

Note that it is not sufficient to merely claim that Jesus is the Christ, but that he is the Christ come in the flesh. This answers the charges of Cerentian gnosticism, which denied that Jesus was the Christ in the flesh, as well as the Docetic gnostics who denied that Jesus was a physical being.

We are told in 1 Corinthians 12:13 that it is only by the Spirit of God that we can call Christ Lord. Only God can pierce the blindness of Satan and bring the revelation to man that Christ is God in the flesh.

Note further that this confession is not the acceptance of a creed, but the acceptance of a person. Many can say they believe a creed about Christ, but only believers accept the person of Christ.

3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

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John states the negative side of the test here. Those spirits that do not confess that Jesus is the Christ come in the flesh are not of God but of satan.

The “spirit of Antichrist” here is used to refer to a present form of the final spirit of Antichrist embodied in the Antichrist of the last days. This spirit was present in John’s time, and will continue to be present until it reaches its final fulfillment in the last days.

“Anti” can mean two things. It can mean “instead of” or “against.” Both possibilities are evident here. The Cerentian gnostics believed in a substitute Christ who was against the real Christ.

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

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Unlike the Cerentian gnostics and the false prophets who denied Christ, John’s readers have overcome the error. This victory is not because they had greater strength, or because they had greater intellect, it is because they had greater grace.

If it were not for the grace of God that illuminates the unregenerate heart and brings salvation it would not be possible for anyone to claim Christ. We are reminded of Christ’s words to Peter in Matthew 16, “Flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto you, but my Father in heaven.” Peter’s confession was not because he was bright, but because God revealed it to him.

There is great consolation in the fact that our spiritual sight is not dependent on our own intellect, but on the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. Greater is he that is in us, that he that is in the world! (1 Corinthians 2:14)

5 They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.

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John further emphasizes the contrast between true and false believers by stating that the false believers are of the world. They have no spiritual sight. As a result, the world listens to them. Why? It is because both they and the world are blinded to the spiritual realities that are only revealed by the Holy Spirit.

When all is said and done, we need to admit that the message of the Gospel is to those that perish foolishness. All of the great philosophers and thinkers of the world would have never come up with the Gospel. Why? It is because God delights in bringing to nought the wisdom of man (1 Corinthians 1:18ff.)

6 We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

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Those that are of the world hear the prophets of the world. Those that know Christ hear the prophets of Christ. When we speak to those around us and they reject what we say, we need to take some consolation in the fact that the problem is not us, it is them. If they were of Christ, they would be able to hear and understand at we say. Since they are of the world, communication of spiritual truth is not possible unless the Holy Spirit illuminates their hearts to receive divine truth.

How do we know the spirit of truth and error? It is known by how we are heard. If someone hears the things we have to say (continuous tense) regarding spiritual truth, then it is because they are of God. If they reject what we say, it is because they are not of God.

Thus we have two tests in verses 1-6. The first test is what does a person say about Christ. Those who deny his incarnation and essential deity are not of God. Secondly, who is listening to the person and who does the person listen to. If the person is not of Christ, they are listening to the false prophets and not those who are true prophets.

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

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Love, The Essence of God

The subject now changes to John's third cycle (Burdick) which is the Christian life viewed as an interweaving of the ethical and doctrinal (4:7-5:5).

John exhorts his readers again to love one another (present tense, continually love one another). Why? It is because love has as its source God. Those that love show that they are born of God and that they know God.

The love that John talks about is not some sentimental feeling in the pit of one's stomach, but a self-sacrificial love that evidences itself in deeds.

John now argues from the greater to the lesser. If God loved us while we were sinners, and Christ paid the ultimate penalty for our sin, can we do any less than loving our fellow believers?

The “If” is a first-class conditional statement, and can be better understood as “since.” Since God loved us so much, we should be moved in response to love others.

12 No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

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Love, the evidence of divine indwelling

John starts out describing love as the evidence of divine indwelling by stating the axiomatic truth that no man has seen God at any time. Since God is a spirit, he is not observable with physical eyes. Furthermore, those who gaze upon his effulgent glory die.

