

1 John

1

Summary: *First John opens without a standard epistolary greeting, plunging directly into proclamation: what was from the beginning, heard, seen, and touched — the word of life — is now declared so that the readers may share in fellowship with the Father and the Son. John then states the letter's foundational theological assertion: 'God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all.' The remainder of the chapter tests three claims against this reality: those who say they have fellowship with God but walk in darkness lie; those who walk in the light have fellowship and the blood of Jesus cleanses them; and those who claim to be without sin deceive themselves.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The prologue (vv. 1-4) deliberately echoes the prologue of John's Gospel ('In the beginning was the Word'), but shifts from cosmic theology to sensory testimony — what we have heard, seen, gazed upon, and touched. The declaration 'God is light' (v. 5) is one of the three 'God is' statements in John's writings (alongside 'God is spirit' in John 4:24 and 'God is love' in 1 John 4:8, 16). The interplay of light and darkness throughout the chapter establishes the moral dualism that structures the entire letter.*

Translation Friction: *First John has no named author, sender, recipient, or greeting — it reads more like a theological treatise or homily than a letter. Tradition attributes it to the apostle John, author of the Fourth Gospel. The Greek is notably simple — short sentences, limited vocabulary, repeated patterns — yet the theology is profound. We render the simplicity of the Greek honestly rather than adding complexity.*

Connections: *The prologue echoes John 1:1-14 (the Word who was from the beginning). The light/darkness motif connects to John 1:4-5, 3:19-21, and 8:12. The confession and cleansing language (vv. 7-9) resonates with Psalm 32, Psalm 51, and the Day of Atonement ritual. The 'advocate' (paraklētos) introduced in 2:1 connects to Jesus's promise of the Paraclete in John 14-16.*

¹What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have gazed upon and our hands have touched — concerning the word of life — ²This life appeared, and we have seen it. We testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us. ³That which we possess seen and listened to declare we to you, that you as well may possess fellowship with us — and truly our fellowship is with the Parent, and with his Descendant Jesus Christ. ⁴And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. ⁵This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you: God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we say we have fellowship with

him while walking in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷And the blood of jesus christ his son cleanseth us from all sin, but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another. ⁸And the truth is not in us, if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. ⁹And to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. ¹⁰And his word is not in us, if we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The fourfold 'what' (ho) creates an accumulating sensory testimony: hearing, seeing, gazing, and touching. The progression moves from the most common sense (hearing) to the most intimate (touching). The word *etheasametha* ('gazed upon, beheld, contemplated') implies sustained, attentive looking — not a glance but prolonged observation. The verb *epsēlaphēsan* ('touched, handled, felt') is the same verb used in Luke 24:39 where the risen Jesus invites the disciples to touch him.
1. The phrase *peri tou logou tēs zōēs* ('concerning the word of life') identifies the subject: this sensory testimony is about the logos — the same 'Word' of John 1:1, now encountered through physical senses. This opening directly counters any docetic denial of Christ's physical reality.
2. The parenthetical structure mirrors John's habit of interrupting his thought to expand on a crucial point. The phrase *hētis ēn pros ton patera* ('which was with the Father') directly echoes John 1:1 ('the Word was with God'). The preposition *pros* ('with, toward') implies face-to-face relationship, not mere proximity.
2. Three verbs describe the apostolic response to seeing the life: *heōrakamen* ('we have seen' — perfect tense, the seeing has permanent effect), *martyroumen* ('we testify' — present tense, the testimony continues), and *apangellomen* ('we proclaim' — present tense, the announcement goes on). Sight produces testimony produces proclamation.
3. The purpose of the proclamation is *koinōnia* ('fellowship, participation, sharing, partnership'). This is not casual social interaction but deep communion — first horizontal (with us) and then vertical (with the Father and with his Son). The fellowship with the apostolic community is simultaneously fellowship with God. There is no private, individualistic spirituality here — relationship with God is mediated through and expressed in community.
3. The phrase *meta tou patros kai meta tou huiou autou Iēsou Christou* places the Father and the Son as equal partners in fellowship — a casual but profound affirmation of the Son's divine status.
4. Some manuscripts read 'your joy' (*hymōn*) rather than 'our joy' (*hēmōn*). The SBLGNT reads *hēmōn* ('our'). The choice matters: 'our joy' means John's joy is completed when the recipients enter into fellowship — the writer's joy depends on the readers' response. This echoes John 15:11 and 16:24, where Jesus speaks of his joy being made complete in his disciples.
5. The word *angelia* ('message, announcement') appears only here and in 3:11 in the New Testament. John claims this message came directly from Christ ('from him' — *ap' autou*). The declaration *ho theos phōs estin* ('God is light') is one of John's three great 'God is' statements (with 'God is spirit' in John 4:24 and 'God is love' in 4:8, 16).
5. The double negation *skotia en autō ouk estin oudemia* ('darkness in him is not — none') is emphatically redundant in Greek, using both *ouk* and *oudemia* to eliminate any possibility of darkness in God. This absolute claim sets up the ethical tests that follow.
6. The first of three conditional tests (vv. 6, 8, 10), each beginning with 'if we say' (*ean eipōmen*). The verb *peripatōmen* ('walk') is a Hebrew idiom (*halak*) for one's manner of life — how a person conducts themselves daily. John's test is simple: claimed fellowship with the God who is light is contradicted by a life characterized by darkness. The phrase *ou poioumen tēn alētheian* ('we do not do the truth') treats truth as something practiced, not merely believed — truth is lived.
7. Walking in the light produces two results: fellowship with one another (*koinōnian met' allēlōn* — note: not fellowship with God, which is assumed, but with each other) and ongoing cleansing from sin. The present tense *katharizei* ('cleanses, keeps cleansing') indicates continuous purification, not a one-time event. The blood of Jesus is not a past transaction only but an ongoing reality for those who walk in the light.
7. The scope is comprehensive: *apo pasēs hamartias* ('from all sin, from every sin') — no sin is beyond the cleansing power of Christ's blood for those who walk in the light.
8. The second 'if we say' test. The claim to sinlessness is not merely mistaken but self-deceptive (*heautous planōmen*, 'we lead ourselves astray'). The Greek *hamartian ouk echomen* ('we do not have sin') likely addresses a proto-Gnostic claim that the enlightened are beyond sin. John counters: to deny the reality of sin is to exile truth from oneself. Note the distinction between 'having sin' (the ongoing reality of sinfulness, v. 8) and 'committing sins' (specific acts, v. 9).
9. The Greek *homologōmen* ('confess, acknowledge openly') literally means 'to say the same thing' — to agree with God's assessment of our sin, to call it what it is. The basis for forgiveness is not human merit but God's character: *pistos* ('faithful' — he keeps his promises) and *dikaiois* ('just, righteous' — his forgiveness is consistent with his justice, not a violation of it).
9. The dual result of confession is forgiveness (*aphē*, 'release, cancellation') of sins and cleansing (*katharisē*, 'purification') from all unrighteousness. Forgiveness addresses the guilt; cleansing addresses the stain.

