

1, 2, & 3 JOHN - A TEACHER'S GUIDE

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

This question may be broken down further as follows:

- a. Why did God do it/allow it?
- b. Why did He record it for our study?

“To be permitted to have a view of God is the highest privilege accorded to man. This privilege should be prized above all earthly distinction or honor.” *ST*, June 16, 1898

1. Do these three short letters from John the Beloved add anything to your understanding of God, His character, or His government? Why and when do you think John wrote them?

Church history tells us that John the apostle moved to Asia Minor, probably Ephesus, at some point after the death of Mary the mother of our Lord. There is no record of when John the apostle moved from Jerusalem to Asia Minor and the city of Ephesus. Philip Schaff says that it was probably not before the death of Paul around A.D. 63 [Paul's death was probably in A.D. 67.], since there are no references to John in Paul's letters to his churches in Asia Minor. He supposes that the death of Paul and Peter in Rome would have urged John to take charge of these churches. Since Ephesus was the capital of that region of the Roman Empire, it would have been the choice city to take up residence in order to manage nearby churches. Therefore, it is most likely that he moved to Ephesus in the 60's. Perhaps his move was also encouraged by the Jewish War of A.D. 66-70, which would have made Judea a very dangerous place to live.

The city of Ephesus served both as the economic center of this region and as the center of church leadership over the churches that Paul the apostle established in this region. During John's stay there he was banished to the island of Patmos during the later part of the reign of Domitian, who ruled Rome from A.D. 81 to 96. After the death of this Roman emperor John was freed and returned to Ephesus where he lived until his death.

We see in the Revelation of John a reference to the churches of Asia Minor. Jesus appears to John and gives him messages for seven churches. The fact that Jesus would give these messages to John, and not another, to deliver to the seven churches is a likely indication that John was overseeing these churches. We see from 2 and 3 John that he was called “the Elder”, which suggests an honorary title describing his leadership role in this region. It is within this context that John writes his three epistles that we find in the New Testament.—Everett, G. H. (2011). *The Epistle of 2 John. Study Notes on the Holy Scriptures (4-5)*. [Content in brackets is added based on more complete evidence.]

First John was apparently written to the church at Ephesus where John had been the pastor for a long time. It was written because a breakaway group (See 1 John 2:19.) was trying to convince others to join them. (1 John 2:26) We can guess that the breakaway group did not believe Jesus was the Messiah (1 John 2:22; 5:1) nor that He had come in

the flesh. (1 John 4:2) They felt no need of the mediatorial services of Jesus since they claimed to have direct knowledge of and fellowship with God. (1 John 1:6; 2:4) Practical Christian living, morality, and love were not as important to those in the breakaway group as visions and spiritual revelations. (1 John 4:1-4)

The First Letter of John has two main purposes: to encourage its readers to live in fellowship with God and with his Son, Jesus Christ, and to warn them against following false teaching that would destroy this fellowship. **This teaching was based on the belief that evil results from contact with the physical world, and so Jesus, the Son of God, could not really have been a human being.** Those teachers claimed that to be saved was to be set free from concern with life in this world; and **they also taught that salvation had nothing to do with matters of morality or of love for others.**

In opposition to this teaching the writer clearly states that Jesus Christ was a real human being, and he emphasizes that all who believe in Jesus and love God must also love one another. (*Good News Bible* - Introduction to 1 John)

Early Christian tradition identified this work as a letter of John the apostle. The terminology and the presence or absence of certain theological ideas in 1 John suggest that **it was written after the gospel**; it may have been composed as **a short treatise on ideas** that were developed more fully in the fourth gospel. To others, the evidence suggests that 1 John was written after the fourth gospel as part of **a debate on the proper interpretation of that gospel**. Whatever its relation to the gospel, 1 John may be dated toward the end of the first century. Unlike 2 and 3 John, it lacks in form the salutation and epistolary conclusion of a letter. These features, its prologue, and its emphasis on doctrinal teaching make it more akin to **a theological treatise** than to most other New Testament letters.

The purpose of the letter is to combat certain false ideas, especially about Jesus, and to deepen the spiritual and social awareness of the Christian community (1John 3:17). Some former members (1John 2:19) of the community refused to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ (1John 2:22) and denied that he was a true man (1John 4:2). The specific heresy described in this letter cannot be identified exactly, but it is a form of **docetism or gnosticism; the former doctrine denied the humanity of Christ to insure that his divinity was untainted, and the latter viewed the appearance of Christ as a mere stepping-stone to higher knowledge of God.** These theological errors are rejected by an appeal to the reality and continuity of the apostolic witness to Jesus. **The author affirms that authentic Christian love, ethics, and faith take place only within the historical revelation and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The fullness of Christian life as fellowship with the Father must be based on true belief and result in charitable living; knowledge of God and love for one another are inseparable, and error in one area inevitably affects the other.** Although the author recognizes that Christian doctrine presents intangible mysteries of faith about

Christ, he insists that the concrete Christian life brings to light the deeper realities of the gospel.

The structure and language of the letter are straightforward yet repetitious. The author sets forth the striking contrasts between light and darkness, Christians and the world, and truth and error to illustrate the threats and responsibilities of Christian life. **The result is not one of theological argument but one of intense religious conviction expressed in simple truths. The letter is of particular value for its declaration of the humanity and divinity of Christ as an apostolic teaching and for its development of the intrinsic connection between Christian moral conduct and Christian doctrine.** (*The New American Bible* - Introduction to 1 John)

Though this epistle does not state the name of its author, solid evidence suggests that it was written by John, the son of Zebedee and the brother of James (cf. Mark 1:19,20). Strong similarities between this letter and the Gospel of John substantiate the testimony of many early church fathers—e.g., Papias, Polycarp, and Irenaeus—that both works are the products of John, the apostle of Jesus.

The varied themes contained in this brief epistle support the view that 1 John was **a pastoral letter** designed to accomplish a number of tasks in the assemblies in which it would be read. The more prominent themes are these:

(1) The Gnostic movement, which developed fully in the second century, was already in its beginning stage. The entrance of Platonic philosophy into Christian thought was responsible in part for the existence of a small but vocal minority who claimed a special “knowledge” (*gnosis*, Gk.) which other believers did not possess. This knowledge centered around the concept of **the essential goodness of spirit and the inherent evil of all matter**. Naturally if all matter were evil, then Gnosticism would have a problem with the incarnation of Jesus—i.e., with the idea that God took upon Himself an actual body. Two methods were introduced to avoid this problem. First, the **Docetic Gnostics** (*dokeo*, Gk., meaning “to appear”) argued that Jesus only appeared to have a body. In reality He was an apparition, a phantom. To this theory 1 John is addressed. The initial verses stress the full humanity of Jesus. The second theory is sometimes called **Cerinthian Gnosticism** after its chief spokesman, Cerinthus of Ephesus, a persistent opponent of John the apostle. **Cerinthus believed that the divine Christ came upon the human Jesus at His baptism but left Him prior to the crucifixion. The Gospel of John was written to affirm the eternity and preexistence of the Christ who became flesh. Thus, while John’s Gospel presents the deity of Christ, his first epistle emphasizes Jesus’ full humanity.**

(2) A second important theme in 1 John is the assurance of salvation. Phrases emphasizing Christian certainty occur five times in this short epistle and stress the believer’s position in Christ.

(3) A third prominent theme is love. The word appears in the epistle more than thirty-five times.

