

Jesus is Real

The First Letter of John Adult Bible Study

- I. Chapter 1 - Know what you're talking about
- A. *What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon and touched with our hands concerns the Word of life-- 2 for the life was made visible; we have seen it and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was made visible to us-- 3 what we have seen and heard we proclaim now to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; for our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. 4 We are writing this so that our joy may be complete. 5 Now this is the message that we have heard from him and proclaim to you: God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we say, "We have fellowship with him," while we continue to walk in darkness, we lie and do not act in truth. 7 But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, then we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of his Son Jesus cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say, "We are without sin," we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrongdoing. 10 If we say, "We have not sinned," we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*
- B. Seeing and Knowing
1. Have you seen the Lord?
 2. Do you know what you're talking about
 3. Are you a first hand witness?
 4. Knowing = experience
- C. Sobriety and the truth
1. The practicality of John
 - a. Not up in the clouds, not empty words "I LUV the Lord"
 - b. Do your flesh and blood actions manifest this?
 - c. Has the Word truly become flesh in you?
 2. The perfection of John
 - a. There is NO darkness in God at all
 - b. What about us?
 - c. When Jesus has completed his work in us this will be true. We will be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect
 3. The point of John
 - a. We do have sin. We need to soberly assess this fact about ourselves.
 - b. But this sober appreciation leads to the solution.
 - c. The admission of our problem brings us to the Doctor who alone can heal us.
 - d. But if we say we have no sin we are deceived and make God a liar.
 - e. Only in admitting our problem are we on the way to true rather than apparent perfection.

- f. So here to John is a practical realist.
- (1) Look at your actual behavior and the drives in you
 - (2) Draw the proper conclusion
 - (3) And go to the Lord for the help that will actually and really transform us.

II. Chapter two - Prove His power

A. *My children, I am writing this to you so that you may not commit sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one. 2 He is expiation for our sins, and not for our sins only but for those of the whole world. 3 The way we may be sure that we know him is to keep his commandments. 4 Whoever says, "I know him," but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But whoever keeps his word, the love of God is truly perfected in him. This is the way we may know that we are in union with him: 6 whoever claims to abide in him ought to live (just) as he lived. 7 Beloved, I am writing no new commandment to you but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. 8 And yet I do write a new commandment to you, which holds true in him and among you, for the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining. 9 Whoever says he is in the light, yet hates his brother, is still in the darkness. 10 Whoever loves his brother remains in the light, and there is nothing in him to cause a fall. 11 Whoever hates his brother is in darkness; he walks in darkness and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes. 12 I am writing to you, children, because your sins have been forgiven for his name's sake. 13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have conquered the evil one. 14 I write to you, children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong and the word of God remains in you, and you have conquered the evil one. 15 Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, sensual lust, enticement for the eyes, and a pretentious life, is not from the Father but is from the world. 17 Yet the world and its enticement are passing away. But whoever does the will of God remains forever. 18 Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that the antichrist was coming, so now many antichrists have appeared. Thus we know this is the last hour. 19 They went out from us, but they were not really of our number; if they had been, they would have remained with us. Their desertion shows that none of them was of our number. 20 But you have the anointing that comes from the holy one, and you all have knowledge. 21 I write to you not because you do not know the truth but because you do, and because every lie is alien to the truth. 22 Who is the liar? Whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Whoever denies the Father and the Son, this is the antichrist. 23 No one who denies the Son has the Father, but whoever confesses the Son has the Father as well. 24 Let what you heard from the beginning remain in you. If what you heard from the beginning remains in you, then you will remain in the Son and in the Father. 25 And this is the promise that he made us: eternal life. 26 I write you these things about those who would deceive you. 27 As for you, the anointing that you received from him remains in you, so that you do not need anyone to teach you. But his anointing teaches you about everything and is true and not false; just as it taught you, remain in him. 28 And now, children, remain in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not be put to shame by him at his coming. 29 If you consider that he is righteous, you also know that everyone who acts in righteousness is begotten by him.*

