

Introduction

1 John is a small book but is packed with a lot of love, advice, and theology. We believe that this was written by John, the Apostle of Jesus (see our slide presentation on the Gospel of John parts 1-3). One major reason we believe this is because the language in 1 John is very similar to the language in the Gospel. Words that occur in 1 John often are also common in John's Gospel.

- Love (*agape*) is used 50 times
- Life (*zoe*) is used 14 times
- Light (*phos*) is contrasted with darkness and appears with similar words (manifest—*phanero*)
- Remain/abide/stay (*meno*) occurs 24 times
- Witness (*martyro*) occurs 12 times
- Truth (*aletheia*) occurs 15 times

We don't know exactly when John wrote this letter but we can guess. Scholars do have fragments of the Gospel of John (pieces of an ancient Greek manuscript) dating to 120-150AD. This suggests that John's Gospel was circulated before 100AD. 1 John may have been written around John's day; however it is hard to determine whether the letter was written before or after the Gospel.

We think that John wrote while living near the Asian town of Ephesus, in modern Turkey. History tells us that John lived there before he died. The Gospel of John describes Jesus' healing (John 5); Jesus and bread (John 6); and Jesus' turning water to wine (John 2). Dionysius (the god of wine), Asclepius (the god of healing), and Demeter (the goddess of bread) were all three important gods in Ephesus. John wanted the church to see that Jesus is greater than all gods.



Theater at Ephesus



Basilica of St. John the Apostle



Ancient House of Mary Mother of Jesus

In 1 John the apostle is addressing a problem in the church. It seems that the church struggled with their faith and faithfulness. John calls them to stay faithful and remain (*meno* is used 24 times) in Jesus. He often contrasts staying and going. Those who leave were not really part of the group (2:19). The antichrists were opposed to the work of Jesus and went out from the church. They left and will pass away, as will the world (2:16). Remaining in Jesus involves loving each other.

The church also struggled with loving each other. John used strong language to tell the church that not loving their brother was a sin, of the evil one, and contrary to the nature of God (2:9)

This continues to be an issue for the modern church. Those who study church growth indicate that while the church in Africa, South America, and Asia is growing—the church in America, Canada, and Europe is declining. Christians in America are becoming a minority. The church in North America does not carry the power, respect, and prestige it once did. We can understand why. Pedophilia, affairs, financial embezzlement, alcoholism, drugs, and abuse have all been done by clergy to members and those outside the churches. Division, fighting, and disharmony have become characteristics; in the minds of those not part of a church, of the church. John's challenge to love and be faithful calls even the modern church to repent and change our behavior.

In your study of this book it is our hope that you will see the love of Jesus and manifest this love in your life as well as the lives of others.

Use this book as a study guide, small group lesson, or as a personal devotional. At the end of each chapter is a place to journal.

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Chapter 1

1:1-4

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life.² This life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and witness (testify) to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.³ That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have relationship (fellowship) with us; and indeed our relationship (fellowship) is with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ.⁴ We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

This is what I think the text is saying to me...

Structure

1:1-4 That which was from/at the beginning
 That which we heard
 That which we looked at with our eyes
 That we beheld/marveled at and touched

The life was manifest

We looked at it (observed it)

We witnessed it

We proclaim life eternal

With the father

Manifested in us

1:3 That which we *looked at*

We heard it

We proclaim it to you

So that you may have fellowship/relationship with us

Ron Notes:

The word for beginning (*arches*= start, beginning, or author) in the Gospel of John suggested the beginning of time. John 1:1 tells us that Jesus was in the beginning with God and was God. In John 1:14-18 he came down and they saw him and his glory. John the baptizer was also a witness and friend of the bridegroom for Jesus. He introduced people to Jesus—followed by others. John pointed to Jesus as the one who takes sin away.

In 1 John *arches* is the word of life. Both Jesus and the experience of his ministry seem to be the beginning. John and the disciples (us/we???) were the witnesses and the ones now to share/proclaim joy and fellowship to the community reading this letter. “We” witness and make this joy complete with a relationship in Jesus.

Proclamation/preaching and writing are witnesses of who or what we have seen, felt, experienced, and witnesses. This tells us that our message first must be one of experience. We are not simply prophets who speak for God, we witness God’s revealed nature in Jesus. Preaching and sharing our faith are acts of faith but they are also results of our experiences in Jesus. We testify to what we see, read, hear, and experience.

Second, our experience has an effect on us. Who among us who has been transformed, forgiven, loved, and experienced grace can keep silent. We don’t preach out of anger, compulsion, rage, fear, or discipline. We preach out of our encounter with Jesus. We write because we are overflowing with joy and we want to share this joy with others. We sing, create, play music, compose, work, serve, and love because we are giving others what has been given to us. We minister out of our experiences and relationship with God.

Finally, our relationship with Jesus is meant to be shared. Notice that John mentions things such as:

- Your relationship/fellowship is with us...
- Our relationship/fellowship is with the Father and Jesus...
- Your joy may be complete...

1:5-10

⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

This is what I think the text is saying to me...

Structure:

God is light = no darkness which means God is pure

Walk in darkness = fellowship with him, he does not live

Walk in light = fellowship with one another and cleansing blood

Say have no sin = deceive truth not in us

Confess sins = faithful and just and forgive and cleanse sin

Say not sinned = practice lie word not in us

Walk in darkness = say no sin, not have sin, deception, practice lie = say we have relationship with him

Walk in light = confess sins, blood, cleanse, forgive = relationship with others

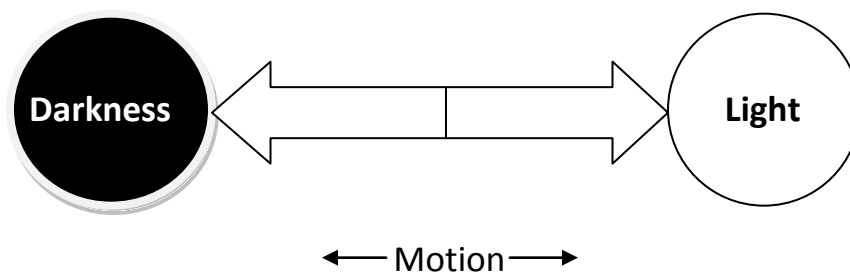
The problem is not “outsiders” but those inside who lie...

