



Sunday School Lesson
1 John 2:1-17
 by Lorin L. Cranford
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Knowledge - Light - Love



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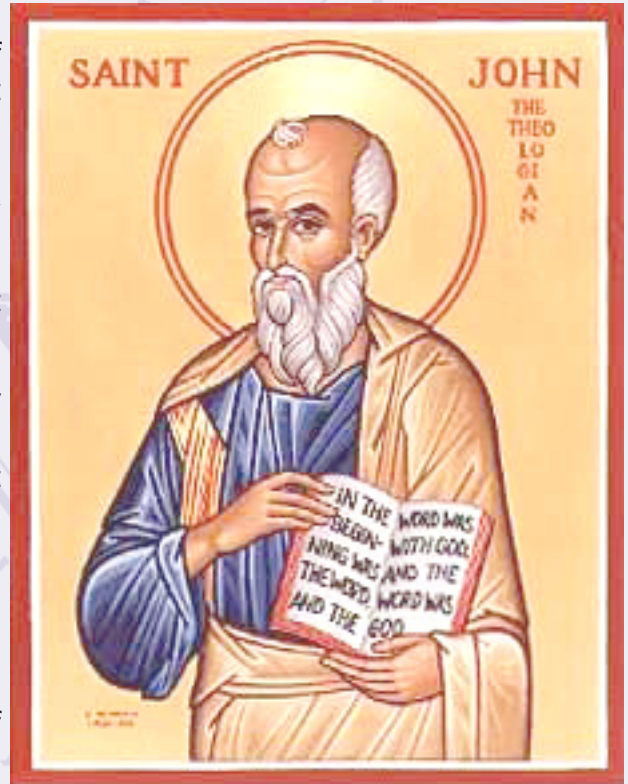
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The first letter of John doesn't much look like a traditional letter in the first century pattern of writing letters. In form, however, it is a letter that looks like a cross between a typical letter and a philosophical treatise. Greek philosophers often set forth their ideas about how life should work in a formal letter format. 1 John moves in this direction. This hybrid form allowed for advocating a particular philosophy, but used a written format that was more readily acceptable to a wider reading audience. To colleagues the 'treatise' form was preferred, but to wider audiences a 'formal letter,' such as 1 John, was better.

In 1 John, one encounters a "philosophy" that links a lifestyle of holy living to a profound relationship to the risen Christ. This lifestyle revolves mostly around personal behavior and interpersonal relations with others, particularly with fellow believers. The presentation of this message is painted by using dramatic word pictures as the structural skeleton for "fleshing out" the details of holiness and faith commitment. Primary images that make up the 'skeleton' are light - darkness;

truth - false; loving - hating; knowing - being ignorant; sinful - righteous; obeying - disobeying. The images almost always have their counter part, but sometimes not in semantic balance with one another, e.g., truth - false. Images serve for idea expression, and the perception of the reality takes precedence over logically balanced expression. Our passage uses several of these images in order to develop the ideas that John wanted to communicate.



I. Context

[Previous studies in 1 John](#) have already developed a perspective on the external history and basic literary issues. Relevant materials from those studies will be used here, and new material will be developed as it becomes necessary for the study of our passage in 2:1-17.

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a. Historical

The ancient letter arises out of specific historical circumstances. Thus are “occasional” writings. The identification of those circumstances becomes important for correct interpretation of the contents of the letter. But with the hybrid nature of 1 John, this historical setting is somewhat diminished. Such letters tend to set forth timeless principles of living. Specific historical situations often recede into the background, even though remaining important for interpretation. 1 John does, indeed, make extensive use of what in Greek grammar is termed the “gnomic” verb function. Such writing considerably closes the historical gap between the ‘then’ and ‘now’ meanings. But historical and literary factors still remain important to the interpretive process.

External History. **Who was responsible for the composition of this document?** 1 John is one of three letters in the General (Catholic) Letter section of our New Testament with the name of ‘John’ attached to them. Careful reading of the texts of these letters will leave the reader searching in vain for any direct mentioning of John as the writer of any of these letters. The only person’s name mentioned in 1 John is Jesus Christ. In 2 and 3 John the sender of these letters is identified only as “the elder.”

Where then does the idea that a John wrote these letters originate, since it cannot be based directly on references to the writer inside these documents? The answer comes from early Christian tradition in the second through eighth centuries. Yet, careful examination of this body of early Christian literature indicates difference of opinion over the author of this letter. The term ‘The Elder’ in 2 and 3 John was gradually identified with the apostle John, the son of Zebedee, in many early Christian circles, but not in all. Papias of Hierapolis in 130 AD challenged this view, as did Dionsyus of Alexandria in 262 AD. Eventually, however, the linking of the three letters, along with the fourth gospel and the book of Revelation with the apostle John prevailed and became the basis for the headings of these three letters containing the name ‘John.’ Current biblical scholarship reflects divided opinion on how reliable this early church tradition is. Serious arguments, both pro and con, can be marshaled in support of either side of the issue.

My personal *inclination* is to link the three letters together (at minimum, only 1 John) with the fourth gospel in a common authorship, although readily acknowledging the difficulties of such. At

best, tentative conclusions must be drawn, rather than hard-and-fast judgments. The contents of the three documents provide some helpful insight into the historical situation surrounding their composition toward the close of the first Christian century.

Where was this document written? Most scholars, although skeptical of early church tradition about John the apostle as author, will nevertheless accept the early church idea that associates the writing of 1 John in and around the ancient city of [Ephesus](#) toward the end of the first Christian century. Within the traditional view of authorship, the understanding is that the apostle John spent the last several decades of his earthly life in ministry to Christians in Ephesus.



If correct, then this letter emerges after the initial preaching of the gospel in the city by Paul in the middle 50s. Another apostle has become a revered leader of the Christian movement there. This letter is then addressed to the believing community at Ephesus, in a manner similar to Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians, although we can determine far less of the specific circumstances surrounding the Ephesian community of faith at this point in time.

To whom was this document written initially, and why? The above exploration probed the historical identification of the recipients of the letter from early church tradition. From the contents of 1 John some insight can be gleaned about the first readers of this letter. Through a careful reading of the document, one can see that the teaching authority of the writer had been challenged and thus the letter was responding to that challenge. An alternative

understanding of Christianity was being set forth in the Christian community(s) of Asia, and this new view of the gospel led to behavioral patterns that were different from those set forth in the apostolic gospel message as G. B. Caird (“Johannine Letters,” *New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, iPreach) describes:

”Throughout the first letter we find a series of warnings against those who make claims which are not justified by the facts: ‘if we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness’ (1:6); ‘if we say we have no sin’ (1:8); ‘he who says ‘I know him’ but disobeys his commandments’ (2:4); ‘he who says he abides in him’ (2:6); ‘if any one says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother’ (4:20). It is obvious that these denunciations are not made without good reason and that someone has actually been making such professions. The opposition has been laying claim to a special knowledge and love of God and to a peculiarly intimate relationship with him which has set them above the common distinctions between good and evil and therefore above the demands of Christian ethics. It is probable, too, that the initial message of the letter: ‘God is light and in him is no darkness at all,’ is directed against a theology which held that God comprehended in himself both light and darkness.”