B. Practical Proof of his Power (verses 1-6)

1. ***My children, I am writing this to you so that you may not commit sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one. 2 He is expiation for our sins, and not for our sins only but for those of the whole world. 3 The way we may be sure that we know him is to keep his commandments. 4 Whoever says, "I know him," but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But whoever keeps his word, the love of God is truly perfected in him. This is the way we may know that we are in union with him: 6 whoever claims to abide in him ought to live (just) as he lived.***
2. Since we've been set free we don't have to sin. God's forgiveness is more than an overlooking of our faults. It is a removal of our sins and the power of sin. Jesus died on the cross to forgive but also to give us power over sin.
3. Yet, since we grab hold and appreciate this power only slowly we still do sin. But here too practical John says, stay the course. Don't give up. Keep coming back to him so that the power of his expiated blood can set you free.
4. Don't be satisfied with anything less! Don't say you really know him or that your knowledge of him is complete is you're still sinning. No way! Your knowledge and love of him are not perfected until you are perfected.
5. Don't play games and talk about how you love God etc. without doing a reality check. Our actual behavior is the best indicator of the true condition of our faith and our heart.
 - a. Luke 6:45 *The good man out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure produces evil; for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?*
 - b. Mat 15:19 *For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a man;*
6. N.B.
 - a. John is not obsessed with behavior as an end in itself. Such an attitude trivializes the human person. Rather his focus is on the *true* heart of a person.
 - b. But how do we know our true heart? It is possible to have false notions of our true motives and heart.
 - c. John is practical. He says look at your behavior as the best indicator of the true condition of your heart.
7. What's the proof of Jesus Power in us?
 - a. We live just as Christ lived
 - b. When we do this, God's love is perfected in us. The word becomes flesh in us.
 - c. Pretty practical huh?

C. New or No? (Verses 7-8)

1. **7 Beloved, I am writing no new commandment to you but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. 8 And yet I do write a new commandment to you, which holds true in him and among you, for the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.**
2. The commandment to be perfect and holy is not new. God had often called Israel to holiness
 - a. Lev 11:45 *For I am the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God; you shall therefore be holy, for I am holy."*
 - b. Lev 20:7 *Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy; for I am the LORD your God. Keep my statutes, and do them; I am the LORD who sanctify you.*
 - c. Num 15:40 *So you shall remember and do all my commandments, and be holy to your God.*
3. Yet there *is* something new here. For the darkness and long reign of sin is ended and the true Light (Jesus Christ) is shining!. In other words a new power is available to you. The power of the Cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now that there is light we can see. The Word has become flesh and dwelt among us and to all who believe in him there is given the power to become the children of God
 - a. John 1:12 *But to all who received [Jesus], who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth;*
4. The Old Testament had already prophesied this new reality and power:
 - a. Ezek 36:25 *I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.*
5. So what?
 - a. Don't live an Old Testament live
 - b. Life a victorious, grace-filled and new Life
 - c. Rom 6:4 *We were buried therefore with Christ by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin.*
 - d. Are you walking in newness of life?
 - (1) Really?

D. What's going on in the inside?

1. ***9 Whoever says he is in the light, yet hates his brother, is still in the darkness. 10 Whoever loves his brother remains in the light, and there is nothing in him to cause a fall. 11 Whoever hates his brother is in darkness; he walks in darkness and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.***
2. Our outer behavior alone is not enough for us in terms of assessing our true heart. We must also examine the inner movements of our heart. Hatred and factions and envy and discord and exploitation wreak terrible havoc in our hearts and lead, among other things to bad behavior and a darkened heart and mind. There is no place for this in the truly transformed human person.
3. Recall our study of the Sermon on the Mount:
 - a. *Mat 5:20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca, ' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.*
 - b. A heart weighed down with anger and bitterness is in darkness, in need of transformation and in danger of hell.
4. But note, to be free of this and thus be able to love is proof of being transformed. It is the best evidence of being in Christ, in the Light. Further, there is nothing to cause a fall because the Light helps us find our way to heaven.

E. Intriguing inquiry

1. ***12 I am writing to you, children, because your sins have been forgiven for his name's sake. 13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have conquered the evil one. 14 I write to you, children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong and the word of God remains in you, and you have conquered the evil one.***
2. Note the recurrence of the word “because” (Greek = *hoti*). This word bespeaks a reality. What it really means is “due to the fact of some “cause” you “be” (are) in you present circumstance.” For example, “You can read this because you are literate” means: due to the cause of the fact your transformation by the education you received, you are now able to read this.”
3. So what is John getting at?
 - a. I (John) have been telling you about a transformed life and the

