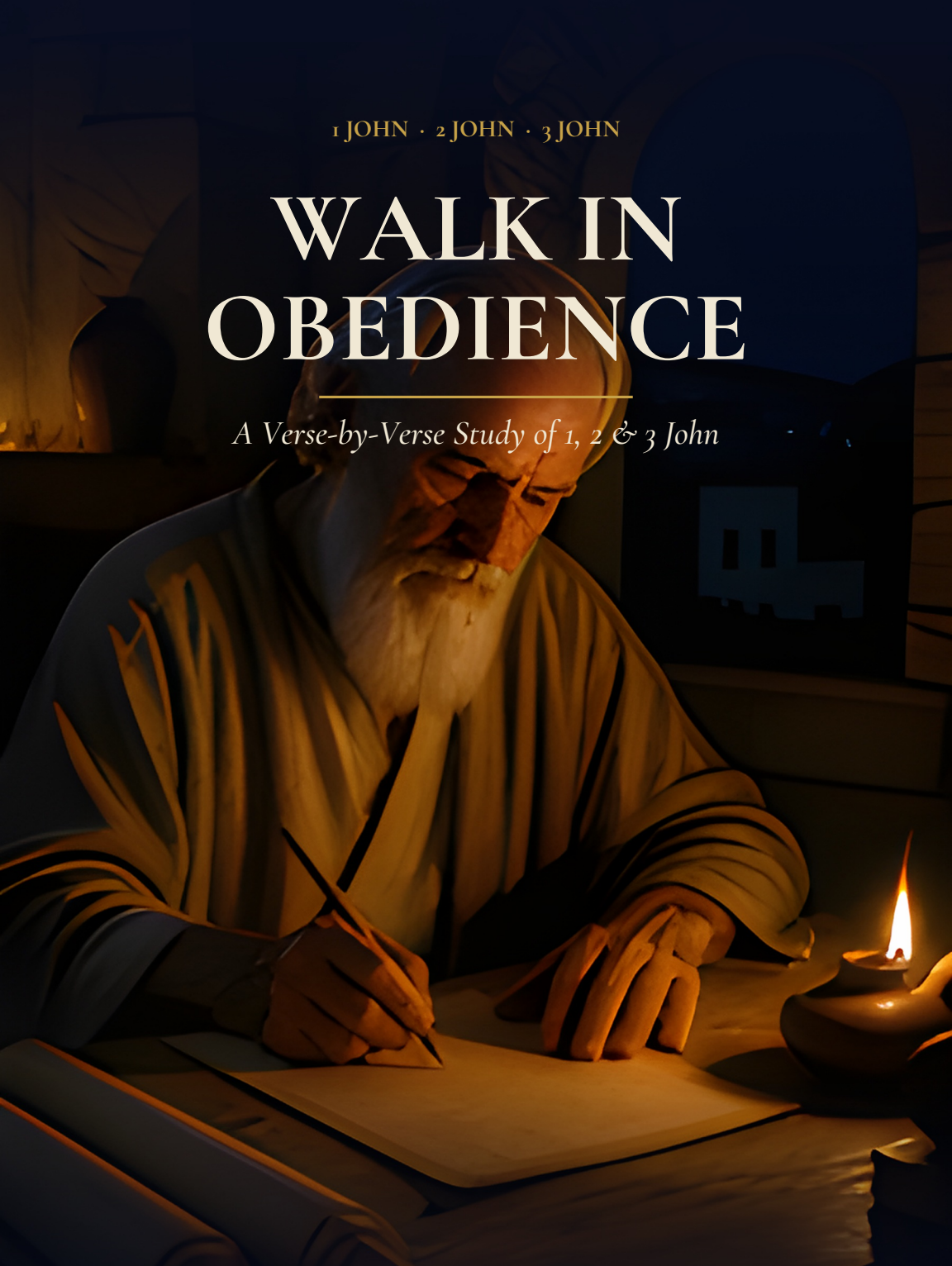
1 JOHN · 2 JOHN · 3 JOHN

# WALK IN OBEDIENCE

*A Verse-by-Verse Study of 1, 2 & 3 John*



REV. GEORGE H. STODDARD

*In His Hands Ministries International*

1 JOHN · 2 JOHN · 3 JOHN

# Walk In Obedience

*A Verse-by-Verse Study of 1 John, 2 John & 3 John*

**Rev. George H. Stoddard**
*In His Hands Ministries International*

**Walk In Obedience**
A Verse-by-Verse Study of 1 John, 2 John & 3 John

Copyright © 2026 Rev. George H. Stoddard. All rights reserved.

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version (KJV), a public-domain translation.

No part of the original commentary, study questions, prayers or design of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form without written permission of the publisher, except for brief quotations in reviews and for non-commercial teaching handouts.

**About the illustrations:** The photographic-style chapter and part illustrations in this book are AI-generated artistic interpretations created for this edition. They are not historical photographs and are not intended to depict the actual appearance of any biblical person or place.

Published by Booklyn · In His Hands Ministries International
inhishandsministries.com

First full-color edition, 2026.

# Contents

**Why 1, 2 & 3 John, and Why Obedience** . . . . . 5

**1 John** . . . . . 9

Walking in the Light . . . . . 11

Abiding in Obedience . . . . . 16

Children of God in Practice . . . . . 24

Love Tested and Proven . . . . . 31

The Victory of Faith . . . . . 37

**2 John** . . . . . 45

Walking in Truth . . . . . 46

**3 John** . . . . . 53

Fellowhelpers to the Truth . . . . . 54

**The Whole Duty of Walking with God** . . . . . 59

**About the Author** . . . . . 60

Introduction

# Why 1, 2 & 3 John, and Why Obedience

Three short letters close out the New Testament's collection of general epistles under John's name — one substantial, two barely a page each — and together they take up less space than a single chapter of his Gospel. Yet few portions of Scripture return as often, or as pointedly, to the plainest test of real faith: does it walk?

Tradition, and the internal evidence of style and vocabulary, point to the apostle John as author of all three — the same hand that wrote the fourth Gospel, using the same distinctive vocabulary of light, life, truth, love, and abiding. Most scholars place the writing somewhere between AD 85 and 95, from Ephesus, where John is remembered to have spent his final years shepherding the churches of Asia Minor after the deaths of the other apostles. He writes now not as a young man present at the empty tomb, but as an old pastor, watching false teaching creep into congregations he will not be able to guard forever.

The danger he confronts head-on in 1 John was an early form of what would later be called Gnosticism — a teaching that prized secret spiritual "knowledge" (gnosis) above simple apostolic faith, and that struggled to accept a real, physical incarnation of God in Christ. Some carried this so far as to deny Jesus had truly come "in the flesh" (1 John 4:2–3); a further strand, Docetism, held that His physical body only seemed real. If matter itself is beneath God, these teachers reasoned, then how a person treats the body — and therefore how they behave — hardly matters either. John will not let that stand for a moment. He ties right belief about Christ's person to right living in Christ's pattern so tightly that neither can be pulled loose from the other anywhere in these three letters.