(4) A fourth theme is that of proper Christian behavior. The Gnostic philosophy not only had a problem with the body of Jesus but also encountered **an ethical difficulty with the existence of the human body**. Again two views developed. The first of these, **asceticism**, was **an attempt to subject the evil, material body to the good spirit by rigorous denial and limitations forced on the body**. The second position, **antinomianism**, **viewed the body as hopelessly evil. One had only to be certain that the spiritual aspect of his being was sanctified. In that view, the body's activities were not important. This attitude gave rise to unbridled license**. John's epistle is a ringing indictment against both propositions, particularly antinomianism. (*Believer's Study Bible* - Intro to 1 John)

First John is distinctive in its emphasis on assurance of salvation. This stress is seen by the numerous references to what the believer *knows*: 1 John 2:3,5,29; 3:14,16,19,24; 4:13,16; 5:15,18-20. Further, John often speaks in terms of polarities or contrasting elements: light and darkness, love and hate, God's Spirit and the spirit of Antichrist, God's children and the children of the Devil. (*KJV Study Bible*)

Gnosticism was a problem that threatened the church in Asia Minor during the second century A.D. Gnosticism was a teaching that blended Eastern mysticism with Greek dualism (which claimed that the spirit is completely good, but matter is completely evil). This teaching was present in the church in a seminal form during the latter years of the first century. By the middle of the second century it had become a fully developed theological system, which included Gnostic gospels and epistles. John recognized the danger of Gnosticism and wrote to counteract its influence before it could sweep through the churches of Asia Minor. Based on the concept that matter is evil and spirit is good, **some Gnostics concluded that if God was truly good He could not have created the material universe. Therefore, some lesser god had to have created it. According to them, the God of the Old Testament was this lesser god. The dualistic views of Gnosticism were also reflected in the prevalent belief that Jesus did not have a physical body. This teaching, called Docetism, claimed that Jesus only appeared to have a human body and never actually suffered pain and death on the Cross.**

Another heresy that John addressed in this letter and personally confronted at Ephesus was **Cerinthianism**. This heresy taught that Jesus was just a man upon whom the "Christ" descended at His baptism, that the Christ then departed from Jesus just before His crucifixion, and that thus the spiritual Christ did not really suffer and die for humanity's sins on the Cross, but only appeared to.

There are several indications that John was addressing these heresies in this epistle. Note the use of expressions like "which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled" (1 John 1:1); "every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God" (1 John 4:2); and "He who came by water and blood" (1 John 5:6). All of these phrases use explicit and vivid

language to describe the Incarnation, the truth that Jesus is both completely God and completely human. (*Nelson's Study Bible* - Intro to 1 John)

Several considerations indicate that 1 John was written after the Gospel of John. **First**, it refers very briefly to ideas that the Gospel unfolds much more clearly and fully. Apparently the readers are presumed to have knowledge of the Gospel. **Second**, the conflict with docetism is absent from the Gospel and appears to be a later development. **Third**, there is no hint in 1 John of the ideological conflict with "the Jews" that pervades the first half of the Gospel. The Gospel shows the Christian community painfully distinguishing itself from the Jewish people, while 1 John reflects a later time, when Christian self-identification was well-established and could be presupposed.

Another indication for the date of 1 John comes from comparison with the letters of Ignatius (about A.D. 110) and Polycarp. These writings criticize false teachings similar to but more developed than those addressed in 1 John. To accommodate this development, 1 John should be dated some years earlier than 110. (*Geneva Study Bible* - Intro to 1 John)

The heresy was a forerunner of second-century Gnosticism, which taught that matter is essentially evil and spirit is essentially good. This dualistic viewpoint caused the false teachers to deny the Incarnation of Christ and, hence, the Resurrection. **The true God, they taught, could never indwell a material body of flesh and blood.** Therefore, the human body that Jesus supposedly possessed was not real, but merely apparent. John wrote vigorously against this error (see 1 John 2:22,23; 4:3).

They also taught that since the evil human body was merely an envelope for the spirit within, and since nothing the body could do could affect the inner spirit, ethical distinctions ceased to be relevant. Hence, they had no sin. John answered this error with indignation (see 1 John 2:4, 6, 15-17; 3:3, 7, 9, 10; 5:18).

"Gnosticism" is a word derived from the Greek *gnosis*, meaning "knowledge." Gnostics later taught salvation by mental enlightenment, which came only to elite spiritual initiates, not to the ordinary rank and file of Christians. Hence, **they substituted intellectual pursuits for faith and exalted speculation above the basic tenets of the gospel.** John again reacted strenuously (see 1 John 2:20,27), declaring that there is no private revelation reserved for a few intellectuals, and that the whole body of believers possesses the apostolic teaching.

John's purpose in writing, then, was to expose the heresy of the false teachers and to confirm the faith of the true believers. (*Spirit-Filled Life Study Bible* - Intro to 1 John)

Nine times in 1 John the writer addresses his readers as his "little children" and nine times among the three letters as "beloved." Likewise, he refers to himself as "the elder" (2 John 1, 3 John 1). His writing style is reflective and loosely structured, and he uses some of the simplest Greek in the New Testament.

One of the most notable features of 1 John in particular is the way in which **the writer presents his material in formulaic expressions (for example 1 John 2:12-14; 5:6-8). These may be the beginnings of creedal statements and catechisms that package truth in a memorable way so as to lock it into the reader's thinking.** (*Word-in-Life Study Bible* - Intro to 1 John)

John, Epistles of. Three epistles traditionally attributed to the apostle John, belonging to the 7 “general” or “catholic” epistles. 1 John is properly called a “general” epistle in view of the fact that it is not addressed to a specific church or individual. Strictly speaking, 2 John and 3 John are not “general” epistles, but private letters to individual members of the churches which John had served as pastor. In the earliest extant Greek manuscripts the titles of the 3 epistles are simply *Ioannou A*, “of John 1,” *Ioannou B*, “of John 2,” and *Ioannou G*, “of John 3.” The author does not identify himself in any of these epistles, but Johannine authorship is attested from earliest times, and the epistles are quoted by many of the Church Fathers. Polycarp, reputed to have been an associate of John the apostle, seems to quote from 1 John 4:3 in ch. 7 of his epistle to the Philippians, which was written c. a.d. 115. According to the church historian Eusebius, Papias (died c. a.d. 163) “used testimonies from the first [former] epistle of John” (*Hist. Eccl.* iii. 24). Writing between A.D. 182 and A.D. 188, Irenaeus quoted various passages from the first 2 epistles (*Against Heresies* iii. 16. 5, 8). The *Muratorian Fragment* (written c. A.D. 170) attributes both 1 John and 2 John to the apostle John. Thus from earliest times the authenticity and right of these epistles to a place in the canon is firmly fixed. The ancient tradition of Johannine authorship is still further strengthened by the resemblance between 1 John and the Gospel of John in style, vocabulary, word order, grammatical construction, and the pairing of opposite ideas. For instance, both begin with John’s unique designation of Christ as the “Word” that came forth from the Father (1 John 1:1-3; cf. John 1:1-3, 14). Both express the wish that the recipients’ “joy may be full” (1 John 1:4; cf. John 16:24). Both speak of “a new commandment” (1 John 2:8; cf. John 13:34) and refer to Jesus Christ as “the true light” (1 John 2:8; cf. John 1:9). Both encourage believers to “love one another” (1 John 3:11; cf. John 15:12). Both speak of the Christian as passing “from death unto life” (1 John 3:14; cf. John 5:24). Both refer to the Holy Spirit as the “Spirit of truth” (1 John 4:6; cf. John 14:17). Both speak of God as sending “his only begotten Son” into the world (1 John 4:9; cf. John 3:16), and declare that “life” is to be found in Him (1 John 5:11; cf. John 1:4). For other close verbal similarities between the Epistles and the Gospel compare 1 John 2:1 with John 14:16; 1 John 2:3 with John 14:15; 1 John 2:11 with John 12:35; 1 John 2:17 with John 8:35; 1 John 2:23 with John 15:23; 1 John 2:27 with John 14:26; 1 John 3:22 with John 8:29. For a characteristic pairing of opposite ideas compare 1 John 3:14 with John 1:5; 1 John 2:9, 10 with John 12:25; 1 John 2:8 with John 5:24. The few differences that exist between the Gospel and the Epistles can easily be attributed to difference in subject matter and degree of organization. The similarities far outweigh the dissimilarities, a fact that bears silent but impressive witness to identity of

authorship between the Epistles and the Gospel. **The author identifies himself as one of the apostles who personally saw and heard Christ during His earthly ministry** (1 John 1:1; 2; 4:14; cf. John 1:14), and affectionately addresses his converts as “little children” (1 John 2:1, 12, 18, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21), implying that he was advanced in age at the time of writing...The Gospel and the Epistles give evidence of having been written at approximately the same time. Whereas some 19th-cent. critics formerly assigned both to the latter part of the 2d cent., it is now generally agreed that manuscript evidence points conclusively to the close of the 1st cent. as the time of writing...

I. **The First Epistle of John.** Despite the fact that 1 John makes no specific identification of its author, its intended readers, the place of writing, its destination, or the time of writing—and thus lacks the usual characteristics of a Greek Letter—it is obviously an epistle. Apparently it was addressed to believers with whom the writer had been closely associated (see 1 John 2:1, 12, 18, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21). The apostle John is known to have spent the closing years of his ministry at Ephesus, as pastor of the Christian churches in the Roman province of Asia. Presumably, this epistle was addressed to these believers.