Ron's Notes

John reminds the reader that we are all to share in the joy and fellowship that exists with God. Since God is manifested as Father, Son, and Spirit then we also exist in community. We share our faith because it is meant to be shared. The “we” suggests that people come alongside others to walk in the light. The last part of the chapter suggests something interesting. What is this great message that John wants to tell us? God is light. There is no darkness. Period. We cannot fellowship with God and walk in darkness.

Sometimes light and darkness are metaphors for good and evil. Other times they describe two different worlds. It may be that John wants the reader to know that they cannot live in both worlds. There is the world of God and it means a radical break from the other world. It may also be that John wants the reader to know that the darkness is evil and doomed to destruction. Often he uses the words for remain, passing away, and maturity. For John, it seems that light penetrates darkness and transforms those who move toward its glory. Yet light can also fade and those who wish to be in the light must remain. I get the impression that the reader is moving. They are either moving toward the light or toward the darkness. We are walking in one direction.

It also seems that John wants the reader to make a choice. Just as, in the Gospel, John wants them to choose to believe or reject Jesus, the choice here seems to be the life of the church. Choose darkness or light. You can't have both.



Many times we believe that the Christian life is black or white. This thinking which says “Everything is good or bad, there is no middle ground,” is very immature. Ancients did not see black or white—they used the illustration of darkness and light. Light penetrates, shines, and illuminates the darkness. Darkness retreats from the light. It is not important where you are, it is important where you are going. For the ancients life involved motion. Two roads, two choices, two paths. Ancients saw life as a journey.

John tells us that God is light and shines into the darkness. We are called to walk in the light, meaning toward God. To walk in the darkness means we reject God, ignore God, walk away from God, lie, and retreat from the light. Walking toward the light means that we draw near to God and become like Jesus. God empowers us to be light by forgiveness, love, and direction. Those who walk in the light are moving from sin, acknowledge their sin, and repent. They seek to better themselves and become people of God. This is an encouraging message of hope, power, and freedom.

James Wood' Notes :

Darkness parallels saying we have no sin; Light parallels acknowledging or confessing our sin. So when we are walking in the darkness we are hiding the truth (even from ourselves at times) and sin has power in our lives. Confession brings light to our lives and disarms sin of its power. Try it – confess something that has been troubling you. See if the temptation does not lose its power when revealed in the light. A key part of this is that confession/light must happen in community. It's easy enough to confess to God (he knows it all anyway), but walking in the light means that we confess our sins to one another. When we live in community we care for each other and want to help one another to walk in the light.¹

John makes it clear that he is walking along side his readers. He is constantly saying “we” (“we claim to be without sin . . . we claim to have not sinned” etc.) to show that he is engaged in the same struggle as they are. This is a sensitive teacher and friend who is shepherding his flock by example, he shows his own struggle with sin and darkness to also show how one can step onto the path of light.

Notes

The things we do many times separate us from God. When we live in ways that are destructive to ourselves and others we sin against God as well as others. When we choose to go against God's desires for us we sin against God and ourselves. When we reject God's love we lose our direction. Deep down, we know the things we have done that are against God's plan for us. We are all in the image of God and have a conscience that tells us right from wrong. It tells us about darkness and light.

Other times the things others have done to us drive us from God. While it may not have been our fault we respond with anger, hatred, guilt, shame, and self destructive behavior. We blame Jesus for the works of evil people yet forget that evil people crucified him and turned their backs on God. Daily people give God the finger and damage innocent lives by their actions. You may have been one of those victims. Yet, you feel you are in darkness.

¹ Note: This is not forced confession as in other faith traditions, but John is pointing out that as we learn to walk in the light we will understand that community and accountability to one another are a part of that walk. We will find people in the community of God who can support us and help us to carry the burden of our temptations.

If you have not read the Gospel of John we would first like you to read it. Learn the story and hear the message of how God came to earth to seek and save you.

If John's joy is complete by telling you that God is light, write below how God's love has helped you to draw closer to Jesus. Describe the direction you are going and why you are moving toward God and the light.

Now that you have written this, how can you testify to others what you have seen, heard, touched, and observed.

Chapter 2

2:1-6

¹ My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate/representative with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² He is the propitiation (sacrifice) for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. ³ And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we 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, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him: ⁶ whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

This is what I think the text is saying to me...

Structure

2:1 My children I write to you so that you do not sin

If you do sin = we have advocate/*paraklete* to the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is merciful concerning sin, not just yours but the whole world

In this we know that we know him

Keep his commands

Liar = says "I know," but does not keep his commands

Keep commands = truth in *agape*/love is mature
 I remain in him = ought to keep his commands

John is setting us up for explanation of commands

Ron Notes:

My children I don't want you to sin—but if you do, we have an advocate who is our *ilasmos*. I think that it is interesting that *ilasmos* has been translated propitiation or expiation. What does this word mean? There is a Greek root to this word which involves mercy. Luke 18:13 “God have mercy on me a sinner...” uses a form of this word. Heb. 2:17 uses this word for atonement. It is also a term for sin offering and in the Greek version of the Old Testament it is used for the mercy seat on the ark of covenant.

It is important that we understand not only the definition of the word, but the psychology behind sacrifice. In the past we understood sacrifice as a way to soothe or satisfy an angry God. Therefore, many scholars and ministers today are concerned that we have a form of divine child abuse in the death of Jesus. God was angry with us so he mutilated Jesus, his son, instead of us. While this has worked in the past it is a violent image and contradiction to a loving God. It also provides us with a scary image of God—the angry father who abused his son instead of us. It seems, through this view, that God states, “Someone's gotta pay for this sin. Who will it be?”