- power in you for the Word to become flesh.
- b. Why can I tell you this?
 - (1) Because your sins have been forgiven
 - (2) Because You Know Him who is from the beginning
 - (3) Because You have conquered the evil one
 - (4) Because you are strong and the Word of God remains in you.
 - c. Due to these “causes” you “be” (are) able to live a whole new life
4. So then here is are the questions
 - a. Have your sins been forgiven?
 - b. Do you know him who is from the beginning?
 - c. Have you conquered the evil one?
 - d. Are you strong?
 - e. Does the Word of God remain in you?
 5. Really?
- F. Fix your focus
1. ***15 Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, sensual lust, enticement for the eyes, and a pretentious life, is not from the Father but is from the world. 17 Yet the world and its enticement are passing away. But whoever does the will of God remains forever.***
 2. Another practical measure of our transformation is what we have our hearts set on.
 3. The “World” is here understood as the collective climate of rebellion alienation and resentment against God. The place wherein rule the powers and principalities of darkness, anger and rebellion.
 4. To one degree or another we struggle to be free of the web of this world. TO the degree that we are still attached to the rebellion and darkness of this world we are not yet in possession of a fully transformed heart. Only God can really set us free.
- G. The Test of Time
1. ***18 Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that the antichrist was coming, so now many antichrists have appeared. Thus we know this is the last hour. 19 They went out from us, but they were not really of our number; if they had been, they would have remained with us. Their desertion shows that none of them was of our number....22 Who is the liar? Whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Whoever denies the Father and the Son, this is the antichrist. 23 No one who denies the Son has the Father, but whoever confesses the Son has the Father as well.***
 2. Note at one time they said they were with us and they loved the Lord. But now look at them. They never really were with us. It was just a lot of words and unreality. But the word was not flesh in them it was only lip service.

H. *21 I write to you not because you do not know the truth but because you do, and because every lie is alien to the truth...24 Let what you heard from the beginning remain in you. If what you heard from the beginning remains in you, then you will remain in the Son and in the Father. 25 And this is the promise that he made us: eternal life. 26 I write you these things about those who would deceive you. 27 As for you, the anointing that you received from him remains in you, so that you do not need anyone to teach you. But his anointing teaches you about everything and is true and not false; just as it taught you, remain in him. 28 And now, children, remain in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not be put to shame by him at his coming. 29 If you consider that he is righteous, you also know that everyone who acts in righteousness is begotten by him.*

1. Under this topic we should discuss conscience
 - a. We know what we're doing
2. Every person comes equipped with a conscience
 - a. Rom 1:18 *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened.*
 - (1) This text refers to the Gentiles.
 - (2) Even though they did not have the Bible they did have a mind and a conscience along with God's revelation through nature.
 - (3) Note that in failing to use their mind and conscience they became darkened in their thinking.
 - (4) This is a truth that we should grasp. We like to tell ourselves little and big lies which results in "stinkin' thinkin'" Over time if we refuse to listen to our conscience, it's voice becomes suppressed and our mind becomes darkened. Even though, deep down we know the truth, our surface thinking is distorted by lies and confusion.¹
3. This passage should not be interpreted as the absolute denial for any sort of a teacher. Clearly we do need some teaching and teachers; otherwise, why is John writing? But in typical Johannine absolutism² he insists that we can never deny we had nothing going for us, that we were in total

¹At a certain level we love confusion since it "allows" us to avoid facing the truth and thereby needing to make a change or a commitment to the truth. This is intellectual sloth and is a signi

²Recall that we have previously discussed "Jewish Abosolutism" as resulting from the nature of a language that has few comparative words. There is very little room for a middle ground in the language or thought of an ancient Jew. We may find this alarming or extreme at times but it is a refreshing balance to our modern tendency to set aside clear notions of right and wrong and to turn everything merely into a matter of degree.

ignorance. This concept of a conscience, an innate perception of basic right a wrong, is something we must recapture in the modern era.

4. Further, as Christians, we have the assistance of an anointing. That is to say, by our baptism the Holy Spirit further enlightens us with an infused knowledge that goes beyond what the un-aided intellect could grasp on it's own.
5. The bottom line is *remain in him*. That is, stay rooted in your relationship with Jesus in a way that is living and conscious and you'll know the truth and live in it more and more perfectly.