That is the reason for this study's title. "Walking" is John's own picture, used throughout 1 John and again in 2 John, for the whole direction and manner of

a life — not a single choice made once, but a road traveled daily. Obedience, as John describes it, is never a cold list of rules kept to earn favor; it is what love looks like once it becomes real and durable enough to shape a life. "This is the love of God," he writes, "that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3).

1 John, the longest of the three, reads like a pastor's letter more than a formal treatise — circling back again and again to a handful of tests by which a believer, and a church, can tell true faith from false: Do you believe rightly about who Jesus Christ is? Do you walk in the light, honest about sin rather than hiding it? Do you love the brethren, in deed and not only in word? John does not present these as three separate hoops but as three faces of one reality, returning to each from different angles until his readers cannot mistake his meaning.

2 John, written to "the elect lady and her children" — very likely a way of addressing a particular local church and its members — compresses 1 John's warning about false teachers into a single urgent practical instruction: do not extend the hospitality of a Christian home, or the credibility that comes with it, to teachers who deny the truth about Christ. Truth and love govern each other here: love for people never means welcoming error, and guarding truth is never an excuse for anything less than love.

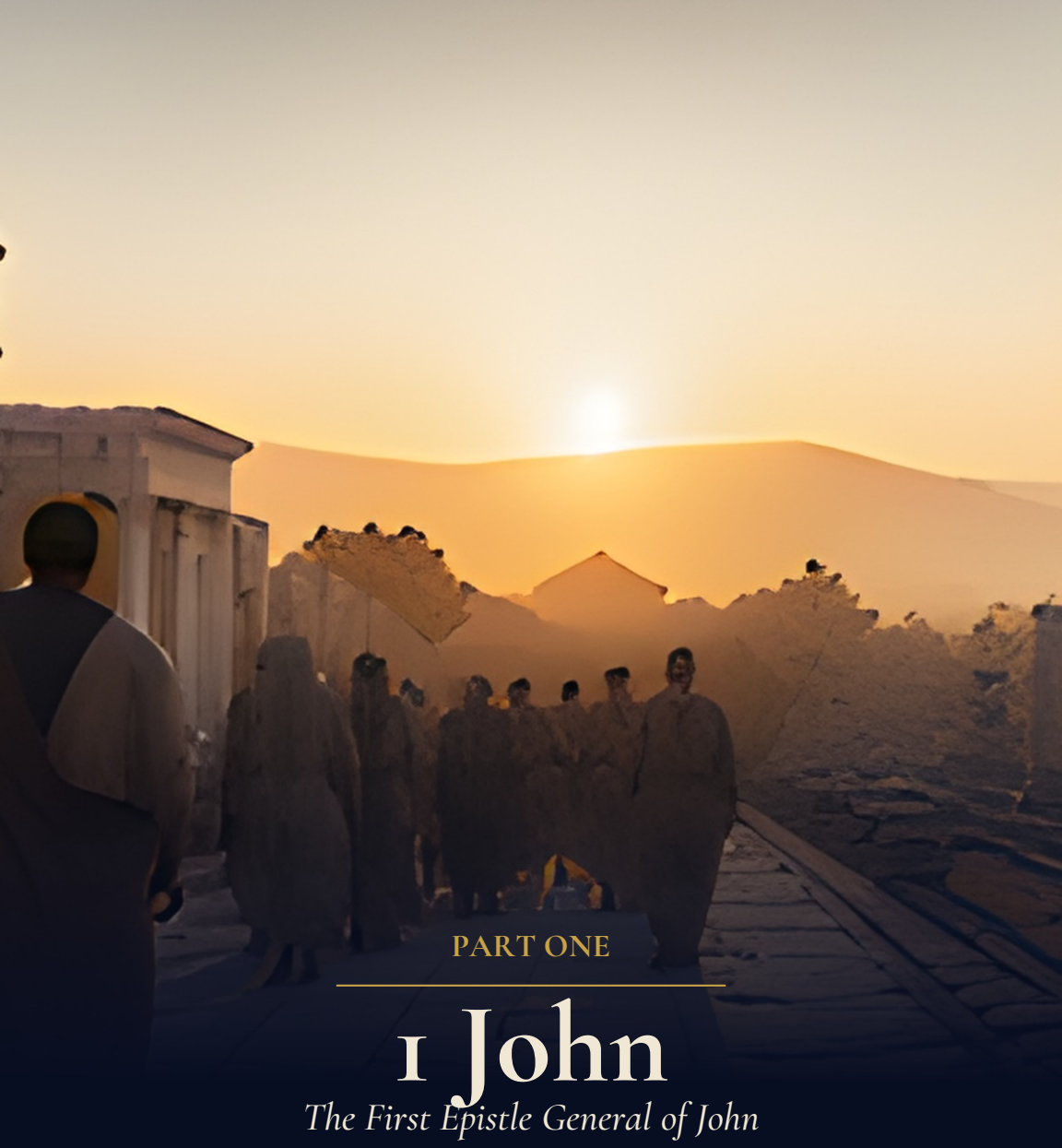
3 John turns the same coin over to show its opposite side. Written to a real individual, Gaius, it commends hospitality shown rightly, to faithful traveling ministers of the gospel, and contrasts it sharply with Diotrephes, a man in the same church who "loveth to have the preeminence" and abuses his position to reject the apostle's authority and cast out those who disagree. Between the two men stands Demetrius, quietly commended for a good reputation earned the old-fashioned way: through consistent, observable conduct.

Read together, these three letters give a remarkably complete, practical picture of what it means to walk in obedience: sound belief about Christ, honest dealing with sin, love proven in action rather than words, discernment toward false teaching, and simple faithfulness in ordinary relationships. May this study serve you well, whether you read it alone at your kitchen table or open it to

teach a room full of people hungry to walk more closely with the Lord.

## The Three Letters at a Glance

| Letter | Written to | Central theme | Key verse | Verses |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 John | Churches of Asia Minor | Fellowship with God proven by belief, obedience and love | 5:13 | 105 |
| 2 John | "The elect lady and her children" | Walking in truth and love; refusing false teachers | v. 6 | 13 |
| 3 John | Gaius, a beloved friend | Hospitality to faithful workers; pride exposed | v. 4 | 14 |



PART ONE

# 1 John

*The First Epistle General of John*

*Dawn over Ephesus, where John shepherded the churches of Asia Minor.*

# 1 John

*The First Epistle General of John*

## Fellowship, Light, and Love

John wrote this letter as an old man, likely from Ephesus, somewhere near the end of the first century — the last living eyewitness of the incarnate Christ, writing to churches he had shepherded for decades. He does not name himself, and he does not need to. His voice is unmistakable: the same rhythm of light and darkness, life and death, love and hate, that fills his Gospel now fills a pastor's letter to people he calls, again and again, "my little children."

Two dangers had entered the churches John loved. The first was doctrinal: a teaching, later called Gnosticism, that regarded matter as evil and spirit as the only true good. Some carried this so far that they denied Jesus Christ had truly come "in the flesh" (4:2–3) — to them, a real incarnation was unthinkable for a holy God. John calls this teaching what it is: the spirit of antichrist. The second danger was moral: if the body doesn't matter, why does sin? Some in these churches had begun to claim advanced spiritual knowledge while living however they pleased, treating obedience as optional for the truly enlightened. John will not allow the two to be separated. Right belief about Christ and right living in Christ stand or fall together.