This opposition movement had questioned the incarnation of Christ (2:20; 4:2). Although previously participating in the apostolic believing community, they had abandoned it (2:19) in order to begin their own version of Christianity, and it had been met with pagan acceptance (4:5). G.B. Caird sums up the identity of this group with this statement:

“An aberrant Christianity, which teaches salvation by esoteric knowledge, excites an enthusiasm devoid of moral concern, and nourishes a spirituality contemptuous of all things material, can be identified unmistakably as an early form of the movement which came to be known as Gnosis or GNOSTICISM. At this stage, however, there is no sign of the gross sensuality which was countenanced by some of the later developments of the Gnostic heresy; the moral laxity here stigmatized consists solely in an indifference to the practical demands of the law of love.”

Therefore, the main thrust of 1 John was to assure the members of the apostolic community of the essence of authentic Christianity, both in its belief and in its ethics, as a corrective to the false teaching being spread by the opposition. What we see in 1 John is a Christian leader appealing to believers to base their religious experience on a firm foundation, rather than the foundation of falsehood and error.

Internal History. The highly “principilized” nature of 2:1-17 minimizes time and place markers inside the passage. At first glance, “world” might seem to be a place marker. But for 1 John it transcends mere materiality and becomes a spiritual force counter to the Heavenly realm. The definition of the “things in the world” in verse 16 underscores this. Fleshly desire, passion of the eye, and arrogance in physical living allude to material things, but also reach deeper. The larger historical background and polemical nature of 1 John provide interpretive clues for time / place implications. But nothing direct surfaces inside the passage itself.

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b. Literary

Genre. In order to make sense of our passage, some exploration of the literary aspects needs to take place, along side the historical exploration just attempted. This focuses on the way the contents of the document were written (genre), how our passage contributes to the message of the entire document (context), and how the ideas are organized inside the passage itself (rhetorical structure).

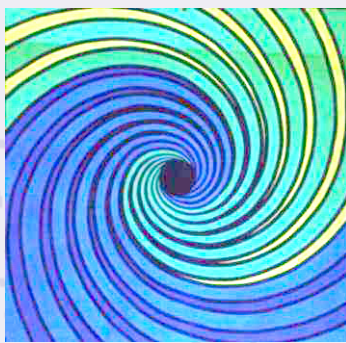
What is the literary style of this passage? Although labeled an ancient letter, this document bears few of the marks that are found in ancient letters. See my discussion on this at Cranfordville.com under <http://cranfordville.com/NT-genre.htm#Epistle>.

In contrast, 2 John and 3 John follow ancient letter patterns very closely, but not 1 John. The prologue of 1 John 1:1-4 somewhat sets the foundation for the remainder of the document (NRSV):

“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 joy may be complete.”

As to literary form, the Bible student can only conclude that 1 John is an ancient letter in a very loose definition of the term. As was mentioned at the beginning of this study, this document reflects a hybrid nature. It has tones of an ancient philosophical tractate and also of an ancient letter. The tractate was an essay or treatise advocating some particular

philosophy. The ancient formal letter sometimes provided a genre usable to philosophers when their ideas were to be promoted to a wider audience than just a small circle of fellow philosophers. The popularity, and thus acceptability, of the letter format made it appealing to philosopher seeking credibility for their ideas. 1 John, from all appearances, follows this hybrid letter form. Why he chose this form is not clear. But most likely it helped gain credibility for his ideas. Also, it may have served to help counter written expressions of the Gnostic opposing.



more I study 1 John, the more the image of a swirl fits the thought structure, beyond the idea of a spiral.

The target of this swirl is love: for God and for one another. The emphasis on love has been summed up well by David Rensberger in the *Abingdon Commentary*:

The centrality of love can be seen in the things for which it is the signal and test: knowing and abiding in God (2:3-6; 3:23-24; 4:7-8, 12, 16), walking in the light (2:9-11), being God's child (2:29; 3:10; 4:7), eternal life (3:14), confidence at the judgment (4:17-18), and our own love for God (4:20-5:1). People do not become children of God by their own good deeds; to be born of God is a gift of God's love, which calls forth and enables Christians' love (3:1-2; 4:9-11, 19). Yet love united to christological confession is the one unfailing test of those who truly are God's children (4:7; 5:1). Where there is no love at work, there is no Christianity. This implies that Christianity is not purely a matter of individual salvation, since love cannot be practiced by one person alone. Knowing God, loving God, being confident of eternal life — all the things that we might consider "spiritual" — are real only in concrete living in community with other human beings. "Beloved, let us love one another" (4:7).

II. Message

Literary Structure. As is discussed in greater detail under [Summary of Rhetorical Structure](#) in the internet version of this study, the passage can be divided out in a couple of ways. My opinion is that a threefold pattern is slightly preferable to a twofold approach. We will follow the threefold approach.

a. Commandments, vv. 1-11

Greek NT

2:1 Τεκνία μου, ταῦτα γράφω ὑμῖν ἵνα μὴ ἁμαρτήτε. καὶ ἐάν τις ἁμαρτή, παράκλητον ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν δίκαιον· 2:2 καὶ αὐτὸς ἰλασμός ἐστιν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, οὐ περὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων δὲ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου.

2:3 Καὶ ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκουμεν ὅτι ἐγνώκαμεν αὐτόν, ἐὰν τὰς ἐντολάς αὐτοῦ τηρῶμεν. 2:4 ὁ λέγων ὅτι Ἔγνωνκα αὐτόν καὶ τὰς ἐντολάς αὐτοῦ μὴ τηρῶν, ψεύστης ἐστὶν καὶ

NASB

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

3 By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and

NRSV

1 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

NLT

1 My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if you do sin, there is someone to plead for you before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who pleases God completely. 2 He is the sacrifice for our sins. He takes away not only our sins but the sins of all the world.

3 And how can we be sure that we belong to him? By obeying his commandments. 4 If someone says, "I belong

ἐν τούτῳ ἡ ἀλήθεια οὐκ ἔστιν· 2·5 ὃς δ' ἂν τηρῇ αὐτοῦ τὸν λόγον, ἀληθῶς ἐν τούτῳ ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ τετελείωται, ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκομεν ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐσμεν. 2·6 ὁ λέγων ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν ὀφείλει καθὼς ἐκεῖνος περιεπάτησεν καὶ αὐτὸς οὕτως περιπατεῖν.

2·7 Ἀγαπητοὶ οὐκ ἐντολὴν καινὴν γράφω ὑμῖν ἀλλ' ἐντολὴν παλαιὰν ἣν εἶχετε ἀπ' ἀρχῆς· ἡ ἐντολὴ ἡ παλαιὰ ἐστὶν ὁ λόγος ὃν ἠκούσατε. 2·8 πάλιν ἐντολὴν καινὴν γράφω ὑμῖν, ὃ ἐστὶν ἀληθὲς ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν, ὅτι ἡ σκοτία παράγεται καὶ τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινὸν ἤδη φαίνει.

2·9 ὁ λέγων ἐν τῷ φωτὶ εἶναι καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ μισῶν ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ ἐστὶν ἕως ἄρτι. 2·10 ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ φωτὶ μένει καὶ σκάνδαλον ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν· 2·11 ὁ δὲ μισῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ ἐστὶν καὶ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ περιπατεῖ καὶ οὐκ οἶδεν ποῦ ὑπάγει, ὅτι ἡ σκοτία ἐτύφλωσεν τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ.



