



1 John 1-5 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Word of Life

1 We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— 2 this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— 3 we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. 4 We are writing these things so that our[a] joy may be complete.

God Is Light

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

1 John 2 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Christ Our Advocate

2 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

3 Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments. 4 Whoever says, "I have come to know him," but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; 5 but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: 6 whoever says, "I abide in him," ought to walk just as he walked.

A New Commandment

7 Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word that you have heard. 8 Yet I am writing you a new commandment that is true in him and in you, because[a] the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. 9 Whoever says, "I am in the light," while hating a brother or sister,[b] is still in the darkness. 10 Whoever loves a brother or sister[c] lives in the light, and in such a person[d] there is no cause for stumbling. 11 But whoever hates another believer[e] is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness.

12 I am writing to you, little children,
because your sins are forgiven on account of his name.

13 I am writing to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.

I am writing to you, young people,
because you have conquered the evil one.

14 I write to you, children,
because you know the Father.

I write to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young people,
because you are strong
and the word of God abides in you,
and you have overcome the evil one.

15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; 16 for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 And the world and its desire^[f] are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever.

Warning against Antichrists

18 Children, it is the last hour! As you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. From this we know that it is the last hour. 19 They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But by going out they made it plain that none of them belongs to us. 20 But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and all of you have knowledge.^[g] 21 I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and you know that no lie comes from the truth. 22 Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ?^[h] This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. 23 No one who denies the Son has the Father; everyone who confesses the Son has the Father also. 24 Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father. 25 And this is what he has promised us,^[i] eternal life.

26 I write these things to you concerning those who would deceive you. 27 As for you, the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and so you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, abide in him.^[j]

28 And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he is revealed we may have confidence and not be put to shame before him at his coming.

Children of God

29 If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who does right has been born of him.

1 John 3 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

3 1 See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he^[a] is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. 3 And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

4 Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. 5 You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. 6 No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. 7 Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. 8 Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil; for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. 9 Those who have been born of God do not sin, because God's seed abides in them;^[b] they cannot sin, because they have been born of God. 10 The children of God and the children of the devil are revealed in this way: all who do not do what is right are not from God, nor are those who do not love their brothers and sisters.^[c]

Love One Another

11 For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. 12 We must not be like Cain who was from the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. 13 Do not be astonished, brothers and sisters,^[d] that the world hates you. 14 We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death. 15 All who hate a brother or sister^[e] are murderers,

and you know that murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them. 16 We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. 17 How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister[f] in need and yet refuses help?

18 Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. 19 And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him 20 whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. 21 Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; 22 and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

23 And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. 24 All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

1 John 4 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Testing the Spirits

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

God Is Love

7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. 15 God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. 16 So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. 17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. 19 We love[b] because he first loved us. 20 Those who say, “I love God,” and hate their brothers or sisters,[c] are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister[d] whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. 21 The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters[e] also.

1 John 5 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Faith Conquers the World

5 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ[a] has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. 3 For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, 4 for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the

victory that conquers the world, our faith. 5 Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Testimony concerning the Son of God

6¹ This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth. 7 There are three that testify:[b] 8 the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree. 9 If we receive human testimony, the testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God that he has testified to his Son. 10 Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony in their hearts. Those who do not believe in God[c] have made him a liar by not believing in the testimony that God has given concerning his Son. 11 And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Epilogue

13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

14 And this is the boldness we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him. 16 If you see your brother or sister[d] committing what is not a mortal sin, you will ask, and God[e] will give life to such a one—to those whose sin is not mortal. There is sin that is mortal; I do not say that you should pray about that. 17 All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that is not mortal.