However, the wrath was not from God, it was from us. Jesus did not satisfy God's desire for blood—he satisfied our desire for blood. In one way the sacrifice of Jesus took our/human hostility. Interesting note that in the Gospel of John it was not God who was angry, it was those who hated Jesus. John makes it a point, in the Gospel, to remind us that the religious leaders hated Jesus. Jesus was not murdered by the Father, he was murdered by humans. This sacrifice because of our sin calls us to seek forgiveness and repentance.

Sacrifice carried a celebrative atmosphere. People celebrated the sacrifice as a gift to a god. Pagan gods were angry and called for a sacrifice to “calm them down.” The God of the Bible called for a sacrifice to cover our sins. This does not suggest a violent, angry God, it suggests a people sacrificing for their forgiveness and celebrating (with a meal) God's mercy. People ate in the presence of God (Deuteronomy 27:7). This was a celebration, not a time of trembling and fear.

Jesus is our advocate and sacrifice. *First, advocates represent us in court and uses the proper court language to represent our case.* The advocate communicates for us and brings our case to the judge. When I have taken a woman to court for an order of protection (restraining order) against her partner or husband we have an advocate who explains the language of the document and helps us fill out the form. Then she and I help the woman stand before the judge and translate or explain the situation to the judge and the decision to the woman. The advocate helps represent the person to the

judge. Jesus also helps us in the presence of God. He clarifies the message from God so that we can understand and reflect the glory of God.

Second, the sacrifice is offered to open the lines of communication between God and us. It is not about anger, fear, and pain. It is about communication. Jesus is our communication with God. Jesus is God. Therefore, God desires a relationship with us enough to come close and communicate with us. The story of an angry God killing his son to forgive our sins is divine child abuse. The story, however, is not about an angry God, it is about a loving God who empowers us to be near, loved, and forgiven. It is a God who takes our fears, anger, sins, and pain and removes it. We have no reason to run from God because our sin is dealt with.

Notice that John tells us that Jesus is not only for us but for the whole world. While many in the church feel we should focus inwardly, John reminds us that Jesus came for all people, in all places, in every age. Evangelism and outreach happen when we acknowledge that Jesus' sacrifice is not only for me, it is for others. We share our faith because we want all to know the love of God, as we do. Jesus is not our personal Lord and Savior—he is the Savior of all. Salvation is a choice and is available to all.

This is why we proclaim Jesus to others. People do not need to keep running from God. They run from God because they fear God. Just as the abused woman stands before the judge in fear and shame, so we stand before a God in the same way. Yet the woman does not always understand that the judge is her friend. He/she is there to protect the woman and represent our laws, which are designed to keep people safe. Our laws also provide abused victims with financial grants, safe houses, rent supplement, counseling, child safety measures, and incarceration for the abusers. She does not know this. She is afraid of the man/woman in the robes behind the court chambers. Yet the advocate helps her, we help her, to understand that she can come for help and receive it. So Jesus is our advocate, not our enemy. God is a merciful judge, not an ogre.

2:3-6

To know God is to keep the commands

To keep the commands means that love is perfected (matured, *telos*)

4:11 We ought to love others

4:17 Love matured gives us confidence

4:18 No, fear in mature love

The word translated here as mature is *telos*= typically this word has also been translated finish, complete, perfect. I like the mature translation but am concerned about perfect as a translation. The Greek word can mean any of these. However, mature seems to be a better translation. **First, it is not consistent to translate *mature* in one place and *perfect* in others.** Perfection suggests something unattainable. Maturity is both expected and possible. Notice how maturity is used in Eph. 4:11-16. Maturity is the goal of all Christians.

¹¹He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, *to mature adulthood*, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Christian leaders are given to the church to help members “mature” in the faith. Maturity is the goal for all of us.

Second, love/agape helps a person mature and develop. In Matthew 5:43-48 Jesus tells us to “be mature as your heavenly father is mature...” How do we mature?

Matt. 5:43-48 = love for all people is mature love

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸**You therefore must be mature, as your heavenly Father is mature.**

Col. 3:14 = love matures and binds

¹⁴ Above all these put on love, which binds everything together in mature harmony.

This is why *Agape* is one of our core values at the Agape Church of Christ. It develops spiritual maturity in people. We are called to spiritual maturity and this is developed by loving others and ourselves. When we practice unconditional love, giving, acceptance, and empowerment we begin to spiritually mature. John will talk more about this later.

The love of God matures us when we keep the commands of God and walk as God walked (Jesus). John seems to be leading up to a definition of the commands of God. What are the commands of God? Are they fierce? Are they judgmental? Are they rules and regulations designed to keep me pure?

James Notes:

It is interesting to me that in 1 John Jesus is the *paraklete* whereas in the gospel it seems to be the Holy Spirit that can only come after Jesus has left. Jesus is an advocate before the Father on our behalf – perhaps the Holy Spirit is an advocate to us on the behalf of the Father?

I'm concerned with how we express atonement in today's culture. The New International Version translates *ilasmos* as "atoning sacrifice". One of the difficult jobs of Christians through history is finding new metaphors to express what happened with Jesus' death and how God worked to take away our sin. The idea of a propitiatory sacrifice makes it seem as if the wrath of God demanded death. While the OT sacrificial system does involve the death of animals and the shedding of blood, it seems to be more concerned with proper giving, providing for the priests and having a fellowship meal with God. Nearly every sacrifice was cooked over the fire and then eaten by the priests. While there are sacrificial systems in the pagan world that demanded some sort of flesh-payment to appease the wrath of the gods, the sacrifices to Yahweh most certainly were not so.

I think John's other word choice offers us a great metaphor to used today: *katharsis*. Catharsis, cleansing, or healing. Through Jesus, we are healed of our brokenness, cleansed of our hurts, and made into whole people. Jesus submits himself to all the hurt of a broken world lashing out at the pain of healing. Our wrath is due to our desire to remain as we are: damaged. God's ultimate desire for us is that we can be made into whole people – the kind of people he created us to be.