10. The third 'if we say' test escalates the stakes: denying our sin does not merely deceive ourselves (v. 8) but makes God a liar (pseustēn poioumen auton). The perfect tense hēmartēkamen ('have not sinned') claims a sinless history, which contradicts God's own testimony that all have sinned. The consequence — 'his word is not in us' (ho logos autou ouk estin en hēmin) — means total alienation from God's truth. This is the most severe of the three tests.

2

Summary: *First John 2 develops the letter's central themes of fellowship with God, obedience, and love. John begins by describing Jesus as the advocate (parakletos) and atoning sacrifice for the world's sins, then establishes that knowing God is demonstrated by keeping his commandments — particularly the command to love. The chapter introduces the famous triad of worldly temptations (the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life) and warns that the world is passing away. John then addresses the appearance of 'antichrists' — those who have left the community and deny that Jesus is the Christ — and reassures believers that they possess an anointing (chrisma) from the Holy One that guards them in truth.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The term parakletos ('advocate, one called alongside') connects Jesus's ongoing heavenly ministry to the same word used for the Holy Spirit in John's Gospel (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). John's 'antichrist' language appears here for the first time in the New Testament — not as an apocalyptic beast figure but as a present theological reality: anyone who denies the Father and the Son. The concept of chrisma ('anointing') given to all believers democratizes what was once reserved for kings and priests, echoing the promise of Jeremiah 31:34 that all would know the LORD directly.*

Translation Friction: *The 'new commandment that is also old' (vv. 7-8) presents an apparent paradox that John resolves by locating the newness in its realization through Christ. The identity of the 'antichrists' likely refers to a specific secession from the Johannine community (v. 19: 'they went out from us'), not a future eschatological figure. The three-stage address to 'children,' 'fathers,' and 'young men' (vv. 12-14) may reflect age groups, spiritual maturity levels, or rhetorical variation — the text does not resolve this clearly.*

Connections: *The advocacy of Christ before the Father (v. 1) connects to the high-priestly intercession theme of Hebrews 7:25 and Romans 8:34. The 'new commandment' echoes John 13:34. The 'antichrist' concept draws on Daniel 7-8 and the Olivet Discourse (Mark 13:22). The warning about worldly desires parallels James 4:4 and the temptation narrative of Genesis 3 (the tree was good for food, a delight to the eyes, and desired to make one wise).*

¹My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father — Jesus Christ, the righteous one. ²He himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. ³And by this we know that we have come to know him: if we keep his commandments. ⁴Whoever says "I have come to know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. ⁵But whoever keeps his word, in that person the love of God has truly been made complete. By this we know that we are in him. ⁶Whoever claims to remain in him ought to walk in the same way that he walked. ⁷Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment that you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you heard. ⁸Yet I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. ⁹Whoever says he is in the light yet hates his brother is still in the darkness even now. ¹⁰Whoever loves his brother remains in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. ¹¹But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes. ¹²I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. ¹³I am writing to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. ¹⁴I have written to you, children, because you have known the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God remains in you, and you have overcome the evil one. ¹⁵Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in that person. ¹⁶For everything in the world — the

desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the arrogance of life — is not from the Father but is from the world. ¹⁷And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God remains forever. ¹⁸Children, it is the last hour, and just as you heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared. From this we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us. But they went out so that it would be made clear that none of them were of us. ²⁰But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. ²¹I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie comes from the truth. ²²Who is the liar, if not the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist — the one who denies the Father and the Son. ²³Everyone who denies the Son does not have the Father either. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. ²⁴As for you, let what you heard from the beginning remain in you. If what you heard from the beginning remains in you, then you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. ²⁵And this is the promise that he himself promised us: eternal life. ²⁶I have written these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. ²⁷As for you, the anointing that you received from him remains in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things — and is true and is not a lie — just as it has taught you, remain in him. ²⁸And now, little children, remain in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink back from him in shame at his coming. ²⁹If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Greek *teknia* ('little children') is a term of intimate affection, not condescension, reflecting the elder's pastoral relationship with the community. The word *parakletos* ('advocate, helper, one called alongside') is the same term Jesus uses for the Holy Spirit in John 14:16. Here it describes Christ's ongoing intercessory role before the Father. The adjective *dikaion* ('righteous') qualifies Christ as the perfect advocate — his righteousness is the ground of his intercession.
2. The Greek *hilasmos* ('atoning sacrifice, propitiation, expiation') carries both the sense of turning away wrath (propitiation) and covering sin (expiation). The word echoes the Hebrew *kapporet* (mercy seat) and the Day of Atonement ritual of Leviticus 16. The scope — 'the whole world' (*holou tou kosmou*) — extends the atonement beyond the believing community, a remarkable universalizing statement.
2. [TCR Cross-Reference] Draws on Leviticus 16. Consult the TCR rendering of that passage for the underlying Hebrew and the rationale for key translation choices.
3. John uses two different tenses of *ginoskein* ('to know'): the present *ginoskomen* ('we know' — ongoing awareness) and the perfect *egnokamen* ('we have come to know' — completed action with present results). True knowledge of God is not abstract or mystical but is verified by obedience. This epistemological test recurs throughout the letter.
4. John's blunt designation — *pseustes* ('liar') — is characteristic of the letter's stark moral categories. The claim to know God while disobeying him is not merely mistaken but constitutes a lie. 'The truth is not in him' treats truth as an indwelling reality, not merely a correct proposition.
5. The phrase 'the love of God' (*he agape tou theou*) is ambiguous in Greek — it could mean God's love for us, our love for God, or the kind of love that comes from God. The context suggests all three dimensions. The verb *teteleiōtai* ('has been made complete, perfected') is a perfect passive, indicating a divine work brought to completion in the obedient believer.
6. The Greek *peripatein* ('to walk') is the standard metaphor for conducting one's life, corresponding to the Hebrew *halak*. 'As he walked' (*kathōs ekeinos periepatēsen*) refers to Jesus's earthly life as the model for Christian conduct. The verb *opheilei* ('ought, is obligated') expresses moral necessity, not mere suggestion.
7. The SBLGNT reads *agapetoi* ('beloved') rather than the KJV's 'brethren.' The 'old commandment from the beginning' likely refers to the love command that the community received when they first heard the gospel (cf. John 13:34). The paradox of old and new is resolved in the next verse.
8. The commandment is both old (rooted in the Torah's love command, Leviticus 19:18) and new (realized in Christ and the believing community). The present tense *paragetai* ('is passing away') and *phainei* ('is shining') indicate an eschatological transition already underway — the new age has begun but the old has not yet fully departed. This 'already but not yet' tension characterizes Johannine eschatology.
8. [TCR Cross-Reference] References Leviticus 19:18 — the TCR OT rendering of that text provides the Hebrew source and explains the translation decisions involved.
9. The test is relational: hatred of a fellow believer (*adelphos*, 'brother') invalidates any claim to spiritual enlightenment. The phrase *heōs arti* ('even now, until this moment') suggests someone who has never actually moved from darkness to light, despite their claim.