18 We know that those who are born of God do not sin, but the one who was born of God protects them, and the evil one does not touch them. 19 We know that we are God's children, and that the whole world lies under the power of the evil one. 20 And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know him who is true:[f] and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols.[g]

Footnotes:

- 1 John 1:4 Other ancient authorities read your
- 1 John 2:8 Or that
- 1 John 2:9 Gk hating a brother
- 1 John 2:10 Gk loves a brother
- 1 John 2:10 Or in it
- 1 John 2:11 Gk hates a brother
- 1 John 2:17 Or the desire for it
- 1 John 2:20 Other ancient authorities read you know all things
- 1 John 2:22 Or the Messiah
- 1 John 2:25 Other ancient authorities read you
- 1 John 2:27 Or it
- 1 John 3:2 Or it
- 1 John 3:9 Or because the children of God abide in him
- 1 John 3:10 Gk his brother
- 1 John 3:13 Gk brothers
- 1 John 3:15 Gk his brother
- 1 John 3:17 Gk brother
- 1 John 4:3 Other ancient authorities read does away with Jesus (Gk dissolves Jesus)
- 1 John 4:19 Other ancient authorities add him; others add God
- 1 John 4:20 Gk brothers

¹ The Johannine comma or additional Trinitarian material in 5:6-8 is the 3rd to 4th century CE Latin theological gloss

1 John 4:20 Gk brother
1 John 4:21 Gk brothers
1 John 5:1 Or the Messiah
1 John 5:7 A few other authorities read (with variations) 7 There are three that testify in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one. 8 And there are three that testify on earth:
1 John 5:10 Other ancient authorities read in the Son
1 John 5:16 Gk your brother
1 John 5:16 Gk he
1 John 5:20 Other ancient authorities read know the true God
1 John 5:21 Other ancient authorities add Amen

Notes

Overview

Source: Raymond E. Brown
Date: Circa 100 CE – after John 1-20, before John 21 and before the redactor had edited John.
To: Christians in the Johannine community who had undergone a schism.
Authenticity: Author in the Johannine tradition; probably not by the author of the Gospel.
Unity: Great majority of scholars believe is a unified composition.
Integrity: The Johannine comma or additional Trinitarian material in 5:6-8 is the 3rd to 4th century CE Latin theological gloss, ie added, otherwise no other additions.
Formal Division:
1:1-4 Prologue
1:5-3:10 Part One: God is light and we must walk in the light
3:11-5:12 Part Two: Walk as the children of God who has loved us in Christ
5:13-21 Conclusion

What is the conflict?

- Believers have left the community over a difference in interpretation.

What is the author's solution?

- The author urges believers to stay with what they have heard from the beginning.
- Believe in the identity of the physical, human, Jesus with the divine Son of God and in the saving value of his death.
- It means keeping the commandment to love God and one another.
- The insistence on "God is love" is why the letter still resonates today.

Differences between Gospel of John and 1, 2 and 3 John Epistles

- The Prologue of 1 John does not emphasize the incarnation of the personalized Word as does the Prologue in John 1 – rather it testifies to the word (message) of life which was seen, heard and felt – the human career of Jesus.
- 1 John assigns God features the Gospel of John assigns to Jesus: God is light and God gives the commandment to love one another.
- Less emphasis on the Spirit as a person, and the Gospel term Paraclete or Advocate is never used. (Jesus Christ is the paraclete in 1 John 2:1) And spirits must be tested (1 John 4:1,6).
- Final eschatology is stronger in 1 John than in John, where realized eschatology dominates. There is more emphasis on the Parousia as the moment of accountability for Christian life (1 John 2:28-3:3).
- The Dead Sea Scroll language parallels are much closer in 1 John than John.

Detail

Raymond E. Brown

Purpose of letter: A division has arisen in the Johannine community, sparked by different views of Jesus. Both groups professed belief that the Word was God, but they disagreed on the importance of what the Word had done as flesh – the way he “walked”. One group felt his actions had set a moral standard to be followed; the other held simply believing in the Word was all that mattered. What Christians did had no more importance than what Jesus had done.