III. Chapter Three - become what you are

A. *1 See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 3 Everyone who has this hope based on him makes himself pure, as he is pure. 4 Everyone who commits sin commits lawlessness, for sin is lawlessness. 5 You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. 6 No one who remains in him sins; no one who sins has seen him or known him. 7 Children, let no one deceive you. The person who acts in righteousness is righteous, just as he is righteous. 8 Whoever sins belongs to the devil, because the devil has sinned from the beginning. Indeed, the Son of God was revealed to destroy the works of the devil. 9 No one who is begotten by God commits sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot sin because he is begotten by God. 10 In this way, the children of God and the children of the devil are made plain; no one who fails to act in righteousness belongs to God, nor anyone who does not love his brother. 11 For this is the message you have heard from the beginning: we should love one another, 12 unlike Cain who belonged to the evil one and slaughtered his brother. Why did he slaughter him? Because his own works were evil, and those of his brother righteous. 13 Do not be amazed, (then,) brothers, if the world hates you. 14 We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers. Whoever does not love remains in death. 15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life remaining in him. 16 The way we came to know love was that he laid down his life for us; so we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. 17 If someone who has worldly means sees a brother in need and refuses him compassion, how can the love of God remain in him? 18 Children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth. 19 (Now) this is how we shall know that we belong to the truth and reassure our hearts before him 20 in whatever our hearts condemn, for God is greater than our hearts and knows everything. 21 Beloved, if (our) hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence in God 22 and receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. 23 And his commandment is this: we should believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another just as he commanded us. 24 Those who keep his commandments remain in him, and he in them, and the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit that he gave us.*

B. Our Status

1. *1 See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*

C. The strength from our status - becoming what we are

1. *3 Everyone who has this hope based on him makes himself pure, as he is pure. 4 Everyone who commits sin commits lawlessness, for sin is lawlessness. 5 You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. 6 No one who remains in him sins; no one who sins has seen him or known him. 7 Children, let no one deceive you. The*

person who acts in righteousness is righteous, just as he is righteous. 8 Whoever sins belongs to the devil, because the devil has sinned from the beginning. Indeed, the Son of God was revealed to destroy the works of the devil. 9 No one who is begotten by God commits sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot sin because he is begotten by God.

D. The sober truth - by our fruits we are known

1. *10 In this way, the children of God and the children of the devil are made plain; no one who fails to act in righteousness belongs to God, nor anyone who does not love his brother. 11 For this is the message you have heard from the beginning: we should love one another, 12 unlike Cain who belonged to the evil one and slaughtered his brother. Why did he slaughter him? Because his own works were evil, and those of his brother righteous.*

E. Soul Searching self-test (how do you rate?)

- 1. *13 Do not be amazed, (then,) brothers, if the world hates you.***
 - a. Does it? Remember what is meant by “the world” (see above) Do you have a few enemies? Do some people think you’re strange for your Christian values?
- 2. *14 We KNOW that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers. Whoever does not love remains in death. 15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life remaining in him.***
 - a. Do you really love others from the heart
 - b. Or is it a merely tolerance or peaceful co-existence that better describes your heart vis a vis others?
 - c. If there is deep anger or hatred of another can this possibly be of God?
 - d. John points to the end of such attitudes: murder. We may not have actually murdered yet but those whom we hate might as well be dead for all we care. Thus we have murdered them in our heart.
- 3. *16 The way we came to KNOW love was that he laid down his life for us; so we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.***
 - a. Love is not merely a vague feeling it involves concrete sacrifice.
- 4. *17 If someone who has worldly means sees a brother in need and refuses him compassion, how can the love of God remain in him?***
 - a. Do we actually care for the needy and poor in our lives
 - b. What is meant by compassion? Is it the same as merely giving people what they want?
- 5. *18 Children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth.***
 - a. Remember - the word became flesh!
 - b. How about our words?
 - c. We say we are of God!
 - (1) Does this result in love?
 - (2) does this love bear fruit? Has it become flesh?
- 6. *19 (Now) this is how we shall KNOW that we belong to the truth and reassure our hearts before him 20 in whatever our hearts condemn, for God is greater than our hearts and knows everything.***