Notes:

The first eleven verses are made up of at least three “swirls” pointing the reader to loving obedience to Christ.

Verses 1-2 in reality link up to [1:5-10](#) almost as much as they do with [2:3-17](#). Many commentators will see the series of “if” clauses (ἐὰν) beginning in 1:6 and ending in 2:1 as the main connecting links.

does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; 5 but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: 6 the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

7 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. 8 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.

9 The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. 10 The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. 11 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.

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.

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 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, is still in the darkness. 10 Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light, and in such a person there is no cause for stumbling. 11 But whoever hates another believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness.

to God,” but doesn’t obey God’s commandments, that person is a liar and does not live in the truth. 5 But those who obey God’s word really do love him. That is the way to know whether or not we live in him. 6 Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Christ did.

7 Dear friends, I am not writing a new commandment, for it is an old one you have always had, right from the beginning. This commandment -- to love one another -- is the same message you heard before. 8 Yet it is also new. This commandment is true in Christ and is true among you, because the darkness is disappearing and the true light is already shining.

9 If anyone says, “I am living in the light,” but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is still living in darkness. 10 Anyone who loves other Christians is living in the light and does not cause anyone to stumble. 11 Anyone who hates a Christian brother or sister is living and walking in darkness. Such a person is lost, having been blinded by the darkness.

To be sure, these are present, but they do not dominate as these commentators assume. Additionally, this overlooks several other thought structure signals suggesting a new direction in 2:1.

What links them to 2:3ff. are the introductory formula “I write” and the vocative “my children.” The shift moves for a generalized “we” to a personal

“you.”

The focus is on sin. In 1:5-10, the emphasis has been on acknowledging one’s sinful actions. To claim fellowship with Christ while walking in darkness means lying and not following divine truth. On the other hand, walking in light means fellowship with one another and cleansing of sin by the blood of Jesus. To claim we do not possess sin equals self deception and being void of God’s truth. But confession of sin means God’s forgiveness. Again, claiming to have not committed sin questions God’s very character and being void of God’s Word as a shaping influence in our life.

In this context, John begins in 2:1 with the declaration that his aim in writing this letter to that his readers would not be committing sins.

The warm tones of this section are signaled by the vocative “my little children” and the second person plural “you.” This way of addressing his readers as his spiritual children is common in his letter; *τεκνία* occurs seven times as noun of direct address: 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21. Always in the plural, it introduces an admonition each time except for the 2:12 instance. The effect is to give his demands a caring pastoral tone. Twice an alternative plural term *παιδία* with similar meaning is used: 2:14, 18. These are not used to introduce exhortations.

His admonition is couched as an indirect prohibitive command (*ἵνα*-clause), which adds to the politeness of the demand. This is the better way of taking the clause, rather than the adverbial purpose role, even though many translations take it as such. John is doing more than stating his goal in writing; he is defining the responsibility of his readers in regard to sin as Christians. The use of the Aorist tense verb *ἀμάρτητε* underscores the obligation to not commit a single act of sin. John’s Gnostic opponents had claimed sinlessness, by denying the reality of sin for the believer. John adamantly condemned such thinking in 1:5-10. But the ultimate goal for every believer is to avoid sinful actions.

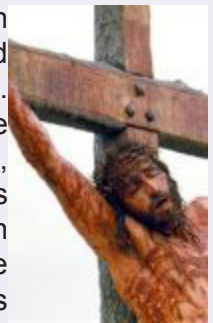
Then John’s proviso kicks in: “But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (*καὶ ἐάν τις ἀμάρτη, παράκλητον ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν δίκαιον*). He wants his readers to avoid sin, but he knows such is not likely to happen on an ongoing basis. So he sets up a possible scenario where someone commits an act of sin: *ἐάν τις ἀμάρτη*. In such instances believers have an advocate (*παράκλητον*) in Christ. The term for ‘advocate’ literally means ‘one called along side of’ for the purpose of assisting. In legal settings, it

is the idea of a defense attorney. Before the Father in the Heavenly court, Jesus constantly pleads our case. The temptation is to read Job 1 into the picture and see the devil as the prosecuting attorney against us. But such would read too much into the image here.

Of course, this assumes a legal setting in the statement. Based on the use of this term for the role of the Holy Spirit in the Johannine writings, many prefer the translation “intercessor.” This diminishes the legal understanding. The Message, for instance, expresses this as “Priest-Friend”, understanding the Heavenly location in terms of temple rather than court room. But most assume the setting is legal.

The following statements in verse 2 clearly understand the temple setting. Jesus is not only advocate but also *ἱλασμός*. This term is subject to more than one understanding inside the temple setting. In pagan writings the idea was that a proper sacrifice placated the anger of the gods so that they wouldn’t “zap” the worshipper. But in the LXX of the OT the term can translate Hebrew words referring either to God removing the guilt incurred in sin through the sacrifice presented to Him. Or, it can simply mean the guilt is removed before God through the sacrifice. Although many commentators see the meanings as either / or choices, it seems better to see both meanings in this term, used only here and in 4:10 with identical meanings. The coverage of the atoning sacrifice is for the sins of both Christians and the rest of the world. John sees the potential of Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary as sufficiently powerful to cover the sins of all humankind. His emphasis upon universal inclusion may very well be intended to counter either Jewish or Gnostic exclusiveness. Christ’s death can cover our individual acts of sin as believers. This challenge came to the Gnostic opponents who were denying acts of sin after salvation.

Verses 3-8 intensify the condemnation of the Gnostic view of salvation. Denial of sinful actions is heresy; now lack of obedience to the commands of Christ reflects non-salvation status before God. How does one know that he knows Christ? This play on words is even more profound in the Greek. We *γινώσκομεν* (present tense) that we *ἐγνώκαμεν* (perfect tense) him. The past time *ἐγνώκαμεν* has made profound impact that extends into the present. And what is that impact? “We obey his commandments” (*ἐάν τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ τηρῶμεν*). John’s assumption of a



scenario of obedience becomes the means by which we “know that we know him.” Of course, ‘knowledge’ is salvation. It is John’s term for Paul’s “salvation.” To know Christ is to be personally related to him. This image served to counter the Gnostic view of salvation as possession of a special secretive knowledge (γνώσις) that brought salvation.

John makes a couple of declarations with reverse perspectives:

To say that one knows Christ and not do what Christ commands: (1) such a person is a liar, and (2) God’s truth isn’t in him. Both accusations were especially targeting the Gnostic claim to exclusive possession of divine truth because of possessing the salvific knowledge.

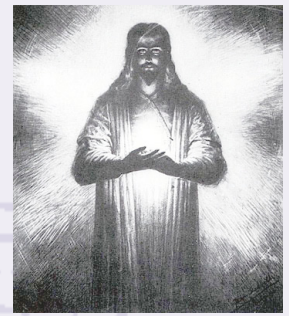
To be obeying Christ’s word means: (1) the love of God is fully realized in this person. (2) In this we know that we are in Christ.

The key to authentic profession is keeping Christ’s commands. For John the genuineness of the inward is reflected in the outward. What we do says who we are. Here we see a reflection of Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 7:16, 20): “You will know them by their fruits.” Also James (2:17): “So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.” And Paul (Eph. 2:10): “For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.”