10. The Greek skandalon ('cause of stumbling, trap, offense') could mean either that the loving person does not stumble, or that the loving person does not cause others to stumble. Both senses may be intended — love both secures the believer and removes obstacles for others.
11. The threefold description — being in darkness, walking in darkness, not knowing one's direction — forms a devastating portrait of spiritual blindness. The verb etyflōsen ('has blinded') is aorist, suggesting a decisive event: hatred did not merely dim but extinguished sight. The imagery echoes John 12:35.
12. The address teknia ('little children') encompasses the whole community. The perfect passive apheōntai ('have been forgiven') indicates a completed and enduring reality. Forgiveness comes 'on account of his name' — that is, through the person and work of Christ, not through the community's merit.
13. The 'fathers' (pateres) are characterized by deep, mature knowledge of Christ, 'him who is from the beginning.' The 'young men' (neaniskoi) are characterized by victory over 'the evil one' (ton poneron) — likely Satan. The perfect tenses (egnōkate, nenikēkate) indicate accomplished realities that continue in force.
14. The shift from graphō ('I am writing') to egrapsa ('I have written') may indicate a second pass through the same groups, or an epistolary aorist referring to the letter itself. The SBLGNT reads paidia ('children') for the first address here, a slightly different word than teknia in v. 12 but with similar meaning. The young men's strength is grounded in two realities: the indwelling word of God and their victory over the evil one.
15. The Greek kosmos ('world') here does not mean the created order (which God loves, John 3:16) but the world-system organized in opposition to God — the values, priorities, and allegiances that compete with devotion to the Father. The prohibition is a present imperative with mē, forbidding an ongoing disposition.
16. The triad of worldly temptations has often been compared to the threefold temptation in Genesis 3:6 (good for food, a delight to the eyes, desired to make one wise) and the temptation of Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11). The Greek epithymia ('desire, craving') is morally neutral in itself but here denotes disordered desire directed at flesh-gratification and visual acquisitiveness. The word alazoneia ('arrogance, boastfulness, pretension') refers to the vain confidence that comes from material security (bios here meaning 'livelihood, possessions' rather than mere 'life').
16. [TCR Cross-Reference] Quotes Genesis 3:6. The TCR rendering of that OT passage preserves the Hebrew source text and documents the translation decisions behind it.
17. The present tense paragetai ('is passing away') conveys the world's transience as an ongoing reality, not merely a future event. The contrast between the passing world and the one who 'remains forever' (menei eis ton aiōna) echoes the Johannine theme of abiding. Doing the will of God is not legalistic compliance but alignment with God's eternal purposes.
18. The phrase eschatē hōra ('last hour') without the article suggests a qualitative description of the present era rather than a precise chronological claim. John's innovation is to pluralize 'antichrist' (antichristoi polloi) — the expected single eschatological opponent has multiplied into many present figures. The word antichristos appears only in the Johannine Epistles (here, 2:22, 4:3, and 2 John 7) in the entire New Testament.
19. This verse reveals the concrete historical situation behind the letter: a group has seceded from the community. John interprets their departure theologically — it was not a loss but a revealing. The contrary-to-fact conditional (ei ... ēsan ... memenekeisan an) asserts that genuine belonging would have produced perseverance. Their leaving exposed what was always true.
20. The Greek chrisma ('anointing') is etymologically related to Christos ('anointed one'). In the Old Testament, anointing was reserved for kings, priests, and occasionally prophets. John declares that all believers possess this anointing. The SBLGNT reading oidate pantēs ('you all know') rather than oidate panta ('you know all things') emphasizes that every believer — not just leaders — has been given knowledge through the Spirit.
21. John writes not to inform but to confirm — the community already possesses the truth through their anointing. The final clause establishes an absolute separation between truth and falsehood that will undergird his identification of the secessionists' teaching as lies.
22. The definite article (ho pseustēs, 'the liar') elevates this beyond a general statement — this is the liar par excellence. The specific denial — that Jesus is the Christ — likely reflects a proto-Gnostic or Cerinthian position that separated the human Jesus from the divine Christ. John insists that denying the Son necessarily entails denying the Father, because the two are inseparable in the Johannine theological framework.
23. The verb homologeōn ('confessing, acknowledging') is the counterpart to arnoumenos ('denying'). The relationship with the Father is mediated entirely through the Son — there is no access to the Father apart from the Son. This echoes Jesus's words in John 14:6-9. Some manuscripts omit the second clause; the SBLGNT includes it.
24. The emphatic hymeis ('you') at the beginning contrasts the faithful community with the secessionists. 'From the beginning' (ap' archēs) refers to the original apostolic message they received. The logic is reciprocal: if the message remains in them, they remain in the Son and the Father. Abiding in the truth and abiding in God are inseparable.
25. The promise (epangelia) of eternal life (tēn zōēn tēn aiōnion) is the content of remaining in the Father and Son. In Johannine theology, eternal life is not merely future but a present reality that begins with knowing God (John 17:3). The emphatic autos ('he himself') likely refers to Christ.
26. The participle planōntōn ('those deceiving, leading astray') is present tense, indicating ongoing activity. The secessionists are not merely gone — they are actively attempting to draw the remaining community after them. The verb planein ('to lead astray, deceive') is the root of the English 'planet' (a wandering star) and captures the sense of being led off course.

