

Notes & Outlines

1 JOHN

J. Vernon McGee

1 JOHN

WRITER: John the Apostle

DATE: A.D. 90-100

John evidently wrote his Gospel first, then his epistles, and finally the Book of Revelation before his death about A.D. 100.

PURPOSE:

John expressed the purpose for his writing in each of the three types of revelation:

His *Gospel* in John 20:30, 31:

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

His first *epistle* in 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.

His *revelation* in Revelation 1:19:

Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.

Actually, there is a fivefold purpose expressed in 1 John:

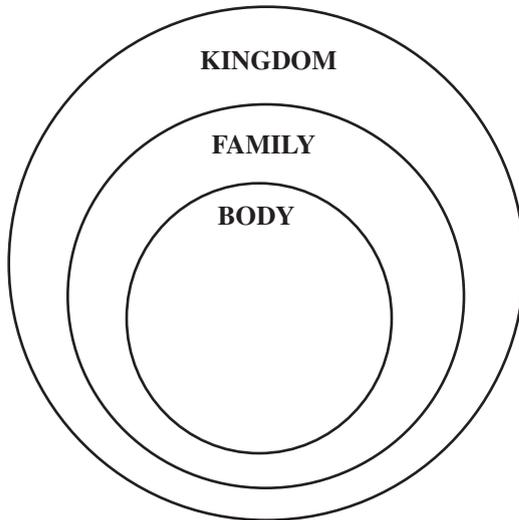
- (1) 1:3 — “That ye also may have fellowship with us [other believers]; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”
- (2) 1:4 — “That your joy may be full.”
- (3) 2:1 — “That ye sin not.”
- (4) 5:13 — “That ye may know that ye have eternal life.”
- (5) 5:13 — “That ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”

THE FAMILY OF GOD:

This epistle has been called the *sanctum sanctorum* of the New Testament. It takes the child of God across the threshold into the fellowship of the Father’s home. It is the *family* epistle; John is writing here to the family of God. *Father* is used thirteen times and *little children* eleven times.

Paul wrote to the church; John wrote to the family. The church is a body of believers in the position where we are blessed “with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). We are given that position when we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. In the family we have a relationship which can be broken, but is restored when “we confess our sins.” Then He “is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

The body of believers who constitute the church are in the family of God, though the family is larger than the church. The church and the family are both in the Kingdom of God but are not synonymous terms.



KEY WORDS:

Light (used six times); *love* (used thirty-three times); *life* (used fifteen times); *fellowship* (used four times); *know* (used thirty-eight times) — John wrote to meet the first heresy that entered the church. It was Gnosticism, which boasted super-knowledge. It accepted the deity of Jesus, but it denied His humanity. John gives us the true gnosticism — knowledge.

OUTLINE:

- I. **God is LIGHT (1:5)**, Chapters 1:1 — 2:2
 - A. **Prologue**, Chapter 1:1, 2
 - B. **How the little children may have fellowship with God**, Chapters 1:3 — 2:2

1. By walking in light, 1:3-7
2. By confessing sin, 1:8-10
3. By advocacy of Christ, 2:1, 2

II. God is LOVE (4:8), Chapters 2:3 — 4:21

- A. **How the dear children may have fellowship with each other by walking in love**, Chapter 2:3-14
- B. **The dear children must not love the world**, Chapter 2:15-28
- C. **How the dear children may know each other and live together**, Chapters 2:29 — 4:21
 1. The Father's love for His children, 2:29 — 3:3
 2. The two natures of the believer in action, 3:4-24
 3. Warning against false teachers, 4:1-6
 4. God is love; little children will love each other, 4:7-21

III. God is LIFE (5:12), Chapter 5

- A. **Victory over the world**, vv. 1-5
- B. **Assurance of salvation**, vv. 6-21

COMMENT:

I. God is LIGHT (1:5), Chapters 1:1 — 2:2

A. Prologue, Chapter 1:1, 2

v. 1 — “From the beginning” is not the beginning of John 1:1 (beyond time in eternity past) nor the beginning in Genesis 1:1 (beginning of creation). This beginning goes back to the incarnation and the earthly life of Jesus.

Gnosticism, the first heresy, denied the reality of the humanity of Jesus. Some said that the Spirit came upon Him at His baptism, and left Him at the cross.

John asserts the reality of the total personality of Jesus:

1. “We have heard” (ear gate) — apostles heard His voice;
2. “We have seen” (eye gate) — apostles saw Him;
3. “Looked upon” is literally *gazed upon*; we get our word *theater* from the original word. To look saves; to gaze sanctifies.

And, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.
(John 3:14, 15)

4. “Handled”

Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. (Luke 24:39)

John reclined upon the bosom of Jesus in the upper room. He heard the heartbeat of God!

“Word of life” (see notes on John 1:11).

v. 2 — The apostles saw eternal life, Jesus Christ, and they witness to it.

B. How the little children may have fellowship with God, Chapters 1:3 — 2:2

1. By walking in light, 1:3-7

v. 3 — “Fellowship” is *koinonia*, meaning *having in common* or *sharing with*. Christian fellowship means sharing the things of Christ. Paul used *koinonia* when speaking of praying, teaching the Word of God, the Lord’s Supper, and giving.

v. 4 — Joy for the believer is one of the purposes of this epistle.

v. 5 — “God is light” — not *a* light or *the* light. *Light*, as used here, is moral character. It means the holiness of God that searches out and penetrates the darkness of sin and evil. Sin cannot exist in His presence as darkness cannot exist in the presence of physical light. Light is life giving (John 1:4). Light speaks of the glory, radiance, beauty, purity, and stainless holiness of God.

v. 6 — “Darkness” is more than the opposite of light. It is hostile to God. It is evil and denotes chaos. This refers to an attempt to bring God down to the level of man. A Gnostic sect in that day believed that they were no longer under the moral law of God. This is the same as the so-called “new morality.” Napoleon said that laws were made for ordinary people; he was above them.

v. 7 — Any believer who walks in the light of the Word of God discovers sin in his life. As a believer, he knows that the blood of Christ can cleanse him from sin, as it did when he first came to Christ for salvation.

2. By confessing sin, 1:8-10

v. 8 — While some try to bring God down to man’s low level, others attempt the opposite. They attempt to lift themselves to God’s level. They say that they have no sin. They claim sinless perfection and total sanctification. These actually deceive themselves. They are guilty of self-deception and lying.

v. 9 — Since God cannot be brought down to man's low level and man cannot attain to God's exalted level, man finds himself on the horns of a dilemma. What can he do? Note the biblical solution: "Confess" (*homologomen*) means to say the same thing that God says. God says they are acts of sin. Tell it to God as it is — the sin should be spelled out.

"He is faithful" — we might deceive ourselves.

"Just" (righteous) — "The blood of Jesus Christ...cleanseth us from all sin" (v. 7). He forgives and cleanses.

v. 10 — We make God a liar when we say we do not sin. He says we do.

3. By the advocacy of Christ, 2:1, 2

v. 1 — This is the third factor in having fellowship with God and Christ. God's arrangement for a believer not to sin is perfect, but our entrance into it is imperfect. An advocate is an attorney called to the side of a client in trouble. He is a comforter. The Lord Jesus Christ is in heaven to defend the sinning believer from the charge of the accuser of the brethren.

v. 2 — Without His defense, the sinning saint would be in deep trouble. He is the sacrifice that makes the throne of God a mercy seat. We need mercy — He is rich in mercy.

"Propitiation" is *expiation*, the basis on which God extends mercy; mercy seat.

II. God is LOVE (4:8), Chapters 2:3 — 4:21

A. How the dear children may have fellowship with each other by walking in love, Chapter 2:3-14

v. 3 — Obedience to Christ is the basis of assurance.

"We do know" is *we know by experience*, in contrast to the esoteric knowledge of the Gnostics.

v. 4 — Disobedience to Christ is a proof that we do not know Him. This is plain and direct language. Disobedience to Christ on the part of a professing Christian is tantamount to being a liar. The life is a lie.

v. 5 — "Keepeth his word" includes not only His specific commandments but whatever pleases Him (John 14:15-23).

v. 6 — Christ is manifest in the believer when he keeps the word of Christ. Full commitment is to love Christ. The question is not, "Are you committed?" but, "Do you love Christ?"

v. 7 — "Old commandment...from the beginning" is the commandment that the Lord Jesus gave to His apostles when He was with them on earth — which He repeated many times (see John 13:34, 35; 14:21, 23, 24; 15:10, 12).

B. The dear children must not love the world, Chapter 2:15-28

v. 15 — “World” (*kosmos*) means *creation; order; system*. It could have one of three meanings: (1) material creation; earth (Ephesians 1:4); (2) humanity; mankind (John 3:16); (3) world system — satanic (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Ephesians 2:2 — *greed; ambition; pleasure; deceit*). John is speaking here of the last meaning, i.e., two world systems: God’s and Satan’s. Man is subject to one or the other (Galatians 6:14; 2 Peter 2:20).

v. 16 — “Lust of the flesh” — Eve saw that the tree was good for food. “Lust of the eyes” — Eve saw that the tree was good to look at.