Thus John leads up to the climatic “whoever says, ‘I abide in him,’ ought to walk just as he walked” (ὁ λέγων ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν ὀφείλει καθὼς ἐκεῖνος περιπάτησεν καὶ αὐτὸς οὕτως περιπατεῖν). Keeping Christ’s commands is not hard to figure out. Just follow the lifestyle of Jesus. He set the example that he expects his disciples to follow.

Verse 7 and probably also verse 8 bring this middle unit to a close: “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. Yet I am writing you a new commandment that is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.” John makes an interesting play on the adjectives “old” and “new” which modify the noun “commandment.” At first he declares he is not writing a new commandment (ἐντολὴν καινὴν). Rather it is an old commandment (ἐντολὴν παλαιάν). Then he declares that he is writing a new commandment (ἐντολὴν καινὴν). The subtle play on these adjectives pushes us toward defining commandment. The old commandment that is not new John defines as “the word that you have heard” (ὁ λόγος ὃν ἠκούσατε).

What is this? The apostolic gospel message. It and it alone defined true Christianity and Christian obligation to Christ. The new commandment that John did write is qualified as: “true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining” (ὁ ἐστὶν



ἀληθὲς ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν, ὅτι ἡ σκοτία παράγεται καὶ τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινὸν ἤδη φαίνει). The content of the commandment most likely is stated in the following two axiomatic declarations set in antithetical form: “Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light, and in such a person there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates another believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness.”

The gospel for John’s readers was an old commandment that had been well established by the end of the first Christian century when John wrote these words. This stood in stark contrast to the Gnostic opponents who had created a new gospel out of thin air decades after Jesus taught the principles of the Kingdom of God. But a new command for John’s readers was his affirmation that loving / hating a fellow Christian was the verification of spiritual status before God. The accuracy of this is grounded first in Jesus and then in John’s readers.

The basis for it is that darkness has been defeated at Calvary and the true Light, Jesus, has now begun shining to offer a way of salvation to all who will follow him.

Again, actions betray inner spiritual reality. Love now is love for fellow believers. This is the commandment. Keeping the commandments now is existing in the Light which is Christ. To exhibit “hate” (μισέω) toward a fellow believer betrays several things: (1) this person is still enveloped in spiritual darkness; (2) he lives in darkness, i.e., his behavior reflects darkness; (3) he doesn’t know how to live properly because darkness has blinded him. Importantly, knowing here is οἶδεν, rather than γινώσκω elsewhere. The fine distinction is that a person living in darkness is living in ignorance. It’s not that he’s just not experiencing knowledge. John’s point is intense. Salvational knowledge, ‘knowing’ and ‘light,’ are not something one can figure out with the brain.

Does this relate to us? Most emphatically yes! Our objective as believers must be to avoid sinful actions. Will we sin? Yes, and Christ stands between

us and God pleading out case. As 1:9 declares, “if we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” No matter what some preacher may say, genuine Christianity is reflected in how it does what Christ commanded. Disobedience to Christ’s words, even in the midst of claiming to know Christ, reflects spiritual non-existence. The example of how we’re to live is set by the life of Christ. We simply walk in his path as our obedience to him. This is an old word that has been around since Christ. No one

has made it up in order to create a religion more to their liking, although many have tried since the first century. Such efforts reflect the spiritual darkness down inside the individuals attempting this. Although claiming ‘enlightenment’ to a new and better way, they have only succeeded in deluding themselves. One of the central commands of Jesus that he exemplified himself is: love one another. Living in the true enlightenment of Jesus leads to such brotherly love.

.....
b. Affirmations, vv. 12-14

Greek NT

2:12 Γράφω ὑμῖν, τεκνία, ὅτι ἀφέωνται ὑμῖν αἱ ἁμαρτίαι διὰ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ. 2:13 γράφω ὑμῖν, πατέρες, ὅτι ἐγνώκατε τὸν ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς. γράφω ὑμῖν, νεανίσκοι, ὅτι νενικήκατε τὸν πονηρόν. 2:14 ἔγραψα ὑμῖν, παιδι- ᾶ, ὅτι ἐγνώκατε τὸν πατέρα. ἔγραψα ὑμῖν, πατέρες, ὅτι ἐγνώκατε τὸν ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς. ἔγραψα ὑμῖν, νεανίσκοι, ὅτι ἰσχυροὶ ἐστε καὶ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ὑμῖν μένει καὶ νενικήκατε τὸν πονηρόν.

NASB

12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name’s sake. 13 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. 14 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.

NRSV

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.

NLT

12 I am writing to you, my dear children, because your sins have been forgiven because of Jesus. 13 I am writing to you who are mature because you know Christ, the one who is from the beginning. I am writing to you who are young because you have won your battle with Satan. 14 I have written to you, children, because you have known the Father. I have written to you who are mature because you know Christ, the one who is from the beginning. I have written to you who are young because you are strong with God’s word living in your hearts, and you have won your battle with Satan.

Notes:

The literary function of this unit is discussed in detail in the [Rhetorical Structure](#) section. In short, this eloquent poetic structure transitions from vv. 8-11 into vv. 15-17. It reaches backward reenforcing the affirmation of John’s initial readers found in v. 8, “**a new commandment that is true** in him and **in you**.” In so doing John prepares his readers for the admonition to distance themselves from worldliness (vv. 15-17).

The manner in which John achieves this is remarkable, and distinct to the rest of the New Testament. He uses a couplet of parallel statements:

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

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.

The structural ingredients for these statements contain three basic elements, as S.S. Smalley (*Word Biblical Commentary*, Logos Systems) notes:

Each sentence is built up according to a pattern which includes three elements: (a) the verb γράφειν (“to write”) followed by ὑμῖν (“to you”); (b) a noun in direct address; (c) a clause introduced by ὅτι (“because”).

Several interpretive questions need answering in order to have a clearer grasp of what John is getting at here.

First, who are ‘children,’ ‘fathers,’ and ‘young men’? Again, Smalley (WBC) surveys the history of interpretation at this point:

How are we to understand the author’s triple description of his readers, as children, fathers and young men? Three approaches to this question are possible, and have been suggested by commentators (see the excellent summary in Marshall, 137–38).

First, it could be argued that John is referring to three distinct groups of people in his church. (a) In this case the meaning may be a literal one: children, younger men and older men (cf. Windisch, 115–16). The difficulty with this level of interpretation, however, is twofold. In the first place, the order in which the groups are mentioned is not consecutive; and secondly, the naming of “fathers” and “young men” seems to indicate a male-dominated (even monastic?) community. While some scholars (e.g. Käsemann, *Testament*; cf. Cullmann, *Circle*) have argued for the “sectarian” character of Johannine Christianity, there is no evidence for supposing that John’s church discriminated between the sexes in terms of its membership. See further Brown, *Community*, 88–91; cf. also 2:15–17. (b) On the other hand, John may be addressing groups within his circle whose members are at different stages of spiritual development, and describing them metaphorically as children (that is, recently converted), fathers (those established in the faith), and young men (those still growing in Christ). So Stott (96). Again, however, there are difficulties in this view. Once more the order does not follow a chronological sequence; secondly, the qualities specified sometimes overlap (cf. v 14a, “you have known the Father” and v 14b, “you have known him who has existed from the beginning,” which cannot be sharply distinguished; see the comment below); and thirdly, there is no obvious reason why each of the qualities mentioned should not be typical of all Christians, and not just of one group at a particular stage of spiritual growth. At the same time, as Marshall (137) points out, the characteristics to which John refers are in each instance particularly relevant to the group which is being addressed: the young convert would be specially conscious of God’s forgiveness (but see v 14a, where knowledge of the Godhead, shared with the fathers, is alluded to in place of “forgiveness”); the

mature Christian would know God in a deep way; and growing believers would have the spiritual motivation and strength to conquer the evil one.