However, just because God cannot be seen, his essential nature can be manifested by our love towards one another. One of the problems we have as finite beings is that there is no way we can communicate or understand the infinite God any more than a small mirror can reflect the full output of the sun. We can only hope to reflect a small part of God’s character to those around us. One of the ways we can do this is by our love towards one another. The infinite and eternal God is thus manifested in a small way to those who observe our lives.

The idea of “perfect love” is not perfection in the ultimate sense, but completeness. How is God’s love for us completed in our lives, it is by the fact that we love one another.

13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

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How do we know that we dwell in Christ and he in us? It is because we have been given his Spirit. John is not changing the subject here, rather he is giving another facet of love.

Romans 5:5 says that the “love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us.” The love of God has as its source God himself. The love of God in us has as its source God in the person of the Holy Spirit. In other words, the love we manifest to others is not a creation of our own wills, but is a of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

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Diving indwelling, the result of faith

One of the greatest truths of the New Testament is that God dwells in each believer personally in the person of the Holy Spirit. Those that are believers, all share in the indwelling spirit.

The “we” in this verse is in the emphatic sense. This leads us to believe that John is talking about himself, and the other witnesses of Christ’s life and ministry. This is the testimony of an eyewitness, and not a casual bystander.

15 Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

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Those that confess Jesus as the Son of God have God dwelling in them. This is in contrast to the Cerentian gnostics who denied Christ and said he was a mere man.

Again, we must emphasize that it is not possible to deny the life and ministry of Christ while at the same time claiming a relationship with God. The only way to God is Christ.

See John 14:23-24.

16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

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The “we” here is not John and the Apostles, but John and his readers. In distinction to the Cerentians gnostics John and his readers have known (understood spiritual truth) and believed (placed faith and confidence in that truth). What is the love God had toward us? It is the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf.

John repeats the fact that God is love. Since God is love, those that dwell (present tense) in God and have God dwelling (present tense) in them will naturally exhibit love.

17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

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The fruit of love

The “herein” refers back to verse 16, and has as its thought the fact that we dwell in God and he in us. This is the way God’s love is made complete in us. Another way to see this is that God’s love finds expression in our love for others.

One of the results of this love is that we will have boldness in the day of judgment. Why? Because God’s love in us is proof that we are of God and that Christ has paid the penalty of our sin. Just as God is love, so are we love in this world. In other words, God’s character is evidenced in our lives thus proving our relationship with him.

18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

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John now states this same truth negatively by talking about the opposite of love, namely fear. This fear is the opposite of the boldness in verse 17. Those that do not exhibit the love of God in their lives live in fear because the proof that they are born again is not evident.

“Torment” actually means “punishment.” One of the most miserable people you will ever find are those that know of God’s judgment and see their need of salvation, but do not believe they are saved. They live in fear of divine punishment and judgment because the assurance of their salvation is missing.

Negatively, those that fear do not have God’s love evidenced and manifested in them.

Those that love God, however, exhibit by that manifestation of love in their lives that they are truly born of God. This gives them confidence and not fear on the day of judgment.

19 We love him, because he first loved us.

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A restatement of the source of love

Why do we love God? Is it because we decide in and of ourselves to love him? No! It is because he first loved us. God always takes the initiative in salvation. Men do not seek God, they seek what God gives. It is God who seeks and saves the lost.

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

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The Necessity of Brother Love: Brother love demanded by logic

John now talks about someone who claims to love God and yet on the same time hate their brother. To John this is an impossibility, but he must make his case.

The first argument is that love towards our brother is demanded by logic. How can a man say he loves God, whom he has not seen, while at the same time hating his brother whom he has seen. This is an argument from the lesser to the greater. If a man cannot do the lesser thing, which is to love his brother, how can he do the greater thing, which is to love an unseeable God?

Such a man is a liar. He cannot say he loves God while he hates his brother.

21 And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

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Brother love demanded by commandment

John's second argument is that of command. Whether we feel like it or not, the bottom line is that we are commanded by God to love our brothers in Christ (John 13:34-35). If nothing else, loving our brother is an act of obedience. In fact, the entire law is summed up by love towards God and love towards others (Matthew 22:37-39).