“Pride of life” — Eve saw that the tree was to be desired to make one wise.

v. 17 — This world system is passing away.

v. 18 — There is coming a man who will head up the antichrist system. He is Antichrist.

“Antichrist” is *against Christ* (denial) or *imitation of Christ* (pretense). Antichrist is both. Many have appeared in the history of the world. Here is a list of but a few:

Gnostics — “They [the followers of Carpocrates] say that Jesus was the son of Joseph and born after the manner of other men.” (Iraeneus. Only human.) “In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, God came down to Capernaum [not born of any mother], and taught.” (Opening of *Marcion’s Gospel*.)

Muslims — “Verily Christ Jesus the son of Mary is the apostle of God...Say not, There are three Gods...God is but one God. Far be it from Him that He should have a son.” (*Koran*, ch. iv. Sale, p. 80.)

Communists — “Here is a new mystery — that of Divinity dividing itself into two halves...God the Father, seeing from the height of His eternal splendour, that the poor God the Son, flattened out and astounded by His fall, is so plunged and lost in matter, that having reached the human state, He has not yet recovered Himself, decides to come to His aid.” (Bakunin, *God and the State*, p. 31.)

Theosophists — “To identify the Lord with the historical Jesus, maintaining the latter to be very Deity, Jehovah in person, who assumed a fleshly body, and manifested Himself as a man, in order to save men from Hell, and commanded His disciples to call Him Lord, is to fall into a common error.” (*The Perfect Way*, p. 257.)

Atheists — “Jesus was some fine sort of man perhaps, but our Saviour of the Trinity is a dressed-up inconsistent effigy of amiability, a monstrous hybrid of men, an infinity making significant promises of help-

ful miracles for the cheating of simple souls, an ever absent help in times of trouble.” (H. G. Wells, *Outline of History*.)

v. 19 — Pseudo-Christians will not stay under the preaching of the Word of God. Their departure is their identification.

v. 20 — The Holy Spirit is the Teacher of the believer (John 16:12-15).

v. 21 — John’s purpose is not to give them something new. They know the gospel.

v. 22 — This is the mark of Antichrist. He denies both God and Christ.

v. 23 — You cannot deny one without denying the other.

v. 24 — If the Word does not abide in a professing Christian, he will eventually drift from the truth.

vv. 25, 26 — This is a warning against false teachers.

v. 27 — (See v. 20.) The Holy Spirit is the final authority.

v. 28 — It is possible for a believer to be ashamed at the rapture of the church. Obedience and assurance make the coming of Christ a joyful anticipation.

C. How the dear children may know each other and live together, Chapters 2:29 — 4:21

1. The Father’s love for His children, 2:29 — 3:3

Chapter 2

v. 29 — It is one thing to testify that we know Christ and are in Him; it is quite another to have a life that reveals that He is our righteousness. We recognize other believers by their lives, not their lips. Righteousness is a family characteristic of the Father and His children.

Chapter 3

v. 1 — This is my own literal translation: “Behold ye, of what sort of love the Father hath given to us, that we should be named children of God, and we are: and because of this the world does not begin to understand us, because it did not know begin to understand Him.”

We do not *expect* to be the sons of God — WE ARE! This is a thrilling fact for which every believer can exult, rejoice, and constantly thank Him.

v. 2 — This is not all. We should be like Christ — not identical, but

like Him. We do not know how wonderful that is, for we have not seen Him as He is. God sees us as we shall be some day.

v. 3 — This is an incentive for holy living now.

2. The two natures of the believer in action, 3:4-24

v. 4 — Sin is basically that which is contrary to the will of God — insubordination to the will of God.

v. 5 — In John's Gospel, Jesus came to take away the sin of the world; He bore the penalty of sin. Here in John's epistle, He takes away the practice of sin in the life of a believer. He is without sin, as was the sin offering. He removes the guilt of sin and also provides the power to deliver from the habit of sinning.

v. 6 — The believer who abides in Christ does not practice sin. He cannot live a sinful life. Only pigs live in pigpens — sons go home eventually. To continue in sin means the person was never saved in the first place.

v. 7 — The one practicing righteousness is a child of God.

v. 8 — "Committeth sin" is *practices sin*. The prodigal son may get in the pigpen, but he will not live there. The devil sinned from the beginning, and he continues to sin. His is a career of nothing but sin. The Son of God was revealed to unloose the works of the devil. Christ came to make it possible for a believer not to live in sin.