Second, it has been proposed that by “children” John means all the members of his congregation (as often in this letter; cf. 2:1, 28); and that, within this community, he then goes on to address as “fathers” and “young men” two specific groups. (c) In this case two sets of church officers may be in mind, and John is using the formal titles πατέρες and νεανίσκοι as the equivalents of the terms πρεσβύτεροι (“elders” or “presbyters”) and διάκονοι (“deacons” or “servants”), which were coming into use as designations for the leaders of the church and their assistants in the NT period (cf. Acts 20:17; 1 Tim. 3:8–13; also Ignatius, *Phld.*, 4.1). This is the view of Houlden (70–71), who speculates that the title πατέρες, rather than πρεσβύτεροι, is used for officials in John’s church because his “elders” were those with supervising responsibility for “a number of dependent congregations” (71). Houlden does not, however, provide a balancing explanation for John’s use of νεανίσκοι instead of διάκονοι. (For a similar view cf. Spicq, *RB* 76 [1969] 524.)

(d) An alternative suggestion, close to the previous one, is to take πατέρες and νεανίσκοι in a general sense: as the older and younger Christians who belonged to John’s community of “children.” (Among these, in fact, the “fathers” were most likely to be leaders.) Other NT writers refer to these two categories of believers in similar terms: e.g. 1 Tim 5:1, “Do not rebuke an older man (using πρεσβύτερος) harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father (ὡς πατέρα). Treat younger men (νεωτέρους) as brothers”; also 1 Pet 5:5, “Young men (νεώτεροι), in the same way be submissive to those who are older (πρεσβυτέροις).” Middle-age was evidently not a concept which existed in the early Church!

This interpretation is attractive, and frequently adopted. So Brooke, 43–45; Bultmann, 31; Schnackenburg, 123. I. de la Potterie, “Connaissance,” 86–91 (especially 91), followed by Malatesta, *Interiority*, 167, suggested that the writer’s sense is an inclusive one: all believers are being exhorted, from the oldest to the youngest. In support of this proposal are cited Jer 31:34; Joel 2:28 and 3:1 (in the Hebrew text); cf. Acts 2:17. However, if the “fathers” and “young men” in this passage are understood exclusively in terms of office or age, how is it that what is said to be true of one group could and should be true of them all? Deacons and young men, for example, are not the only Christians who should know about the conquest of evil. Indeed, John himself seems to acknowledge this fact by attributing to the “children” in v 14a what he says about the “fathers” in vv 13a and 14b (that they have known the Lord).

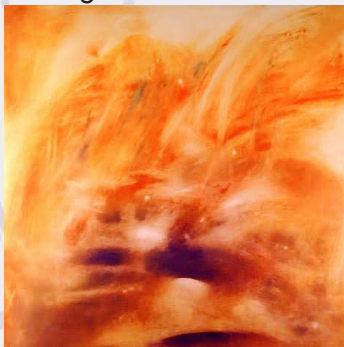
A third approach (e) refers the triad “children-fa-

thers-young men” rhetorically to the spiritual qualities which should characterize all Christians at any time. John, it is claimed, emphasizes these and draws them out by distributing them into groups. This interpretation, which goes back to Augustine (see Wilder, 236–37), thus amounts to saying that “all Christians are (by grace, not nature) children in innocence ... young men in strength, and fathers in experience” (Dodd, 38–39, who unnecessarily adduces parallels from the Corpus Hermeticum, 11:20 and 13:11, to support his argument). Whatever the age of his readers, therefore, John can properly say to them all: “your sins have been forgiven; you have known him who has existed from the beginning; and you have conquered the evil one.”

The variety of possible interpretations we have surveyed, combined with the literary character of this passage, indicates that we should perhaps avoid making exclusive decisions about the meaning of the terms τέκνία (παιδιά), πατέρες and νεανίσκοι. Knowing the Johannine mentality as we do, it is quite possible that our author is at this point being deliberately ambivalent. Almost certainly he is referring to his whole church when he calls his readers “children,” but within that group he is in one sense recollecting and addressing the young and old in physical age (d); while in another sense he is referring to the spiritual privileges of Christian youth and maturity which should belong to all believers: interpretation (e), but cf. also (b). In either case he is pointing out the riches of orthodox faith belonging to the “fathers” and “young men” of his church, in stark contrast to the heresies which were being propagated by the other two groups within the Johannine community: those with too high a view of the nature of Jesus, and those with an inadequate understanding of his fully divine person. Marshall, 138, thinks that John was indebted to a traditional scheme of expression here, originally used in the manner (c) or (d), but now applied in the manner (e).

Smalley’s approach has appeal. The danger is that it’s inclusiveness may be a ‘cop out’ from making a difficult interpretive decision.

Second, what is the significance to the tense shift between the first three present tense forms and the second three Aorist tense forms of γράφω? The NRSV translates them the same way, “I write,” while the NASB and NLT go from “I write” to “I have written.” A slight distinction is found in the RSV with “I am writing” to “I write.” Several understandings have surfaced over the years, some of which have little credibility. To see a huge difference between the two tenses is questionable, in my opinion. I suspect the shift is



due to stylistic concerns more than anything else. Thus the Aorist forms in the second set are merely “epistolary Aorist” tense forms with the same essential meaning as the present tense forms in the first set. I find it difficult to see the present tense referring to what has been written up to v. 12, and the Aorist tense forms alluding to what will be written beginning in v. 15.

Thirdly, what is the function of the ὅτι-clauses? Grammatically this subordinate conjunction can define either the content of what is being written (“that”; substantival object clause function) or the reason for the writing (“because”; adverbial causal clause function). In a quick survey of a dozen or so major English translations only one translated ὅτι as “that.” The others rendered it as “because.”

Most importantly is the content of the ὅτι-clauses in each set of declarations. Assertions of forgiveness of sins, knowledge of the “one from the beginning... the Father,” “victory over the Evil One” are found. They surface in this pattern:

The children

- (1) have their sins forgiven
- (2) know the Father

The fathers

- (1) know the One from the beginning
- (2) know the One from the beginning

The young men

- (1) have experienced victory over the Evil One
- (2) are strong
the word of God continues in them
have experienced victory over the Evil One

What a litany of spiritual qualities. And thus powerful affirmations about John’s initial readers.