The author writes, as a pastor, to his spiritual children, assuming that they are already familiar with the principles of salvation, and admonishes them to put these principles into practice. **He stresses love—solicitous concern for the well-being and happiness of others—as the primary Christian virtue.** Such love is the basic attribute of God (1 John 4:8), and comes from God (v 7). God sent His Son to reveal this love (v 10), and believers ought to love one another (v 11). In so doing they testify to the world that they know God (v 8) and are truly converted (vs 16, 20). The love of the world and the love of the Father are mutually exclusive (1 John 2:15-17). John bases his urgent appeal to make the principle of love effective on his earnest conviction that Christ’s return is imminent (v 18). It is already “the last time” as evidenced by the appearance of many antichrists (v 18), who were once Christians (v 19). But now they deny that Jesus of Nazareth is “the Christ,” that is, the Messiah foretold by the prophets of old. They deny that Jesus is the Son of God (v 22), and that true divinity and true humanity were united in the one Person, Jesus Christ (1 John 4:3; 5:5; cf. John 3:16). **These heretical teachings are identical with those of the Docetists, who taught that Christ was merely a phantom, without a real body, and with those of the followers of Cerinthus, a Judaizing proto-Gnostic, who taught that Jesus was the natural-born son of Joseph and Mary, and that the spirit of the Christ entered His body at baptism and withdrew prior to His death on the cross.** The Docetic heresy thus denied the true humanity of Christ, where that of Cerinthus denied His true divinity. It is generally accepted that John wrote his 1st epistle particularly with the Docetic heresy in mind.

Following the introduction (1 John 1:1-4) in which John affirms Christ’s true divinity and humanity as the central truth of the gospel, he goes on (1 John 1:5-2:6) to the supreme importance of walking in the light, by which he means making a practical application of the truths of the gospel to the daily

life. When the Christian obeys Christ's commands he can know that he is "in him." In 1 John 2:7-14 John sets forth as evidence of obedience to Christ a selfless love for the brethren. Next (1 John 2:15-28), John warns against false teachers. A Christian's only safety is to hold fast the gospel as he has received it, in order to have confidence when Christ appears (v 28). Those who aspire to be sons of God will aim to be like Christ in word and deed, thus purifying their lives, even as Christ is pure (1 John 2:28-3:24). Duty toward God, John says, is summed up in believing on Jesus Christ as the Son of God and in loving one another as He commanded (1 John 3:23). In 1 John 4:1-5:12 John explains the principles by which Christian believers may tell the difference between teachers of truth and error. The **first test** to be applied is whether they acknowledge or deny that "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh." The **2nd test** is whether they adhere to the gospel as it was originally proclaimed by the apostles (1 John 4:6). The **3rd test** is whether they genuinely love the members of the household of God (vs 7, 8, 13, 20). The eternal life God has promised is in His Son, and unless men accept Jesus Christ as His Son they do not have access to this priceless gift (1 John 5:11,12). In his conclusion (vs 13-21) John reaffirms the importance of believing in Jesus as the Son of God who came to this world to impart eternal life to all who believe in Him.

II. **The Second Epistle of John.** This epistle is in the form of a private letter addressed to "the elect lady" and her "children" (2 John 1). Similarity of language and expression makes evident that 2 John was written by the same author as 1 John. Note, for instance, the expressions: "antichrist" in v 7 (cf. 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3); "walking in truth" (2 John 4; cf. 1 John 1:7); "a new commandment" (2 John 5; cf. 1 John 2:8); "love one another" (2 John 5; cf. 1 John 3:11); and "he hath both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9; cf. 1 John 5:12). 2 John 5-7, 9, 12 may be based on 1 John 1:4; 2:4, 5, 7, 18; 5:10-12, and if so would indicate the order in which the epistles were written. The writer identifies himself simply as "the elder," an appropriate title for the aged apostle John. As to length, the 2nd epistle is of the usual length for one sheet of papyrus then in common use. In this epistle John speaks of the fellowship that binds Christian believers together (2 John 2), praises the recipients of the letter for their faithfulness, and exhorts them to continue in the love of Christ (vs 4-6). He warns against false teachers and suggests how to deal with these heretics (vs 7-11). The letter closes with the hope that writer and recipients may soon meet again (2 John 12,13).

III. **The Third Epistle of John.** A comparison of this epistle with the 2nd indicates a common authorship. This epistle is a personal letter addressed to a certain Gaius, otherwise unknown, a faithful believer whom John commends for his hospitality toward the apostles and other traveling teachers. The letter deals with the Christian's duty to extend hospitality to true teachers, and to beware of false teachers. As one who has distinguished himself by extending hospitality to itinerant preachers, Gaius will appreciate the counsel John gives. The schismatic tendencies of Diotrephes are to be firmly rejected. He seems to have been an elder in the church or to have held some other prominent position in it that afforded him an opportunity to speak

against John (vs 9,10). Furthermore, he had refused to entertain visiting preachers and had forbidden those under his charge to do so, and even had gone so far as to deprive them of membership in the church (v 10). Other instruction John has in mind must wait; he expects soon to visit the church of which Gaius is a member (vs 13,14).”—Horn, S. H. (1979). In *SDA Bible Dictionary* (pp. 607–609). Review and Herald Publishing Association. [Brackets and content in brackets are in the original. Bold type is added.]

1, 2, & 3 John

The two most difficult things to get straight in life are love and God. More often than not, the mess people make of their lives can be traced to failure or stupidity or meanness in one or both of these areas.

The basic and biblical Christian conviction is that the two subjects are intricately related. If we want to deal with God the right way, we have to learn to love the right way. If we want to love the right way, we have to deal with God the right way. God and love can't be separated.

John's three letters provide wonderfully explicit direction in how this works. Jesus, the Messiah, is the focus: Jesus provides the full and true understanding of God; Jesus shows us the mature working-out of love. In Jesus, God and love are linked accurately, intricately, and indissolubly.

But there are always people around who don't want to be pinned down to the God Jesus reveals, to the love Jesus reveals. They want to make up their own idea of God, make up their own style of love. John was pastor to a church (or churches) disrupted by some of these people. In his letters we see him reestablishing the original and organic unity of God and love that comes to focus and becomes available to us in Jesus Christ. (*The Message* - Introduction to 1,2,3 John)

2. Why did John start his first letter by talking so much about seeing, hearing, and touching? What is the relationship between 1 John 1:1-3 and John 1:1-3?

As noted at some length above, a breakaway group of “Christians” were teaching the dualistic idea from Greek philosophy that spirit is good and that matter is evil. If this basic assumption is true, then it is impossible for God who is all good to dwell in or become a human body which is material and, thus, evil. While the Gospel of John focuses very strongly on Christ's divinity, the 1st epistle of John focuses on His humanity. John stated again and again that true Christianity is found only in those who recognize both Christ's full divinity and His full humanity.

3. How does it work that “The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from every sin”? (1 John 1:7, *GNB*)

The NT lays much stress on the blood of Christ in connection with the work of redemption. Jesus spoke of His own blood as being “shed for many” (Mark 14:24). We are “justified by his blood” (Romans 5:9). “We have redemption through his blood” (Ephesians 1:7). Christ made “peace through the blood of his cross” (Colossians 1:20). Those who were “far off” have been “made nigh” by His blood (Ephesians 2:13). The church of God has been “purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). We are washed “from our sins in his own blood” (Revelation 1:5).

In the OT the blood is regarded as representing life (see on Leviticus 17:11,14). God forbade men to eat “flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof” (Genesis 9:4). The shedding and sprinkling of blood in the OT sanctuary services meant the taking and the offering of the life of the animals sacrificed. Thus the antitypical shedding of the blood of Jesus means the offering of His life as a sacrifice. **The blood of Christ represents His life offered as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world.**—Nichol, F. D. (Ed.). (1980). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Vol. 6, p. 506). Review and Herald Publishing Association.[Bold type is added.]

4. What is the meaning of 1 John 1:8-10? (Compare Romans 3:4.) How do you fit this with what follows immediately in 1 John 2:1? Is it necessary for Jesus to “speak to the Father in our defense”? (1 John 2:1, *NIV*) Compare John 16:25-27.