27. The statement that believers 'have no need for anyone to teach you' does not reject all teaching (John's letter is itself teaching) but asserts that the community possesses an internal criterion — the Spirit's anointing — by which to evaluate external claims. This echoes Jeremiah 31:34 ('they shall all know me') and Jesus's promise of the Spirit of truth in John 16:13. The final *menete* ('remain') is an imperative: continue abiding in him.
27. [TCR Cross-Reference] Draws on Jeremiah 31:34. Consult the TCR rendering of that passage for the underlying Hebrew and the rationale for key translation choices.
28. The term *parrēsian* ('confidence, boldness, freedom of speech') was a civic virtue in Greek culture — the right to speak openly before authority. Here it describes the believer's posture before Christ at his return. The word *parousia* ('coming, presence, arrival') is the standard early Christian term for the second coming of Christ. John shifts to the first person plural ('we may have') — he includes himself among those who will face this moment.
29. The verb *gegennētai* ('has been born') is a perfect passive, indicating a divine act with enduring consequences — being born of God is not a human achievement but a divine begetting. The logic runs from God's character to the believer's conduct: because he is righteous, those born of him will practice righteousness. This sets up the major theme of chapter 3.

3

Summary: *First John 3 opens with an astonished declaration of God's love in calling believers his children, then develops the incompatibility of habitual sin with divine parentage. John draws a sharp line between the children of God and the children of the devil, using Cain as the paradigmatic example of hatred. The central ethical demand is love expressed in concrete action — not merely in words but in laying down one's life for others, as Christ did. The chapter closes with the assurance that God is greater than our self-condemning hearts, and that obedience and faith produce confidence before God and the indwelling of the Spirit.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The phrase 'what we will be has not yet appeared' (v. 2) is one of the New Testament's most striking admissions of eschatological incompleteness — the full transformation of believers awaits Christ's return. The definition of sin as *anomia* ('lawlessness,' v. 4) is theologically significant: sin is not merely moral failure but rebellion against God's ordering of reality. The Cain reference (v. 12) is the only New Testament use of Cain outside Hebrews 11:4 and Jude 11, and John uniquely attributes his murder to spiritual allegiance to the evil one.*

Translation Friction: *Verse 6 ('no one who remains in him keeps on sinning') and verse 9 ('no one born of God practices sin') have generated extensive debate. The present tenses in Greek indicate habitual, characteristic action — John is describing a pattern of life, not claiming sinless perfection (which would contradict 1:8-10 and 2:1). The tension between the ideal stated here and the realistic acknowledgment of sin earlier in the letter is deliberate, reflecting the 'already but not yet' of Christian existence.*

Connections: *The children-of-God theme connects to John 1:12-13 and Romans 8:14-17. The Cain narrative draws from Genesis 4. The command to love one another echoes John 13:34-35. The laying-down-of-life language directly mirrors John 10:11, 15 and 15:13. The confidence-before-God theme anticipates the boldness language of Hebrews 4:16 and 10:19-22.*

¹See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God — and so we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ²Beloved, we are now children of God, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he appears, we will be like him, because we will see him as he is. ³And everyone who has this hope fixed on him purifies himself, just as he is pure. ⁴Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. ⁵And you know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. ⁶No one who remains in him keeps on sinning. No one who keeps on sinning has seen him or known him. ⁷Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, just as he is righteous. ⁸Whoever practices sin is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose: to destroy the works of the devil. ⁹No one who has been born of God practices sin, because God's seed remains in that person, and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. ¹⁰By this it is evident who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. ¹¹That we should love one another, and for this was the message that you heard from the beginning. ¹²We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's were

righteous. ¹³Do not be surprised, brothers, if the world hates you. ¹⁴We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love remains in death. ¹⁵Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life remaining in him. ¹⁶By this we have come to know love: that he laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. ¹⁷But if anyone has the world's possessions and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does the love of God remain in that person? ¹⁸Little children, let us not love in word or in speech, but in action and in truth. ¹⁹By this we will know that we are of the truth, and we will reassure our hearts before him, ²⁰Because if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. ²¹Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God, ²²Whatsoever we ask, we accept of him, on account of the fact that we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. ²³And this is his commandment: that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he commanded us. ²⁴Whoever keeps his commandments remains in God, and God in that person. And by this we know that he remains in us: by the Spirit that he has given us.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Greek *potapēn* ('what kind of, what manner of') expresses astonishment — this is not merely great love but a foreign, unexpected quality of love. The phrase *kai esmen* ('and we are') is a parenthetical exclamation affirming that the title 'children of God' is not honorific but real. We render *tekna* ('children') rather than the KJV's 'sons' because the Greek *tekna* is gender-inclusive and emphasizes birth-relationship, while *huiioi* ('sons') would emphasize legal status.
2. The tension between 'now' (*nyn*) and 'not yet' (*oupō*) captures the eschatological position of believers — genuine identity now, full transformation later. The promise 'we will be like him' (*homoioi autō esometha*) is stunning in its scope and deliberately left undefined. The causal clause 'because we will see him as he is' suggests that the vision of Christ itself will be transformative — seeing and becoming are linked.
3. The verb *hagnizei* ('purifies') is the same word used for ceremonial purification in the Septuagint (e.g., Numbers 19). The eschatological hope of transformation produces present ethical effort. The standard is nothing less than Christ's own purity (*hagnos*).
3. [TCR Cross-Reference] References Numbers 19 — the TCR OT rendering of that text provides the Hebrew source and explains the translation decisions involved.
4. The Greek *anomia* ('lawlessness') is not merely 'breaking a rule' but rebellion against God's ordering of reality. The equation 'sin is lawlessness' (*hē hamartia estin hē anomia*) defines sin in its deepest sense — not as individual infractions but as a fundamental posture of defiance against divine authority. The present participle *poiōn* ('practicing, doing') indicates habitual action.
5. The verb *ephanerōthē* ('was manifested, appeared') refers to Christ's incarnation. The verb *arē* ('take away, remove, bear') echoes John the Baptist's declaration in John 1:29 ('the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world'). Christ's sinlessness is the ground of his ability to remove sin — only one without sin can bear and remove the sin of others.
6. The present tenses (*menōn*, *hamartanei*, *hamartanōn*) are crucial: John is describing habitual, ongoing action. 'No one who remains in him keeps on sinning' does not assert sinless perfection but rather that abiding in Christ and a settled pattern of sin are incompatible. This must be read alongside 1:8-2:2, where John acknowledges that believers do sin and need an advocate. The distinction is between occasional failure and characteristic lifestyle.
7. The warning against deception (*mēdeis planatō*) suggests the secessionists may have taught that conduct does not reflect spiritual status. John insists on the opposite: practice reveals identity. The standard of comparison is Christ's own righteousness (*kathōs ekeinos dikaios estin*).
8. The phrase *ek tou diabolou* ('of the devil, from the devil') indicates origin and allegiance, just as 'born of God' indicates divine origin. The devil's sinning 'from the beginning' (*ap' archēs*) echoes the serpent narrative of Genesis 3 and Jesus's words in John 8:44. The verb *lysē* ('destroy, undo, dissolve') means literally 'to loose' — Christ unties, dismantles, and dissolves the devil's works.
8. [TCR Cross-Reference] References Genesis 3 — the TCR OT rendering of that text provides the Hebrew source and explains the translation decisions involved.
9. The word *sperma* ('seed') has been interpreted as God's word, the Holy Spirit, or the divine nature implanted in the believer. In context, it likely refers to the divine life-principle communicated through new birth. 'Cannot sin' (*ou dynatai hamartanein*) does not mean absolute impossibility but moral incompatibility — the new nature resists and is fundamentally opposed to habitual sin. The present infinitive *hamartanein* describes an ongoing pattern, not a single act.
10. John establishes two tests by which spiritual parentage is revealed: practicing righteousness and loving fellow believers. The phrase 'children of the devil' (*ta tekna tou diabolou*) is stark — just as there are children of God by divine birth, there are children of the devil by spiritual allegiance. This dualistic framework serves pastoral urgency, not philosophical speculation.
11. The word *angelia* ('message') appears only here and in 1:5 in the New Testament. In 1:5 the message was 'God is light'; here it is the command of mutual love. These two messages — God's nature and the resulting ethical obligation — frame the letter's argument. 'From the beginning' (*ap' archēs*)