Any connections to us in these verses? I think so. Assuming the list of addressees covers the entire gamete of the community of believers, either in age groupings or leadership roles, these affirmations challenge us to measure up. They remind us of the heart of the Christian experience. To be in a personal relationship with the Heavenly Father (knowing) means forgiveness of sins, it means the power to defeat the Devil, it opens up the possibility to delve deeply into the Word of God as a source of strength and direction. In the polemical context of 2:1-17 they provided encouragement both to John and to the readers themselves that successful resistance to the false teachings of the Gnostics was both possible and likely. Spiritual strength is critical to staying on the right path in one’s commitment to Christ.

c. The World & God's Will, vv. 15-17

Greek NT

2:15 Μὴ ἀγαπᾶτε τὸν κόσμον μηδὲ τὰ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ. ἔάν τις ἀγαπᾷ τὸν κόσμον, οὐκ ἔστιν ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ πατρὸς ἐν αὐτῷ. 2:16 ὅτι πᾶν τὸ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ, ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῆς σαρκὸς καὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν καὶ ἡ ἀλαζονεία τοῦ βίου, οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἀλλ' ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου ἐστίν. 2:17 καὶ ὁ κόσμος παραγεται καὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία αὐτοῦ, ὁ δὲ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ μένει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

Notes:

This final unit of material hangs together around two key terms: “love” and “world,” as the [Block Diagram](#) visually illustrates. The header prohibitive admonitions demand a termination of loving the world and what is found in it. To stop loving is one meaning of the Greek verb construction and is reflected in the NLT translation above. More likely the admonition has gnomic qualities and is better expressed in the clumsy English expression: ‘Don’t ever develop an ongoing love for...’ The first translation pattern assumes a historicised focus, while the latter assumes a more timeless quality. Both are possible.

Then in typical fashion, John raised a what if scenario. If someone fails to heed the admonition what is their spiritual situation? Simple. The Father’s love doesn’t exist in them. John sees the presence of God’s love in the believer’s life as a powerful influence. But it is contrary to love for the world. The two cannot exist with one another!

What is wrong with loving the world? The world is not lasting. It is passing away (*παράγεται*). When the Lord returns it will cease. What is in this fading world? John defines this as (1) the desire of the flesh (ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῆς σαρκὸς); (2) the desire of the eyes (ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν); (3) the pride in riches (ἡ ἀλαζονεία τοῦ βίου). Notice that material things within themselves are not mentioned. It’s our attitude toward them that causes the problems. Passion for and arrogance over them is what gets us in trouble. Thus we are looking at “worldliness.” James (4:4)

NASB

15 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. 16 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. 17 The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

NRSV

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 desires are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever.

NLT

15 Stop loving this evil world and all that it offers you, for when you love the world, you show that you do not have the love of the Father in you. 16 For the world offers only the lust for physical pleasure, the lust for everything we see, and pride in our possessions. These are not from the Father. They are from this evil world. 17 And this world is fading away, along with everything it craves. But if you do the will of God, you will live forever.

had this to say: “Adulterers! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.” To tie one’s life onto things is to board a sinking ship! And besides, we are told that the ship is sinking! But most don’t believe it.

The antidote is found in the last declaration: “but those who do the will of God live forever.” Thus the contrast is between anchoring one’s life onto something that won’t last, or walking in God’s will and thus living for eternity. Not a brainer here! Smart people link their lives into what will carry them through eternity: the will of God. The world and passions for what it offers will destroy the individual.

The spiritual dynamic enabling a focus on God’s will and away from the world? The love of God! This love is not mere attitude and disposition by God toward us. No, it is power and influence that changes us into loving, faithful disciples of Christ. God help us to experience the fullness of that love. As John declared in v. 5, keeping Christ’s word is key to it being brought to fullness in our lives.

These spiritual principles are just as true today, as they were when John first wrote them a little over nineteen centuries ago. Were we to build our lives unhesitatingly on these principles, what a difference we would experience!

Greek NT

2:1 Τεκνία μου, ταῦτα γράφω ὑμῖν ἵνα μὴ ἁμαρτήτε. καὶ ἐάν τις ἁμαρτή, παράκλητον ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν δίκαιον· 2:2 καὶ αὐτὸς ἰλασμός ἐστιν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, οὐ περὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων δὲ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου. 2:3 Καὶ ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκουμεν ὅτι ἐγνώκαμεν αὐτόν, ἐὰν τὰς ἐντολάς αὐτοῦ τηρῶμεν. 2:4 ὁ λέγων ὅτι Ἔγνοκα αὐτόν καὶ τὰς ἐντολάς αὐτοῦ μὴ τηρῶν, ψεύστης ἐστίν καὶ ἐν τούτῳ ἡ ἀληθία οὐκ ἔστιν· 2:5 ὃς δ' ἂν τηρῇ αὐτοῦ τὸν λόγον, ἀληθῶς ἐν τούτῳ ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ τετελείωται, ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκουμεν ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐσμεν. 2:6 ὁ λέγων ἐν αὐτῷ μένει ὀφείλει καθὼς ἐκεῖνος περιπάτησεν καὶ αὐτὸς οὕτως περιπατεῖν.

2:7 Ἀγαπητοὶ οὐκ ἐντολὴν καινὴν γράφω ὑμῖν ἀλλ' ἐντολὴν παλαιὰν ἣν εἶχετε ἀπ' ἀρχῆς· ἡ ἐντολὴ ἡ παλαιὰ ἐστίν ὁ λόγος ὃν ἠκούσατε. 2:8 πάλιν ἐντολὴν καινὴν γράφω ὑμῖν, ὃ ἐστίν ἀληθὲς ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν, ὅτι ἡ σκοτία παράγεται καὶ τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινὸν ἤδη φαίνει. 2:9 ὁ λέγων ἐν τῷ φωτὶ εἶναι καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ μισῶν ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ ἐστίν ἕως ἄρτι. 2:10 ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ φωτὶ μένει καὶ σκάνδαλον ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν· 2:11 ὁ δὲ μισῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ ἐστίν καὶ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ περιπατεῖ καὶ οὐκ οἶδεν ποῦ ὑπάγει, ὅτι

NASB

1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. 3 By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 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; 5 but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: 6 the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

7 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. 8 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. 9 The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. 10 The one who

NRSV

1 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.

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 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, is still in the darkness. 10 Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light, and in such

NLT

1 My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if you do sin, there is someone to plead for you before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who pleases God completely. 2 He is the sacrifice for our sins. He takes away not only our sins but the sins of all the world.

3 And how can we be sure that we belong to him? By obeying his commandments. 4 If someone says, "I belong to God," but doesn't obey God's commandments, that person is a liar and does not live in the truth. 5 But those who obey God's word really do love him. That is the way to know whether or not we live in him. 6 Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Christ did.

7 Dear friends, I am not writing a new commandment, for it is an old one you have always had, right from the beginning. This commandment -- to love one another -- is the same message you heard before. 8 Yet it is also new. This commandment is true in Christ and is true among you, because the darkness is disappearing and the true light is already shining. 9 If anyone says, "I am living in the light," but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is still living in darkness. 10 Anyone who loves other Christians is living in the light and does not cause

ἡ σκοτία ἐτύφλωσεν τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ.

2·12 Γράφω ὑμῖν, τεκνία, ὅτι ἀφέωνται ὑμῖν αἱ ἁμαρτίαι διὰ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ. 2·13 γράφω ὑμῖν, πατέρες, ὅτι ἐγνώκατε τὸν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς. γράφω ὑμῖν, νεανίσκοι, ὅτι νενικηκατε τὸν πονηρόν. 2·14 ἔγραψα ὑμῖν, παιδιά, ὅτι ἐγνώκατε τὸν πατέρα. ἔγραψα ὑμῖν, πατέρες, ὅτι ἐγνώκατε τὸν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς. ἔγραψα ὑμῖν, νεανίσκοι, ὅτι ἰσχυροὶ ἐστε καὶ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ὑμῖν μένει καὶ νενικήκατε τὸν πονηρόν.