v. 9 — A believer gets a new nature at conversion, but he does not lose the old nature. The new nature never sins because it is born of God. (e.g., I have some fine budded avocado trees in my yard. Each tree has two natures. Below the budded area they produce small bitter avocados; above the budded area they produce luscious fruit. The wild branches below the bud are removed; the branches above the bud are pruned, but they always produce delicious fruit — they cannot produce wild fruit.)

v. 10 — Christ said, "Ye shall know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16). The one who practices righteousness produces the fruit of the Spirit. Augustine said, "The devil made no one, he begat no one, he created no one, but whosoever imitates the devil is, as it were, a child of the devil, through imitating, not being from him."

v. 11 — See 1 John 2:7.

v. 12 — Cain's offering was evil, as evidenced from his conduct. He was envious of his brother, and he slew him. Pride was in the heart of Cain (see Genesis 4:1-25).

v. 13 — See John 15:18, 19.

v. 14 — Love of the brethren is proof of salvation.

v. 15 — See Matthew 5:21, 22.

v. 16 — This is proof that God loves us.

v. 17 — Love is not a sentiment; love goes into action.

v. 18 — In domestic relations, love is not made in the parlor, but in the kitchen. The wife cooks for her husband, and the husband goes out to work for his wife — this is love in action.

v. 19 — When we demonstrate our love in this way, we have a confidence in prayer.

v. 20 — If we do not have this assurance, God is greater than our hearts — He still hears our prayer.

vv. 21, 22 — Love in action gives assurance in prayer.

v. 23 — This is the Christian life in a nutshell.

v. 24 — The Holy Spirit verifies these things to our hearts if we have not grieved Him.

3. Warning against false teachers, 4:1-6

vv. 1-3 — “Test the spirits” is *prove the spirits*. Love can become rather mushy and sentimental. Paul prayed that “love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment” (Philippians 1:9). The so-called “love” of liberals slops over on all sides. There are many false teachers that the child of God should avoid as he does a rattlesnake. These false teachers are inspired by evil spirits that deny the incarnation of Christ and all His work of redemption that flows from it. The evil spirit denies the Person of Christ and His work. This is the final test. The evil spirit resists and opposes Christ. This is the spirit of Antichrist (see 1 John 2:22).

v. 4 — The Holy Spirit indwells every believer (Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 6:19).

v. 5 — This explains the appeal that many ministers have in the world and their popularity with the unsaved.

v. 6 — The supreme encouragement of the ministry is to know that God’s children will hear you. The elect cannot permanently be deceived. Christ said it is not possible to deceive the elect.

4. God is love; little children will love each other, 4:7-21

v. 7 — Having given a warning against false teachers who are not to be loved, he returns to the theme of this section: Believers are to love one another. This is not sentimental, sexual, or social.

v. 8 — The norm is the love of God. Love works for the best interests of the beloved.

God is light; God is love.

v. 9 — This is the historical evidence that God loved us. We were dead; Christ brought us to life through His death. He gave His life that we might live.

v. 10 — God loved us before there was any response on our part. He gave the Son to make expiation for our sins. He turned the throne of God into a mercy seat.

v. 11 — The giving of Christ to die for us is the norm of love. He is the motivation for our love.

v. 12 — God, who is unseen, is revealed today in the lives of believers. He longs to pour out His love through us.

v. 13 — The Holy Spirit indwells every believer (see v. 4).

v. 14 — This is the gospel witness.

v. 15 — No believer can deny the deity of Christ. He is the only meeting place between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5).

v. 16 — Love is the supreme test. Do you believe that God loves you? Then confess Him before men wherever your lot in life is cast. Again John gives us this definition, “God is love.”

v. 17 — This verse could be rendered like this: *In this is* [God’s] *love perfected with us*. The perfect love is not in us. The perfect love is Christ who came down where we are and became the propitiation for our sins. God put our sins on Him; but when Christ went back to heaven, there was no sin on Him — He had settled it down here. This means that we are as secure in the world as Christ is. What security! This gives us boldness in the day of judgment. Today we represent Him in the world.

v. 18 — This removes fear from the saved sinner’s heart. He is “Perfect Love.” His love for us should give us the feeling of belonging to the family of God.

v. 19 — The best texts omit *Him*. Correctly, *We love, because He first loved us*. This widens the meaning. Some saints say they love Him but do not love “His.” Our love for Christ is in the same ratio that it is for

other believers.

v. 20 — This is direct and pointed and must be taken at face value. This is the test of v. 19.

v. 21 — This is a commandment of Christ. There are no options.