again refers to the original proclamation of the gospel.

12. The verb *esphaxen* ('slaughtered, butchered') is a violent word often used for slaying sacrificial animals (it appears in Revelation for the slaughter of the Lamb, 5:6). John attributes Cain's act to his spiritual origin — he 'was of the evil one' (*ek tou ponērou ēn*). The rhetorical question and answer reveal that hatred of righteousness motivates murder. This interprets Genesis 4 through a spiritual-warfare lens.
12. [TCR Cross-Reference] Draws on Genesis 4. Consult the TCR rendering of that passage for the underlying Hebrew and the rationale for key translation choices.
13. The imperative *mē thaumazete* ('do not be surprised, stop marveling') echoes Jesus's words in John 15:18-19. The world's hatred of believers follows the same pattern as Cain's hatred of Abel — the righteous provoke hostility simply by being righteous. The conditional *ei* ('if') with the indicative *misei* suggests this is a real condition: the world does hate them.
14. The perfect *metabebēkamen* ('we have passed') describes a completed transition with enduring results — believers have already crossed from the realm of death into the realm of life. Love for fellow believers is not the cause of this transition but the evidence of it. The stark alternative — remaining in death — is the default human condition apart from divine intervention.
15. The Greek *anthrōpoktonos* ('murderer,' literally 'man-killer') is the same word used of the devil in John 8:44. John equates hatred with murder in its spiritual essence — the same move Jesus makes in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-22). The logic is relentless: hatred = murder, and no murderer possesses eternal life.
16. The phrase *tēn psychēn autou ethēken* ('he laid down his life') directly echoes Jesus's words in John 10:11, 15 and 15:13. The Greek *psychē* means 'life, soul, self.' Love is defined not by sentiment but by sacrifice. The obligation (*opheilomen*, 'we ought') extends the pattern of Christ's self-giving to all believers — this is the highest expression of the love command.
17. The Greek *splanchna* ('inner organs, bowels, heart') was the seat of compassion in ancient thought, corresponding roughly to the modern 'heart.' The verb *kleisē* ('shuts, closes') is vivid — it pictures someone deliberately closing off the natural response of compassion. John moves from the grand principle (laying down one's life) to the mundane test (sharing material resources), suggesting that daily generosity is the realistic measure of love.
18. The contrast between *logō* and *glōssē* ('word' and 'tongue/speech') on one side, and *ergō* and *alētheia* ('deed/action' and 'truth') on the other, establishes that genuine love is demonstrated through concrete acts. 'In truth' (*en alētheia*) adds the dimension of sincerity — the actions must be genuine, not performative.
19. The verb *peisomen* ('we will persuade, reassure, set at rest') indicates the active process of calming a troubled conscience. Loving in deed and truth provides the believer with objective evidence of genuine faith, which in turn produces inner assurance before God.
20. This is one of the most pastorally significant verses in the letter. The Greek *kataginōskē* ('condemns, accuses') describes the inner voice of self-accusation. The response is not to dismiss the heart's verdict but to appeal beyond it to God, who 'is greater' — his knowledge of our love and obedience is more comprehensive and more gracious than our own self-assessment. The verse offers comfort to the scrupulous, not license to the careless.
21. The word *parrēsian* ('confidence, boldness, freedom of speech') reappears from 2:28. A clear conscience — not from self-deception but from genuine love in action — produces bold access to God. This confidence is not self-reliance but the fruit of a life aligned with God's commands.
22. The connection between obedience and answered prayer echoes John 15:7 ('if you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish'). The logic is not transactional — obedience does not earn answers — but relational: the obedient life is aligned with God's will, so its requests are naturally in harmony with his purposes.
23. John distills all of God's commands into two inseparable requirements: faith in Christ and mutual love. The singular 'commandment' (*entolē*) encompasses both, suggesting they cannot be separated — faith without love, or love without faith, is incomplete. The aorist *pisteusōmen* ('believe') may point to the decisive act of faith, while the present *agapōmen* ('love') indicates ongoing practice.
24. The mutual indwelling formula — 'remains in God, and God in that person' — is the hallmark of Johannine theology (cf. John 15:4-5). The Spirit is introduced for the first time in the letter as the means by which believers know God's presence. This sets up the discussion of testing the spirits in chapter 4. The verb *edōken* ('has given') is aorist, pointing to the definitive gift of the Spirit.

