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## *The First Epistle of John*

The First Epistle of John (the first of three) was written in Ephesus about 90 A.D. Its thought, style, and language are so close to that of the Fourth Gospel that its authorship has traditionally been attributed to John the Apostle.

For more than half a century John had been “a link between the first and third generations of Christians,” an active pastor preaching the gospel among the Jews of Palestine and later, in Asia Minor, among the Gentiles. In the latter days of his ministry the churches of Asia were unsettled by the inroads of Gnosticism, (Greek, *gnosis*, “knowledge”), a blend of Oriental mysticism, Essenic Judaism, and Hellenistic philosophy. The initiates of Gnosticism claimed possession of a special knowledge of truth higher than the revelation that came through Jesus Christ.

Gnosticism regarded spirit as good, matter as evil and the source of all evil, with no contact between good and evil. This premise of the sinfulness of matter led Gnostics into one of two paths. Maintaining that soul and body are separate entities, they regarded the soul as free of any evil the body might do (the teaching called *antinomianism*). This concept led some to extreme asceticism and others to gross immorality.

The point of central importance in this belief of the separateness of spirit and matter was the Gnostics’ denial of the Incarnation. They admitted that Christ had come but denied the humanity of his person while on earth; they held Jesus Christ merely to have been a phantom or appearance and his life in the flesh and his sufferings on the cross to have been unreal. This belief (termed *docetism*) struck at the very core of Christianity.

John wrote his First Epistle as a strong rebuke to those (the “Gnostic Christians”) who had espoused these insidious teachings. Out of his personal knowledge of Jesus he bore witness that Christ had indeed come in the flesh and that Jesus was the Son of God—“that which was from the beginning, which we have

heard, which we have seen with our eyes . . . and our hands have handled, of the Word of life . . . which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us” (1:1,2). “Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son” (2:22).

For the Gnostics the pursuit of knowledge became a life-goal in itself, a “love-less intellectualism” that left them devoid of brotherly love or any sense of responsibility toward the unenlightened.

John uncompromisingly condemned the Gnostic viewpoint licensing sin. Sin was lawless (3:4). “Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning” (3:7,8).

John warned the Church against those who professed a knowledge of God but did not practice the love of God: “He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. . . . He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now” (2:4,9). The Christian’s revelation of God comes through Jesus Christ and is already his: “Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning . . . ye need not that any man teach you” (2:24,27).

The theme of the whole epistle is love—“God is love” (4:16). John defined God’s great love for man, man’s love for God, and godly love one for another. The demand is that men should love one another.

John taught Christians that fellowship with God is a living union with His Son and with one another, and in so doing he reduced the immortal meanings of love and sonship to their essence.

#### THE NATURE OF GOD

“God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” I Jn. 1:5

“God is love. . . .” I Jn. 4:16

“The Spirit is truth.” I Jn. 5:6

#### THE NATURE OF HIS SON JESUS CHRIST

“The Word of life . . . that eternal life, which was with the Father. . . .” I Jn. 1:1,2

“An advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” I Jn. 2:1

“In him is no sin.” I Jn. 3:5

#### THE DIVINE PURPOSE OF THE SON

“For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.” I Jn. 3:8

“This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” I Jn. 5:11

#### THE INCARNATION OF THE SON

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us). . . .” I Jn. 1:1,2

THE GODHEAD  
AND ITS WITNESS

“This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.

“For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.

“And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

“If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself. . . .” Jn. 5:6–10

GOD’S COMMANDMENT TO  
BELIEVE ON HIS SON

“And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ. . . .” I Jn. 3:23

FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD  
AND WITH HIS SON

“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.” I Jn. 1:3, 4

“He that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.” I Jn. 2:23

“If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.” I Jn. 2:24

“We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.” I Jn. 5:20

THE SPIRITUAL NATURE  
OF THE SONS OF GOD

“If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that everyone that doeth righteousness is born of him.” I Jn. 2:29

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” I Jn. 3:2,3

“Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest. . . .” I Jn. 3:9,10

“And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.” I Jn. 3:24

“God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.” I Jn. 4:16,17

“He that hath the Son hath life. . . . These things have I written . . . that ye may know that ye have eternal life. . . .” I Jn. 5:12,13

“We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.” I Jn. 5:18

THE FATHER’S LOVE  
FOR ALL HIS SONS

“Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.” I Jn. 2:20

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.” I Jn. 3:1

“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.” I Jn. 4:9

“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” I Jn. 4:10

#### THE SONS' LOVE FOR THE FATHER

“Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we what we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.” I Jn. 2:5,6

“We love him [God] because he first loved us.” I Jn. 4:19

“Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. . . .” I Jn. 5:1–3

#### BROTHERLY LOVE AND FELLOWSHIP

“If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” I Jn. 1:7

“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” I Jn. 3:16

“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.” I Jn. 4:7

“Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.” I Jn. 4:11,12

“This commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.” I Jn. 4:21

#### ANTICHRIST (Denying God's love)

“Little children . . . as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.” I Jn. 2:18,19

“Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.” I Jn. 2:22

“Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist . . . and even now already is it in the world.” I Jn. 4:3

“He that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.” I Jn. 5:10

#### OVERCOMING THE WORLD

“Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.” I Jn. 4:4

“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” I Jn. 5:4,5

## “LOVE NOT THE WORLD”

As a loving pastor John warns the Christian against evil influences that would draw him away from the love of God: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (I Jn. 2:15–17).

A careful study of John’s First Epistle shows that along with the apostle’s fundamental teachings of the nature of God and His loving relationship to men is his underlying recognition of carnal elements of the human mind antagonistic to Christ; hence many of his positive statements of truth are intensified by a warning or denial against these opposing errors.

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God. . . . We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error” (I Jn. 4:1,6).

### The Spirit of Truth

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“If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” I Jn. 1:7

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“Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.” I Jn. 2:3

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“He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.” I Jn. 2:10

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“He that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.” I Jn. 2:23

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“Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not.” I Jn. 3:6

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“Let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.” I Jn. 3:7

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“Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” I Jn. 3:9

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### The Spirit of Error

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“If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.” I Jn. 1:6

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“He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” I Jn. 2:4

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“But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.” I Jn. 2:11

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“Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father. . . .” I Jn. 2:23

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“whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.” I Jn. 3:6

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“He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning.” I Jn. 3:8

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“Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.” I Jn. 3:10

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The Spirit of Truth

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“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.” I Jn. 3:14

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“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.” I Jn. 3:18

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“We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us.” I Jn. 4:6

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“Love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.” I Jn. 4:7

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“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment.” I Jn. 4:18

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“This commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.” I Jn. 4:21

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“He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself. . . .” I Jn. 5:10

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JOHN’S BENEDICTION

“We know that we are of God. . . . And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

“Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.” I Jn. 5:19–21

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The Spirit of Error

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“He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.” I Jn. 3:14,15

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“Whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” I Jn. 3:17

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“They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.” I Jn. 4:5

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“He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.” I Jn. 4:8

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“He that feareth is not made perfect in love.” I Jn. 4:18

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“If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” I Jn. 4:20

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“he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.” I Jn. 5:10

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