2:7-14

⁷ Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. ⁸ At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. ⁹ Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. ¹⁰ Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. ¹¹ But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes. ¹² I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are 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 overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father. ¹⁴ 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 abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

This is what I think the text is saying to me...

Structure

2:7 Here it is = not new but old

Light shines on this one, darkness not hide

2:9 hate brother = darkness

Love brother = light

2:11 hate brother = in darkness, blind

John tells us more about these commands. Actually, it is an earlier command, not a new command, and one that ties two themes together. In 1:5-10 he suggests that there is a darkness/light theme. In 2:1-6 he suggests that there is a lie/truth theme. The command is the command to love our brother/sister. *First, the one who does not love their brother/sister walks in darkness and lives a lie.* The “command” John is concerned about is loving our spiritual family. John has been building to this point and now focuses on this one command. This is the major one for Christians, and one we have struggled with for years.

Second, the darkness is temporary and the light is stable/permanent. To not love our spiritual family suggests that we become unstable. To practice *agape* for our spiritual family not only matures us, it causes us to remain and be stable in Jesus. It keeps us firm. Those who choose not to practice love or those who retreat from this world are not spiritually stable or mature. Practicing *agape* is the only way we can spiritually develop and grow in our faith.

Structure

2:12

Children = Your sins are forgiven

Fathers = You have known God

Young one s= We have conquered evil

Slaves/servants = You know the father

Fathers = You are known by God

Young ones = You are strong in word and have conquered evil

2:15 Do not love (*agape*) the world or things of world

Love world = not love father

In world

lust of flesh

Lust of eyes

Greed of life, out of the world

2:17 world is passing away and its lust

The will of God remains

Antichrists have come but they left because they are not stable

God remains

They were worldly

Confessing and remaining in the Father is the way

We proclaim life eternal

Remain in him

Ron's Notes

After John challenges them about the command to love their spiritual family, he now moves to encourage them about transformation. They have been forgiven, know the way, and have overcome evil. John appeals to their conversion as if to say, "You are saved, therefore... stay faithful." Notice how often he uses abide/remain (*meno*).

Inside the body of Christ (or the light) is salvation, permanence, and stability. The world is passing away (*paragetai*) so don't fall in love with it. The father is permanent, remains, and is stable. Because of this they know the truth—anything transitional is a lie. The antichrists are transitional and passing away...they left and were not part of us.

Some have suggested that the phrase, “they were not part of us...” is support for what is known as the *Once Saved Always Saved* doctrine. This doctrine suggests that a true believer cannot fall away from God, if they are truly saved. Those who leave the faith, it is suggested, are people who really weren’t converted in the first place. This is nonsense, but that will be addressed later. Relationships are involve love from both sides. Both people commit to each other. If one walks out it does not mean that the other has not been a good partner. Sometimes people choose to leave because they have a problem. A relationship that one cannot leave is abusive and controlling. God does not force people into a relationship. Churches should not force people to stay. To stay/abide/remain is a choice someone must make of their own free will. Yet a healthy relationship involves two people giving, sharing, and loving each other.

John is writing that the antichrists, like the world, were temporary. They did not stay (for whatever reason) because they are in love with the world. The “they were not of us...” suggests more their temporary nature as opposed to the *meno* (permanent) nature of the Christians, like the father. They are of the lie, not the truth. The truth is seen in stability and faithfulness. In 2:26 John seems to wind down with this thought. Those who receive the anointings should remain, stay, and live in the truth. Permanence is something they were taught. This is the truth, the anointing, stability, light, and righteousness. Our walk with Jesus is not temporary. It is designed to be stable and long term.

Notes

What are some of the issues that have caused you to struggle in your faith? Write them below. Then discuss ways that these might cause you to walk away from your faith. Are they dangerous? Are they potentially destructive? Can they be resolved or do you have to remove them from your life?

Chapter 3

3:1-10

¹See what kind of love the Father has given to us that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ²Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. ⁴Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. ⁵You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. ⁶No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. ⁷Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. ⁸Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. ⁹No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. ¹⁰By this it is evident who the children of God are, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

This is what I think the text is saying to me...

Structure

3:1 See how great a love the father has given us

God calls us children

World not know us therefore they do not know him

We are now children of God but what we will be has not yet been shown

This hope helps to purify/make holy us even as [God] is pure/holy

3:4 All who practice sin practice rebellion

Sin is lawlessness = he appeared to take up sin

No sin in God, all who are in God remain (*meno*) and there is no sin

All who practice sin have not observed him nor do they know him

3:7 Children, not be deceived, if you practice righteous behavior

then you are righteous

even as he is righteous

3:9 Born of God not practice sin

seed of God remains

not able to sin

become/born of God

3:10 How do we know children of God and children of Devil? By their actions

Ron notes

John seems to prepare the community for rejection. In John's Gospel the Judean leaders (a strict traditional sect of the Jews) reject the community of Christ as they did Jesus. In 1 John the world rejects them as it does Jesus because it doesn't know him. John 1 = he came to his own who were in the world but his own (humans and especially the Jewish leaders) rejected him. Not all rejected Jesus, but the hard hearted and abusive people were the one who did this. 1 John = the world rejects Jesus because it is passing away. Jesus is permanent, stable. The world cannot see this stability because they are temporary, passing away, being disillusioned. In 1 John the emphasis is on a corrupt and unstable culture rather than corrupt and unstable leaders. The enemy in 1 John is a culture that rejects Jesus.

Darkness is defined further in 1 John. It is the realm of hatred, temporary, disobedience, resistance to confess sin, walking away from God. We are manifested like God and therefore people's rejection of God explains their rejection of us. The antichrists didn't leave us—they left God (1 John 2). However, we shouldn't take rejection personally because it is about God not us. It is due to an unstable culture, not unstable leaders.

