11:25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,"

We know that all people will be resurrected at the return of Jesus. Believers will be resurrected to eternal life. Not only does Jesus provide resurrection and eternal life, he IS resurrection and eternal life. All that we will ever need abides in him, is a part of Jesus himself. He proved this claim dramatically to Mary and Martha when he raised their brother Lazarus from the dead in this chapter 11 of John's Gospel.

14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and

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the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me."

Here is the statement flat out. Jesus is the only way to God. Everyone comes to God by simply believing this. There is no other requirement. Everyone has an equal chance, but there is no other way to God. As Christian believers we must be absolute bigots in this regard; there is only one way to God, not many ways. Jesus is not only THE way he is also THE truth and THE life.

It makes people feel better to claim that there are many avenues to God. Sometimes, Christian believers do not want to offend them by pressing the exclusive claims of Jesus. But we must. If we want them to get there, we must insist on Jesus being the only way to God. John knew this and so must we.

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15:1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser."

15:5 "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."

The image of the vine is an important one. We cannot maintain spiritual or ultimately physical life without actually being attached to Jesus. We cannot just come to him for "refills." We must remain permanently attached like a branch is attached to the vine. If we do not, we will dry up and die. At first we may look all right but in a short time we will begin to dry up and die.

Jesus tells us that the Father is the one who dresses the vine. He is the pruner. If we do not produce good fruit, the Father prunes us so that we can produce good fruit. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,

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longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,
meekness, temperance.” (Gal. 5:22-23)