2·15 Μὴ ἀγαπᾶτε τὸν κόσμον μηδὲ τὰ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ. ἐάν τις ἀγαπᾷ τὸν κόσμον, οὐκ ἔστιν ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ πατρὸς ἐν αὐτῷ. 2·16 ὅτι πᾶν τὸ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ, ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῆς σαρκὸς καὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν καὶ ἡ ἀλαζονεία τοῦ βίου, οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἀλλ' ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου ἐστίν. 2·17 καὶ ὁ κόσμος παράγεται καὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία αὐτοῦ, ὁ δὲ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ μένει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. 11 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.

12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake. 13 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. 14 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.

15 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. 16 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. 17 The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

a person there is no cause for stumbling. 11 But whoever hates another believer 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 desires are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever.

anyone to stumble. 11 Anyone who hates a Christian brother or sister is living and walking in darkness. Such a person is lost, having been blinded by the darkness.

12 I am writing to you, my dear children, because your sins have been forgiven because of Jesus. 13 I am writing to you who are mature because you know Christ, the one who is from the beginning. I am writing to you who are young because you have won your battle with Satan. 14 I have written to you, children, because you have known the Father. I have written to you who are mature because you know Christ, the one who is from the beginning. I have written to you who are young because you are strong with God's word living in your hearts, and you have won your battle with Satan.

15 Stop loving this evil world and all that it offers you, for when you love the world, you show that you do not have the love of the Father in you. 16 For the world offers only the lust for physical pleasure, the lust for everything we see, and pride in our possessions. These are not from the Father. They are from this evil world. 17 And this world is fading away, along with everything it craves. But if you do the will of God, you will live forever.

Greek NT Text Diagram

^{2:1}
 14 Τεκνία μου,
 ταῦτα γράφω ὑμῖν
 καὶ ἵνα μὴ ἀμάρτητε.
 ἐάν τις ἀμάρτη,
 15 παράκλητον ἔχομεν
 πρὸς τὸν πατέρα
 Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν
 δίκαιον·
^{2:2}
 16 καὶ αὐτὸς ἰλασμός ἐστιν
 δὲ
 17 ----- οὐ -----

 18 -----

 καὶ
 περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου.
^{2:3}
 19 Καὶ ἐν τούτῳ
 γινώσκομεν ὅτι ἐγνώκαμεν αὐτόν,
 ἐὰν τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ τηρῶμεν.
^{2:4}
 20 ὁ λέγων ὅτι Ἔγνων αὐτόν
 καὶ τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ μὴ τηρῶν,
 ψεύστης ἐστίν
 καὶ ἐν τούτῳ
 21 ἡ ἀλήθεια οὐκ ἔστιν·
^{2:5}
 22 δ' ὅς ἂν τηρῇ αὐτοῦ τὸν λόγον,
 ἀληθῶς ἐν τούτῳ
 ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ τετελείωται,
 ἐν τούτῳ
 23 γινώσκομεν ἐν αὐτῷ
 ὅτι...ἔσμεν.
^{2:6}
 24 ὁ λέγων ἐν αὐτῷ
 μένειν

καθὼς ἐκεῖνος περιεπάτησεν
 οὕτως

24 ὀφείλει καὶ αὐτὸς.. περιπατεῖν.
25 ^{2·7} Ἀγαπητοὶ οὐκ ἐντολὴν καινὴν γράφω ὑμῖν
ἄλλ'
26 (γράφω ὑμῖν) ἐντολὴν παλαιάν
ἣν εἶχετε ἀπ' ἀρχῆς·
27 ἡ ἐντολὴ ἡ παλαιὰ ἐστὶν ὁ λόγος
ὃν ἠκούσατε.
28 ^{2·8} πάλιν ἐντολὴν καινὴν γράφω ὑμῖν,
ὃ ἐστὶν ἀληθὲς
ἐν αὐτῷ
καὶ
ἐν ὑμῖν,
ὅτι ἡ σκοτία παράγεται
καὶ
τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινὸν ἤδη φαίνει.
29 ^{2·9} ὁ λέγων ἐν τῷ φωτὶ
εἶναι
καὶ
τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ **μισῶν**
ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ
ἐστὶν
ἕως ἄρτι.
30 ^{2·10} ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ
ἐν τῷ φωτὶ
μένει
καὶ
ἐν αὐτῷ
31 **σκάνδαλον... οὐκ ἔστιν**·
32 ^{2·11} δὲ ὁ **μισῶν** τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ
ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ
ἐστὶν
καὶ
ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ
33 **περιπατεῖ**
καὶ
34 **οὐκ οἶδεν**
ποῦ ὑπάγει,
/-----|
ὅτι ἡ σκοτία ἐτύφλωσεν τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ.
35 ^{2·12} **Γράφω ὑμῖν,**
τεκνία,
ὅτι ἀφέωνται ὑμῖν αἱ ἁμαρτίαι
διὰ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ.

36 ^{2:13} **γράφω ὑμῖν**
πατέρες
ὅτι ἐγνώκατε τὸν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς.

37 **γράφω ὑμῖν**
νεανίσκοι
ὅτι νενικήκατε τὸν πονηρόν.

38 ^{2:14} **ἔγραψα ὑμῖν,**
παιδία,
ὅτι ἐγνώκατε τὸν πατέρα.

39 **ἔγραψα ὑμῖν,**
πατέρες,
ὅτι ἐγνώκατε τὸν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς.

40 **ἔγραψα ὑμῖν,**
νεανίσκοι,
ὅτι ἰσχυροὶ ἐστε
καὶ
ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ὑμῖν μένει
καὶ
νενικήκατε τὸν πονηρόν.

41 ^{2:15} **Μὴ ἀγαπᾶτε τὸν κόσμον**
μηδὲ

42 ----- **τὰ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ.**

ἔάν τις ἀγαπᾷ τὸν κόσμον,

43 **οὐκ ἔστιν ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ πατρὸς**

ἐν αὐτῷ·

^{2:16} ὅτι πᾶν τὸ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ . . . οὐκ ἔστιν
ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῆς σαρκὸς ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς

καὶ

ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν

καὶ

ἡ ἀλαζονεία τοῦ βίου,

ἀλλ'·

ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου

(πᾶν τὸ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ) ἐστίν.