John seems to tell us that God remains, is constant, and stays—while the world is temporary. God is stable and permanent. God is light. Light is unfading. Darkness is unstable, chaos, transitional, losing power/influence due to the light. Love penetrates the light. Love heals. But, many people reject God's love. We call this "spiritual attachment disorder." Just as many adopted children go through an attachment disorder phase of their lives so people do the same spiritually. Attachment disorder is a time when an adopted child becomes critical, hostile, angry, or distances themselves from their caregivers. Mostly, it is about how they feel about themselves. They were rejected by biological parents (at least they perceive this as rejection) and begin to take out their anxiety and fear on their caregiver. "How bad can I act so that you too will reject me..." seems to be the attitude. Many times they fear being loved. Adoptive parents and foster parents see this as an incredibly hard time but one that they try to love the child unconditionally through during this phase. Some kids come out of it. Others dive into a live of self destructive behavior. However, it is not about the caregiver. It is about how the child sees themselves.

I believe that many people go through this same disorder with God. Many people fear being loved by an all powerful, loving, and gracious God. However, this is not about us nor is it a reflection on God. It is about their struggle to accept God's love. It is about how they see themselves. Some come out of this disorder, some do not. However, John tells us that we should not take the rejection personally. They are part of a transitioning world and struggle to see the permanence and stability of God. They leave not because of us but because they cannot see. Our response—love people through this phase and maybe some will snap out of it.

3:7-10 is a hard section to read. In the past this has provided problems for people concerning sin. This may be caused by translating the phrase "who sins" rather than "who practices sin." On the one hand it looks as if John is saying that those in Christ do not sin. This would contradict 1:5-10. On the other hand it seems that John is telling us that if we are truly committed to God, we wouldn't sin. This brings guilt on people because we do sin. However, there is a difference between practicing sin and sinning. 1 John 1:5-10 tells us that we sin and need to confess this. Obviously John believes that practicing sin is contrary to our spiritual nature (3:8,9,10). The Greek suggests that we translate the phrase as "practicing sin," or "habitually sinning." If we struggle with sin we can overcome. I have seen people overcome addictions, change abusive speech, control their anger, modify their behavior, and many times remove a sin from their lives to where it is not a temptation. This is called transformation. However, struggling with sin is not the same as continuing to practice sin. The issue concerns behavior modification. Those who are not willing to change, modify their behavior, and struggle to overcome a sin practice sin. They do not practice righteousness. For John, they cannot see or know God. Behavior modification begins with the mind and heart.

- The one who practices sin is of the devil because he was a liar/sinner from the beginning
- You are born of God when you do not practice sin and God's seed remains in us
- You do not have the power (ability) to practice or continue in sin when you are born of God
- If you do not practice righteousness you are of the devil and you do not love spiritual family

John reminds us that we know those of God and those of the devil by their behavior. Changing our behavior is hard work but part of the life of every Christian. Behavior modification takes time, endurance, courage, and patience. The Christian life is about victory over sin, not making excuses for this sin. Yet, John very pointedly defines the sin that he feels strongly about. This section 3:1-10, has a powerful message for us. The text challenges us to love others. This is the evidence that we are born of God, walking in the light, remaining, and maturing. How we live with our church community and our local community reflects our faith.

- 2:2 Jesus died for us and others
- 3:2 The world hates/rejects him and us
- 3:10 We must not hate but love our spiritual family and others
- 3:11-12 This is our message from the beginning
 - Love others
 - Don't be like Cain the murderer
 - His brother was righteous
 - Does this suggest that our brother/sister is like Abel?????

3:11-24

¹¹For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. ¹²We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. ¹³Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. ¹⁴We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. ¹⁵Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. ¹⁶By this we know love that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. ¹⁷But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? ¹⁸Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. ¹⁹By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; ²⁰for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. ²¹Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; ²²and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. ²³And this is his commandment that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. ²⁴Whoever keeps his commandments abides in him, and he in them. By this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

This is what I think the text is saying to me...

James' Notes

- 3:1 The Greek word for give (*dedoken*) can carry the meaning of “entrusted”. I don’t know if this is the best translation, but I like the idea behind it. God’s love has been entrusted to us that we might share it with our brothers and sisters.
- 3:1-3 – The is this repeated identification between Christ and the Christian – the world does not know us as it did not know him. We are like him. We will be purified because he is pure. John’s idea of the Christian life is to look like Christ.
- 3:4-10 – This seems to contradict John earlier where he says that anyone claiming to be without sin is a liar. If that’s true and this section is true, then every Christian would be a liar. This is a favorite passage for people claiming that the Bible is full of contradictions.
 - John uses the word for work/practice *poieo* 13 times in this letter and almost every time it refers to a way of life. This is the word that is usually translated “does” or “do”.
 - In 1 John you can practice sin, or you can practice righteousness. I think a better translation might be “live a life of” or “practice” or “bears fruit”. Somehow to get across that this is a lifestyle, not an isolated action.
 - When John talks about everyone sinning he says that we all “have sin” or that we “sin”; it seems clear that he sees *poieo* actions in a different light.
 - Our lives can bear the fruit of righteousness even though we may sin from time to time. Our accountability to one another and confession of our sins allows God to transform and redeem our mistakes and ultimately bear the fruit of righteousness in our lives.
 - Our live can bear the fruit of sin even if we are living in a Christian appearance. If we are not confessing our sins and submitting to God’s authority we can be the most active members in the church and our lives can bear the fruit of sin (e.g. the moral failure of church leaders).
- 3:20-21 – “God is greater than our hearts” – This is an interesting test to me. Basically, he’s saying that God has given us our consciences to let us know if we are on the right track. The sad

thing is that we have become adept at numbing our hearts when they tell us things we don't want to hear. If we feel guilty or hurt or just wrong we find a panacea to assuage the pain. Maybe God has given us the pain of guilt to let us know that things are not right – something's broken and it needs to be fixed. God wants us to be content, happy, whole people and we can't do that if we're not honest with ourselves.

Ron's Notes:

There is a strong contrast between death and life in this section. For John, hating your spiritual family equals death and murder. Life (God, light, permanence, stability) means loving our spiritual family. The transformation/transference from death to life involves loving our brother/sister in Christ. It is interesting to me that John feels so strongly about this. Of all the things John could say to the church, he tells them that loving each other opens their eyes to God, the world, security, and salvation. For John the proof that we remain in God and are in the "life" is to love brother/sister, lay down life for them, and compassion on them. John wants this love to be shown by action and truth. For John, those who hate are dead, still in the past, and cannot manifest the life and love of God.