- a. A clear conscience is the fruit of living according to the truth we already know in the depths of our being.
 - b. Since God is greater than our hearts we know that we cannot lie to him or play games. Before God everything lays bare
 - (1) Heb 4:12 *For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do.*
- F. Having the mind of Christ
- 1. **21 *Beloved, if (our) hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence in God 22 and receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. 23 And his commandment is this: we should believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another just as he commanded us.***
 - 2. This does not mean “if we’re good children we’ll get what we want.” The deeper meaning is that we have the mind of Christ and want for ourselves what ever is Jesus’ will and whatever pleases him. We don’t just ask for anything. We ask according to the mind and will of Christ for us. What we “want” is not just anything. We want what Christ wants.
 - 3. The fact that we keep the commandments means that God can trust us with his gifts. We will not abuse God’s gift but use them in accord with his will. Thus God trusts us with more.
 - a. Luke 16:10 *"He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and he who is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?"*
- G. Recapitulation
- 1. **24 *Those who keep his commandments remain in him, and he in them, and the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit that he gave us.***

IV. Chapter Four - Tests of life 1 *Beloved, do not trust every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they belong to God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 This is how you can know the Spirit of God: every spirit that acknowledges Jesus Christ come in the flesh be longs to God, 3 and every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus does not belong to God. This is the spirit of the antichrist that, as you heard, is to come, but in fact is already in the world. 4 You belong to God, children, and you have conquered them, for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. 5 They belong to the world; accordingly, their teaching belongs to the world, and the world listens to them. 6 We belong to God, and anyone who knows God listens to us, while anyone who does not belong to God refuses to hear us. This is how we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of deceit. 7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. 8 Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love. 9 In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him. 10 In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God. Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us. 13 This is how we know that we remain in him and he in us, that he has given us of his Spirit. 14 Moreover, we have seen and testify that the Father sent his Son as savior of the world. 15 Whoever acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God remains in him and he in God. 16 We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him. 17 In this is love brought to perfection among us, that we have confidence on the day of judgment because as he is, so are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment, and so one who fears is not yet perfect in love. 19 We love because he first loved us. 20 If anyone says, "I love God," but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God * whom he has not seen. 21 This is the commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.*

A. Do you acknowledge the reality of Jesus Christ? - 1 *Beloved, do not trust every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they belong to God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 This is how you can know the Spirit of God: every spirit that acknowledges Jesus Christ come in the flesh be longs to God, 3 and every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus does not belong to God. This is the spirit of the antichrist that, as you heard, is to come, but in fact is already in the world.*

B. Do you accept the teaching of the Apostles, the scriptures? 4 *You belong to God, children, and you have conquered them, for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. 5 They belong to the world; accordingly, their teaching belongs to the world, and the world listens to them. 6 We belong to God, and anyone who knows God listens to us, while anyone who does not belong to God refuses to hear us. This is how we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of deceit.*

C. Have you experienced God's love for you and is this experience real? 7 *Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. 8 Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love. 9 In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him. 10 In this is love:*

not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God. Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us....16 We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him.

- D. Have you experienced the life of the Spirit at work in you? *13 This is how we know that we remain in him and he in us, that he has given us of his Spirit. 14 Moreover, we have seen and testify that the Father sent his Son as savior of the world. 15 Whoever acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God remains in him and he in God.*
- E. Do you have a clear conscience? *17 In this is love brought to perfection among us, that we have confidence on the day of judgment because as he is, so are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment, and so one who fears is not yet perfect in love.*

V. Chapter Five - Benchmarks of belief - *1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is begotten by God, and everyone who loves the father loves (also) the one begotten by him. 2 In this way we know that we love the children of God when we love God and obey his commandments. 3 For the love of God is this, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, 4 for whoever is begotten by God conquers the world. And the victory that conquers the world is our faith. 5 Who (indeed) is the victor over the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? 6 This is the one who came through water and blood, Jesus Christ, not by water alone, but by water and blood. The Spirit is the one that testifies, and the Spirit is truth. 7 So there are three that testify, 8 the Spirit, the water, and the blood, and the three are of one accord. 9 If we accept human testimony, the testimony of God is surely greater. Now the testimony of God is this, that he has testified on behalf of his Son. 10 Whoever believes in the Son of God has this testimony within himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar by not believing the testimony God has given about his Son. 11 And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 Whoever possesses the Son has life; whoever does not possess the Son of God does not have life. 13 I write these things to you so that you may know that you have eternal life, you who believe in the name of the Son of God. 14 And we have this confidence in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us in regard to whatever we ask, we know that what we have asked him for is ours. 16 If anyone sees his brother sinning, if the sin is not deadly, he should pray to God and he will give him life. This is only for those whose sin is not deadly. There is such a thing as deadly sin, about which I do not say that you should pray. 17 All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that is not deadly. 18 We know that no one begotten by God sins; but the one begotten by God he protects, and the evil one cannot touch him. 19 We know that we belong to God, and the whole world is under the power of the evil one. 20 We also know that the Son of God has come and has given us discernment to know the one who is true. And we are in the one who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. 21 Children, be on your guard against idols.*