That is why "Walk In Obedience" is the right title for this study. Walking is John's own picture for the whole of the Christian life — not a single decision but a direction, a daily manner of life. "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (2:6). Obedience, for John, is never legalism; it is the shape love takes when it is real. "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (5:3). He writes so that his readers might know — not hope, not guess, but know — that they have eternal life (5:13). The tests he gives throughout the letter (do you believe rightly about Christ, do you walk in the light, do you love the brethren) are not hoops to jump through. They are simply what a real, living

fellowship with God looks like from the outside, offered to a church that needed to tell the true from the false in an hour when both were loudly claiming to speak for Christ.

## John's Tests of Genuine Faith

| Test | The empty claim | The real evidence | Where |
|---|---|---|---|
| Light | "We have fellowship with him" while walking in darkness | Walking in the light; confessing sin | 1:5–10 |
| Obedience | "I know him" without keeping his commandments | Keeping his word; walking as he walked | 2:3–6 |
| Love | "I am in the light" while hating a brother | Love in deed and in truth | 2:9–11; 3:14–18 |
| Belief | Denying that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh | Confessing Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God | 2:22–23; 4:2–3 |

1 JOHN 1

# Walking in the Light



*"If we walk in the light, as he is in the light..." (1 John 1:7)*

## ◆ 1 John 1:1–4

> [1] That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; [2] (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) [3] That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. [4] And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

John opens without a greeting, almost without a sentence — four clauses pile up before the verb ever arrives, as if he can hardly contain what he is about to say. "That which was from the beginning" echoes his Gospel's own opening line, and just as deliberately: the Word who was with God in eternity is the same Word whom John heard, saw with his own eyes, looked upon, and touched with his own hands. Against any teaching that Christ was a phantom or an idea, John plants four physical verbs like four witnesses in a courtroom. This is not philosophy handed down; it is testimony given by an eyewitness.

The purpose of that testimony is fellowship — the Greek word is **koinonia**, a shared life, not a shared opinion. John does not write to win an argument but to bring his readers into the same communion with the Father and the Son that he himself enjoys. Verse 4 gives the emotional key for the whole letter: joy. Every warning, every test, every hard word that follows is written so that joy might be "full," not diminished. A letter this serious about sin and obedience is, at its root, a letter about happiness — the kind that only comes from being rightly related to God.

## ◆ 1 John 1:5–7

> [5] This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. [6] If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: [7] But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

"God is light" is the first of two great definitions John gives of God in this letter (the second, "God is love," waits until chapter 4). Light here means unmixed moral purity — not one influence among others in God's character, but the whole of it: "in him is no darkness at all." No shadow of compromise, deception, or evil has any place in Him.

From that definition John draws the first of several test-sentences that structure this letter: a claim followed by a reality check. Anyone can say they have fellowship with God. The claim costs nothing. But if the life behind the claim moves in darkness — in hidden sin, in deception, in a manner of living contrary to God's character — the claim is simply a lie, however sincerely it is meant. This is the first appearance of the book's title theme: walking. Fellowship with the God of light is not proven by a testimony given once but by a direction sustained daily.

Verse 7 is the flip side, and it is a promise, not merely a warning. Walking in the light does not mean living without flaw — it means living in the open, honestly, in the same moral direction as God Himself. And the wonderful surprise is that this walking in light is precisely where fellowship with other believers happens ("one with another") and where the blood of Jesus continually — the tense is ongoing — cleanses from all sin. Light does not mean sinlessness. It means nothing hidden from the God who forgives.

## ◆ 1 John 1:8–10

> [8] If we say that 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 that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

John will not let his readers drift toward either extreme. Some in his churches, perhaps under the influence of early Gnostic ideas that treated the "real" self as untouched by bodily sin, were claiming a kind of sinlessness. John answers plainly: to say "we have no sin" is not spiritual maturity, it is self-deception, and it puts truth itself outside of us.

Verse 9 is one of the most quoted verses in the New Testament, and rightly so — it is the hinge of the whole passage. Confession, not perfection, is the walkway back into fellowship whenever a believer sins. And notice what secures the promise: not our sincerity, but God's own character. He forgives because He is "faithful and just" — faithful to His covenant promise to forgive those who come to Him through Christ, and just because that forgiveness was fully purchased at the cross, not given as a loophole around justice. Confession here is agreement with God about sin, not a bare admission wrung out under pressure; the word means literally to "say the same thing" God says about our sin.

Verse 10 raises the stakes higher still: to deny having sinned at all is not self-deception now but an accusation against God, since His word everywhere declares that all have sinned. The three verses form a ladder — deceiving ourselves, then confessing and being cleansed, then, if we refuse, calling God a liar. John wants no reader left thinking that walking in obedience means walking without ever needing verse 9 again.

## Walk It Out

**Key Verse to Memorize — 1 John 1:9**
*"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

1 John lists three false claims in 1:6, 8 and 10. Which one are you most tempted to make, and why?

2 What is the difference between living without sin and walking in the light?

3 Is there anything you have been hiding from God that verse 9 invites you to bring into the open today?

**Prayer** *Father of lights, I want to walk where You are. Show me what I have kept in the dark, and give me the courage to confess it. Thank You that You are faithful and just to forgive and to cleanse. In Jesus' name, amen.*

1 JOHN 2

# Abiding in Obedience



*"He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." (1 John 2:6)*

## ◆ 1 John 2:1–2

> [1] My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:
> [2] And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

John's tone softens into the first of his many uses of "little children" in this letter — a term of pastoral affection, not condescension. He has just spent three verses insisting that all believers sin; now, in the same breath, he states plainly why he wrote it: "that ye sin not." Grace is never a license. The doctrine of forgiveness in 1:9 is not meant to make sin comfortable but to keep the believer moving toward obedience, with a safety net underneath if he stumbles.

And what a safety net. If any believer does sin, there is an **Advocate** — a legal term, one who pleads a case on another's behalf — standing with the Father. This is not a stranger arguing for a technicality; it is Jesus Christ Himself, "the righteous," presenting His own finished work. Verse 2 explains the ground of His plea: He is the **propitiation**, the sacrifice that fully satisfies God's righteous judgment against sin, turning aside wrath by bearing it Himself. And that sacrifice is not a narrow provision for a chosen few — it is sufficient "for the sins of the whole world," open to all who will come, even if its saving benefit is realized only by those who believe.

## ◆ 1 John 2:3–6

> [3] And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. [4] He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. [5] But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. [6] He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

Here is the verse from which this whole study takes its title. John gives his second great test: not "do you feel close to God" but "do you keep His commandments." This is not salvation by works — John has already grounded forgiveness entirely in the **propitiation** of Christ — but it is the honest evidence of a real relationship. Knowing Christ, in the full biblical sense, is relational and transformative; a "knowledge" that produces no obedience is simply false to its name, and the one who claims it while ignoring His commands is, John says without softening it, a liar.