How are God's love and truth manifested in us? They are manifested by our actions, truths, and love of the spiritual family. Agape love is manifested in works, compassion, and the Spirit. We have stressed that Agape love is maturity and spiritual development. In this section John emphasizes that having compassion on the poor is one act of love. Another act is to love for our spiritual family. Finally, the Spirit guides in this and causes us to walk like God, in love. But, in the ancient world there was no health care plans, retirement programs, and social justice providers. The church had to be a place where the poor were fed, protected, and empowered. The church had to be the place for elder care, child safety, and support for abused and divorced women. The church needed to care for the widows, protect the oppressed in society, and adopt the neglected and abandoned children. The church needed to free the slaves and help the beaten slaves heal and feel safe. The church needed to provide for the poor not only in their towns, but throughout the world. This was how they loved the brothers and sisters in the faith.

Today, many churches have become so inward focused that they sink tremendous amounts of resources into buildings, programs, and ministries to keep the saved saved. However, John calls the church to provide for those in need—therefore showing love and proving that they are reflecting the glory of Jesus and the Father. When churches fight, divide, or allow a few to control the direction and mission of the congregation—love is absent. This may be why so many churches are declining. They are not stable, permanent, or remaining in God's nature.

Notes

John calls us to struggle with sin and overcome it. John also points out that one of the greatest sins is to not love our brothers and sisters in Christ. Below write about two sins you are

Chapter 4

4:1-6

¹ Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. ² By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. ⁴ Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. ⁵ They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶ We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

This is what I think the text is saying to me...

Ron's Notes

Here again John is contrasting the life in the light (permanence) and the life that passes away. The antichrists deny Jesus in the flesh or that he is from God. Too often people focus on who these people are as a sect. Were they a group of "Gnostic" heretics or were they a fully organized religious movement.

It seems, in light of the past texts that the antichrists are:

- Temporary = they are those who left the group.

- Of this world = they set their minds on success in this age rather than the spiritual kingdom of God (Colossians 3:1-4; Phil. 3:20-22).
- Those who practice hating their spiritual family (also cause division) and are like anti-Christ.
- They may say that they do not sin.
- They may take the view of the world towards stability.
- They are not one person, the Beast of Revelation, or an Eastern European ruler who has come to take over the world.²

I don't know if John makes the antichrists equal to a sect but he seems to suggest that these folks left the faith and may not be willing to return (unlike those in 1 John 5:16). Too often this text has been used to give us reason to snub another religious movements or groups of people. This passage provides comfort, not condemnation. John is encouraging them to stay inside, rather than leave with the others. Those who stay behind wonder, at times, if they chose the right path. John reminds them that they need to stand firm. The antichrists are those who abandoned the church and are living in a world that is passing away/decaying.

Why did they leave? Probably because they do not believe in Jesus or they may have lost a sense of faith and trust over time. For some reason John is not concerned about "going and getting these people to come back." He states that they left, they are anti-Christ, and they reject the core belief system of the church which is that, "Jesus has come in the flesh."

Many times churches worry about, "closing the back door," which means keeping people from leaving the church. John would suggest that the church leave the door ajar. This provides a way out for those who want to leave and/or potentially cause trouble. Mark Driscoll, Mars Hill Church in Seattle, compares this to a colon. Every body needs a colon to expel waste. If the colon does not work then the body becomes sick due to toxic buildup. Some people need to leave and John suggests that we not accommodate them. The church is a place where people make choices and have the option to leave if they are not committed to our core values.

John also tells us that those who believe in the incarnation are from God. It seems that churches fight amongst themselves over issues less important than the deity of Jesus. Some doctrinal issues are valid arguments but in America, Christianity is declining. We are out-numbered and yet we fight, divide, or choose not to associate with the remaining few who preach that Jesus is God in the flesh. In the academic communities I find that many seminaries and/or professors and clergy believe that Jesus was an influential human, but not the son of God. Unfortunately "Christianity" is becoming even more divided concerning the deity of Jesus.

It is important that we embrace the deity of Christ as well as those who, as John wrote, acknowledge Jesus' divinity. While we may not agree doctrinally with everything a church may support, we need to work with what we have in common. There is a tremendous need to proclaim that Jesus is God's son and is God who came to us in the flesh. This common belief should unite us and cause us to

²For more information on the *Left Behind* series and modern culture see:
http://psybibs.revdk.com/2006/clark.sent_ahead.htm

work together and encourage each other. This message is, worldwide, not a majority view and distinguishes Christianity from other world religions. Only Christianity believes that God came in the flesh to teach us, love us, and provide a way of salvation to human beings. John tells us that this belief is from God and God's Spirit.

In 4:5-6 John tells us that these antichrists both listen to and speak to the instability of the world. They ignore John's teachings as well as the church's. You can't tell these folks what to do. Too often we waste time preaching at people who aren't interested. In the story of the see farmer (Matthew 13:1-23) Jesus tells us that some people ignore the message of the Gospel, some listen but only temporarily, and others listen and make a life commitment to Jesus. Our goal is to tell the story of Jesus and God's love. Our goal is to persuade others to listen. Our goal is to listen. Our goal is not to force people who don't care.

4:7-21

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. ¹³ By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. ¹⁶ So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. ¹⁷ By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. ¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. ²¹ And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

This is what I think the text is saying to me...

Ron's Notes

John is summarizing his points in this section. God is love (*agape*). God loved us first. We are like God when we practice Agape love. When we love our spiritual family (and others) we become like God and love is perfected/mature in us. John's comment in 4:18 mentions that there is no fear in love but that perfect/mature love drives out fear. Emotionally this is a powerful statement. *First, it suggests that a mature love of God is not based out of fear.* Yet, fear is a normal part of life.

