

1 John
Chapter Two
Leon L. Combs, Ph.D.
2012

In this section, John gives three tests a person can use to determine if he is indeed a child of God. The first is the moral test that is given in verses 3-6. The second test is the social test given in verses 7-11. The third test is the sound doctrine test given in verses 18-27. These are tests that an individual should use for himself and not as a test for others.

1John 2:1-2 My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

John is not saying that it is ok to sin since our sins will be forgiven. He is urging the readers to respect Holy God so that any sin is repugnant and to be avoided at all costs. He then recognizes that no person other than Jesus is perfect so they are not to be shocked when they do sin. When they do sin they are to know that they have an advocate with the Father as is stated elsewhere also: “Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.” (Rom 8:33-34) John then elaborates on this advocate by saying that He is “the righteous”, meaning that Jesus will not “sugar coat” our sins but present them before the Father and claim forgiveness for the sins based upon the payment by the advocate. Since Jesus fulfilled His role as the propitiator of our sins, He does not claim any innocence on the part of the person who sins but instead claims His righteousness and perfect payment so that the Father may stamp the person forgiven before His court.

The last phrase, “also for those of the whole world” has provided a lot of difficulty for interpreters. Some take it literally and in isolation of other Scripture to mean that Jesus died for the sins of everyone and so all will be in heaven. This is obviously not true in context of all Scripture and not true even in the limited context of the writings of the Apostle John such as:

John 13:1 Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.

John 17:9 "I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine;

1John 3:1 See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

Another possible explanation has been put forward for those opposed to the Calvinistic concept of “limited atonement”. They say that the sacrifice of Jesus was for everyone who lived or will live but it is only applied to the ones who accept it by faith. However this means that for those who do not accept it the sacrifice was not efficacious and so was not a meaningful sacrifice. This interpretation means that Jesus’ sacrifice failed for those who reject it. If the sacrifice of Jesus was not acceptable for all intended then it was not satisfactory. Surely that explanation has to be rejected also.

The best explanation is that John, a Jew, is saying that the perfect sacrifice of Jesus applies to Gentiles as well as Jews and that is the inclusion nature of which he speaks. Thus the word “us” refers to the Jews and those of the whole world includes all people of all races.

1John 2:3-6 And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

John now begins to specifically address how anyone knows that they really know God with the **first test** that is the moral test or the test of righteousness. A person who really knows God will not knowingly and habitually behave in ways against the character of God. He is not saying that the person never sins for he has already addressed the fact that children of God do sin but not habitually. When I was growing up I loved my dad but I did not always obey him. However when I did anything that I knew was against his character I felt bad and worked to not repeat the actions. This knowledge of having grieved God is much stronger in the Christian for he is indwelt with the Holy Spirit and God will discipline His children. This section is not recommending legalism for none of our works can gain favor with God. Double imputation means that all of our sins have been forgiven and the righteousness of Jesus Christ has been put into our account before God. Since we cannot exceed that righteousness or even match it, certainly no works of ours can add to what is already in our account before God. The true child of God will want to please his Father and emulate the walk of Jesus Christ in the world as much as possible.

Anyone who belongs to a visible church probably has made a public confession that Jesus Christ is his Lord. But if that person does not obey the commandments of God then he “is a liar, and the truth is not in him”. Ethics are never divorced from doctrine and knowledge. The false teachers who left the church stressed knowledge but their ethics did not match any true knowledge of God. John is telling the remaining church members that they can judge the actions of the false teachers and see that they do not really know God. They can also judge their own knowledge of God by how thoroughly they want to obey His commandments. A Christian will “walk the talk” as stated by Jesus: “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” (John 14:15).

What does the phrase “the love of God has truly been perfected” mean? It is also mentioned in: “No one has beheld God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.” (1 John 4:12) The love that Christians have for each other reflects their love for Jesus. It was God’s love for His people that led to the sending of Jesus: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16) The fact that Christians obey God’s commandments means that the plan of God was perfected in them. It is not that we are made perfect in our walk here since sanctification is a life-long task but God’s plan was perfected in us since the work of Jesus was perfected to justify us before the Father.