Verse 5 turns the test inside out: keeping His word is not a burden added onto love, it is love reaching its intended shape. "The love of God perfected" does not mean love made flawless, but love brought to its full, mature expression — like a plant reaching the fruit it was always meant to bear. And then comes the standard against which every claim of abiding in Christ must be measured: walking as He walked. Not a vague spirituality, but the concrete, observable pattern of Jesus' own life — His obedience to the Father, His compassion, His

integrity, His love for people that cost Him something. To claim abiding in Christ is to take on an obligation, John says plainly, to walk that same road.

### ◆ 1 John 2:7–11

> 7 Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning. 8 Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth. 9 He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. 10 He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. 11 But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.

John plays deliberately with old and new. The command to love is old — it goes back to the Law itself (Leviticus 19:18) and was certainly among the first things his readers heard when they became believers. Yet it is also new, because Jesus gave it fresh, concrete content and example at the Last Supper (John 13:34) — "as I have loved you" raises the old command to a standard it never had before. It is "true in him and in you" because the light of Christ has already begun dawning; darkness is passing, even if not yet fully gone.

Verses 9–11 apply the light-and-darkness picture from chapter 1 directly to how believers treat one another. A claim to be "in the light" is worthless — is even self-contradictory — if it coexists with hatred toward a brother. Love for other believers is not one Christian virtue among many; it is, in John's stark terms, the very definition of walking in light. And the danger of hatred is not only moral but perceptual: it blinds. The one who hates "knoweth not whither he goeth" — hatred does not just harm relationships, it disorients the hater's whole sense of direction, making him unable to see where his own path is leading.

## ◆ 1 John 2:12–14

> 12 I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. 13 I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. 14 I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.

These three verses form a small poem in the middle of the letter, addressed to three groups that most naturally read as stages of spiritual maturity rather than literal age — the whole congregation is in view, seen at different points along the same road. To the "little children," the foundational fact of forgiveness through Christ's name. To the "fathers," the deep, settled knowledge of "him that is from the beginning" — not new information but a relationship matured over time, the kind that needs no more said about it than to name it twice. To the "young men," the language of combat and strength: they have overcome the wicked one because the word of God abides in them.

John is not measuring his readers to find them wanting; he is affirming, in the middle of a letter otherwise full of tests and warnings, that real spiritual life already exists among them at every stage. Obedience is not a project undertaken by beginners while the mature move on to something else — forgiveness, knowledge of the Father, and victory over the evil one belong together at every level of Christian growth.

## ◆ 1 John 2:15–17

> [15] Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. [16] For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. [17] And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

"The world" here is not the physical creation, which God made and called good, nor even the world of people He loves (John 3:16 uses the same Greek word, **kosmos**, in exactly that sense). It is the whole organized system of life that runs on values opposed to God — a value system, not a place. John says plainly that love for the Father and love for this system cannot coexist in the same heart; not because they compete for attention, but because they are fundamentally different orientations of love.

Verse 16 anatomizes what "the world" is made of: appetite (the lust of the flesh), acquisitiveness (the lust of the eyes), and status (the pride of life) — the same three-fold temptation, many readers have long noticed, that faced Eve in the garden (good for food, pleasant to the eyes, desirable to make one wise) and faced Jesus in the wilderness. It is the oldest playbook in the world, repackaged endlessly by every generation as something new.

The closing contrast is what makes obedience worth the cost: the world, with everything it offers, is passing away — already in decay even at its most impressive moment — while the one who does God's will abides forever. This is not a threat but a reorientation of desire: why build a life around what is already dissolving, when obedience anchors a person to what will last?

## ◆ 1 John 2:18–23

> [18] Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. [19] They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. [20] But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. [21] I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. [22] Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.
> [23] Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: [but] he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.

This is John's direct confrontation with the false teachers troubling his churches. He does not speculate about a single end-times figure alone; he points to a present reality — "even now are there many antichrists" — anyone, in any age, who denies the Father and the Son as revealed in Jesus Christ stands in that spirit. Verse 19 gives a hard but clarifying principle: these teachers had been part of the visible church and then left it. Their departure did not create a defection from true faith; it revealed one that was already there. Perseverance, not a good start, is what marks genuine faith.

Against the false teachers' claim to superior "knowledge," John tells his ordinary readers they already have everything they need: an "**unction**" (an anointing, the Holy Spirit's presence and teaching) that lets them recognize truth from lie without needing secret higher instruction. The test he gives could not be more concrete: denying that Jesus is the Christ, denying the Son as He truly is, is to lose the Father as well, because the two cannot be separated. Right doctrine about who Jesus is, is not a side issue in this letter — it is the ground obedience stands on.

## ◆ 1 John 2:24–29

> [24] Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father. [25] And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life. [26] These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. [27] But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him. [28] And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming. [29] If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.

John's answer to seduction by false teaching is not novelty but memory: let what you first heard — the apostolic gospel, unchanged — remain in you. Verse 27's statement that "ye need not that any man teach you" is not a dismissal of teachers (John is teaching them at this very moment) but a warning against any voice claiming a hidden, superior revelation beyond the gospel his readers already received. The Spirit-taught believer is equipped to test such claims and find them wanting.

The chapter closes on the theme that will govern chapter 3: abiding now in light of Christ's appearing. Obedience is future-facing. To "abide in him" is to live now in a way that will produce confidence, not shame, at His coming — a coming John's readers expected imminently and every generation since has watched for. And verse 29 quietly introduces the test of new birth that chapter 3 will develop at length: righteous living is not incidental evidence of salvation, it is the family likeness. Everyone born of a righteous God does righteousness — not perfectly, but characteristically, as the pattern of a life.

## Walk It Out

**Key Verse to Memorize — 1 John 2:6**
*"He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked."*

1 According to 2:3–5, how can a believer know that he truly knows Christ?

2 Name one concrete way Jesus walked that you can imitate this week.

3 Which part of the world's playbook in 2:16 — appetite, possessions or status — pulls hardest at your heart?

**Prayer** *Lord Jesus, You are my Advocate and the propitiation for my sins. Teach me to walk as You walked, to love my brother, and to hold loosely the things that are passing away. Amen.*

1 JOHN 3

# Children of God in Practice



*"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us." (1 John 3:1)*

## ◆ 1 John 3:1–3

> [1] Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. [2] Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. [3] And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

"Behold" — John wants his readers to stop and actually look at something they may have grown too familiar with to notice: that being called children of God is not a figure of speech but an act of love so extravagant it needs an exclamation to introduce it. And the cost of that identity is the world's incomprehension — believers should not be surprised to be misunderstood by a world that never understood the Father either.

Verse 2 holds together a present certainty and a future mystery with remarkable honesty: we are God's children now, full stop, yet what we will finally become has "not yet" been revealed even to us. What we do know is enough: when Christ appears, we will be made like Him, because seeing Him as He truly is will itself be transforming. This future hope is not meant to produce idle daydreaming but present discipline — verse 3 draws the practical line directly from it. Anyone who genuinely holds this hope purifies himself now. A hope fixed on becoming like a pure and holy Christ cannot comfortably coexist with a life indifferent to present holiness.