1:1-4 Primitive sketch of the Prologue from John 1:1-18. Lacks the clarity found in the Gospel of John. Word of *Life* – where *life* is more prevalent than the *word* in this letter. Word of life is about a life that has been made known; the word is the proclamation of divine life made visible in and through Jesus. This enables the readers to participate in this life, and thus to have fellowship with the living Go. Fellowship (1:3-4) is the root of Christian joy and an essential element of the Johannine community (with us).

Part One: God is Light and We Must Walk in Light (1:5-3:10)

1:5-7 The world is divided into light and darkness (see John 3:19-21) with God as the light of the just.

1:8-2:2 Turns to false propagandists who refuse to acknowledge their wrongdoing is sin.

True Christians acknowledge or publicly confess their sins. For which Jesus is the expiation. (Notice the emphasis on the salvic value of the death of Jesus, a theme found in only a few passages in Gospel of John.)

2:3-11 If we do sin with a paraclete with the Father. Keeping the commandments and thus perfecting the love of God is the theme of 1 John 2:3-11.

2:12-14 A powerful but enigmatic statement.

2:28-3:3 deals with the theme of the appearance of Christ and turning to the idea of the union with God and Jesus.

The Parousia, the return of Jesus, is a prominent theme here. (It is not in the Gospel of John: 5:26-29²; 14:1-3³). The connection between the realized eschatology of John and the final eschatology of 1 John is that although Jesus, who was righteous, is already present to all believers who do what is right, the fullness of union is only possible with his final return.

3:4-10 We are children of God because God’s seed begat us. The children of God and the children of the devil are plainly distinct because the formed act in righteousness and love of the brothers and sisters.

Part Two: Walk as the Children of the God of Love (3:11-5:12)

In Part One the message was light, in Part Two the message is love. Christ laid down his life for us, therefore we should be willing to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. Specifically, those with means should help a brother in need suggests that the secessionists were the wealthier members of the community and so to be equated with the world.

3:19-24 The necessity of loving. The false propagandists are deficient in love of others.

4:1-6 invokes a test, that “by their fruits you shall know them” to discern false prophets with their claim of being led by the Spirit. Every spirit led person will acknowledge that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, and those people belong to God.

² John 5:26-29 (NRSV) 26 For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; 27 and he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. 28 Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice 29 and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

³ John 14:1-3 (NRSV) 14 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe[a] in God, believe also in me. 2 In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?[b] 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.

Footnotes:

John 14:1 Or You believe

John 14:2 Or If it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you

4:7-21 Theme of love for one another. God is love. God took the initiative of sending his only Son in to the world to that we might have life and that sins might be expiated – a divine love for sinners. (John 3:16⁴; Rom 5:8⁵)

Any one claiming to love God while hating their Christian brothers and sisters are liars.

5:1-5 A close interconnection of Johannine motifs is illustrated by the treatment of faith, love and commandments. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is begotten by God and will conquer the world – this is a victory won by faith.

5:6-8 The three who testify the Spirit, the water and the blood seem to echo John 19:34. This salvic witness borne by Jesus' shedding blood and water is corrective of the secessionists who placed all the emphasis of understanding Jesus' salvic action on the moment of his being baptized as the Spirit descended.

5:9-12 By stressing the divine testimony leads to belief in God's Son and the possession of eternal life.

5:13-21 The Conclusion

Purpose of writing: 5:13 "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life."

The writer urges prayers for sinners, except for sinners who commit the deadly sin of joining the secessionists, which is a form of apostasy.

3 We Know proclamations are made: proforma set of dualistic statements around those with God versus those with the Evil One.

He ends with an affirmation of the divinity of Christ. And a cry to guard against idols – for the secessionists their false Christology is a form of idolatry.

Interestingly, 1 John has none of the conventions of a traditional epistle/letter. There is no obvious structure or plan to the document.

Issues for reflection:

1. There is a debate about whether the text should be read as poetry;
2. 1 John 2:15-17 has been criticized as too negative, 1 John is describing God's creation after it has been marred by sin
3. 1 John's insistence on love "God is love" and refusal to pray for those who commit a deadly sin (5:16)

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Overall: not a letter, more of an essay to deal with a specific problem.