The Bible is very clear on the fact that we are all sinners. (1 Kings 8:46; 2 Chronicles 6:36; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:23) To try to claim that we are not is simply to show that we are deceiving ourselves and accusing God of being a liar! But, God is forgiveness personified, and it is no problem for Him to forgive us. In fact, the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:20) suggests that **He forgives us even before we ask Him.** (Compare Luke 23:34.) First John is often quoted as supporting the idea that our only hope is based on the fact that Jesus is in heaven pleading on our behalf before a somewhat reluctant Father! Jesus Himself, denied that idea as recorded in John 16:25-27. Jesus also repeatedly stated that He and the Father are One and that anyone who had seen Him had seen the Father. (John 14:9; 10:30; 17:21)

Ellen White described what would have happened if the Father had come instead of the Son.

Had God the Father come to our world and dwelt among us, humbling Himself, veiling His glory, that humanity might look upon Him, the history that we have of the life of Christ would not have been changed.... In every act of Jesus, in every lesson of His instruction, we are to see and hear and recognize God. In sight, in hearing, in effect, it is the voice and movements of the Father.—Ellen G. White, *Letter 83*, 1895; *That I May Know Him* 338.4.

Then John went on to say: “But if anyone does sin, we have a helper (*paraklete*) in the presence of the Father—Jesus Christ, the One who does what is right.” (1 John 2:1, *NCV*) There is nothing in this verse in the original language to suggest that Jesus is pleading with God! **Jesus stands in God’s presence answering the accusations against us; those accusations are brought by the Devil. (Zechariah 3:1-5; Revelation 12:10) This all takes place in front of the court of the universe.** (Compare Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7; Daniel 7:9-13.)

God must make it clear to every intelligent being in the universe that we are “safe to save” and “safe” for members of the rest of the universe “to live next door to.”

Those who refuse to co-operate with God on earth would not co-operate with Him in heaven. It would not be safe to take them to heaven.—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons* 280.2.

So, Christ spreads out the full record before our future neighbors and friends. But, God goes way beyond revealing our past record of sins. God can reveal all of our future life as well. He can read our thoughts and reveal our characters. What God and the inhabitants

of the rest of the universe are concerned about is whether or not it is safe to live next door to us for the rest of eternity. If we have become the kind of people that are God's friends and, therefore, safe to live next door to, it does not really matter what our past records show. **So, it is correct for Jesus to say that there is no necessity for Him to plead with the Father for us because the Father knows and loves us Himself! (John 16:26) In the judgment, God simply makes a diagnosis based on His full knowledge of our entire lives, past and future, and demonstrates to the universe whether or not we can be safely admitted to heaven.**

So, there is no conflict between 1 John 2:1 and John 16:26. Jesus is speaking to the onlooking universe on our behalf in God's very presence; but, He certainly is not pleading for the Father to forgive us! The Father Himself loves us.

5. What is the meaning of "Christ himself is the means by which our sins are forgiven"? (1 John 2:2, *GNB*) If Christ dealt with all the sins of every person, why aren't all saved?

Following is a traditional explanation of the meaning of this text based on the forensic understanding of the gospel (from the *Believer's Study Bible*):

The only N.T. occurrences of *hilasmos* (Gk., "propitiation") appear in 1 John: here and in 1Jn 4:10. Some explain this term as a reference to expiation or the removal of sin's effect. However, the weight of evidence affirms clearly that *hilasmos* portrays the placating of God's wrath toward sin; hence, Christ's death (1Jn 1:7) satisfies the just demands of God's holy judgment against sin. Thus, Christ does not simply represent believers before God (1Jn 2:1), He also provides the grounds for their forgiveness—He is both Advocate and atoning sacrifice. Jesus' provision of propitiation does not mean that the Father is uninvolved in salvation; in actuality, God's love is the ultimate source of Christ's work (John 3:16; 1Jn 4:9). The universal extent of the atonement of Christ is nowhere clearer than here (cf. John 1:29), but this does not guarantee that everyone's sin is automatically forgiven. Christ's work applies only to those who believe in Him (cf. 1Jn 4:15; John 5:24).—Criswell, W. A., Patterson, P., Clendenen, E. R., Akin, D. L., Chamberlin, M., Patterson, D. K., & Pogue, J. (Eds.). (1991). *Believer's Study Bible* (electronic ed., 1 Jn 2:2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Note these comments from the *SDA Bible Commentary*:

...This, of course, must not be understood to mean that the sacrifice of Christ was, like pagan sacrifices, offered to conciliate an offended god and to persuade him to regard sinners more favorably.

"The atonement of Christ was not made in order to induce God to love those whom He otherwise hated; it was not made to produce a love that was not in existence; but it was made as a manifestation of the love that was already in God's heart" (*Signs of the Times*, May 30, 1895 par. 6; *7ABC* 472.3; cf. *SC* 15). Actually, God sacrificed Himself in Christ for man's redemption. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor. 5:19; cf. *DA* 762).—Nichol, F. D. (Ed.). (1980). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Vol. 6, p. 506). Review and Herald Publishing Association.

What needed to be done to "deal with sin"? (See Romans 8:3.) The record of the sinner's sins is permanently a part of this world's history. God must preserve this record

for eternity to make certain that sin will never rise again. (*ST*, December 30, 1889 par. 4; *5BC* 1132.9; *OHC* 45.4; *TA* 205.3) If someone, perhaps billions of years in the future, should be tempted to rebel and try to start a world or universe on some principle other than God's principle of love, then God will sit that person down and let him/her view the results of the last such experiment, this earth.

God is not concerned about our **past** record of sins as many suppose, but rather, He is concerned about our **future** behavior. If we have become the kind of people who are perfectly safe to live next door to for eternity, it no longer matters what kind of people we were in the past. But, in order to "deal with sin," God had to do much more than just find a legal way to "forgive" our sins. God must answer all the accusations that Satan has raised against Him and against us in the great controversy. We need to have the evidence that God can be trusted! We need to see what the results of sin are. We need to know that sin is serious not because it makes God angry, but because it is deadly. The only way for God to demonstrate that was to die Himself—the death that results from sin. Thus, Jesus died on the cross, not of crucifixion, but of sin. We do not fully understand how that works; but, God and the angels certainly do. And we were allowed to see that, in fact, Jesus died. Next, we must understand that God did not kill Him. Notice that His cry on the cross was not: "My God, My God, why are you killing Me!" but rather: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me!" (Matthew 27:46)

In the beginning, God said that sin will lead to death. (See Genesis 2:17; compare Romans 6:23.) Satan had claimed that was a lie. (Genesis 3:4) In the death of Jesus on the cross, we see the truth of God's original statement. At the cross, the truth about sin was revealed once and for all. It will never need to be done again. All the wicked who die at the end, die needless deaths. They could have taken advantage of God's gracious provision of salvation.

6. What is the relationship between "knowing God" and "keeping the commandments"? (1 John 2:3-4)

The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely—because he is required to do so—will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey.... The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right—because right doing is pleasing to God.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* 97 (1900).

A sullen submission to the will of the Father will develop the character of a rebel. By such a one service is looked upon as drudgery. It is not rendered cheerfully, and in the love of God. It is a mere mechanical performance. [If he dared, such a one would disobey. His rebellion is smothered, ready to break out at any time in bitter murmurings and complaints.] Such service brings no peace or quietude to the soul.—Ellen G. White, *MS* 20, 1897 (*MR* # 970); *Signs of the Times*, July 22, 1897 (3*ST* 400:2:1) - section in [...] omitted in *That I May Know Him* p. 120; *12MR* 236.

The only possible way to truly obey God and "keep the commandments" is by coming to know Him so well that we recognize the wisdom and rightness of all of His commands. If we attempt to keep them out of fear or perhaps out of hope of reward, sooner or later, we will fail. It is only those who come to know God well enough through study of His Word who will ultimately do what is right because it is right.