## ◆ 1 John 3:4–10

> [4] Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. [5] And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. [6] Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. [7] Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. [8] He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. [9] Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. [10] In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

This is the most debated passage in the letter, because taken alone verse 9 seems to say a Christian literally cannot sin — which would contradict 1:8–10 outright. Read in context, John is not describing sinless perfection but characteristic direction. The Greek verbs describing sin here are in the present tense, which carries the sense of continuous or habitual action: "whosoever is born of God doth not [keep on] commit[ting] sin" as an ongoing, defining pattern of life, because God's own life (His "seed") is now planted in the believer and works against that pattern from within. The one who sins as a way of life, unbothered and unrepentant, "hath not seen him, neither known him" — whatever he may claim.

Verse 8's phrase "for this purpose" states the whole mission of Christ in a single clause: to destroy the works of the devil, whose defining trait, in contrast to God's, is that he "sinneth from the beginning" as his settled character. This gives John's readers a clean diagnostic in verse 10, and it could not be more practical: not mystical experience, not claimed knowledge, but two visible marks — doing righteousness, and loving one's brother — reveal whose child a person actually is.

## ◆ 1 John 3:11–15

> [11] For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. [12] Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous. [13] Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. [14] We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. [15] Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

John reaches back to Genesis for his negative example: **Cain**, the first murderer, whose hatred began not as random cruelty but as resentment of his brother's righteousness (Genesis 4:1–8). It is a sobering pattern that repeats across history — evil often hates good not despite its goodness but precisely because of it, since righteousness exposes what evil would rather hide. If the world hates believers for the same reason, John says, that is not a surprise to be alarmed by but a confirmation of which family the believer belongs to.

Verse 14 gives another test of assurance, stated as plainly as John ever states anything: love for the brethren is evidence — not the cause, but the visible proof — of having already passed from spiritual death into life. The converse in verse 15 is startling in its severity: hatred toward a brother is placed in the same moral category as murder, echoing Jesus' own teaching in Matthew 5:21–22 that anger and murder share a root. John is not saying every irritated feeling forfeits salvation; he is saying that a settled, unrepented hatred toward a fellow believer is simply incompatible with eternal life abiding in a person, because it belongs to death's territory, not life's.

## ◆ 1 John 3:16–18

> [16] Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. [17] But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? [18] My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

Verse 16 defines love not by feeling but by an event: the cross. Christ's self-sacrifice is the standard by which believers now understand what love actually is, and it sets an obligation — not necessarily literal martyrdom, but the same posture of laying down what is ours for the good of others. Verse 17 brings that lofty standard down to the most ordinary situation imaginable: a believer with material means, who sees a brother's genuine need, and closes his heart to it. John's question is rhetorical because the answer is obvious — love for God simply does not "dwell" in a heart that can do that.

Verse 18 is the summary line, and it is the practical heartbeat of the whole letter: love proven "in deed and in truth" rather than merely "in word" and "tongue." This is not a devaluing of words of love, but a refusal to let words substitute for them. Obedience, in John's vision, is always concrete — it shows up in what a person actually does with what they have, for the person actually in front of them.

## ◆ 1 John 3:19–24

> [19] And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. [20] For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. [21] Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. [22] And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. [23] And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. [24] And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

John pauses here to address something every honest believer knows: an accusing conscience. Verse 20 is one of the most pastorally important verses in the letter — when the heart condemns, God is greater than the heart, and knows all things. This is not a comfortable dismissal of guilt; it is a deeper honesty than the heart itself can manage. God's knowledge includes what the accusing heart may miss: the reality of Christ's finished sacrifice, the sincerity behind a stumbling love, the difference between besetting weakness and settled rebellion. A troubled conscience does not have the final word about a believer's standing — God does, and He knows more than the heart can measure.

When the heart does not condemn, the result is confidence — including confidence in prayer, which John ties directly (v. 22) to a life of practiced obedience, not because obedience earns answered prayer as a wage, but because a life aligned with God's will naturally asks for what pleases Him. Verse 23 then compresses "his commandment" (singular) into two inseparable parts: believing rightly in Jesus Christ, and loving one another — doctrine and love, the two threads John has been weaving throughout the letter, tied into a single knot. Verse 24 closes the chapter with the promised proof of mutual abiding: the Spirit God has given.

## Walk It Out

**Key Verse to Memorize — 1 John 3:18**
*"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth."*

1 How does the hope of seeing Christ (3:2–3) change the way you live today?

2 Explain in your own words why 3:9 describes a pattern of life rather than sinless perfection.

3 Who in your church or neighborhood has a need you could meet "in deed and in truth" this week?

**Prayer** *Father, what manner of love You have given, that I should be called Your child. When my heart condemns me, remind me that You are greater than my heart. Let my love be more than words. Amen.*

1 JOHN 4

# Love Tested and Proven



*"Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." (1 John 4:11)*

## ◆ 1 John 4:1–6

> [1] Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. [2] Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: [3] And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. [4] Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. [5] They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. [6] We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

"Try the spirits" gives John's readers a direct command against naive credulity. Not every claim to spiritual experience or prophetic insight is from God, and the church is responsible to test what it hears rather than accept it simply because it comes wrapped in spiritual language. John supplies a doctrinal, checkable test rather than a subjective feeling: does the teaching confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh — fully, genuinely human as well as fully divine? This single test cuts directly against the denial troubling his churches, and it remains a sound test of any teaching that diminishes either Christ's true humanity or His full deity.

Verse 4 offers real comfort in the middle of real warfare: believers have already overcome these false teachers, not through their own spiritual sophistication but because "greater is he that is in you" — the Holy Spirit — "than he that is in the world," a clear reference to the spiritual power behind the deception. The passage closes by naming a hard reality: false teaching, precisely because it speaks the world's language and flatters the world's assumptions, will often find the world listening eagerly. That popularity is not evidence of truth; if anything, in John's framework, it should raise suspicion.

## ◆ 1 John 4:7–12

> [7] Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. [8] He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. [9] In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. [10] Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. [11] Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. [12] No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

"God is love" is John's second great definition, and it must be read exactly as carefully as "God is light" in chapter 1: not that love is God (a very different, sentimental claim that would make any strong feeling divine), but that love belongs to God's essential character so completely that it can be named as one description of who He is. Verse 7 grounds the command to love in that reality — love originates in God, so anyone who genuinely loves shows the mark of being born of Him, and anyone without love simply does not know Him, whatever else they may claim.

Verses 9–10 define love, as chapter 3 did, by an historical event rather than a feeling: God sending His only Son, not because we first loved Him, but entirely on His own initiative, to be the **propitiation** for sin. This is love's true shape — not a response earned, but a gift given to those who deserved judgment. And from that gift John draws the same obligation he drew from the cross in chapter 3: "we ought also to love one another." Verse 12 adds a striking thought — no one has ever seen God directly, yet He becomes visible, in a real sense, whenever believers love one another. Love between Christians is not just obedience to a command; it is the ongoing, visible demonstration of an invisible God's own character.

