

John's Testimony

1 John is not a letter. It's a treatise. It's John's explanation of what a Christian should be and do, with spiritual truths admixed. It succinctly states how we're to live during this entire inter-advent era. Its overall structure is not easily understood (probably repeating cycles). Maybe the structure is not important. But there clearly are many 3-verse groupings (I call them units) throughout, and that helps greatly to grasp John's thought. (Some units are a bit longer than 3 verses.) Many of the units end with a link to the next one. Each unit has important instruction for the reader.

I can't emphasize enough that what's stated in this portion of Scripture is *exceedingly* important—it teaches what being a Christ follower is and what it means. What John says is radical; if we're only superficial or immature believers, this text will be convicting. What John writes here must not be ignored.

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1:1,2,3. There's no formal Prologue, as commentators claim. This first 3-verse unit does, however, seem to introduce the treatise. John actually knew Jesus, and that resulted in the convictions stated in the text. The goal for us to know and live these same convictions is eternal life and *koinonia*, intimate fellowship with God. The goal and blessing of salvation is to be in intimate, personal relationship with God and with other believers.

1:4. John is writing Scripture. Why? Scripture is permanent. And words are powerful, because they enter one's mind and can control us—if we allow them to do that. Jesus commissioned His first disciples to found the Church by writing about Him, His work, and His commands and teachings. John was responsible to do that, and we're accountable for what he wrote.

1:5,6,7. In this world we inhabit, there's conflict between good and evil. A profession of faith is meaningless. It's how we *live* that demonstrates if we're on the side of God, the side of good, or not. Our lives must express godliness; if not, we're phonies, liars. And if we're godly, we enjoy the blessing of intimate relationship with each other and Jesus' infinitely efficacious atonement keeps us fit to be with God. We must get this: It's only by "walking in the light," that is, living out God's righteousness, that we're saved. This isn't "works" salvation, it's the Apostolic Christian faith! By the way, notice how the prior theme of fellowship continues into this unit and the unit ends by introducing the issue of sin. The theme of lying will re-appear again and again.

1:8-2:2. In this 5-verse unit, John wants us to understand that the core problem is sin. The irruption of God was necessitated by sin. The greatest thing anyone can know is that God, in ineffable grace, undertook in the Person of the Son to remove the sin issue from us so we can enjoy a creation blessing with our Creator. Denying our sinfulness—which is easy to do in pride and self-righteousness—isn't merely ignorance of the atoning work of Christ, but a defiant rejection of it. The theme of lying is introduced here and will continue in subsequent units.

2:3-8. Here's another long unit, 6 verses. Get this! John hammers the necessity of obedience to Jesus's commandments. It's by obeying Jesus that (a) we "walk" as Jesus walked, i.e., live His life, (b) we "know" God, i.e., are in relationship with Him, and (c) we express God's love. Love is as love does, and what love must do is obey God. Only by being obedient to Jesus can we know that we're saved. Notice how the themes of liar and darkness vs. light continue in this unit and link to the next.

2:9,10,11. John introduces in this 3 verse unit what being in the light means: Loving fellow believers. This is so important it will recur again and again. Refusing to love other Christians is not merely a failure, it's dwelling in evil. Indifference to other believers, that is, not actively loving them, is hatred. This unit is parallel to 1:5-7, suggesting chiastic structure. So up to here is probably one section.

2:12,13,14. John calls attention to his writing this Scripture three times in this 3-verse unit. He knows his readers intimately, and can state that they're saved, which includes having forgiveness of sins, being in relationship with Jesus and with the Father, defeating Satan, and having the Word of God control their lives. This unit concludes the above section (1:5 to 2:11), just as 1:1-4 opened it; note "from the beginning" and "I'm writing." The next unit opens a new section.

2:15,16,17. A new section begins with this 3-verse unit. We're to eschew everything that's not of God. The "world" and everything in it is idolatrous. Our obsession instead must be to fulfill God's revealed will—and we must allow nothing to distract us. Jesus' teaching thru John is radically demanding. Notice that John introduces "remains," a word that will re-appear. Jesus used this word repeatedly in His upper room discourse (John 15:1-10). We're to be faithful in our relationship with Jesus, as He is faithful in keeping us.

2:18-23. This longer unit introduces another enemy of God's people, the antichrists. These are powerful political leaders who hate Jesus, who deny that He's the promised Messiah, and who seek the worship that is really owed to Jesus and to God. The theme of "remaining" reappears and a new theme appears here, having an anointing to empower us to discern the evil-doers in the world. This unit ends (v. 23) with a propositional statement of an important truth about God, the identity of the Son with the Father.

2:24-29. This 6-verse unit reprises themes already discussed. We have enemies who seek to deceive us, to defeat us, but the indwelling Holy Spirit and the Word protect us. This unit seems to serve as a conclusion to a section on our enemies, from 2:15 to 2:29..

3:1,2,3. In this 3-verse unit, John highlights how exceedingly special our love-relationship is to God. John's argument is, as a child of God, we must be just like God, that is, holy.

3:4,5,6. Another 3-verse unit on the problem of sin and Jesus' work in dealing with it. This unit logically follows the one before; Our lives must not express sin! If we continue living in sin, our claim to salvation is phoney.