7. How do you explain John's statement in 1 John 2:18: "Children, it is the last hour"? How could he make such a statement in the A.D.90s—less than 70 years after Christ died? Was he wrong? Did the Holy Spirit "mis-inspire" him? Did John believe that the end was very near? Are we embarrassed to mention the "signs of the end" such as: 1) The Lisbon earthquake which took place on November 1, 1755? Or, 2) "The dark day," and "the moon turning to blood," which happened on May 19, 1780? Or, 3) "The falling of the stars" which occurred on November 13, 1833? It seems that such a long time has passed since those events? How do you interpret the prophecy: "This generation shall not pass away until all is fulfilled"? (Matthew 24:34) Joel was proclaiming that the end was near 700 years before Christ's first coming! (Joel 1:15; 2:1)

Try to imagine what would happen if God had said thousands of years ago that the judgment and the second coming of Christ would not take place until some 2000 years after Christ's first coming! As ordinary human beings, we would soon forget all about getting ourselves ready for His return and bury ourselves in our earthly pursuits. Furthermore, none of us knows for sure when our last day or last hour is coming. For any one of us at any moment, it could be the last hour. What would be wrong in being always prepared for His coming? Ellen White dealt with this question very well and from a prophet's perspective:

The angels of God in their messages to men represent time as very short. [See Romans 13:11, 12; 1 Corinthians 7:29; 1 Thessalonians 4:15, 17; Hebrews 10:25; James 5:8, 9; 1 Peter 4:7; 1 John 2:18; Revelation 22:6, 7.] Thus it has always been presented to me. It is true that time has continued longer than we expected in the early days of this message. Our Saviour did not appear as soon as we hoped. But has the Word of the Lord failed? Never! It should be remembered that the promises and the threatenings of God are alike conditional. [See Jeremiah 18:7-10; Jonah 3:4-10.]...—Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events* 38.3.

God had committed to His people a work to be accomplished on earth. The third angel's message was to be given, the minds of believers were to be directed to the heavenly sanctuary, where Christ had entered to make atonement for His people. The Sabbath reform was to be carried forward. The breach in the law of God must be made up. The message must be proclaimed with a loud voice, that all the inhabitants of earth might receive the warning. The people of God must purify their souls through obedience to the truth, and be prepared to stand without fault before Him at His coming.

Had Adventists, after the great disappointment in 1844, held fast their faith and followed on unitedly in the opening providence of God, receiving the message of the third angel and in the power of the Holy Spirit proclaiming it to the world, they would have seen the salvation of God, the Lord would have wrought mightily with their efforts, the work would have been completed, and Christ would have come ere this to receive His people to their reward. But in the period of doubt and uncertainty that followed the disappointment, many of the advent believers yielded their faith.... Thus the work was hindered, and the world was left in darkness. Had the whole Adventist body united upon the commandments of [696] God and the faith of Jesus, how widely different would have been our history!

It was not the will of God that the coming of Christ should be thus delayed. God did not design that His people, Israel, should wander forty years in the wilderness. He promised to lead them directly to the land of Canaan, and establish them there a holy, healthy, happy people. But those to whom it was first preached, went not in “because of unbelief.” Their hearts were filled with murmuring, rebellion, and hatred, and He could not fulfill His covenant with them.

For forty years did unbelief, murmuring, and rebellion shut out ancient Israel from the land of Canaan. The same sins have delayed the entrance of modern Israel into the heavenly Canaan. In neither case were the promises of God at fault. It is the unbelief, the worldliness, unconsecration, and strife among the Lord’s professed people that have kept us in this world of sin and sorrow so many years.—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript 4*, 1883; *Evangelism* 695.1-696.2; *Mar* 61.2-6; *1SM* 67.8-69.1. [Content in brackets is present in the original source in a footnote.]

8. If John was wrong about it being “the last hour,” was he wrong also when he said, “God is love”? (1 John 4:8) And when he said, “Sin is the transgression of the law”? (1 John 3:4) Does it mean that for those people it was the last hour, but for the rest of the world it was not? How do you think the people who actually received the letter understood it? What would people do if God said: “Don’t worry; it’s not the last hour; you’ve got plenty of time left”? Did God inspire John to write this just to keep us on our toes?

John was not wrong. Since John himself was probably well into his nineties when he wrote this, he recognized that he could die any day; for him that would be his last hour. None of us knows when some tragedy might strike us, and it would become our last hour. For this reason God encourages us to stay awake and be prepared at all times.

9. By the time Jesus had died the second death, been buried over Sabbath, and rose to return to heaven on Sunday, weren’t all the major questions answered to the satisfaction of the universe looking on? Did they have any more significant questions about God’s character and His government? Would it not be true then, that if at some point we got the message and truly began to preach it, the work could be finished quickly? If God is the kind of Person many have claimed that He is—arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe—would it be good news to hear that He is coming back?

This is not an act of arbitrary power on the part of God. The rejecters of His mercy reap that which they have sown. God is the fountain of life; and when one chooses the service of sin, he separates from God, and thus cuts himself off from life. He is “alienated from the life of God.” Christ says, “All they that hate Me love death.” Ephesians 4:18; Proverbs 8:36. God gives them existence for a time that they may develop their character and reveal their principles. This accomplished, they receive the results of their own choice. By a life of rebellion, Satan and all who unite with him place themselves so out of harmony with God that His very presence is to them a consuming fire. The glory of Him who is love will destroy them.

At the beginning of the great controversy, the angels did not understand this. Had Satan and his host then been left to reap the full result of their sin, they would have perished; but it would not have been apparent to heavenly beings that this was the inevitable result of sin. A doubt of God’s goodness

would have remained in their minds as evil seed, to produce its deadly fruit of sin and woe.

But not so when the great controversy shall be ended. Then, the plan of redemption having been completed, the character of God is revealed to all created intelligences. The precepts of His law are seen to be perfect and immutable. Then sin has made manifest its nature, Satan his character. Then the extermination of sin will vindicate God's love and establish His honor before a universe of beings who delight to do His will, and in whose heart is His law.

Well, then, might the angels rejoice as they looked upon the Saviour's cross; for though they did not then understand all, they knew that the destruction of sin and Satan was forever made certain, that the redemption of man was assured, and that the universe was made eternally secure. Christ Himself fully comprehended the results of the sacrifice made upon Calvary. To all these He looked forward when upon the cross He cried out, "It is finished."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 764.1-764.4.

The times and seasons God has put in His own power. And why has not God given us this knowledge?—Because we would not make a right use of it if He did. A condition of things would result from this knowledge among our people that would greatly retard the work of God in preparing a people to stand in the great day that is to come. We are not to be engrossed with speculations in regard to the times and the seasons which God has not revealed. Jesus has told His disciples to "watch," but not for definite time. His followers are to be in the position of those who are listening for the orders of their Captain; they are to watch, wait, pray, and work, as they approach the time for the coming of the Lord; but no one will be able to predict just when that time will come; for "of that day and hour knoweth no man." **You will not be able to say that He will come in one, two, or five years, neither are you to put off His coming by stating that it may not be for ten or twenty years.... We are not to know the definite time either for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit or for the coming of Christ.**—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, March 22, 1892 par. 10; *Ev* 221.1; *1SM* 189.2; *Hvn* 166.1; *LDE* 33.2; *Mar* 136.2; *1888* 959.3. [Bold type is added.]

Why have we not taken these words seriously and set about to finish the gospel in our lifetimes? Wouldn't that make God happy? Why would we want to make Him wait another generation in the hope that they might do a better job? Hasn't God waited long enough?

10. What do you think of John's explanation of why some people leave the church? (1 John 2:19)

Is it true that everyone who leaves the church does so because he was never really part of the church in the first place? A number of research studies have determined that for a person to become a member of a church and remain there permanently, s/he must experience at least two of the following three things:

- 1) Be reasonably convinced that the doctrines and teachings are correct;
- 2) Make real friends among the members;

3) Get involved in church activities.

How does that fit with John's comments?

11. What is suggested by 1 John 3:2, (GNB): "...We know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he really is"? Isn't the purpose of these studies to see God as He really is?

In the book *Great Controversy* p. 555, Ellen White wrote:

It is a law both of the intellectual and the spiritual nature that by beholding we become changed. The mind gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is allowed to dwell. It becomes assimilated to that which it is accustomed to love and reverence. Man will never rise higher than his standard of purity or goodness or truth. If self is his loftiest ideal, he will never attain to anything more exalted. Rather, he will constantly sink lower and lower. The grace of God alone has power to exalt man. Left to himself, his course must inevitably be downward.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* 555.1. [Bold type is added.]

As we get more acquainted with Jesus and realize what a wonderful Person He is, won't we want to become more like Him? Shouldn't that result in our becoming more and more like Him? That is a process that we may hope will continue for the rest of eternity.

12. What is the meaning of 1 John 3:4? What really is sin? (Compare James 4:17 and Romans 14:23.)

As suggested by the references cited above, there are three texts in the Bible which define *sin*.