## ◆ 1 John 4:13–16

> [13] Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. [14] And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. [15] Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. [16] And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

John returns to the theme of assurance, now grounding it explicitly in the Trinity's joint work. The Spirit given to believers is the evidence of mutual indwelling with God (v. 13); the Father's sending of the Son as Saviour of the world is a fact John and the other apostles personally witnessed and now testify to (v. 14); and the confession that Jesus is the Son of God is again the doorway into that indwelling relationship (v. 15) — the same doctrinal test from chapter 2 and the start of this chapter, now tied directly to abiding in God rather than merely to avoiding **antichrist**'s error.

Verse 16 closes the thought with a phrase that could stand as the summary of the whole letter: believers have "known and believed" the love God has for them — not merely heard about it, but come to trust and rest in it as a settled fact. And John repeats his definition once more, "God is love," this time drawing out its relational conclusion: dwelling in love is dwelling in God Himself, and God, in turn, dwells in the one who loves. Doctrine and love are, once again, revealed as two sides of a single, inseparable reality.

## ◆ 1 John 4:17–21

> [17] Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. [18] There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. [19] We love him, because he first loved us. [20] If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? [21] And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

Verse 17 promises boldness rather than dread at the final judgment, and grounds it in an astonishing claim: "as he is, so are we in this world." Not that believers become divine, but that Christ's own righteous standing is now theirs by union with Him, even now, in this present world — which is exactly why the judgment to come holds no terror for those who are in Him. Verse 18 explains the mechanism: love and tormenting fear cannot coexist at full strength. As love toward God matures and settles, the anxious fear of judgment that naturally accompanies guilt is progressively displaced, because that fear belongs to a relationship still uncertain of its standing, and the believer's standing in Christ is not uncertain at all.

Verse 19 states the order of the whole gospel in six words: God's love came first; ours is only ever a response. And verses 20–21 bring the chapter to its unavoidable, practical point, echoing chapter 3's **Cain** illustration in blunt form: a claimed love for the invisible God that produces hatred toward a visible, flesh-and-blood brother is not spiritual paradox — it is a lie, plainly stated. Love for God and love for God's people are not two separate commandments to be weighed against each other. They are, in John's repeated insistence, one single commandment.

## Walk It Out

**Key Verse to Memorize — 1 John 4:19**
*"We love him, because he first loved us."*

1 What test does John give in 4:1–3 for discerning true and false teaching? Why is it still needed today?

2 How does 4:10 define love? How is that different from the way the world defines it?

3 What fear in your life could "perfect love" cast out?

**Prayer** *God of love, I love You because You first loved me. Give me discernment to test every spirit, and fill me with Your love so fully that fear has no room left. Amen.*

1 JOHN 5

# The Victory of Faith



*"This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." (1 John 5:4)*

## ◆ 1 John 5:1–5

> [1] Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. [2] By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. [3] For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. [4] For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. [5] Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

John ties together, in a tight logical knot, the three strands he has been weaving throughout the letter: belief, love, and obedience. Believing rightly that Jesus is the Christ is the mark of new birth (v. 1); love for God the Father naturally extends to love for His other children, since loving a parent means loving what the parent loves (v. 1); and that love for God's children is itself verified — not replaced — by loving God and keeping His commandments (v. 2). None of the three can be isolated from the others and still mean what John means by it.

Verse 3 restates the letter's title theme in its most concentrated form: real love for God simply is keeping His commandments, and — against every instinct that treats obedience as heavy and restrictive — His commandments "are not grievous." Why not grievous? Because verse 4 supplies the answer: everyone born of God already has, built into that new birth, the capacity to overcome the world's opposing pull. The very faith that first believed in Christ is the ongoing "victory" by which that overcoming continues. Obedience is not grievous to the one who has already, in Christ, overcome the world's power to make disobedience seem more attractive than it is.

## ◆ 1 John 5:6–8

> [6] This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. [7] For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. [8] And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

"Water and blood" most likely points to two bracketing events in Christ's earthly ministry: His baptism, where the Father and Spirit publicly testified to His identity (Matthew 3:16–17), and His death on the cross, where blood and water flowed from His pierced side (John 19:34) — His entrance into public ministry and His death for sin, both affirming who He truly is against any teaching that wanted a "spiritual" Christ without a real incarnation or a real, bodily death.

A brief textual note is worth including here for honest students of Scripture: the explicit naming of "the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost" as the three heavenly witnesses in verse 7 (sometimes called the "**Comma Johanneum**") is not found in the earliest Greek manuscripts of 1 John and is widely regarded by textual scholars as a later addition that entered the Latin textual tradition before making its way into the Greek text used for the King James Version. This does not weaken the doctrine of the Trinity, which rests on abundant other Scripture; it simply means careful readers should know the manuscript history behind this particular wording. What is not in dispute, in any manuscript, is the three earthly witnesses of verse 8 — Spirit, water, and blood — united in the same testimony to who Jesus is.

## ◆ 1 John 5:9–13

> [9] If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. [10] He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. [11] And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. [12] He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. [13] These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

John reasons from the ordinary to the extraordinary: people routinely accept human testimony in courts, in relationships, in everyday business — how much more should God's own testimony about His Son be received. The believer, John says, carries an inward confirming witness (v. 10), while the one who refuses to believe effectively accuses God of lying — a serious charge, stated without apology, because unbelief is never neutral in John's thinking; it is a rejection of testimony God Himself has given.

Verse 12 compresses the entire gospel into one of the shortest, starkest sentences in the New Testament: "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." No other qualification is offered, no alternative path suggested — possession of eternal life is defined entirely by relationship to Christ. And verse 13 states, in effect, the purpose statement of the whole letter: John has written all of this so that believers may know, with settled confidence rather than anxious guessing, that they have eternal life. Assurance, not uncertainty, is what this letter is meant to produce in every reader who has genuinely believed on the name of the Son of God.

## ◆ 1 John 5:14–17

> [14] And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: [15] And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. [16] If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. [17] All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.

The assurance John has just described in verse 13 immediately produces confidence in prayer — not a blank check for any request whatsoever, but confidence that requests aligned with God's will are heard and answered. This is not a limitation that weakens prayer; it is what makes prayer meaningful rather than magical, since a request truly "according to his will" is, by definition, already something God is glad to grant.

Verses 16–17 introduce a difficult phrase — "a sin unto death" — that John does not fully explain, and honest interpreters differ on its precise meaning. It most likely does not refer to any single sin so grave it cannot be forgiven, since Scripture elsewhere promises forgiveness for every sin brought to Christ in genuine repentance. It more probably describes a settled, final, unrepentant rejection of Christ — a hardened apostasy so complete that intercessory prayer for restoration is no longer the appropriate response. John is not discouraging prayer for struggling believers; quite the opposite — he actively commands it for the ordinary sins "not unto death" that mark every Christian's ongoing battle, promising that such prayer brings life to the one prayed for.

## ◆ 1 John 5:18–21

> [18] We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not. [19] And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. [20] And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. [21] Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

John closes with three great "we know" statements that summarize the settled confidence this whole letter has built toward. First, the new birth produces a life kept safe from the evil one's decisive grip — not exemption from temptation, but preservation of the one truly born of God. Second, believers know their identity is fundamentally different from "the whole world," which lies under the sway of the wicked one — a sober reminder that the church is never simply an extension of the surrounding culture's values. Third, and climactically, believers know Christ has come and given real, true understanding of God Himself — not speculation, not secret knowledge available only to an elite few, but genuine knowledge of "the true God, and eternal life," available to every believer through the Son.