In verse 6 John uses the word “abides” and continues to repeat it in the following verses. Jesus also spoke about the importance of our abiding in Him:

John 8:31 Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine;

John 15:4 "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

John 15:6 "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

John 15:7 "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you.

John 15:9 "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.

John 15:10 "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.

A dictionary defines abide as: “to remain in one place or state” or “to continue, endure”. Abiding in Jesus Christ as Lord is a mark of perseverance by those who have truly been regenerated and justified. In verse 19 we will read that the false teachers who left the congregation were really never Christians and so they did not abide in Jesus. John then gives a test for whether or not someone is abiding in Jesus: those who walk in the world as did Jesus. This test gave rise to a fad marked by the question: “What would Jesus do?” Bracelets with “WWJD” on them appeared as did many booklets addressing the question. However, like most fads, this one also faded away. However God’s Word continues to pose this test of whether or not someone is abiding in Jesus. The true Christian will abide because God is involved in preserving him: “All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.” (John 6:37). Tribulations may show that someone has not been regenerated but, for a Christian, such amplifies and builds upon the solid foundation:

Rom 5:3-5 And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

1John 2:7-11 Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. On the other hand, 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. The one who says he is in the light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who 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.

John now gives the people the **second test** regarding their state before Jesus that is the social test. John tells the congregation that he has not been given a new gospel or changes in the gospel as did the false teachers. He is reminding them that the commands as given by Jesus and recorded in the gospel messages is true and complete. However he is giving them a new commandment that is based upon the truth given by Jesus Christ. That new commandment is to love the brothers and sisters who are in Christ. This had already been given by Jesus: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35). John gives this as a new commandment in the context of his overall message concerning how one may know that he is a child of God. The person who has been truly regenerated and justified will find a love for other Christians growing in his heart. If a person claims to be a Christian and is cold toward other Christians then he should doubt his salvation.

This is an old command in that such was mentioned in the Old Testament also: “You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.” (Lev 19:18). But the Jews took this to mean their neighbors were fellow Jews and they were to hate their enemies (all who were not Jews). However Jesus took this commandment to a new level when He said:

Matt 5:43-47 “You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax-gatherers do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

Jesus then took this love command to the highest level when He died on the cross and suffered separation from the Father for the first time in eternity for taking our sins: “And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Mark 15:34). Thus with the coming of Jesus a new light appeared in the darkness to define God’s love to the highest level. John then applies this new light as this second test to determine the true state of a person before God. If someone professing to be a Christian does not love fellow Christians then he still walks in the darkness and is self-

deceived. The Gnostics claimed to be enlightened but John is saying that they are still in the darkness because they do not love as Jesus loved.

Someone may want to question John saying that those who hate Christians are not in the light for some may think that they don't really hate anyone. People tend to think of hate in a very strong emotional sense of wanting harm for them, but the test of loving someone requires a closer examination of how one hates someone. God hates some people and actions:

Psalm 5:5 "The boastful shall not stand before Thine eyes; Thou dost hate all who do iniquity."

Isaiah 1:14 "I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts, They have become a burden to Me. I am weary of bearing them.

Isaiah 61:8 For I, the Lord, love justice, I hate robbery in the burnt offering; And I will faithfully give them their recompense, And I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

We may also hate who and what God hates:

Psalm 119:104 From Thy precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way.

Psalm 119:113 I hate those who are double-minded, But I love Thy law.

Psalm 119:128 Therefore I esteem right all Thy precepts concerning everything, I hate every false way.

Psalm 119:163 I hate and despise falsehood, But I love Thy law.

Psalm 139:21 Do I not hate those who hate Thee, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against Thee?

But God also showed His love by sending Jesus: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16).