1 John 3:4 (GNB): Whoever sins is guilty of breaking God's law, because sin is a breaking of the law.

Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.—*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. (1989). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

James 4:17 (GNB): So then, those who do not do the good they know they should do are guilty of sin.

Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin.—*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. (1989). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Romans 14:23 (GNB): But if they have doubts about what they eat, God condemns them when they eat it, because their action is not based on faith. And anything that is not based on faith is sin.

But those who have doubts are condemned if they eat, because they do not act from faith; for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.—*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. (1989). (Romans 14:23). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

What do you think of these three definitions of *sin*? A careful look at the three verses suggests that 1 John is the most narrow definition. James 4:17 takes a more positive approach to the understanding of *sin* and is more broad. But, clearly, the most comprehensive definition of *sin* is Romans 14:23. But what is faith?

A biblical definition of faith based on all of Scripture and stated so well by one of God's best modern friends, Dr. A. Graham Maxwell, is as follows:

Faith is [just] a word we use to denote a relationship with God as with a Person well known. The better we know Him, the better this relationship may be.

Faith implies an attitude toward God of love, trust, and deep admiration. It means having enough confidence in Him, based upon the more than adequate evidence revealed, to be willing to believe whatever He says [as soon as we are sure that He has said it], to accept whatever He offers [as soon as we are sure that He is the one who is offering it], and to do whatever He wishes [as soon as we are sure He is the one who wishes it]—without reservation—for the rest of eternity.

Anyone who has such faith is perfectly safe to save. This is why faith is the only requirement for heaven. [Faith also means that like Abraham and Moses, God's friends, we know God well enough to reverently ask Him, "Why?"]—A. Graham Maxwell, *You Can Trust the Bible*, p. 81. [Content in brackets is added based on Dr. Maxwell's lectures.]

If we are willing to accept that definition of *faith*, then we can conclude that anything that brings us closer to God is promoting faith; and anything that takes us away from God is, therefore, sin/lawlessness/rebellion.

Thus, we see that all three definitions fit together. Sin is lawlessness or rebelliousness because it is a violation of God's law and shows that we are in rebellion against God. The same is true when we know what is right to do and we choose not to do it. That is rebellion or lawlessness; it certainly does not bring us any closer to God in that relationship we call *faith*.

13. Does 1 John 3:8 explain why Jesus came to this earth? What would be suggested by this explanation? Without the great controversy perspective, what would this verse mean?

Read Romans 8:3 in the *Good News Bible*. Jesus came to refute and answer all of Satan's claims and accusations. Even the angels in heaven had questions after Satan's rebellion in heaven. But, none of those accusations have been proven to be true. They are all lies from the father of all lies! (John 8:44) So, it is true that Jesus, by bringing us the truth, has destroyed the works of the Devil?

14. What is the meaning of 1 John 3:9: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin;...and he cannot sin, because he is born of God"? (KJV) (Compare 1 John 3:6.) Does this mean that if we catch ourselves falling into sin, we were not truly converted? How do you fit this with Jesus's statements in John 3 and 1 John 2:1? Was Moses not converted throughout his life—even though he spoke to God "face-to-face" (Numbers 12:8) and God called him His friend (Exodus 33:11)—because he sinned at the rock near the end of his life? (Numbers 20:12) (To clarify these verses, be sure to look in modern versions.) If "sin is rebelliousness," (1 John 3:4) what is the real issue? What does 1 John 3:4 teach us about the real nature of sin?

Most modern versions will clarify the meaning in these verses. Take for example the *Good News Bible*:

1 John 3:9 (GNB): None of those who are children of God continue to sin, for God’s very nature is in them; and because God is their Father, they cannot continue to sin.

The present tense verb in the Greek implies a continuous action. If we continue to sin and ignore God’s offer of help to stop sinning, it should be clear why such people will not be saved. On the other hand, if we do accept God’s help and are transformed by our relationship with Him, then we will be able to stop sinning sooner or later.

15. How should we “test the spirits”? (1 John 4:1-3) Would you feel comfortable “testing” the Holy Spirit? John suggested that they should already have known that the Antichrist was coming. Who had already talked about the Antichrist and tested all things? (1 Thessalonians 5:19-22; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12)

That is what makes God so believable and trustworthy. That is why it is safe to have faith in Him. God has nothing to fear from the closest possible scrutiny. He is not trying to deceive anyone. He is not trying to hide anything. On the other hand, the Devil has been lying since the time he was in heaven. Nothing he says is trustworthy. So, God simply says, “Test everything.” If we do that, God will always win.

16. Is 1 John 4:8 the most convincing evidence in your mind that “God is love”? After having read through the Old Testament and the New Testament, do you need a key text to tell you this? In your mind what is the most convincing evidence of all that “God is love”?

A careful reading of the entire Bible should, once and for all, answer the question about whether God is love. But, the most convincing evidence must ultimately be the life and death of Jesus Christ. John 3:16 points clearly to that evidence. 1 John 4:8,16 just point to John’s obvious conclusions based on all the evidence that God had provided up to that time. These three short letters may have been the last things to have been written in our Bible, and John was assuming that his readers would be quite familiar with the content of all of Scripture.

17. How do you understand 1 John 4:18 (GNB): “There is no fear in love, perfect love drives out all fear”? Can you fit this with Proverbs 9:10 in the Old Testament and Revelation 14:6-11—the three angels’ messages—which was also written by John? How would you feel if God, the Father, walked into your home right now to visit you? If fear has to do with punishment, *should* we be afraid of God? (Compare *Selected Messages, book 1*, 235.)

Based on a correct understanding of God and the great controversy, we should love God and be deathly afraid of sin. But, unfortunately, the Devil has turned that upside-down. Because of the long period of time during the Dark Ages when people were threatened with “God’s punishment”—eternally-burning hell fire—if they did not do exactly what the church demanded of them, people came to fear God. And because sin has become so rampant, we find ourselves surrounded by it all the time. So, even if at one time we had a healthy fear of sin, many of us have become so familiar with it that we have come to think of it as almost normal! So, what should we do to correct this situation? The only permanent solution is to focus on the life of Christ and the teachings of the Bible until what is going on in the world becomes offensive to us.

All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses. The will, refined and

sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. **When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 668.3. [Bold type is added.]

18. Do you agree with the logic in 1 John 4:20 and 5:1? (Compare 1 John 3:14; 4:7-12.)

Does it seem logical to you that if you do not love your brothers and sisters, you cannot love God? Is this a denial of sibling rivalry? Do we have to love everyone that we have “seen” before we can love Someone whom we have “not seen”? Some people have come from very dysfunctional families. They may not have spoken to some of their family members for years. Does that mean it is impossible for them to love God? Ellen White stated plainly that to know God is to love Him.

The earth was dark through misapprehension of God. That the gloomy shadows might be lightened, that the world might be brought back to God, Satan’s deceptive power was to be broken. This could not be done by force. The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God’s government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened. ***To know God is to love Him***; His character must be manifested in contrast to the character of Satan. This work only one Being in all the universe could do. Only He who knew the height and depth of the love of God could make it known. Upon the world’s dark night the Sun of Righteousness must rise, “with healing in His wings.” Malachi 4:2.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 22.1; AG 23.3; RC 23.3. [Bold type and italics are added.]

To know each of our family members may not lead us to love them! And what about our Christian brothers and sisters? Are they always lovable? Some would interpret this verse to mean that those who are members of God’s family—begotten of God—will love God and love those who are members of God’s family. Is that what is intended? John suggested in John 13:34-35 that Christians will stand out in the world because of their love for one another. Shouldn’t that be our goal?

19. Have you ever felt that you would like to pray for a friend but could not because they had committed a “mortal” sin? (1 John 5:16) What kind of sin “leads to death”? (NIV) What kind of sin “does not lead to death”? (NIV) Did John give us a clear way to distinguish between the two types of sin? Compare Hebrews 6:4-6 and Hebrews 10:26. Is there a type of sin that even God cannot forgive and deal with? What makes a sin “unpardonable”? If prayer is “conversation with God as with a friend,” shouldn’t we talk to God about anything that concerns us?