3:7,8,9,10. In this 4-verse unit, John affirms that we must actually live righteously; having righteousness imputed to us (justification) is evidently not sufficient. Righteousness includes love for other believers. Our lives must be totally pure, without sin. The conflict between good and evil is here reprised, and Jesus' work to deal with Satan. Also reprised is our relationship to God. The love for other believers links this unit to the next.

3:11-18. This long unit is focused entirely on love for other believers. It's a practical kind of love, one that meets needs. It's a love that establishes that we're saved; a loveless life identifies the person as not saved.

3:19,20,21. John introduces in this 3-verse unit the role that our conscience has in controlling us, in allowing us to enjoy our fellowship with God, or not.

3:22,23,24. This 3-verse unit concludes the section 3:1 to 3:24, John reiterates the necessity of obeying Christ, in particular the one that demands love for one another. The theme of abiding recurs here as well. To believe in Jesus is not mental agreement with a biblical statement, but entering into a trusting, love relationship with a unique, living Person, Jesus.

4:1-6. This 6-verse unit begins a new section. It could perhaps be two separate units, but I've put them together as one, because it all seems to be connected. The focus is on demonic deceptions that oppose Jesus (and us) vs. But if we obey what John has written, we escape being deceived, and the indwelling Spirit aids us in this. John is reprising this theme from a previous section.

4:7-12. This 6-verse unit returns to one of the two essential features of a believer's life, love. (The other is obedience to Christ's commands.) John's focus is God's love and our love for others. John is reprising this theme also from a previous section."Residing" links this unit to the next.

4:13,14,15. This 3-verse unit reprises the previously discussed theme of "residing" ("remaining" in the NIV). John is again reprising a theme from a previous section. "Confession" is more than merely making a statement; it means acknowledging something as a truth to be lived out or acted on. "Residing" here links to the next unit.

4:16-5:3. In this long unit, John hammers home the essential features of Christianity, love and obedience. The two are unified: we obey out of love. And if we love God, we necessarily also love other believers. "Fathered by God" links this unit to the next.

5:4,5. This brief unit (2 verses) focuses on overcoming (a military term referring to conquering, or gaining victory over someone or something). If we're believing in Jesus and are saved, we're overcomers. With this, he concludes the section from 4:1 to 5:5..

5:6-10. This 5-verse unit states that God has given testimony regarding the Person of Jesus. The theme of testifying links to the next unit. Testimony is also how John opened this treatise, and all thru it John has been giving testimony, Spirit-led testimony to spiritual

5:11,12,13. The specific testimony in this 3-verse unit is that by belief in the Person of Jesus, we gain eternal life.

5:14,15,16. In this 3-verse unit, John affirms our privilege of prayer, and that it should be intercessory (priestly) prayer. Sin resulting in death links to the next unit.

5:17-20. There is no epilogue as most commentators claim. This last unit of 4 verses reprises previously discussed themes. We're in a relationship with God who protects us from sin and Satan. John states again that Jesus is the Son, and we're in Him who is eternal life.

5:21. Finally, our responsibility is to eschew idolatry, which is everything that's not of Christ. A perfect conclusion!

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In almost every unit, John also expresses his testimony, his conviction as to the Person of Jesus. He is the eternal Son, the righteous One, who has come to impart eternal life to those who believe in Him. He defeated Satan. He makes atonement for sin. He takes us to the Father. We become children of God and have access to God because of Him. The entire treatise is suffused with Christology.

The text of 1 John is not a jumble of thoughts and ideas. It's a treatise that's been skillfully crafted. By identifying key words and then breaks in the author's thought as he uses those key words, units and sections can be identified. Doing that helps the reader to grasp John's message. Although everything John writes here is inspired truth, the repetition of key themes seems to stress certain truths more than others. And the one theme most repeated is the absolute, unqualified necessity to obey Jesus' command to love others, in particular other believers.

The treatise is permeated throughout with doctrine. We must know truth! But what John does here is insert necessary propositional truths into the units that deal with other themes. This highlights the easily missed understanding that doctrinal truth determines behavior. Or to say it conversely, how we live must be based on doctrinal truth. Thus, for example, we love others because God loves us, and so we mirror God's Person by loving others. And as God's love is expressed or made tangible in real life, so we're to love others "not in word but in deed," that is, in real life. Let's also get this: Knowing correct doctrine is necessary but insufficient for salvation. We must know doctrine *and act on it appropriately*. It's our response to what truths God has revealed that determines our relationship to God, indeed, our salvation. We must have the mind of Christ, and His values, His worldview and His desires—indeed, His life. *That* is salvation.

What's so compelling about this treatise is its starkness. There are no shades of gray. One is either of Jesus or the devil. One is either dwelling in light or in darkness. There's either truth, or lies, Christ or idolatry. We're either in fellowship, or not. One either loves as God loves, or not. John is writing non-negotiable fundamentals for us to adopt as our own. And then to live based on them.

So this is why John gave us this treatise: It's his testimony. John is telling us truth and we're accountable to God for our response to it. He's telling us about Jesus and what knowing Jesus must mean to us.