4

Summary: *First John 4 contains the letter's theological and emotional climax. It opens with a call to test the spirits, providing a christological criterion: every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ as having come in the flesh is from God. John then develops the theme that God is love — not merely that God loves, but that love defines his very nature. God's love is demonstrated in sending his Son as an atoning sacrifice, and this love calls forth a response of mutual love among believers. The chapter reaches its apex in the declaration that perfect love drives out fear, and closes with the warning that anyone who claims to love God while hating a brother is a liar.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The twin declarations 'God is love' (vv. 8, 16) are among the most quoted sentences in the Bible and represent the deepest theological distillation in the Johannine writings. Notably, John does not say 'love is God' — the statement is not reversible. God defines love, not the reverse. The christological test (vv. 2-3) addresses what appears to be an early docetic heresy that denied the reality of Jesus's physical incarnation. The phrase 'perfect love drives out fear' (v. 18) is psychologically profound and theologically revolutionary, redefining the human relationship to divine judgment.*

Translation Friction: *The identity of the false prophets and the 'spirit of the antichrist' (vv. 1-3) points to the same secession described in 2:19. The confession 'Jesus Christ has come in the flesh' (v. 2) targets a specific denial — likely a proto-docetic or Cerinthian teaching that the divine Christ merely appeared to be human. The phrase 'he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world' (v. 4) has often been decontextualized; in its original setting, it refers to discernment of true and false teaching, not a general promise of victory.*

Connections: *The testing of spirits connects to Deuteronomy 13:1-5 and 1 Corinthians 12:3. The incarnation confession echoes John 1:14 ('the Word became flesh'). The 'God is love' declarations connect to the broader biblical narrative of God's chesed (steadfast love) and its ultimate expression in the cross. The fear/love dynamic resonates with Romans 8:15 ('you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear'). The 'no one has ever seen God' statement (v. 12) echoes John 1:18.*

¹Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ²By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God — and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof you have heard that it should come. And even now already is it in the world. ⁴You are from God, little children, and have overcome them, because he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. ⁵They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of deception. ⁷Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹In this the love of God was revealed among us: that God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰In this is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, if God loved us in this way, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God remains in us, and his love has been made complete in us. ¹³By this we know that we remain in him and he in us: because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. ¹⁵Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God remains in that person and that person in God. ¹⁶And we have come to know and have believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God, and God remains in that person. ¹⁷In this, love has been made complete among us, so that we may have confidence on the day of judgment, because as he is, so also are we in this world. ¹⁸There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears has not been made complete in love. ¹⁹Indeed, we love him, because he first loved us. ²⁰If anyone says, "I love God," and yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For the one who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. ²¹And this commandment we have from him: that whoever loves God must also love his brother.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb dokimazete ('test, examine, prove') was used for testing metals and coins for genuineness. John does not counsel gullibility or blanket suspicion but careful discernment. The connection between 'spirits' and 'false prophets' indicates that John views human teaching as inspired by spiritual powers — behind every prophet stands a spirit, and not all spirits are from God.
2. The confession Iēsoun Christon en sarki elēlythota ('Jesus Christ having come in the flesh') is the christological touchstone. The perfect participle elēlythota ('having come') indicates a completed action with ongoing results — Christ came in the flesh and remains incarnate. This targets any teaching that would deny the reality of the incarnation. The confession is not merely intellectual assent but a public declaration (homologeī).
3. The SBLGNT reads simply 'does not confess Jesus' (mē homologeī ton Iēsoun) rather than the fuller reading in some manuscripts. The brevity may be significant — any diminishment of Jesus, not merely the specific denial of his incarnation, fails the test. The 'spirit of the antichrist' is identified not as a future apocalyptic figure but as a present spiritual reality already operating through false teachers.
4. The perfect nenikēkate ('you have overcome') declares victory as an accomplished fact. The 'them' (autous) refers to the false prophets and the spirits behind them. The ground of victory is not the believers' own strength but the indwelling presence of God (through the Spirit, cf. 3:24). 'He who is in the world' refers to the devil (cf. 5:19).
5. The false teachers' popularity is not a mark of truth but of worldly origin. Their message resonates with the world because it comes from the world. John establishes a diagnostic principle: the audience a message attracts reveals its source. This is not anti-intellectualism but a theological observation about spiritual affinity.
6. The 'we' (hēmeis) likely refers to the apostolic circle — those who bear the original eyewitness testimony (cf. 1:1-3). Response to apostolic teaching becomes a second test of spiritual authenticity. The contrast between 'the Spirit of truth' (to pneuma tēs alētheias, cf. John 14:17, 15:26, 16:13) and 'the spirit of deception' (to pneuma tēs planēs) frames the situation in stark dualistic terms.
7. This verse begins the letter's theological crescendo. Love is traced to its source: it originates in God (ek tou theou). The one who loves demonstrates two realities — divine birth (gegennētai, perfect passive) and knowledge of God (ginōskei, present active). Love is both the evidence and the fruit of the divine relationship.
8. The declaration ho theos agapē estin ('God is love') is one of the most profound theological statements in Scripture. The predicate is without an article, making it qualitative — love characterizes God's very essence. Critically, the statement is not reversible: 'love is God' would be pantheistic. Rather, all genuine love has its source and definition in God's own nature. The aorist ouk egnō ('did not know') suggests the person never truly knew God, not that they lost knowledge.
9. The Greek monogenē ('only, unique, one-of-a-kind') is rendered 'only Son' rather than 'only begotten' because the word emphasizes uniqueness rather than the manner of origin. The perfect apostalken ('has sent') indicates a completed mission with enduring effects. The purpose — 'that we might live' (hina zēsōmen) — defines God's love as life-giving. The verse parallels John 3:16 in its structure and theology.
10. The priority of God's love is emphatic: love originates with God, not with humanity. Human love for God is always a response, never the initiative. The word hilasmon ('atoning sacrifice') reappears from 2:2, connecting God's love directly to the cross. The aorist ēgapēsen ('he loved') and aposteilen ('he sent') point to the historical acts of the incarnation and crucifixion as the definitive demonstration of divine love.
11. The conditional ei ('if') with the indicative is a first-class condition, assuming the reality of the premise: since God has loved us this way. The obligation (opheilomen, 'we ought') flows from the indicative of God's action — the imperative of love is grounded in the prior reality of having been loved. John does not say 'we ought to love God back' but 'we ought to love one another' — divine love redirects outward.
12. The opening statement — 'no one has ever seen God' (theon oudeis pōpote tetheatai) — echoes John 1:18. The invisible God becomes visible, as it were, through the mutual love of his people. The perfect participle teteleiōmenē ('made complete, perfected') indicates that God's love reaches its intended goal and full expression when it flows through believers to one another.
13. The phrase ek tou pneumatōs autou ('of his Spirit') uses the partitive ek, suggesting a share in the Spirit rather than the Spirit in totality — though the theological distinction should not be pressed too far. The Spirit is the inner witness to the mutual indwelling of God and believer, confirming what love makes visible.
14. The 'we' (hēmeis) is emphatic and likely refers to the apostolic eyewitness circle (cf. 1:1-3). The perfect tetheametha ('we have seen') and apostalken ('has sent') indicate enduring realities rooted in historical events. The title sōtēra tou kosmou ('Savior of the world') appears elsewhere only in John 4:42, spoken by the Samaritans — a universalizing title that extends salvation beyond Israel.
15. The confession 'Jesus is the Son of God' is the christological complement to v. 2's confession of the incarnation. Together they affirm both the divinity and the true humanity of Jesus. The result of confession is mutual indwelling — the same reciprocal abiding that characterizes the Father-Son relationship (John 14:10-11) is extended to believers.
16. The second declaration 'God is love' (ho theos agapē estin) now carries the full weight of the chapter's argument. Knowing and believing God's love are paired as twin aspects of a single response — experiential knowledge and volitional trust. The mutual indwelling formula reaches its fullest expression: to remain in love is to remain in God, and to remain in God is to have God remain in you.