A. Faith is Fundamental - *1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is begotten by God, and everyone who loves the Father loves (also) the one begotten by him.*

1. Note the connection between faith and our new nature.
2. Faith is not merely an abstraction, or some vague intellectual adherence to doctrine
3. Faith is a transformative power. Through it we are begotten by the Father and begin to share his nature. This brings forth a new and divine nature within us. We now begin to think and love as God does and to do the things of God.
4. Thus faith is real, it is transformative. It is about real change in our lives - faith is incarnational. The Word becomes flesh in us.

B. Proof that is Pure - **2 *In this way we KNOW that we love the children of God when we love God and obey his commandments. 3 For the love of God is this, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome***

1. I say I love I say that I am a child of God, that I have saving faith but how do I best know it is true?
2. The fact that I keep the commandments is the purest proof of my love and my faith and my status as a child of God. The keeping of the commandments is the necessary fruit of faith and God's love, and of our new nature.
3. When the Love of God is really in me I begin to love the things and people that God loves. I love truth, justice, mercy, and every virtue. I love every person God has created.
4. All the commandments are a spelling out of love.
 - a. Matt 22:35 *And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets."*
5. There is further proof for which we should look - namely that his commandments are not burdensome to us.
 - a. Love gladly undertakes the will of the beloved.
 - b. Thus, that we no longer see the commandments as an imposition is a proof that his love is in us and that we are truly his beloved children.

C. Vindication as an Indication - **4 *for whoever is begotten by God conquers the world. And the victory that conquers the world is our faith. 5 Who (indeed) is the victor over the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God***

1. Remember what is meant by "world" here.
2. The world is that collection of philosophies and forces that are opposed to God and to the will and mind of God.
 - a. Sensuality
 - b. Pride and arrogance
 - c. Ambition
 - d. Selfishness
 - e. Rebellion
 - f. Sinful drives
 - g. Materialism
 - h. Godlessness
 - i. Etc.
3. Thus our victory (our vindication) over these forces is further proof that our faith is real, that the Word is becoming flesh in us.

- D. Fulness of the Faith - **6 *This is the one who came through water and blood, Jesus Christ, not by water alone, but by water and blood.***
1. There is some ambiguity as to what is meant here. Nevertheless there are a number of things that can be said.
 - a. First, for John, the “water and the blood” had a special significance. At the end of his gospel there appears these lines: *But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness -- his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth -- that you also may believe.* (John 19:34-35) Clearly John attaches special significance to this fact and these words conveyed an essential part of the meaning of his gospel.
 - b. The water would seem to clearly indicate his baptism and the blood his cross. Now since Jesus came by water and blood, not by water only, it would seem that some were claiming that he came through water only. In other words that his role of messiah and savior was accomplished only in and through his baptism in the Jordan but that the cross was not a part of it. As we saw earlier in the letter, there is a heresy lurking behind the scenes of this letter which John is battling. The heresy is Gnosticism.³ Among the teachings of the Gnostics was that of Cerinthus who taught that the Jesus was just an ordinary man. The Christ descended into him in the form of a dove at his baptism. Hence the Christ dwelled in Jesus by way of some kind of alliance. Before the crucifixion the Christ departed and returned to the Father. John obviously disagrees and insists that Jesus, the Christ came in water and in blood.
 - c. A similar and related theory (in that it is based in historical circumstances) is that John is making a distinction between the baptism of Christ and the baptism of John the Baptist. This is an important theme in his Gospel⁴ where John the Baptist himself states: *I baptize with water; but among you stands one whom you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.* (John 1:26-27). Hence John is distinguishing the baptism of John in the Jordan and the true baptism of Jesus wherein the saving waters come from his side rather than the Jordan per se. The true saving waters from Christ’s side. were merely pre-figured by the waters of the Jordan. Christ also prophesied of the water that would flow from his side: *On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, which those*

³Remember that Gnostics taught that matter was evil and spirit was good. Hence they could not accept the truth that God literally took flesh in Jesus. Thus they had novel ways of understanding the scriptures which explained away the obvious truth of the incarnation.