It is perfectly righteous to hate the object of God's hate. But 1 John 2:1-22 all involve someone hating his brother, meaning a person who claims to be a fellow Christian. Someone can express hate for a fellow Christian without a strong emotion. They may show hate by being envious of him, gossiping about him, not rejoicing in his times of rejoicing even if he obtained something we wanted, not weeping with him in times of sorrow, not giving the person praise upon his accomplishments, coveting what he has, being jealous of some aspect of the person, etc. A review of 1 Cor 13 would be in order here to show what real Christian love involves and the reverse of that love is hate. Every Christian needs to carefully test himself to see if he passes this test of love for brothers: "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you-- unless indeed you fail the test?" (2Cor 13:5). We should not wait until the final test: "each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work." (1Cor 3:13).

1John 2:12-14 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

John is assuming that the recipients are Christians and so their sins have been forgiven through the work of Jesus Christ (double imputation). Now he seems to be writing to three categories of spiritual development. The children are those new Christians, the young men are those who have been Christians for awhile and have experience dealing with Satan, and the fathers are those spiritual elders who should be the leaders of the congregation. To the children John says that their sins have been forgiven for the sake of Jesus and that they now know the Father. To the young men he says that they have overcome the evil one and they are spiritually strong with the word of God abiding in them. To the fathers he says that they know Jesus who existed from the beginning and he repeats that statement because they are firmly rooted in knowing that the Son of God has always existed. The children can see what will be involved in their spiritual development as they come into the next two stages. The young men can remember their initial knowledge of their sins being forgiven and God being their father and such will help them further develop at this stage and into the next stage. The fathers can remember their first love and their victories over the evil one as they further lead the group. This is a wonderful statement to the entire congregation of believers to “be what they are so that they can be what they can be”.

1 John 2:15-17 Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves 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 boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever.

To the entire span of spiritual maturity in the church John tells not to love the world or the things of the world. This should remind us of what Jesus said: “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” (Matt 6:24). The word “world” is underlined above to show the six times it appears in these three verses and that indicates that it is very important to understand the meaning of the word. It is the Greek word “kosmos” and it can have three primary meanings. First it can mean the general world as in John 1:10. Second it can mean the creation of God that contains people and this meaning is present in John 3:16, 17; 1 John 2:2; John 4:42; and 1 John 4:14. In all those verses it represents all of humanity and not individuals for then it would infer universal salvation, which is against many other verses. Third it can mean the ethical standards of the people and this is the meaning of John here.

John is telling all the Christians of all spiritual developments not to love the worldly things that will pass away. He is not specifically speaking against material things but is speaking against the love of material things. Worldly standards that Christians are to avoid include the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, the boastful pride of life and any other standards that are against the character of God. Jealousy and selfish ambition are certainly included (James 3:14) in worldly things to be avoided. Any actions that do not reflect the love of God would be included as well such as gossip and other items Paul listed that are lusts of the flesh:

Gal 5:19-21 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Paul ended the list with “things like these” so the list can continue.

The lust of the eyes would refer to anything that one might covet such as material possessions, social standings, professional accomplishments, popularity of family members, etc. Finally he mentions the boastful pride of life that can affect people in all walks of life including pastors.

John tells them that the love of the world and the love of God are incompatible so a child of God cannot love that which God does not love. Also the world and all of its temporary standards are passing away and one day will be totally renewed: “But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.” (2 Peter 3:13). We are to not strive for treasures on earth but in heaven:

Matt 6:19-20 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; Following Christ means rejecting all that is not in Christ. Christians should not commit spiritual adultery and they should not even flirt with the things of the world.

1John 2:18-19 Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us.

John now begins to give the people his **third test** that they may use to determine if indeed they are children of God: the sound doctrine test. This aspect continues until verse 27. He addresses the readers as “children” meaning that he thought of them as true children of God. The “last days” is an indeterminate (from our perspective) time period beginning with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ:

Acts 2:17 'And it shall be in the last days,' God says,' That I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all mankind; And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, And your young men shall see visions, And your old men shall dream dreams;

Heb 1:2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

The “last hour” is only used by John in this epistle but he certainly is referring to the same period of time as the last days although from his perspective it would seem that he was closer to the time of the Parousia. This letter was written after 70 AD when the Temple was destroyed so it would have seemed to John that God was preparing to end the church era. If the Greek is translated literally it would read “a last hour” rather than “the last hour” indicating that John understood the last days to have increments of time bringing forth further understandings of God’s dealing with humanity.