17. Love's completion (teteleiōtai) produces confidence (parrēsian) before the final judgment. The remarkable claim 'as he is, so also are we in this world' (kathōs ekeinos estin kai hēmeis esmen) asserts that believers already share Christ's standing before the Father — not because of their own merit but because they abide in love. This is among the most daring statements in the letter.
18. The Greek *exō ballei* ('casts out, drives out') is forceful — love does not merely soothe fear but expels it entirely. The word *kolasin* ('punishment') connects fear to the expectation of divine judgment. Perfect love (*teleia agapē*) — love that has reached its intended goal — eliminates the dread of condemnation. John does not deny the reality of judgment but declares that those who abide in love need not fear it.
19. The SBLGNT omits the object ('him') found in some manuscripts, making the statement broader: we love — in general, in every direction — because God's prior love enables and motivates all of our loving. The adverb *prōtos* ('first') establishes the absolute priority of divine initiative. Human love is always derivative and responsive.
20. The argument moves from the lesser to the greater: if you cannot love a visible brother, you certainly cannot love the invisible God. The word *pseustēs* ('liar') reappears (cf. 1:10, 2:4, 2:22), maintaining John's unsparing moral vocabulary. The test is devastatingly practical — love for God is measured by love for the people around you.
21. The chapter closes by fusing love for God and love for one's brother into a single, indivisible commandment. The two cannot be separated — the vertical and horizontal dimensions of love are one. The source of the command (*ap' autou*, 'from him') could refer to God or to Christ; the ambiguity may be intentional, since both the Father and the Son have issued this command (cf. John 13:34, 15:12, 17).

5

Summary: *First John 5 brings the letter to its conclusion by weaving together its major themes: faith, love, obedience, and assurance. John declares that faith in Jesus as the Son of God overcomes the world, and identifies three witnesses — the Spirit, the water, and the blood — that testify to the truth of Christ. The chapter reaches its crescendo with the assurance of eternal life for those who believe in the Son. John addresses the topic of sin leading to death versus sin not leading to death, and closes with three affirmations introduced by 'we know,' providing the community with certainties to anchor their faith.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The threefold witness of Spirit, water, and blood (vv. 7-8) is one of the most debated passages in the Johannine writings. The water likely refers to Jesus's baptism, the blood to his crucifixion, and the Spirit to ongoing divine testimony — together affirming that Jesus was the Christ from baptism through death, not merely at one point. The Comma Johanneum (the Trinitarian expansion found in some late manuscripts at vv. 7-8) is not present in the earliest Greek manuscripts and is not part of the SBLGNT text. The distinction between sin 'leading to death' and sin 'not leading to death' (vv. 16-17) has generated extensive discussion throughout church history.*

Translation Friction: *The Comma Johanneum (a Trinitarian gloss reading 'the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one') found in later Latin manuscripts and some late Greek manuscripts is absent from all early Greek manuscripts, the earliest Latin manuscripts, and the earliest church fathers. It is not included in the SBLGNT and is accordingly not included in our rendering. The identity of the 'sin leading to death' (v. 16) remains disputed: possibilities include apostasy, the denial of Christ that characterizes the secessionists, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, or mortal sin in a later Catholic sense. In context, the most natural referent is the christological denial of the secessionists.*

Connections: *The overcoming-the-world language (vv. 4-5) echoes Jesus's declaration in John 16:33. The witness of water and blood connects to John 19:34 (water and blood flowing from Jesus's pierced side). The assurance of eternal life (v. 13) parallels the purpose statement of John's Gospel (John 20:31). The prayer-confidence passage (vv. 14-15) develops the teaching of 3:21-22. The closing warning about idols (v. 21) echoes the Old Testament prophetic tradition.*

1Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves the one who has been born of him. 2By this we know that we love the children of God: when we love God and carry out his commandments. 3For this is the love of God: that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, 4For whatsoever is brought into the world of God overcometh the age — and this is the victory that overcometh the age, even our faith. 5Who is the one who overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? 6

This is the one who came through water and blood — Jesus Christ. He came not by water only, but by water and by blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. ⁷For there are three that testify: ⁸Three things testify on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood — and these three are in agreement. ⁹If we accept the testimony of humans, the testimony of God is greater, because this is the testimony of God: that he has testified concerning his Son. ¹⁰Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony within himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning his Son. ¹¹And this is the testimony: that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹²Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. ¹³I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. ¹⁴And this is the confidence that we have before him: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. ¹⁵And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him. ¹⁶If anyone sees his brother committing a sin that does not lead to death, he should ask, and God will give him life — to those who commit sins not leading to death. There is sin that leads to death; I am not saying he should pray about that. ¹⁷All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death. ¹⁸We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but the one who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him. ¹⁹We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. ²⁰And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know the one who is true. And we are in the one who is true — in his Son Jesus Christ. This one is the true God and eternal life. ²¹Little children, guard yourselves from idols.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The perfect *gegennētai* ('has been born') indicates that divine birth precedes and enables faith — belief is the evidence, not the cause, of being born of God. The logic of the second clause is familial: to love the parent is necessarily to love the parent's children. This links faith (believing Jesus is the Christ) with love (for God and for fellow believers) as inseparable marks of divine birth.
2. The logic here reverses the direction of 4:20-21. There, love for the brother was the test of love for God. Here, love for God and obedience to his commands verify that our love for fellow believers is genuine rather than merely sentimental. The two tests are mutually reinforcing — neither can stand alone.
3. Love for God is defined not by emotion but by obedience — keeping his commands. The declaration that his commands 'are not burdensome' (*bareia ouk eisin*) echoes Jesus's words in Matthew 11:30 ('my yoke is easy and my burden is light') and stands in contrast to the Pharisaic burden-making that Jesus condemned. The divine birth described in vv. 1 and 4 is what makes obedience possible rather than oppressive.
4. The neuter *pan* to *gegennēmenon* ('everything/everyone born of God') generalizes the principle. The present *nika* ('overcomes') describes an ongoing reality, while the aorist *nikēsasa* ('having overcome') treats the victory as accomplished. Faith is identified as the instrument of victory — not military power, political strategy, or ascetic discipline, but trust in God. The noun *nikē* ('victory') appears only here in the New Testament.
5. The rhetorical question expects the answer 'no one else.' The present participle *nikōn* ('overcoming') and *pisteuōn* ('believing') indicate ongoing, characteristic activity. The confession 'Jesus is the Son of God' is the specific content of world-overcoming faith — it is christological, not vague spiritual optimism.
6. The 'water' most likely refers to Jesus's baptism and the 'blood' to his crucifixion. The emphatic insistence — 'not by water only, but by water and by blood' — suggests the false teachers accepted Jesus's baptism (the beginning of his ministry) but denied the saving significance of his death. The Spirit provides ongoing testimony to the full reality of Christ. Calling the Spirit 'the truth' (*hē alētheia*) echoes Jesus's description of the Spirit as 'the Spirit of truth' (John 14:17, 15:26, 16:13).
7. The SBLGNT text here is significantly shorter than the KJV. The KJV's expanded reading — 'in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth' — is known as the Comma Johanneum. This expansion is absent from all Greek manuscripts before the fourteenth century, absent from the earliest and best Latin manuscripts, and unknown to the Greek church fathers. It entered the Latin tradition through marginal glosses that were eventually incorporated into the text. It is not part of the original letter. The SBLGNT correctly omits it, and our rendering follows the critical Greek text.
8. The three witnesses — Spirit, water, and blood — converge in a single testimony about Jesus Christ. The phrase *eis to hen eisin* ('are into the one,' i.e., 'agree as one') indicates not identity but unanimous testimony. Under Jewish law, two or three witnesses established a matter (Deuteronomy 19:15); God provides three converging witnesses to his Son. The Spirit witnesses through ongoing testimony in the community, the water through the baptism that inaugurated Jesus's ministry, and the blood through the death that completed it.
8. [TCR Cross-Reference] References Deuteronomy 19:15 — the TCR OT rendering of that text provides the Hebrew source and explains the translation decisions involved.