⁴For example, he even diverts the prologue of the Gospel to emphasize John’s auxiliary role: *There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light. The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world.* Jn 1:6-9

who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (John 7:37-39)

- d. There is also a way to understand the water and the blood as references to sacraments: the water to baptism, the blood to the Eucharist. Hence the meaning would be that there is more to the Christian life than getting born. There is also the sustaining power needed for that life and it is given in the Eucharist.
 - e. Yet another way to understand the text is from a more moral point of view. Thus it means that there is more to the Christian Life than the glory of the life of baptism. There is also the suffering of the Cross which inevitably enters each Christian's life.
 - f. None of these meanings necessarily exclude the others. Each of them contains an important insight.
- E. The Testimony that is True - ***The Spirit is the one that testifies, and the Spirit is truth. 7 So there are three that testify, 8 the Spirit, the water, and the blood, and the three are of one accord. 9 If we accept human testimony, the testimony of God is surely greater. Now the testimony of God is this, that he has testified on behalf of his Son. 10 Whoever believes in the Son of God has this testimony within himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar by not believing the testimony God has given about his Son. 11 And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.***
1. There is a testimony to the truth and reality of our faith that God gives us. John calls it to our attention. Allow me to rework the logic of the passage a bit.
 2. Regarding this testimony John says several things:
 - a. The SUBSTANCE of this testimony -
 - (1) ***11 And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son...10 Whoever believes in the Son of God has this testimony within himself.***
 - (2) Remember what is meant by "eternal life." It is the fullness of life, the gift of a totally new life.
 - (3) This is a testimony, a witness, because we can observe this new life in ourselves.
 - b. The SOURCE of this testimony
 - (1) ***So there are three that testify,***
 - (a) ***the Spirit***, - the power of the New Life of God in us
 - (b) ***the water***, - the power of our baptism wherein the old Adam died and the New Adam (Christ) came alive
 - (c) ***and the blood*** - The transformative power of the Eucharist we receive - we become what we eat.
 - c. The SURETY of this testimony
 - (1) ***9 If we accept human testimony, the testimony of God is surely greater.***
 - (2) Why is it we so readily accept human testimony about a whole range of things but the testimony of God is so easily brushed aside by many?
 - (3) Again note that the testimony to which he refers is not some vague, mysterious or spooky testimony. It is about

real things like a changed life, the transformative power of God's Word becoming flesh in us.

- F. Requirement of Renewal - ***12 Whoever possesses the Son has life; whoever does not possess the Son of God does not have life. 13 I write these things to you so that you may know that you have eternal life, you who believe in the name of the Son of God.***
1. How do you know you possess the Son?
 2. By the new, full (eternal) life you obviously have.
 3. If you don't have it you don't have the Son.
- G. The Crux of our Confidence - ***14 And we have this confidence in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us in regard to whatever we ask, we know that what we have asked him for is ours.***
1. Notice there is a basis for our confidence. We are not called merely to stir up confidence in ourselves.
 2. The basis of our confidence is this
 - a. Christ lives in us and his word becomes flesh in us
 - b. Thus we begin to think and love as He does.
 - c. We want what he wants.
 - d. His priorities become our priorities.
 - e. Thus we ask according to his will
 - f. We ask him for what he wants to give us.
 - g. Hence when we ask we get.
 3. So our confidence is based in our unity with Christ, on the fact of our transformation. It is not a willy nilly confidence.
 4. St. Augustine said, "Love God and, what you will, do" But what will we "will" when we love Christ and are at one with him through a transformed nature? Clearly we will want what he wants. We won't ask for dumb stuff or harmful things etc.
- H. An Aside on Sin - ***16 If anyone sees his brother sinning, if the sin is not deadly, he should pray to God and he will give him life. This is only for those whose sin is not deadly. There is such a thing as deadly sin, about which I do not say that you should pray. 17 All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that is not deadly. 18 We know that no one begotten by God sins; but the one begotten by God he protects, and the evil one cannot touch him.***
1. Again, lets work backward through the logic.
 2. No one begotten by God sins. That is to say, to the degree that the divine nature comes alive in us we will not sin.
 3. For this reason, sin is a serious matter. It is a sign that something is incomplete. When we detect our self or one of the brethren in sin it should be a matter for fervent prayer that God's transformative power put sin to death and bring the grace of new life alive.
 4. What about "deadly sin?" It is our catholic tradition to distinguish between mortal and venial sin. Mortal sin is a sin that is serious enough to cause a