John tells them about the antichrists because of the influence of the false teachers who left the congregation since they are teaching against the gospel message of Jesus Christ. Only John uses this particular word but the concept is used in various parts of the Bible. Jesus told of such: “And then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ'; or, 'Behold, He is there'; do not believe him; for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order, if possible, to lead the elect astray.” (Mark 13:21-22). Paul also wrote of a single person who would be an antichrist: “Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.” (2Thess 2:3-4). These antichrists are people who will try to deceive the children of God from within the church. The false teachers left the congregation but they established another congregation based upon their false teachings and so are attempting to represent the church.

John tells the remaining members of the church that those who left are not representatives of Jesus Christ but they are “not really of us”. So John is telling them that these people are teaching against Christ and so represent an antichrist. John is giving us two important concepts. **One** is that there are visible churches and the invisible church. The visible churches are those congregations which teach a false gospel. The members may seem to be very spiritual and they are religious in their worship but the object of their worship is not God. The invisible church is the total group of regenerate, justified believers all over the world and of all time. **Secondly**, John tells them that true believers will persevere, since if those people that left had believed they would have stayed. Every church will consist of true and false believers and the temptation is to cleanse the church but Jesus warned against doing that (Matt 13:24-30) because we cannot see another person’s heart.

1John 2:20-25 But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the

antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also. As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life.

The unbelievers left the congregation but John knows that the remaining people have the anointing of the Holy Spirit and they know the true Gospel. He further encourages them by letting them know that he knows that they know the truth. He states the fundamental error of the false teachers is that they deny that Jesus is the Christ. He calls them the liar for this fundamental heresy. Not only do they deny that Jesus is the promised Messiah of the Old Testament but that Jesus is the Son of God. There is a coupling of knowledge so that anyone who knows Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God also has the Father. John quotes Jesus on this subject in his gospel: “Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how do you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (John 14:9). “I and the Father are one.” (John 10:30).

John then tells them how they can avoid falling prey to the teachings of antichrists and that is to abide in the gospel message that they have heard from the beginning of the church. By abiding in the proper doctrine they will also abide in the Son and in the Father. John then tells them that they have this promise of God that He will provide eternal life to those who abide in the truth.

1John 2:26-27 These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides 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, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.

He referred earlier to the anointing that they had of the Holy Spirit and he repeats it here in reference to their remaining firmly rooted in the true gospel message. There will always be deceivers trying to mislead Christians because Satan has lost them as his children and now he wants to reduce their effectiveness in the Kingdom of God that is working through the church. John does not mean that there is no teaching ministry within the church but, in context, he is referring to the false teaching of people who are teaching false doctrines. The Holy Spirit will teach true children of God: “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.” (John 14:26). In chapter four John will tell them to test the spirits so they can be sure that only the Holy Spirit is their teacher: “Beloved, 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.” (1 John 4:1). They then are to abide in the true gospel message and to trust the anointing Spirit to guide them.

1John 2:28-29 And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.

The words “and now” can be understood to mean “since this is so” meaning that they indeed are children of God with Jesus the Son of God as their Lord. A teaching that remains today is the concept that all men are children of God under Him as the Father but that is not the teaching of the Bible. In his gospel, John clearly stated the identity of the children of God: “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,” (John 1:12). The first “Him” is Jesus, the “He” is the Holy Spirit, and the “His” is again Jesus as Lord. So again Christianity comes forward as very exclusive, which the world and religions hate. John also quotes Jesus affirming this exclusivity: “Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.”(John 14:6). So there are not many ways to God. There is only one way to God and that is through Jesus Christ.

Again John tells them to abide in Jesus so that at His Second Coming all true Christians will not shrink in shame but go to Him in confidence that He is their Lord and Savior. Knowing that Jesus is righteous, Christians will attempt to do as Jesus would do in any situation of their life. Again one of the tests of being a Christian is that children of God will attempt to imitate their Father and thus we can all know that such people are really born of Jesus.