9. The argument moves from the lesser to the greater: if human testimony is accepted in legal proceedings, how much more should divine testimony be trusted? The perfect memartyrēken ('he has testified') indicates that God's testimony is a completed and standing witness. The content of God's testimony is explained in v. 11.
10. The believer possesses God's testimony internally — through the Spirit's witness (cf. 3:24, 4:13). The one who refuses to believe does something far worse than mere skepticism: he 'has made God a liar' (pseustēn pepoiēken auton). This is the ultimate insult — calling God's testimony about his own Son false. The perfect tenses (pepoiēken, pepisteuken, memartyrēken) emphasize settled states with ongoing consequences.
11. The content of God's testimony is now made explicit: he has given eternal life, and that life is located exclusively in his Son. The aorist edōken ('gave') points to the definitive gift accomplished through Christ's death and resurrection. The phrase 'this life is in his Son' means that eternal life is not an independent commodity but is inseparable from the person of Jesus Christ.
12. The statement is perfectly balanced and admits no middle ground. 'Having the Son' means possessing a living relationship with Christ through faith. The addition of 'of God' (tou theou) in the second clause adds formal weight to the negative statement. This verse is the letter's sharpest expression of the exclusive connection between Christ and eternal life.
13. This verse parallels the purpose statement of John's Gospel (John 20:31). The Gospel was written 'so that you may believe'; the letter is written 'so that you may know that you have eternal life.' The audience is those who already believe — the letter's purpose is assurance, not evangelism. The SBLGNT does not include the second clause found in some manuscripts ('and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God').
14. The word parrēsia ('confidence, boldness') appears for the fourth time in the letter (2:28, 3:21, 4:17). Prayer confidence is not presumption — it is conditioned by alignment with God's will (kata to thelēma autou). The verb akouei ('hears') carries the Hebrew sense of hearing that includes responding and acting.
15. The logic is: if God hears (v. 14), and we know he hears (v. 15a), then we already possess what we have asked (v. 15b). The present echomen ('we have') expresses a certainty so firm that the future answer is treated as already in hand. This is the prayer of faith — not manipulating God but trusting his character and alignment with his purposes.
16. The distinction between sin 'not leading to death' (mē pros thanaton) and sin 'leading to death' (pros thanaton) is the most debated passage in the letter. In context, the 'sin leading to death' most likely refers to the deliberate, settled denial of Christ that characterizes the secessionists — a willful apostasy that places one beyond the reach of intercessory prayer. John does not forbid prayer for such sin but declines to command it. Ordinary sin within the community should prompt intercessory prayer, and God will respond with life.
17. John clarifies that all wrongdoing (adikia, 'unrighteousness, injustice') is genuinely sin — he is not trivializing non-fatal sin. But the reassurance is clear: not all sin is the irrecoverable apostasy described in v. 16. Most sin within the community can be addressed through confession and intercessory prayer.
18. The first of three 'we know' (oidamen) statements that close the letter. The SBLGNT reading ho gennētheis ek tou theou ('the one who was born of God') likely refers to Christ, not the believer — Christ protects the one born of God. The aorist passive gennētheis (referring to Christ's unique divine birth) is distinguished from the perfect gegennēmenos (referring to the believer's new birth). The evil one 'does not touch' (ouch haptetai) — the verb implies grasping or laying hold of, suggesting that Satan cannot seize or control the one Christ guards.
19. The second 'we know' statement. The contrast is stark: believers are 'from God' (ek tou theou), while the entire world-system 'lies in the evil one' (en tō ponērō keitai). The verb keitai ('lies') suggests a passive, helpless state — the world lies in the devil's grip without resistance. The dative/locative en tō ponērō is better rendered 'in the power of the evil one' than the KJV's abstract 'in wickedness.'
20. The third and climactic 'we know' statement. The verb hēkei ('has come') is present tense with perfect force — he has come and is present. The word dianoian ('understanding, insight, mind') denotes the faculty of spiritual comprehension that Christ has given. The final sentence — houtos estin ho alēthinos theos kai zōē aiōnios ('this one is the true God and eternal life') — is among the strongest christological affirmations in the New Testament. The pronoun houtos ('this one') most naturally refers to the nearest antecedent, Jesus Christ, identifying him directly as 'the true God and eternal life.'
21. The letter's abrupt closing has puzzled commentators. The imperative phylaxate ('guard, protect, keep') is an aorist suggesting decisive, urgent action. In context, the 'idols' (eidōlōn) likely refer not to pagan statues but to the false conceptions of God promoted by the secessionists — any substitute for the 'true God' just identified in v. 20. After a letter devoted to distinguishing truth from falsehood, the final word warns against every counterfeit. The SBLGNT does not include the 'Amen' found in some manuscripts.