The very last line lands with surprising simplicity after such theological heights: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." An idol is anything set up in the place that belongs to the true God alone — whether the ancient literal images John's first readers still encountered daily in Ephesus, or the subtler idols every generation invents in their place. It is a fitting final word for a letter about walking in obedience: after every doctrine has been affirmed and every test of love applied, the whole of the Christian life still comes down to this — guarding the heart's worship for the one true God, and refusing everything that would compete for it.

## Walk It Out

**Key Verse to Memorize — 1 John 5:13**
*"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God."*

1 Why does John say God's commandments "are not grievous" (5:3)? Do you experience them that way?

2 Read 5:11–13 slowly. What does it mean to you to know, not merely hope, that you have eternal life?

3 What modern idol (5:21) most threatens to take God's place in your life?

**Prayer** *Lord, thank You for the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith. Thank You that whoever has the Son has life. Keep me from every idol, and keep my heart for You alone. Amen.*



PART TWO

# 2 John

*The Second Epistle of John*

*"The elect lady and her children" — a household walking in truth.*

# 2 John

*The Second Epistle of John*

## Truth and Love Guarded Together

The shortest letter John ever wrote fits on a single sheet of ancient papyrus — exactly the length, as John himself notes in closing, that suited a letter meant to be followed up in person. Its recipient, "the elect lady and her children," has been understood two ways across church history: either a literal Christian woman of some standing and her family, or — more likely, given how naturally the language reads as corporate address, and how "the children of thy elect sister" appears at the close — a local church, addressed the way Scripture elsewhere personifies a congregation as a woman and her members as her children.

Whichever reading is right, the letter's burden is the same one that runs through 1 John, condensed to its most urgent, practical edge: false teachers denying the true incarnation of Christ are moving from town to town, depending on the hospitality believers traditionally extended to traveling teachers. John's instruction is startling in a faith built on generous welcome: do not receive them, do not even send them on their way with a blessing. To do so is not neutral kindness; it makes the host a "partaker" in the false teaching being spread. Truth and love are not competitors in this letter — they are partners that must never be separated, each keeping the other honest.

2 JOHN

# Walking in Truth



*"Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink." (2 John 12)*

## ◆ 2 John 1–3

> [1] The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth; [2] For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever. [3] Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

John identifies himself simply as "the elder" — not claiming apostolic title, but the honored, familiar standing of an aging pastor known to his readers without need of further introduction. In the first two verses "truth" appears four times, setting the letter's keynote before a single instruction is given. His love for this church is "in the truth," shared by everyone who has genuinely known that same truth — love here is not a private sentiment but a bond created by shared belief in Christ.

Verse 2 makes a claim that undergirds everything to follow: this truth is not a temporary teaching subject to revision but something that "dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever." That permanence is precisely why John will insist, later in the letter, on guarding it so carefully. Verse 3's greeting — grace, mercy, and peace — adds "mercy" to the more typical apostolic greeting of grace and peace, a pastoral touch fitting a letter that will soon warn of real danger; and it closes by naming the twin themes that govern the whole short letter: "truth and love," inseparably paired.

## ◆ 2 John 4–6

> [4] I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father. [5] And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another. [6] And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.

John's joy at finding "thy children walking in truth" is not generic pleasure at good behavior — it is the same test he applies throughout 1 John, now applied warmly to a specific, known congregation: real faith shows itself as a walk, an ongoing direction of life, not a single profession made once. Notice, too, that walking in truth is itself called "a commandment from the Father" — belief and conduct are never treated in these letters as separate categories with separate rules.

Verses 5–6 return to the "old and new" language of 1 John 2:7–8: the command to love is not new information, but John presses it again because it is easy to hear and hard to keep walking in, especially when love and doctrinal faithfulness begin to feel like they pull in opposite directions, as they will in the very next verses. Verse 6 defines love, exactly as 1 John 5:3 did, not as warm feeling but as obedience in motion: "this is love, that we walk after his commandments." The command and the walk are one and the same thing viewed from two angles.

## ◆ 2 John 7–11

> [7] For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. [8] Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. [9] Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. [10] If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: [11] For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

Here is the letter's urgent center, and the same doctrinal test named in 1 John 4:2–3 reappears almost word for word: deceivers who deny that Jesus Christ has truly come in the flesh. John calls this denial by its full, uncompromising name — a deceiver and an **antichrist** — with no room left for treating it as a minor variation in emphasis. Verse 9 states the stakes as starkly as anywhere in the New Testament: someone who "transgresseth" (literally, goes ahead of or beyond) the received doctrine of Christ, thinking this makes them more advanced, "hath not God" at all — however sincere or spiritually impressive the departure may appear.

Verse 10's instruction has troubled some readers, who wonder how it fits with Christian hospitality elsewhere commanded throughout Scripture. The key is what is actually in view: not travelers in general, not people of different opinions on secondary matters, but itinerant teachers specifically bringing a false doctrine of Christ's person into congregations, seeking the credibility and material support that a public welcome from the church would supply. To open the door to such teaching, John says, is to become a "partaker" — an active participant, not a passive bystander — in its harm. Refusing to lend Christian credibility to a false gospel is, in this specific case, the loving thing to do for everyone the false teacher might otherwise deceive.

## ◆ 2 John 12–13

> [12] Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full. [13] The children of thy elect sister greet thee. Amen.

John closes the way he began 1 John — with joy as the goal of the whole correspondence. A letter, however carefully written, is a poor substitute for presence, and John clearly prefers the fuller communication and fellowship of a face-to-face visit over "paper and ink." There is a lesson here easily missed in an age of countless written and digital messages: even inspired, authoritative teaching is not meant to replace the personal, relational life of the church — it serves that life, and looks forward to it.

The closing greeting from "the children of thy elect sister" — most naturally read as another local congregation John is presently among — quietly reinforces the corporate reading of the letter's opening address, and reminds the recipients that they are not isolated: they belong to a wider fellowship of churches walking, however imperfectly, in the same truth and the same love John has spent this short letter urging them never to separate.

## Walk It Out

**Key Verse to Memorize — 2 John 6**
*"And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it."*

1 Why do truth and love need each other? What happens when a church keeps one without the other?

2 How would you lovingly decline to support a teacher who denies Christ came in the flesh?

3 Who has taught you the truth, and how can you thank them by walking in it?

**Prayer** *Father, let me walk after Your commandments in truth and love. Guard my home and my church from every deceiver, and keep us abiding in the doctrine of Christ. Amen.*



PART THREE

# 3 John

*The Third Epistle of John*

*Traveling ministers welcomed "after a godly sort."*

# 3 John

*The Third Epistle of John*

## Hospitality and Pride

If 2 John warns against welcoming the wrong people, 3 John — written around the same time, likely as a companion letter — commends welcoming the right ones, and does so through the most personal, individually addressed writing anywhere in John's letters. There is no veiled congregation here; Gaius is a real, named individual, evidently a member (perhaps a leader) of a congregation elsewhere, known personally to John and warmly loved by him.