Author and Relation to Gospel of St. John: comes from the same community as the Gospel of John, and possibly the same writer. It is not certain.

Date and Place: After the Gospel was written possibly 100-110 CE possibly in Ephesus

Historical Background: letter written to address/oppose people "who went out from us" secessionists.

Message: 1 John urges readers to stay with what they have "heard from the beginning" (1.1). Believe in the identity of the physical, human Jesus with the divine Son of God and in the saving value of his death. Keep the commandment to love on another – and one cannot believe in Jesus without loving one another. The message "God is love." (4.8) has kept people interested in 1 John.

The Word of Life

1:1-4 Themes: Jesus Christ had real humanity; and be faithful to the traditions about what has been revealed in Jesus.

⁴ John 3:16 (NRSV) 16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

⁵ Romans 5:8 (NRSV) 8 But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

- 1:1 What was from the beginning – not only since creation; but also the word of life, that is the Christian message that was embodied in Jesus and has been handed down since. Look at and touched – emphasizes the physical reality of what the tradition proclaims.
1:2 Revealed – Revelation is a key theme of the Gospel of St. John (1:1, 8; 1:31; 2:11; 3:5, 8). In the Gospel revelation comes through the cross.
1:3 Jesus is Christ and God's Son. Fellowship evokes the intimate relationship between God, Jesus and believers
1:4 That our joy might be complete – core Johannine theme.

God is Light

- 1:5-2:11 Dominated by light and darkness
A section using light and darkness, and including 6 quotations from the authors opponents.
1:6, 8, 10 on sin
2:4, 6, 9 on obedience
1:8-2:2 1 John maintains the possibility of sinlessness at least in the idea but recognizes the reality of human sin and expresses confidence that God forgives sin through Jesus.
1:8 The truth is identical to God's word.
1:9 Confess: admitting one's sinfulness is a condition for forgiveness

Christ our Advocate

- 2:1 Advocate – Holy Spirit
2:9-11 Love and hate are not just feelings – they are also deeds.
2:15-17 John aligns the world with the devil and against God
2:23 Response to Jesus determines one's relationship with God
2:28-3:10 The focus shifts from the opponents to the readers with an emphasis on revelation. When Jesus comes and is revealed those who abide in him will also be revealed; indeed, because he has already been revealed to destroy sin, God's children are already revealed by their love.

Children of God

- 3:11-17 Love and giving up one's life are contrasted with hatred and taking life.
3:18-24 Deeds of love give assurance of a relationship with God.

God Is Love

- 4:1-6 Verses that treat opponents ideas about Jesus, focusing on what is from God versus what is from the world.
4:7-18 God's love for us and our love for one another.
4:16 God is love. This phrase and the following language on "abiding" summarizes the core of the Johannine message.
4:19-5:5 Our love for God and one another is linked with right belief in Jesus by means of God's commandments⁶.

⁶ Love Commandments: John 14:15, 21-24, 31; 15:10; 1 John 2:3-5; 2 John 6

John 14:15 (NRSV) 15 "If you love me, you will keep[a] my commandments.

Footnotes: John 14:15 Other ancient authorities read me, keep

21 They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them." 22 Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?" 23 Jesus answered him, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. 24 Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me."

30 I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; 31 but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us be on our way. **John 15:10** (NRSV) 10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

Faith Conquers the World

5:7-8 Only a few late manuscripts include the “Trinitarian comma”.

1 John 5:7 A few other authorities read (with variations) 7 **There are three that testify in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one.** 8 And there are three that testify on earth:

Bibliography

Raymond E. Brown, Introduction to the New testament
Harper Collins NRSV Study Bible

1 John 2:3-5 (NRSV) 3 Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments. 4 Whoever says, “I have come to know him,” but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; 5 but whoever obeys his word, **truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection.** By this we may be sure that we are in him:”

2 John 6 (NRSV) **6 And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment just as you have heard it from the beginning—you must walk in it.**