In this passage John was discussing those who continue to sin and hold God up to public shame. This was discussed also in Hebrews 6:46; 10:26-29. The sin this is “unto death” is the sin that we are not willing to give up. It is the sin that we continue to commit. Remember that sin separates us from God, and God is the only Source of life. (Isaiah 59:2; Acts 17:28)

The Holy Spirit is the One who reaches out to us to help us and convince us of the truth. He works with the angels to pull together the people of God. If we refuse His help, God does not have any other agency through which to work with us. He works in the name

of Jesus to accomplish all that God wants to do in us. (Acts 4:12) If we reject the Holy Spirit, what other means does God have to draw us? What would it mean to reject the Holy Spirit? How does a person do that? Can we be sure that we have not committed the “unpardonable sin”? If you are worried about committing the unpardonable sin, then you have not committed it! (Matthew 12:31-32)

20. Why do none of the modern versions include the last half of 1 John 5:7 (KJV)? This appears to be an excellent verse supporting the Trinity. Do the modern versions leave it out because the modern translators no longer believe in the Trinity?

See *Comma Johanneum*:

F. F. Bruce tells us that 1 John 5:7 first appears in the writings of the Priscillian, a Spanish Latin heretic (d. A.D. 385). Priscillian writes:

“As John says ‘and there are three which give testimony on earth, the water, the flesh the blood, and these three are in one, and there are three which give testimony in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Spirit, and these three are one in Christ Jesus.’” (*Liber Apologeticus*)—Everett, G. H. (2011). *The Epistle of 1 John. Study Notes on the Holy Scriptures* (34).

There is no evidence to suggest that the last half of 1 John 5:7 was in the original manuscript.

2 John

James MacKnight notes that although five of the General Epistles (James, 2 Peter, 2&3 John, and Jude) were slow in being received into the New Testament canon by the early Church, it does not mean that they were viewed as forgeries; it rather showed that slow circulation of these epistles had not allowed them to be as quickly judged and proven authentic. This is because the New Testament church was extremely careful before accepting any book as canonical, and did in fact identify certain writings as forgeries. Westcott says, “As a general rule, quotations have a value positively, but not negatively: they may shew that a writing was received as authoritative, but it cannot fairly be argued from this fact alone that another which is not quoted was unknown or rejected as apocryphal.”

Another reason that the epistles of James, 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude were not quickly recognized by the early Church was the brevity of these letters. This brevity gave them less attention during public readings, since they were not immediately recognized as circulatory letters. This circumstance accounts for their slow circulation and for them being omitted from some of the earliest translations of the Christian Scriptures and canons. Because of their slower circulation, they were much less referred to by the earliest church fathers, making it more difficult to establish their genuineness. However, apostolic authorship won their favor by the time the canon was officially closed.—Everett, G. H. (2011). *The Epistle of 2 John. Study Notes on the Holy Scriptures* (5).

21. Do you think the *elect lady* mentioned in 2 John 1 and 5 referred to a particular woman? Or, does she represent a whole church?

Many scholars believe that *elect lady* was a code word for a church. But, whether or not it was a code word for a church, 2 John is a very short letter with only 245 Greek words; so, it was written on a single piece of papyrus—the shortest book in the Bible.

1:1 “The elder unto the elect lady and her children”—“The elder”—John the apostle uses this term partly out of respect for his old age, and perhaps out of respect for [his] position in the church as the last living apostle. Although this title was commonly given to the leaders of local churches, John uses it in humility and in love for those whom he oversees. He also uses this same title in his third epistle.

3 John 1:1, “The elder unto the wellbeloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth.”

Note that Peter also uses this title in his first epistle.

1 Peter 5:1, “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:”

The fact that John does not use his title as apostle like Paul did so often may lie in the fact that John’s office was not as challenged as Paul’s office. John was clearly one of the twelve chosen apostles. In comparison, Paul had to earn and defend his authority as an apostle.

“The elect lady”—The Greek word for “lady” is *Kuria*, or “Cyria.” John Gill points out that this Greek name “Cyria” would be translated “Dominia” with the Romans, or “Martha” with the Hebrews, since *EL* signifies “lord” in the Hebrew, with the proper name rendered (אתרמ), thus, “Martha.”

Albert Barnes tells us that the ancient Syriac and Arabic translators understand the Greek phrase “the elect lady” (*eklektae kuria*) to be an individual, for both have retained the proper name Cyria in their text. Barnes goes on to say that there is evidence in other literature of this period of people who carried this name. Therefore, he renders this passage, “The presbyter unto the elect Cyria.”

However, the Greek leaves off the definite article “the”, and allows for the subject to become “an elect lady.” I believe that the tone of this letter allows it to be for circulation among sister churches. He rejoices in the children walking in truth (verse 4). He addresses a warning in the plural, to all of you (verse 10). He desires to come and speak to them (in the plural) (verse 13).

Also, it is evident that John addresses in the plural his recipients throughout the entire epistle except in verse 5 (I beseech thee, lady ... unto thee) and in 13 (the children of thy elect sister greet thee). Otherwise, John mostly addresses in the plural.

Finally, verse 13 sends a greeting from “thy elect sister,” thus strongly implying a sister church.

“and her children”—This term could have been used literally or figuratively to mean church members. Note:

Galatians 4:19, “My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you,”

Galatians 4:25, “For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.”

1 Timothy 1:2, “Unto Timothy, my own son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.”

1 John 2:1, “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:”

John uses this term ten times in his first epistle to describe his recipients.—Everett, G. H. (2011). *The Epistle of 2 John. Study Notes on the Holy Scriptures* (25–26). [Brackets and content in brackets are added for clarification.]

22. Who are the deceivers referred to in 2 John 7? Compare 1 John 4:1-3; Matthew 24:23-24.

2 John 7 (GNB): Many deceivers have gone out all over the world, people who do not acknowledge that Jesus Christ came as a human being. Such a person is a deceiver and the Enemy of Christ.

1 John 4:1-3 (GNB): ¹ My dear friends, do not believe all who claim to have the Spirit, but test them to find out if the spirit they have comes from God. For many false prophets have gone out everywhere. ² This is how you will be able to know whether it is God’s Spirit: anyone who acknowledges that Jesus Christ came as a human being has the Spirit who comes from God. ³ But anyone who denies this about Jesus does not have the Spirit from God. The spirit that he has is from the Enemy of Christ; you heard that it would come, and now it is here in the world already.

Matthew 24:23-24 (GNB): ²³ [Jesus said:] “Then, if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or ‘There he is!’—do not believe it. ²⁴ For false Messiahs and false prophets will appear; they will perform great miracles and wonders in order to deceive even God’s chosen people, if possible.” [Content in brackets is added.]

The troublemakers are clearly identified later in the present verse: they are those who deny the full implications of the incarnation....The clause reads literally, “those not confessing Jesus Christ coming in flesh.” The form of the Greek verb emphasizes the timelessness of the truth of the incarnation, in contrast with 1 John 4:2, where the historical fact is stressed.—Nichol, F. D. (Ed.). (1980). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Vol. 7, pp. 687–688). Review and Herald Publishing Association.

But it may well be that C. H. Dodd is right when he says that in a late Greek writer like John, who did not know Greek as the great classical knew it, we cannot lay all this stress on tense; and that we are better to take it that he means the same as he meant in 1 John 4:2. That is, these deceivers are denying the reality of the incarnation and therefore denying that God can fully enter into the life of man.

It is intensely significant to note how the great thinkers held on with both hands to the reality of the incarnation. In the second century, again and again Ignatius insists that Jesus was *truly* born, that he *truly* become man,

that he *truly* suffered and that he *truly* died. Vincent Taylor, in his book on *The Person of Christ*, reminds us of two great statements of the incarnation. Martin Luther said of Jesus: "He ate, drank, slept, waked; was weary, sorrowful, rejoicing; he wept and he laughed; he knew hunger and thirst and sweat; he talked, he toiled, he prayed ... so that there was no difference between him and other men, save only this, that he was God, and had no sin." Emil Brunner cites that passage, and then goes on to say, "The Son of God in whom we are able to believe must be such a One that it is possible to mistake him for any ordinary man."

If God could enter life only as a disembodied phantom, the body stands for ever despised; then there can be no real communion between the divine and the human; then there can be real salvation. He had to become what we are to make us what he is.—Barclay, W. (Ed.). (1976). *The Letters of John and Jude* (pp. 142-143). Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster John Knox Press.

John was making a strong statement against the heresy known as docetism, a form of gnosticism which was gaining ground in the early Christian church.

23. How could John who spoke of laying down one's life for the brethren (1 John 3:16) say what is recorded in 2 John 10-11 (*GNB*)?

So then, if some come to you who do not bring this teaching, do not welcome them in your homes; do not even say, "Peace be with you." For anyone who wishes them peace becomes their partner in the evil things they do.

