

## **3 EPISTLES OF JOHN**

(Lesson 15) - Pastor Joh. W. Matutis

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### **Concerning the studying**

I **recommend** you to read through the respective book in the bible at first. Our manual is the bible. And then to go through one or two pages of the material every day, which implies to also look up and read the given bible scriptures to become thoroughly acquainted with the subject. Another suggestion would be to use this material as one's regular devotion.

If you would like to **obtain a degree (certificate) at the end of the seminar**, you need to answer the **test questions** at the end of each lesson and send or email it to us with your full name and address. And now I wish you lots of joy and spiritual profit during your bible study.

**Pastor Joh. W. Matutis**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The three Epistles of John are definitely written by the author of the fourth Gospel.

They are **remarkably unique in their style and content**. John writes very different than Paul. Even with Peter or James John cannot be compared.

This is a typical characteristic of the abundance of the New Testament. Even though the Gospel of John is very different, he does "**not preach a different gospel**" than Paul, James or Peter. While Paul writes his letters usually **divided by topics** and wants to help his audience with his explanatory and convincing teaching, John rather uses a variety of **„terminologies“**. Those are „truths“, „realities“ resp. „evidence of works“, that can only be understood provided a certain spiritual maturity.

John loves **„antithesis“**, so that the following sentence expresses the **negative or positive** complement to the previous sentence (comp. 1Joh 1,6 & 7; 2,1a & b; 2,4 & 5; 2,9 & 10; 2,24a & b; 3,6a & B; 3,7 & 8; 3,20 & 21; 4,7 & 8; 4,12 & 13; 5,1 & 2; 5,10a & b).

In this way neither Paul, nor Peter nor James have written their texts. It is the original, unique way of expression of John, which is already evident in the Gospel of John (Joh 1,11; 1,12; 12,37 and 12,41.42).

**John always enlightens a keyword from different perspectives.** And he provides the crucial truths in short radical sentences without attempt to reason or explain his point. There are no compromising words trying to soften the brusqueness of the statement. The sentences in themselves are **easy to understand** and consist of simple, distinct words. This forces the reader to **be confronted with the truth of the statement** and find out for himself how it applies to him and his life. Nobody can complain that he cannot understand the words and no specific ability of interpretation is required to get to the core of the subject. Compromises are out of question for John. We have to consider that such sentences as in **1Joh 3,6-9** came from the apostle himself, who made the **love of the brethren** the center of his thinking like no other. His harsh statements are always serving the **ministry of love!**

John can **speak harsh out of love** because to him – corresponding to the basics of the New Testament – it is not about human **„moral“**. His demands are always based on the love that God gave us and poured into us in His love for us. We can see that from scriptures like 1Joh 3,3.9.16; 4,11.19.

In the Epistle of John we do not find **words of moral condemnation**. Compared to Paul **John is not a systematist**. He is consumed with truth in every way and presents it to the readers as simple and neutral as possible. He is obviously so taken by the divine revelation and spiritual truth, that he keeps coming back to it and presents the facts again from another point of view. Even under the risk that this might cause contradiction. In many verses **„love“** is a characteristic of one who **„knows God“**. Then again it is about **„doing the right thing“**, and the fulfillment of the commandments (1Joh 2,33.4; 2,29; 4,7). And then again all seems to be rooted in love and the right dogmatic theology : 1Joh 2,22 f; 4,2 f; 5,1.

In this bible study we will try to make sense of the seemingly contradictory **statements of the apostle** and try to explain the one statement by the use of the other.

We can only correctly understand the **1<sup>st</sup> Epistle of John** when we have understood in our heart the relation between doctrine, life, faith, love, sin, repentance, justification and sanctification.

The uniqueness of the 1<sup>st</sup> Epistle of John **with its harsh words** mixed with great warmth and love in his approach to the church and the seemingly contradictory messages find their origin in the fact that the apostle **is fighting heresy**, which he already sees as a threat to the church.

We cannot necessarily say that topics such as the **exposition and rebuke of false teaching** are the actual or single purpose of his epistles. The apostle also wants to serve **also** the establishment of the church and the right thinking and lifestyle of the members. It is not a **theologian**, but a „**father**“, who loves his children and desires and must protect them from being lead astray.

In order **to fully understand the epistles of John** it is important to have an overview of the heretic movements that the apostle discerned to be a sign of the Last Days and the Antichrist. (1Joh 4,18; 4,3).

**John is not an apologist.** He does not mention names or fight against single men, but against certain movements of false teachings.