type of spiritual death in the person. In effect, mortal sins cuts an individual off from the life of grace. Such a person becomes a spiritual equivalent of a corpse. Corpses if you haven't noticed don't do anything. Since a person is in effect "dead" we cannot pray on their behalf for needs that pertain only to the living. There really is only one prayer that we can utter on behalf of a person in mortal sin and that is that they be given new life through the grace of repentance, conversion and confession. Only for a person who is alive can their be benefit from intercessory prayers. This is because every other gift presumes the presence of life. For those who struggle with less serious, venial sin, prayer is a most helpful remedy however. Prayer causes more of God's grace to descend upon the individual. And God's grace is God's very life. This is why John returns to a theme he discussed earlier: Any one born of God does not sin. In other words, to the degree that God's own life is alive in us and is transforming us, we do not sin. Sin is an indication of the presence of spiritual infirmity. The remedy for this is for God's own life to enliven what is dead. The glory of God is man fully alive. The saints in heaven are fully alive and thus they do not sin.

5. John does not specify what precisely is a mortal sin. Catholic moral teaching has tended to specify sins that are mortal by their nature (*ex genere suo*) and sins that are always mortal, without exception (*ex toto genere suo*). There are also sins which are not mortal by their nature but are serious due to the malice with which they are committed or due to special circumstances in which they were committed.⁵ The scriptures do not presume to give an exhaustive list of mortal sins but there are some texts that speak of serious sins:

- a. *He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters. Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever says a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.* Mat 12:30-33
- b. *For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt. For land which has drunk the rain that often falls upon it, and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed; its end is to be burned. Though we speak thus, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things that belong to salvation.* Heb 6:4-9
- c. St. Paul also lists certain sins which exclude one from the kingdom of God if one dies unrepentant.
 - (1) *Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts, nor*

⁵More specifically three criteria have traditionally been applied to assess the gravity of a certain sin: 1. Grave Matter 2. Sufficient reflection 3. Full consent of the will.

thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor 5:9-11)

(2) *Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger; selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal 5:19-21)*

d. The Old Testament also described four sins that cry to heaven for vengeance:

(1) Murder (Gn 4:10)⁶

(2) Sodomy (Gn 18:20)⁷

(3) Exploiting the poor (Ex. 2:23)⁸

(4) Defrauding the worker of his just wages (James 5:4)⁹

I. **Summary Statement - 19 *We know that we belong to God, and the whole world is under the power of the evil one. 20 We also know that the Son of God has come and has given us discernment to know the one who is true. And we are in the one who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.***

1. We know, that is, we have intimate personal experience, of the fact that the world is dominated by the power of sin and the evil one.

2. But we also know, that is, have intimate personal experience, of our power and ability to live apart from these forces. We know we can live a new life because we know (not just know about) Jesus. Because we know him, we know victory

3. Yes, Jesus is real!

J. **Final exhortation - 21 *Children, be on your guard against idols.***

1. Idolatry is false religion

⁶Gen 4:10 *And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.*

⁷Gen 18:20-21 *Then the LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry which has come to me; and if not, I will know."*

⁸Ex 2:23-25 *In the course of those many days the king of Egypt died. And the people of Israel groaned under their bondage, and cried out for help, and their cry under bondage came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God saw the people of Israel, and God knew their condition.*

⁹James 5:1-4 *Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days. Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.*

2. The false religion John has been denouncing all through this letter is a brand of religion that is vague, abstract and in merely in the world of ideals and theories. A religion that is not really rooted in reality but is content to talk about “good intentions” and private knowledge. This is idolatry.
3. John insists that Jesus is real. That if I really know him, I will really see my life changed! The Word can’t remain on the page of a book or in the world of ideals. The Word has to become flesh in me.
4. I can’t say my faith is real if there are no real results from it. If there are no effects there is no cause. If I’m not actually keeping the commandments more fully, loving my neighbor more and more than my religion, my faith is fake. Not real at all, a mere form of reality.
5. But Jesus is real. Let the Word become flesh.