Do you fear electricity? I think that all of us do. We don't stick our wet tongues into a light socket (at least not twice). We may have done this as children but we learned that it hurts (and causes us to talk funny). Yet we stick things into light sockets every day. We use electricity every day. We have a healthy fear of electricity (we don't swing from power lines) and go about our daily lives without "fear and trembling." So it is with God and our love. We know that God is all powerful, but we go about our lives trusting, loving, and imitating God. We have matured in our faith because we know God and walk with Jesus. I think that this is one of John's points.

A second point has to do with love. Mature love is not driven by fear. It does not produce fear. It does not use fear. Mature love trusts. In Robert Lewis' book *The Church of Irresistible Influence* he maintains that most churches (if not all) do not grow because they are dominated by fear rather than love. Fear keeps us from developing relationships with those outside of our comfort zone. Fear keeps us from taking risks. Fear causes us to horde, overprotect, and control others.

Have you heard the word anxiety? This is a term that describes feelings we get that may cause fear, excitement, or physiological change. We may feel tense due to something that makes us feel scared or uneasy. Our body responds to this anxiety by fight (anger or aggressiveness), flight (running away or avoiding conflict), or freeze (do nothing). Anxiety causes us to act. How do we act or respond?

This depends on our past life or family environment. If I come from a dysfunctional family with abuse, alcoholism, parental conflict, addictions, or an unhealthy form of addressing conflict I may respond to anxiety the way I have become accustomed. Maybe anxiety causes me to become

aggressive, angry, or violent. Maybe I fight rather than calmly listen and try to resolve the issue. Maybe anxiety causes me to run and I avoid conflict, withdraw from expressing my opinion, emotionally shut down and hang my head as a passive listener. Maybe I just freeze. I don't do anything and regret not acting. How I handle anxiety is deeply rooted in my personal history, family of origin, and behavior.

When John says that there is no fear in love he speaks to our anxiety. If you stood before the throne of God today and observed this glory how would you feel? Would you be scared? Would you be fired up? Would you want to talk to God? Would you cry? Would you embrace God?

If you saw Jesus today how would you feel? Would you see Jesus as an angry prophet pointing the finger at you? Would you see Jesus as the rebellious Rabbi who talked to women, held children, and hung out with sinners? Would you be intimidated by him? Would you feel like sitting with him and eating a meal?

John wants us to know that God is love and because God is love we do not have to respond out of fear. God is a loving, caring, gentle being who deeply loves us. God does not want us to be afraid; God wants us to be moved. God does not want us to tremble; God wants us to jump with joy. God deeply loves us and this love does not make us anxious, but safe.

Love empowers others to be the best they can be. Love takes risk. Love gives. Love trusts. Love acts out of compassion and mercy. Is Evangelism an act of love or fear? Do you live your life based on fear or love? Spiritual maturity is manifested by those who love, like God, not only those inside the church—but those outside the church.

John also reminds us that those who left (the anti-Christ) do not have the permanence or stability to stay in God. To stay in God means to love, be loved, and love our spiritual family. It means that we reflect God's love and compassion. Those who left the faith were not able to love others. They left because they were driven by fear, not compassion.

The Agape Church of Christ will be a church that manifests God's mature love. We will be a church that works to love others. We will be a church with a zero tolerance for those who let fear and immaturity hinder their own spiritual growth, as well as the growth of others. We wish to be a church that practices love not fear.

Notes

How does mature Agape love cause people to be permanent and stay in God's kingdom?

What does this chapter challenge you to do spiritually in your own life?

Chapter 5

5:1-12

¹Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. ²By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. ³For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. ⁴For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world-our faith. ⁵Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? ⁶This is he who came by water and blood-Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. ⁷For there are three that testify: ⁸the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree. ⁹If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. ¹⁰Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. ¹¹And this is the testimony that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹²Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

This is what I think the text is saying to me...

Structure

5:1-4

Born of God = believe that Jesus is God's son

Love the one born of God (Jesus—but also spiritual family)

5:2 Practice commands vs practice sin

2:3,4,7,8 = commands are to love brother/sister in Christ

What conquers the world = our belief and faith

The one who believes is born of God.

The one who is born of God loves those who believe.

The one who is born of God obeys God.

The one who obeys God's commands loves those who believe and are born of God.

The one who believes has a testimony from God.

The one who has a testimony from God has a testimony from the Spirit.

The water, blood, and Spirit testify to Jesus.

Loving others, believing, and overcoming sin testify to our salvation.

Ron's Notes

John begins to summarize his message. The characteristics of the Christian involve faithfulness (remaining) by believing in Jesus and practicing the commands of God (loving others). What is faith and belief? Throughout this book John keeps using belief and faith. Belief in the ancient world was different than some define it today.

1. Belief did not mean acknowledgement. To say, "I believe that Jesus is the Son of God..." is not belief—it is a confession or acknowledgement of something that is already true. Our acknowledgement of this statement does not make it true or false in our lives. Jesus is Lord, the Son of God, and the Savior of the world. Belief is the acting out or behavioral response to this statement.
2. Some churches teach that if you acknowledge this and "believe in your heart" (sometimes accompanied by the "sinner's prayer" or an invitation to Jesus to come into your life) that you are saved. This, again, is not belief. In fact nowhere in the Bible do people ask Jesus into their lives. Jesus already came to this world; we do not command or ask him to come to us. *We go to him!* Belief is a core value within us that causes us to be like Jesus.
3. Belief is a lifestyle, a commitment, and walking with God. Belief is a conviction that moves us forward. In Hebrews 3:16-19 the writer uses belief and obedience interchangeably.

¹⁶ For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? ¹⁷ And with whom was God provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸ And

to whom did God swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were **disobedient**?¹⁹ So we see that they were unable to enter because of **unbelief**.

How do I know if I believe? Others see this in my life and the changes that happen. Belief takes time. Belief transforms. Belief is a way of life. Belief is obedience. Belief is my conviction.

You see people's belief. Ethics, character, and maturity; they are all manifestations of one's belief. While no one is perfect we do know one's heart and passion by the way they live.