- It deals with men who came from within the church (1Joh 2,19).
- John speaks of many who have „**gone from them**“ (1Joh 4,5; 1,2,18; 4,2; 2,7).
- they do not belong to the same spiritual movement and there were many different streams

**He is also facing „gnosis“** - (the spirit of that time) – which appeared along with the „**mystical religions**“ that came from the east which deal with "**revelation**" that are won from some **mysterious experiences** that took their souls on a "**trip to heaven**".

The „**gnosis**“ back them was a mix of **Greek strife for knowledge and oriental religiosity, a typical product of Hellenism.** In the end this is only about the idolatry of the human body and its power, its beauty and abilities, the way it was admired and thought of in Hellenism.

- The body is perceived as the lower part of the body and the "**prison of the soul**".
- At the same time the true self spiritually rises up to the spiritual world and despises all physical desires and needs and withdraws from His own will. In the new movement of Christianity the Gnostics found many points of contact for their philosophies which have been persistently claiming to be Christian and biblical, even up to this day. For example the **fatal perception**, that all sexuality is sinful and that there is not supposed to be any physical pleasure. This also affects the eschatological hope of new creation, a new earth with people who have a new body, which is replaced by a religion of „blessed spirits“. **The Gnostics even taught**, that the creator of this substance cannot have been God, but only a lower being, or even the devil himself.

The last consequence is that **the Gnostics are lacking love** for the fallen (lost) people. They left Zacchaeus up to his own sin and also other sinners they would have stamped hopeless and left them up to their misery. They also felt superior compared to another simply believer. Therefore they did not want to hear „**anything about love for the brethren**“. For them the sacrifice of Jesus for the „**lost**“ was incomprehensible and totally contradictory. They believed in „**redeeming yourself**“ by revelation and asceticism.

John and also all other apostles are rebuking **this form of redemption** in their epistles (also 1Cor 8,1, 9,11). In the ancient Christianity there was an uncompromising and radical war against those bizarre heresies (2Cor 10,1-6). Because for them Satan himself was **behind those thoughts** (2Cor 11.13-15).

Even though the Epistles of John (and also the others) are "**historical documents**" which are in certain details related to a special historical condition of a certain church, it still matters to us today because those **trends and movements** (spiritual movements) still exist in the present time. In addition they represent the basic doctrines and warnings for the believers. The church of Jesus and also their threats are basically still the same despite the change of time and situations or conditions.

**The general outline** of the threatening false teachings still have substantial similarities despite their historical differences.

**The concept of Gnosis meets** the idle desire of the natural man who tries to claim God's power allegedly their own wisdom and power in order to understand the mysteries of life. Because of the separation from God through sin they often do not recognize or acknowledge that there is salvation available through the great sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God.

To **dissolve the biblical Jesus Christ**, to underrate the love of God and therefore under-appreciate the love of the brethren, is always a typically tempting kind of stream that opposes the Apostolic Christianity and wants to make it seem pitiful and inferior.

### **The author of the three Epistles**

- The 1<sup>st</sup> letter seems to be more of a newsletter in the common ancient style of a letter.
- The author of the Epistles of John must be the same as **the author of the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel**. This can be concluded based on the style of expression.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> Epistle John does not mention his name, but he counts himself among those **who have heard the word of life** and **saw with their own eyes**, yes whose **hands have touched**. The man who wrote the letter is definitely someone who has lived **very close to Jesus** so that he was not only an **ear- and eye-witness** but also a **"hand witness"**.

Only a man who has been in the closest and intimate circle with Jesus can say that (1Joh 1.1). A man who was among the **"three"**, that Jesus took with Him on certain occasions (Mt 17,1;26,37). When he is referring to himself as „**old**“, he does so because he lived longer than James and Peter and was one of the **„three pillars“** of the ancient church.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> letter the author applies **the usual form** and identifies **himself as author** in the beginning of the letter. He calls himself **"the elder"** resp. the oldest. This cannot be the title of an office because there was no single elder in any church. **"Elders were always appointed** in a plural number (comp. Act 14,23;Tit 1,5).

**Papias**, who wrote his texts between AD 120 and 160, refers this to the direct disciples and eye-witnesses of Jesus especially the apostles. At the time of Papias only two of them were still alive: **Aristion** and **"the old John"**. Therefore John, who lived longer than all other apostles, was called **"the eldest"**. He also called himself the eldest and avoids to mention his name in the letter, just like he also does not mention it in his gospel. There he refers to himself as the **"disciple whom Jesus loved"**, and now **"the eldest"**. This also confirms the authorship of the epistles by the apostle John.