The letter's occasion is almost certainly a leadership conflict. Itinerant missionaries, apparently sent out with John's own commendation, had been traveling among the churches; Gaius had received them warmly, while a man named Diotrephes — exercising considerable, self-appointed authority in his local church — had refused to receive either the missionaries or John's own authority, going so far as to expel from the church anyone who wanted to welcome them. Between these two men, John's approval falls entirely on the side of ordinary, faithful hospitality over ambitious, self-serving control — a contrast as relevant to church leadership in any century as it was in the first.

3 JOHN

# Fellowhelpers to the Truth



*"We shall speak face to face. Peace be to thee." (3 John 14)*

## ◆ 3 John 1–4

> [1] The elder unto the wellbeloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth. [2] Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. [3] For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth. [4] I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

John opens this letter, as he did 2 John, calling himself simply "the elder," and the warmth toward **Gaius** is immediate and personal — "the wellbeloved," and then "Beloved" again and again through the letter (vv. 2, 5, 11). Verse 2's wish that Gaius would prosper and be in health "even as thy soul prospereth" is often lifted out as a general promise of health and wealth; read in context, it is better understood as a genuine, personal wish tied specifically to the report John has just received of Gaius's flourishing spiritual life — a prayer that his outward circumstances would match the good state of his soul, not a universal formula guaranteeing that outcome for every believer.

Verse 3's report comes from traveling "brethren" who had personally witnessed Gaius "walking in the truth" — the same walking language that runs through all three letters, now applied to a single, known man. And verse 4 states what could be the motto of John's whole pastoral life: no greater joy exists for him than hearing that those he has led and shepherded are actually walking in the truth he taught them. It is a joy earned only over years, and only through people's real, sustained obedience — not a single good report, but a confirmed pattern of life.

## ◆ 3 John 5–8

> [5] Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; [6] Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well: [7] Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. [8] We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth.

This is the positive counterpart to 2 John's warning: hospitality shown rightly, to the right people, for the right reason. **Gaius** has evidently opened his home to traveling missionaries — including some who were "strangers" to him personally — and done so faithfully enough that it has been testified to before the wider church. John's instruction to "bring forward on their journey after a godly sort" refers to the ancient custom of provisioning departing travelers: food, funds, companionship for part of the road — practical, costly generosity, not merely a warm word at the door.

Verse 7 explains why this support mattered so much: these missionaries had gone out for the sake of Christ's name, "taking nothing of the Gentiles" — likely meaning they would not accept support from unbelievers, so that no one could say their gospel was for sale. That principled refusal made them dependent on the hospitality of fellow believers like Gaius. Verse 8 draws the conclusion that gives Christian hospitality its full dignity: those who receive and support such workers become "**fellowhelpers** to the truth" — partners in the gospel's advance, even without ever leaving home themselves.

## ◆ 3 John 9–11

> [9] I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. [10] Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church. [11] Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.

John names the problem plainly: **Diotrephes** "loveth to have the **preeminence**" — a love of first place, of controlling position, rather than a love of Christ or His people. This single phrase has become a byword across church history for a recurring danger in Christian leadership: ambition wearing the clothes of ministry. Verse 10 lists his conduct with unflinching specificity — refusing John's earlier letter, "prating against us with malicious words," refusing hospitality to the traveling brethren himself, and actively forbidding others in the church who wanted to show that hospitality, even casting them out of the church.

It is worth noting what John does not do: he does not pretend the conflict is a misunderstanding to be smoothed over with vague appeals to unity, nor does he answer Diotrephes's ambition with ambition of his own. He states the facts and promises to address them in person when he comes. Verse 11's counsel to **Gaius** is disarmingly simple: do not imitate the evil you have just heard described, however much positional authority it may hold; follow the good instead. Doing good, John says once more, reveals whose child a person is — the same family test that ran throughout 1 John, now applied to a live, painful, local conflict.

## ◆ 3 John 12–14

> [12] Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is true. [13] I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee: [14] But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to thee. Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name.

Against the ambition of **Diotrephes**, John sets a quieter, better example: **Demetrius**, commended through a threefold witness — the good report of all who know him, the truth itself (his life matching what he professes), and John's own testimony added on top. Demetrius may well have carried this letter to **Gaius**, and John's commendation would then serve as his introduction — the mirror image of Diotrephes's slander against traveling brethren he refused even to meet.

The letter closes, almost word for word as 2 John did, preferring a personal visit to further writing, with warm, ordinary greetings — "peace," friends saluting friends, greetings passed on "by name" to people John evidently knew individually. It is a fittingly modest ending to the shortest book in the New Testament: after warnings about false doctrine and a leadership conflict named without flinching, the letter's very last words are simply the sound of one Christian friend caring personally for another.

### Walk It Out

**Key Verse to Memorize — 3 John 4**
*"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."*

1 What qualities made Gaius a "fellowhelper to the truth"? Which of them can you practice?

2 Where do you see the spirit of Diotrephes — loving the preeminence — in your own heart?

3 Like Demetrius, what kind of report does your daily life give to those who know you?

**Prayer** *Lord, make my home a place of welcome for those who serve You. Root out every love of preeminence in me, and let my life give a good report of the truth. Amen.*

Closing Thoughts

# The Whole Duty of Walking with God

Step back from the verse-by-verse detail of these three letters, and a single, coherent picture emerges. John never treats obedience as a means of earning what only grace can give — the propitiation of Christ, named explicitly twice in 1 John (2:2; 4:10), is the sole and sufficient ground of forgiveness, and 1:9 stands ready for every believer who stumbles and returns. But neither does he allow grace to be separated from a transformed, observable life. Believing rightly about who Jesus Christ is; walking honestly in the light rather than hiding sin in darkness; loving the brethren in deed and not merely in word; testing teachers and teachings against the apostolic truth once delivered; and showing that truth in the ordinary stuff of hospitality, humility, and faithful

friendship — these are not five separate demands but five angles on one single, integrated life.

That life is what John means by "walking." It is not a destination reached once and left behind, but a direction maintained day after day, choice after choice, often through ordinary and unremarkable moments — a meal offered to a traveling stranger, a temptation toward pride resisted, a sin confessed rather than excused, a small, unglamorous kindness that becomes, in God's accounting, a partnership in the gospel itself.

If these letters have done their work in you, the tests John gives should feel less like an examination to pass and more like a mirror held up with pastoral care — not to condemn, but to help you see clearly whether the faith you profess is the faith that is actually, visibly, joyfully walking. John wrote so that his readers' joy might be full (1 John 1:4) and so that they might know, not merely hope, that they have eternal life (1 John 5:13). May the same be true of every reader of this study: full joy, settled assurance, and a life that walks, day by day, in obedience.

# About the Author

Rev. George H. Stoddard is an ordained minister and the founder of In His Hands Ministries International. His teaching and writing ministry centers on close, verse-by-verse engagement with Scripture, aimed at equipping believers for personal study, small-group teaching, and everyday discipleship. He is the author of an extensive catalog of Christian nonfiction, devotional, and Bible study resources, and a Southern Gospel songwriter and producer with RockRevster Productions.

*Soli Deo Gloria*