For John the church must manifest a core value of belief in Jesus' glory shown by love. John tells the readers that belief, love, and walking as Jesus walked are all intertwined. Those who believe must love their spiritual family because this is how Jesus lived. Those who believe and love are children of God.

John seems to refer to his former Gospel for the witness of Jesus' ministry. The witness of Jesus is the blood, water, and Spirit.

- John 1:33-34 = John the Baptist saw testimony of Jesus when he baptized him
- John 19:35 = John the apostle saw testimony of Jesus when the soldier pierced his side and extracted blood and water
- John 20:22 = the Apostles, including John, witnessed the reception of the Spirit from Jesus

For John, the witness of Jesus is manifested in these three elements.

For us today the same witness is true:

1. *The witness of Jesus is manifested in baptism.* This has always been a classic image/symbol for the church. Baptism is that point when people put on Jesus (Gal. 3:25); are born again (John 3:1-6); are buried and raised with Jesus (Rom. 6:1-6; Col. 2:11-12; and receive forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21). When the church is baptizing others, there is witness to our world that Jesus lives and brings hope. When the church is not baptizing—they do not have a witness in their communities.
2. *The witness of Jesus is manifested by the blood/sacrifice.* Whether it is the juice of communion or the blood of martyrs. Our witness is manifested to this world by our willingness to sacrifice and *die for others*. The witness of Jesus is not manifested by the blood of innocent people in the Crusades, Spanish Inquisition, Conquest of Mexico, and Orthodox church's slaughter of Jews and Muslims in Russia, Kosovo, Ethiopia, or elsewhere. This is the manifestation of the evil one.

However, the witness of Jesus is displayed by those who sacrifice for the hurting in society. They give to others in foreign countries. They lay down their lives to love, forgive, and confront those in sin. Many have shed their blood for the rights of the oppressed. Many have sacrificed to love those outside the body of Christ. This is a witness of Jesus.

3. *The witness of Jesus is manifested by the work of the Spirit.* While many may focus on the healing work of the Spirit they many times neglect the powerful transformation of lives through the Spirit. This is a powerful witness of Jesus. Many faith healers only operate during “appointed times or days of worship,” rather than random healings on the streets of the inner city. Yet the Spirit transforms lives every day, in every place, and in every generation. Our greatest testimony to young people is the power of transformation in a life enslaved by sin and evil.

In the past chapter we discussed fellowship with other believers. Once again I believe that we will never get anywhere by being divisive. We will never gain ground by trying to find fault and pick at the doctrines of other churches. While there are some that teach that Jesus is not divine, many believe that Jesus is God in the flesh and live a life that brings honor to him. While we may not agree with what every other church teaches, we must work to find common ground. Common ground gives us a place to stand together and look into the word. However, we are to focus on outreach and we can learn many things from other churches. As we focus outward we will recognize that we have more in common than not. We will find that our strengths are in what is common and these similarities will help the name of Jesus go into the world.

For John, we are to be a people of love, peace, and faithfulness—not division.

5:13-21

¹³ I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life. ¹⁴ And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him. ¹⁶ If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. ¹⁷ All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death. ¹⁸ We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him. ¹⁹ We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. ²⁰ And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. ²¹ Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

This is what I think the text is saying to me...

Ron's Notes

John appeals and encourages the church concerning sin. There is a distinction between sins. Some lead to death, others do not. All sin is not the same. This is a concern for many in the Christian faith. A man molests his children, confesses that he has “in some way stayed from God’s plan” and then informs people that “all have sinned” and therefore “all are guilty of the same punishment.” A leader has an affair on their spouse or is caught with internet pornography. We cannot discipline the leader because we all sinned, we all deserve God’s punishment, and therefore we have to forgive and reinstate the leader. If not the leader or molester asks us, “Are you perfect? Have you sinned? Aren’t you guilty too?”

So the story goes. Yet John, and many other places in the Bible, reminds us that all sin is not the same. *First, in the Old Testament, one did not sacrifice an animal for every sin.* Some sins required a heifer, others grain, and others something else. One wasn’t stoned for every sin. There were major sins and smaller sins. *All sin was/is not the same.* John tells us (1 John 5:16-17) that there is sin that leads to death and sin that does not.

John makes this distinction.

Second, the child molester is not guilty of one sin. They are guilty of deceiving, manipulating, grooming, abusing, violating, lusting, misusing power, and having forced sex with not only the victim—but all those around them. The repentance is complicated. The sin is complex. The healing for the victims takes many years. It is not the same as smashing my thumb with a hammer and using God’s name the wrong way. They are very different. They affect people differently.

The leader has not just committed one sin. They have broken trust, degraded women and men, misused power, and put up a false front before their church, family, and friends. They have dishonored

Jesus in their community. All sin is not the same! The repentance is complex. The healing for the victims and leader is a long involved process.

John challenges the church to pray for others but to remember that all sin is not the same. The sin that leads to death suggests that a person remained in the group and continued to live in darkness. John reminds us that this person practiced sin, violated God's commands, claimed to live in the light (while in darkness), and deceived the others. At least the antichrists left. These stayed. Their sin has led to death.

The church must call people to the light. There are those who struggle with sin and confess it. They seek to be in the light. They remain but they slowly move ahead. There are also those who put up a false front. They claim to be without sin. They are blinded by the light and return to the dark. They practice sin and continue without asking for help. Some leave. Others stay. The church must still call them to the light.

For John there is confidence. The community of faith is not a place to hide from our sin—it is a place to confess it and repent. It is a place to have confidence that God and our church will help us overcome the darkness. The church must be a place of victory, not failure. Too often I hear Christians say that our churches need to talk more about our sin. While we do need a place of confession we also need to be sharing the stories of victory. It is not important to tell all about my past—it is important to tell about the present and my future. We want to manifest victory not failure. Our leaders need to be open about their struggles but most importantly open about their victories. Victory, not failure, brings hope!

Notes

Explain what you think John is saying about God's love driving out fear. How does this work in your life?