### **The recipients of the three Epistles**

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> we find a clue to **the addressees**. But still it is not as easy as it is in the epistles of Paul. The 2<sup>nd</sup> epistle of **the "eldest"** goes to a church, which is addressed by the metaphor of a woman **who is a chosen mistress of the Lord"**. But where exactly this church was we do not know – we only know that it was **threatened by the teachings of Gnosis** and was called to uncompromising rejection of the false teachers. The apostle was hoping to soon return to this church, therefore the recipients should be found somewhere in the area of **Asia Minor**. It is the Roman province with its capital Ephesus which included the area around the west coast of Asia Minor with its many cities.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Epistle goes out to a certain **"Gajus"**, of whom we do **not know more**, than this letter reveals. We also do not know in which church he lived. It must be a different church than that to which the 2<sup>nd</sup> Epistle is addressed and also another than that where John was at that time.

Unfortunately we know even less about the recipients of the **1<sup>st</sup> Epistle**. They could have lived in a single, big church community. The letter could also have been **addressed to several churches**, with whom the apostle was connected. John lived and ministered in **Ephesus** for a longer period of time. The fact that this letter does not deal with issues related to Judaism supports the assumption that this epistle went out to Asia Minor. Except for a reference to **Cain** in 1Joh 3,12 there is no mention of Old Testament quotes. We obviously look at **Gentile Christian churches** which consisted of Greeks according to the early population of **"Asia"**.

### **The time of authorship of the Epistles**

→ The condition of the church **points to an early date of authorship**. There were not yet church **policies** with certain **"offices"**.

→ The apostle approaches **the "church"**, not any responsible leaders such as a bishop. **Diotrephæs**, who is mentioned in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Epistle cannot be seen as the bishop, he wanted to be the leader among them especially because his position was not secured by the office of a bishop.

The **influence of "Gnosis"** is not an argument against an early time of composition. "**Gnosis**" already existed before Christianity. Their attempt to seize Christianity also could have begun early in church history. What was threatening the church that John wrote to was not different from the things that Paul had to deal with in Corinth in AD 55.

### **The uniformity of the Epistles**

John has no "**different gospel**". In accordance with Paul in view of the other New Testament witness he could say: "**May it be me or others: we preached and you believed**" (1Cor 15,11). He appeals to that which the readers of his letter have "**heard from the beginning**" (1Joh 2,7 a. 14). And yet John has a very important assignment who makes his letters precious and indispensable, almost as if they were written for our time. John is aware that it is about "**life**"! "**Life has appeared**" – "We have come from death to life" – "Whoever has the Son, also has life" – **this is the beginning**, middle and end of his 1<sup>st</sup> letter. He refers to the New Testament message concerning an essential question and desire that every man has, of course also the people of today – **life and love**.

At the same time John saw very clearly what modern psychology also acknowledges in part: that true, **substantial life consists of unconditional love**. Also Paul praises the love of God (Rom 5,5b-11) and testifies the unique greatness of love compared to all other possessions (1Cor 13). The manifold, concrete theme of his letters are **essential** for us. It is the gift, that John makes the crucial point and theme of his letters - "**God is love**" – we only find this in John's texts.

**"If someone does not love he remains dead"**. Only John speaks so radical of this absolute urgency of our love. John presents us the greatness and indispensability of the gospel in a way that can still reach people as human beings, no matter what time, and forces them to listen. It is beneficial that John keeps it short, simple and radical. In this manner the "**apostle of love**" despite of the rejection of the heresies and false teachers.

Also the **Epistle to the Galatians** and the both **Epistles to the Corinthians** of Paul are streaked by the war against false teachings and twisting the gospel. But John promotes a clear separation: if someone does not deliver the real message we should not even greet him (2Joh 10)! He shows us **the spirit of the Antichrist** in anyone who "**eliminates Jesus**" (1Joh 4,3). There is no doubt that John's harshness is motivated by true love.

## **THE 1<sup>st</sup> EPISTLE OF JOHN**

### **MISCELLANEOUS**

Here we see the personality of John, who is simple in his language and just gives faithful account of what he has **„seen and heard“** (1Joh 1, 1). In his letter John uses a simple language and formulates short and straightforward which contains deep truth. This is an evidence that he is a master of his subject and knows exactly what he talks about.

**John describes the family of God** (and the fellowship of the saints) with the Father, who is love and light, and his children who are in His likeness. They have His nature and His being **by birth**. But not only that, the nature of the Father can be seen in our interaction with each other. Just like the Father cannot sin, His children must also not sin. When the Father loves, His children also must love.