Does this remind you of Paul's statements in Galatians 1:6-10?

1 John 3:16 (*GNB*): This is how we know what love is: Christ gave his life for us. We too, then, ought to give our lives for our brothers and sisters!

2 John 10-11 (*GNB*): ¹⁰ So then, if someone comes to you who does not bring this teaching, do not welcome him or her in your homes; do not even say, "Peace be with you." ¹¹ For anyone who wishes them peace becomes their partner in the evil things they do.

Galatians 1:6-10 (*GNB*): ⁶ I am surprised at you! In no time at all you are deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ, and are accepting another gospel. ⁷ Actually, there is no "other gospel", but I say this because there are some people who are upsetting you and trying to change the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel that is different from the one we preached to you, may he be condemned to hell! ⁹ We have said it before, and now I say it again: if anyone preaches to you a gospel that is different from the one you accepted, may he be condemned to hell!

¹⁰ Does this sound as if I am trying to win human approval? No indeed! What I want is God's approval! Am I trying to be popular with people? If I were still trying to do so, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Note this comment: This apparently inhospitable counsel applies only in the case of a "deceiver" and "antichrist" (v. 7), and has no direct bearing on the hospitality that Christians should cheerfully show to needy friends and strangers (see Matt. 25:35; Heb. 13:2). There would be no point in receiving

a visitor who was determined to deceive the church of God....It is not possible for a Christian to “rejoice” or to wish God’s blessing on a “deceiver.” He may pray for him, that he may see the error of his ways and turn to embrace the full gospel of Christ, but Christian fellowship is not possible between the believer and the false teacher (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9-13).—Nichol, F. D. (Ed.). (1980). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Vol. 7, p. 689). Review and Herald Publishing Association.

HERE we see very clearly the danger which John saw in these false teachers. They are to be given no hospitality; and the refusal of hospitality would be the most effective way of stopping their work. John goes further; they are not even to be given a greeting on the street. This would be to indicate that to some extent you had sympathy with them. It must be made quite clear to the world that the church has no tolerance for those whose teaching destroys the faith. This passage may seem on the face of it to run counter to Christian love; but C. H. Dodd had certain very wise things to say about it.

It is by no means without parallel. When the saintly Polycarp met the heretic Marcion, Marcion said: “Do you recognize me?” “I recognize Satan’s first-born,” answered Polycarp. It was John himself who fled from the public baths when Cerinthus, the heretic, entered them. “Let us hurry away lest the building collapse on us,” he said, “because Cerinthus, the enemy of truth, is here.”—Barclay, W. (Ed.). (1976). *The Letters of John and Jude* (p. 144). Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster John Knox Press.

Both John and Paul were making a very clear distinction between those who were faithful to the gospel message and those who were trying to pollute or dilute that message.

3 John:

It is most likely that the General Epistles were written during the time when the early Church experienced its first large-scale persecutions at the hands of the Roman Emperors Nero (A.D. 54–68) and Domitian (A.D. 81–96). It was this season of persecutions that occasioned the need to write and encourage these early believers to hold fast to their faith in Christ, even at the cost of their lives.

Both internal and external evidence suggests that John wrote all three epistles during his later years while overseeing the churches in Asia Minor. He most likely lived in Ephesus when he wrote His Gospel and three epistles. Eusebius (A.D. 260 to 340) tells us that after John returned from the Island of Patmos he went on missionary journeys to set in order the nearby churches of Asia Minor.

“Listen to a tale, which is not a mere tale, but a narrative concerning John the apostle, which has been handed down and treasured up in memory. For when, after the tyrant’s death, he returned from the isle of Patmos to Ephesus, he went away upon their invitation to the neighboring territories of the Gentiles, to appoint bishops in some places, in other places to set in order whole churches, elsewhere to choose to the ministry some one of those that were pointed out by the Spirit.” (Ecclesiastical History 3.23.5)

It is possible that John wrote the second and third epistles in preparation for these missionary journeys, as evidenced in the following verses.

2 John 1:12, “Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full.”

3 John 1:10, “Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.”

3 John 1:14, “But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to thee. Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name.”

Therefore, it is likely that John wrote these two epistles at the same period of time, and after he wrote his Revelation. They would have most likely been written in Ephesus in the later part of the first century.—Everett, G. H. (2011). *The Epistle of 3 John* (p. 12).

24. Do 2 John 12 and 3 John 13 suggest that John had to do his own writing rather than using a secretary?

2 John 12 (GNB): I have so much to tell you, but I would rather not do it with paper and ink; instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you personally, so that we shall be completely happy.

3 John 13 (GNB): I have so much to tell you, but I do not want to do it with pen and ink.

In this letter the apostle has dealt only with the most urgent matter, to warn his readers about the danger of false teachers. Many other topics call for attention, but they can best be dealt with more clearly and expeditiously by word of mouth. John appears to be his own secretary.—Nichol, F. D. (Ed.). (1980). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Vol. 7, p. 689). Review and Herald Publishing Association.

That is, when John began to write the epistle he planned to discuss many matters, but contemplation of the grave situation in connection with the work of Diotrephes leads him to plan an early visit to the troubled church.—Nichol, F. D. (Ed.). (1980). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Vol. 7, p. 698). Review and Herald Publishing Association.

The best way to destroy our enemies, as Abraham Lincoln said, is to make them our friends. We can never compromise with mistaken teachers but we are never free from the obligation of seeking to lead them into the truth....John was wise and he knew that letters can often only bedevil a situation and that five minutes heart to heart talk can do what a whole file of letters is powerless to achieve. In many a church and in many a personal relationship, letters have merely succeeded in exacerbating a situation; for the most carefully written letter can be misinterpreted, when a little speech together might have mended matters. Cromwell never understood John Fox, the Quaker, and much disliked him. Then he met him, and after he had spoken to him, he said, “If you and I had but an hour together, we would be better friends than we are.” Church courts and Christian people would do well to make a resolution never to write when they could speak.—Barclay, W.

(Ed.). (1976). *The Letters of John and Jude* (p. 145). Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster John Knox Press.

It seems clear that John had in mind to visit the church to which these letters were addressed as soon as possible. He recognized the safety of personal contact and *face-to-face* conversation or, according to the Greek, *mouth-to-mouth* communication.

25. Has the truth set us free of the greatest bondage of all—misunderstanding and fear of God? Have you ever been afraid of God? Have you ever felt totally free of the fear of God?

This is a thought question for you to answer personally. We hope the answer is that you now feel more comfortable with God while being totally reverent and respectful.

26. Is the testimony of Jesus the truth that He revealed about His Father's character?

The book of Revelation speaks a great deal about the "testimony of Jesus." What is that? Would it coincide with the truth that He came to bear about the Father?

The law of Jehovah was burdened with needless exactions and traditions, and **God was represented as severe, exacting, revengeful, and arbitrary.** He was pictured as one who could take pleasure in the sufferings of his creatures. The very attributes that belonged to the character of Satan, the evil one represented as belonging to the character of God. **Jesus came to teach men of the Father, to correctly represent him before the fallen children of earth. Angels could not fully portray the character of God, but Christ, who was a living impersonation of God, could not fail to accomplish the work. The only way in which he could set and keep men right was to make himself visible and familiar to their eyes....**

Christ exalted the character of God, attributing to him the praise, and giving to him the credit, of the whole purpose of his own mission on earth,—to set men right through the revelation of God. In Christ was arrayed before men the paternal grace and the matchless perfections of the Father. In his prayer just before his crucifixion, he declared, "I have manifested thy name." "I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." When the object of his mission was attained,—the revelation of God to the world,—the Son of God announced that his work was accomplished, and that the character of the Father was made manifest to men.—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, January 20, 1890, par. 6,9; **contrast *ST* December 4, 1893; *Manuscript Releases*, vol 18, 358.3-359.1; *RH* August 14, 1900; *YI* November 21, 1883; *RH*, November 1, 1892 par. 12. [Bold type is added.]**

Don't these words make it very clear that the "whole purpose of His mission" was to reveal the truth about God the Father?

27. Would you be ready to lay down your life for the brethren? (1 John 3:16)

The early Christian leaders faced death every day. It is hard for us to imagine such a situation in our day; but, we understand that days like that will come again in the future. Are we ready? Tertullian (ca. 155-240 A.D.) said: "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." (*Apologeticus*, Chapter 50) Will that be true again some day?

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Last Modified: May 10, 2016

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