III. God is LIFE (5:12), Chapter 5

A. Victory over the world, vv. 1-5

v. 1 — Faith produces the new birth. The one who is born again will love others who are born again. These cannot be confined to a certain denomination, church, race, clique or group.

v. 2 — When we love God and keep His commandments, we love other believers because that is one of His commandments. These commandments do not refer here to the Old Testament Law but to the commandments of Christ.

v. 3 — “Burdensome” does not mean that they are difficult to keep, but rather that they do not impose a burden when they are kept. “In keeping of them there is great reward” (Psalm 19:11). Jesus said, “For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:30). The breaking of them brings misery and heavy burdens. A mother works long hours in taking care of her baby, but it is not burdensome; it is a joy.

v. 4 — “Victory” — this is the only time the Greek word *nike* occurs in the New Testament. The battle of Jericho is the familiar example. Joshua got the victory over Jericho, not by fighting, but by believing God. The victory was God’s. We cannot overcome the world by fighting it. Conquest depends upon faith (Hebrews 11:30).

v. 5 — Faith in Christ for salvation in the future;
Faith in Christ for salvation here and now from the world.

B. Assurance of salvation, vv. 6-21

v. 6 — There are three that bear witness to the truth of salvation by faith in Christ:

- (1) Water — the Word of God (see John 19:34, 35);
- (2) Blood — the death of Christ for our sins, resulting in forgiveness (see Ephesians 1:7); and
- (3) Spirit — truth (Acts 1:4, 8).

v. 7 — This verse is not in the better manuscripts. I do not feel it adds anything to the text.

v. 8 — The Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost. (Between the

death and resurrection of Christ and the Day of Pentecost, the disciples were not to witness.) The Holy Spirit must work before anyone can be born again. He takes the Word of God and applies the blood of Christ for forgiveness of sins.

v. 9 — We accept the statement of others. The most erratic rumor spreads like wildfire. Someone has said, “You cannot believe all you hear, but you can repeat it.” Newspapers are the Bible for some. If man can be believed, surely the witness of God must be greater.

v. 10 — To refuse to believe God is tantamount to making Him a liar. What is the record? Note the next verse.

v. 11 — This is God’s *carte blanche* statement. Either it is true or it is not true. The One who said it validates the statement.

v. 12 — Either we have Christ by faith or we do not have Him. There is no middle ground. Do you have Christ by faith? Will you believe God?

v. 13 — This is the key verse of the epistle. John wrote this epistle that you may believe on Christ and be saved and, having taken this step, that you might know you have eternal life. Do you believe God? It all rests upon whether or not you believe God. This is your surety. Paul said:

For which cause I also suffer these things; nevertheless, I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day. (2 Timothy 1:12)

v. 14 — This promise hinges on the phrase “according to his will” — then we can have boldness, which is better than assurance. How can we know when prayer is in accordance with the will of God? It must be according to the Word of God. Beyond that, we let God make the judgment.

v. 15 — Final proof is whether or not we have our petitions answered.

v. 16 — This refers to physical death. Believers can commit a sin for which the Heavenly Father will call them home. It may be a different sin for each of His children. Ananias and Sapphira committed the sin unto death (Acts 5:1-11). In Corinth there were some (1 Corinthians 11:30). Absalom did (2 Samuel 15-18). Moses and Aaron did (Numbers 20:12).

v. 17 — Everything that is not right is sin — but not every sin is unto death.

v. 18 — The new nature never sins. Believers living in the flesh (old nature) sin.

v. 19 — “The whole world lieth in wickedness” is *the whole world lieth asleep in the arms of the evil one*. The devil has put the baby to sleep.

v. 20 — The Spirit of God is our Teacher to lead us into all truth.

v. 21 — God’s first statement to us is: “In the beginning God created”; among His last words to us are these, “Keep yourselves from idols.” Anything that stands between Christ and the believer is an idol.

These notes, prepared by J. Vernon McGee, are for the purpose of giving assistance to the listeners of the THRU THE BIBLE RADIO program. They are to be used with the Bible and will be more meaningful as you look up all the Scripture references. Due to the necessary brevity of both notes and broadcasts, a list of recommended books is included for those wanting a more detailed study. These books may be obtained from a Christian library or bookstore or ordered from the publishers.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- Barclay, William. *The Letters of John and Jude*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Westminster Press, 1958.
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