^{2:17} καὶ

44 **ὁ κόσμος παράγεται**

καὶ

45 **ἡ ἐπιθυμία αὐτοῦ -----,**

δὲ

ὁ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ

46 **μένει**

εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

Semantic Diagram

			Τεκνία μου					
	1	-----	14	Pres	Act	Ind	1	S (ἐγώ)
								καὶ
A	a	-----	15	Pres	Act	Ind	1	P (ἡμεῖς)
	2	--						καὶ
								i ----- 16 Pres --- Ind 3 S αὐτὸς
	b	--						δὲ
								a) ----- 17 (Pres --- Ind 3 S αὐτὸς)
								ii-
								ἀλλά
								b) ----- 18 (Pres --- Ind 3 S αὐτὸς)
								Καὶ
	1	-----	19	Pres	Act	Ind	1	P (ἡμεῖς)
								καὶ
								i ----- 20 Pres --- Ind 3 S Ptc phrase
	a	--						καὶ
								ii ----- 21 Pres --- Ind 3 S ἀλήθεια
								δ'
								i ----- 22 Perf Pass Ind 3 S ἀγάπη
I	B	2	--					---
								ii ----- 23 Pres Act Ind 1 P (ἡμεῖς)

								c ----- 24 Pres Act Ind 3 S ptc phrase
								Ἀγαπητοί
								i ----- 25 Pres Act Ind 1 S (ἐγώ)
	a	--						ἀλλ'
								a) ----- 26 (Pres Act Ind 1 S ἐγώ)
	3	--						---
								ii-
								b) ----- 27 Pres --- Ind 3 S ἐντολή

								b ----- 28 Pres Act Ind 1 S (ἐγώ)

	1	-----	29	Pres	---	Ind	3	S ptc phrase

	a	-----	30	Pres	Act	Ind	3	S Ptc phrase
	2	--						καὶ
C	b	-----	31	Pres	---	Ind	3	S σκάνδαλον
								δὲ
								a ----- 32 Pres --- Ind 3 S ptc phrase
								καὶ
	3	--						b ----- 33 Pres --- Ind 3 S ptc phrase
								καὶ
								c ----- 34 Pres --- Ind 3 S ptc phrase

				τεκνία								
	1	-----	τεκνία	-----	35	Pres	Act	Ind	1	S	(ἐγώ)	
	A	2	-----	πατέρες	-----	36	Pres	Act	Ind	1	S	(ἐγώ)
	3	-----	νεανίσκοι	-----	37	Pres	Act	Ind	1	S	(ἐγώ)	
II-												
	1	-----	παιδιά	-----	38	1 Aor	Act	Ind	1	S	(ἐγώ)	
	B	2	-----	πατέρες	-----	39	1 Aor	Act	Ind	1	S	(ἐγώ)
	3	-----	νεανίσκοι	-----	40	1 Aor	Act	Ind	1	S	(ἐγώ)	
	1	-----		-----	41	1 Aor	Act	Imp	2	P	(ὕμεῖς)	
A--												
	2	-----		-----	42	(1 Aor	Act	Imp	2	P	ὕμεῖς)	
III												
	a	-----		-----	43	Pres	---	Ind	3	S	ἀγαπή	
	1	--										
			i	-----	44	Pres	Act	Ind	3	S	κόσμος	
B--		b										
			ii	-----	45	(Pres	Act	Ind	3	S)	ἐπιθυμία	
	2	-----		-----	46	Pres	Act	Ind	3	S	ptc phrase	

Summary of Rhetorical Structure:

The core structure of verses 1-17 is either in a two fold or three fold pattern.

What is not so clear is the function of the second section (statements 35-40 in vv. 12-14). The highly poetic repetition could possibly serve as the introduction to the final section (statements 41-46 in vv. 15-17), or stand alone as depicted in the above Semantic Diagram. It seems to have some literary function possibly along the lines of the highly compacted statements (#s 25-28) in vv. 7-8. These serve as transitional from statements the first section (statements 14-23 in vv. 1-6) to the next section (statements 29-34 in vv. 9-11). Yet, the content doesn't clearly indicate this. Consequently, I have left them as division II in the resulting outline from the Semantic Diagram.

(1) The beginning section (statements 14-34 in vv. 1-11) clearly subdivide into three sections. The passage begins with an admonition to not sin (#14) which is then braced with the emphasis on Jesus as the mediator in case we do sin (#s 15-18). This material largely serves to lay some important issues on the table for discussion.

The second subsection (statements 19-28 in vv. 3-8) hang together largely around the often repeated word "commandment" (ἐντολή). Disobedience / obedience reflect true spiritual existence. Also "knowing / having come to know" are important metaphors. The use of the Greek present tense and perfect tense forms of the verb γίνωσκω plays off each other in subtle but significant ways. The past salvational "coming to know" serves to lay a foundation for the whether our present "knowing" is authentic or not. But the measuring stick for present knowing is obedience / disobedience. Obedience grows out of authentic "coming to know" as the impact (Greek intensive perfect tense verb use).

The "having known" is the starting point to "knowing." Whether one "knows" genuinely is not determined by a claim, but by obedience. The header principle comes in statement 19: "we know that we know him if we keep his commandments." Disobedience to Christ's commandments (#s 20-21) reveals that we don't know Christ and God's truth isn't in us. On the other hand, obedience (22-23) means the full impact of God's love and genuine spiritual existence in Christ. This places on the believer the obligation to "walk" just as Christ walked in his earthly life (#24). Thus we are to obey and that obedience is defined by how Christ lived. Less than this means false claims to Christ and God's truth. This principle doesn't represent

something new for Christians. Instead, it has been an integral part of the proclaimed gospel message from the very beginning.

In the third sub-section, a new command (#28) is set forth by John that darkness is passing away and the true Light has already begun shining. This transitions into the following unit of material in statements 29-34 in vv. 9-11. The controlling motif here is "light" (φῶς). Living in either light or darkness is measured by how one treats his Christian brother. Once again, the claim to exit in this light must be matched by loving one's brother. Hating one's brother, even in spite of a claim to walk in the light, means a triple declaration of falsehoods: statements 32, 33, & 34.

(2) The center section, statements 35-40 in vv. 12-14, represent the most poetic and thus the most elusive unit in 2:1-17. Key to these declarations is the verb γράφω meaning to write. Also the vocative case noun forms define the symmetry of the passage. The first three verb forms are present tense: γράφω, I write. The second three are Aorist tense: ἔγραψα, I have written. In both sets of three, vocative case nouns follow the same sequence with virtually the same nouns: children (τεκνία, παιδία); fathers (πατέρες), and young men (νεανίσκοι). The variation from set to set comes in the causal / object clauses introduced by the Greek subordinate conjunction ὅτι. Although this conjunction could be taken as "that" and thus define what John has written, most translations will understand it to be causal, "because," and thus provide the reason for writing.

(3) The third section, statements 41-46 in vv. 15-17, hang together around the word "world" (κόσμος). A double edged admonition begins with prohibition of loving the world and the things in the world. This structure of big label with designation of its contents will provide structure for the rest of the unit (statements 43-45), except for the final declaration in statement 46. The final declaration provides the counterpart to loving the world: doing God's will.

In a manner typical of 1 John, this passage contains very simple language expression in Greek. This is the reason most beginning Greek students get their first taste of the Greek NT in 1 John. But what exists at the surface level belies what is present in the semantic thought structure underneath the surface. John's skills enabled him to write his ideas down in simple terms, but those ideas are some of the most complex that can be found in the NT. Particularly mystifying is how he stacks his ideas. No clearly defined progression of thought exists. The core concepts in 2:1-17 come together somewhat as a kaleidoscope. And they hang together largely through catch words, and semantically related concepts: sin; obeying / disobeying commandments; knowing; loving / beloved; the world, children.

But these images are not confined to 2:1-17. They are common throughout the letter. Each image is approached with unique expansion each time it surfaces in the letter. 1 John reflects a masterful use of dramatic images as the stack poles around which discussion takes place. Light - darkness, loving - hating, knowing - not knowing, obeying - disobeying, sinful - righteous, the world are central metaphors in the letter.