**John is very abstract**, which may irritate us, but he does not describe the practical experiences of single people, but rather presents **divine principles** but without compromise. He describes such extreme contrasts of light and darkness, love and hate, or death and live. He emphasizes **„brotherly love“** (1Joh 5,1-2) and puts it on the same level of the **„love of God“**. In addition he takes precedence against the **„Antichrists“** who pretend to know, while we are the ones who really know. The **Antichrists** were already at work in his time.

### **AUTHOR**

The author does not mention his name but a **number of features** point to his identity. His **expressions**, especially the names that he gives to his readers – children, little children – beloved, etc would suggest an **older man**. The **exact knowledge about the condition** of his readers and the authority he exercises proves that he is respected and trusted among them. He is **an eye-witness of the love and work of Jesus** and the church history of the 1<sup>st</sup> decade (1Joh 1-3; 3, 11-13). His introduction shows a parallel to the introduction of the 4<sup>th</sup> gospel.

In his language, style and understanding of Christian life, he is so similar to the author of the **4<sup>th</sup> gospel** that you just have to acknowledge that it is the same person.

The characteristic expressions **of the typical vernacular of John** can be found in several places in these epistles: truth and lie, light and darkness, life and death, world, children, perfect joy, comforter, mediator, etc. In both letters there is a **dominant feature** – going all the way and not accepting to do things by halves. There is no **middle way between death and life** or between truth and lie, between light and darkness. But in all this we see that John, the apostle Christi, is the author of these letters. In the ancient time there was not one voice raised to doubt this.

### **Date, author and recipients of the epistle**

Most researchers assume that the 1<sup>st</sup> Epistle, the two others and the gospel of John were written around the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, which would be between AD 90 –100.

### **RECIPIENTS**

As mentioned above, the 1<sup>st</sup> epistle does not have the common style of a letter because it lacks **address, signature and greetings**. In addition it contains no personal messages, which was usually a characteristic of the style of an epistle. It was perhaps more than a „**newsletter**“, maybe some kind of „**sermon**“ (homile) or a Christian „**handbook**“ as an amendment to the gospel of John. Others regard the letter as a polemic paper, which is opposing moral and dogmatic mistakes that started to rise up in the churches. But the free and simple language, the several repetitions of the terminology: „**I am writing to you**“, the intimacy of the relationship between the author and the reader rather remind us of a letter, the loving letter of a loving father to his children. It is very likely that this epistle was addressed **to the church at Ephesus** and the churches around that area, where the apostle had lived for a longer period of time.

### **AUTHENTICITY**

The whole **ancient church confirms the authenticity** of the 1<sup>st</sup> Epistle of John. The earliest witnesses are the church fathers **Polycarp** and **Papias**, who were both disciples of the apostle John: Polycarp knew and quoted the epistle of his „beloved master“, and Papias used, according to **Eusebius**, also the scriptures of 1<sup>st</sup> John. **Justin the martyr** quotes it in his letter to Diognetes an – a memorial of Christian ancient times between AD 120 and 150.

Also in „**The shepherd of Hermas**“ we find such thoughts and expressions that can only be found in this epistle. **Irenaeus**, disciple of Polycarp, quoted the letter several times. The other church fathers like **Tertullian**, **Clemens of Alexandria**, **Origenes** and **Cyprian**, used scriptures of 1<sup>st</sup> John, usually closing with: „... **this is what John the apostle said**“. Moreover this letter was included right from the beginning of the collection process of the New Testament canon.

### **PURPOSE AND GOAL**

The great truth about the fellowship of God with people, like the 4<sup>th</sup> gospel presents it in connection with the life and work of Jesus Christ, are here **applied to every day life** of the Christians. The **teachings of the gospel** are therefore practically explained to the believers. The letter obviously aims to come against the increasing tendency to consider Christian knowledge as superior at the cost of Christian lifestyle (comp. 1Joh 1, 6-7; 2, 3-6; 3, 6-10).

In this movement we can already recognize visible traces of Gnosis, which already started to develop in the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. The Christian message was threatened to be twisted by **allegedly illuminated** people (1Joh 4, 1. These „**false prophets**“ and „**Antichrists**“ taught, that Jesus only seemed to have died and risen. They denied that **Jesus was a real man** and claimed that a divine being had come upon him during the baptism and left Him the night before His passion. Even though John highly values **spiritual revelation** he decisively forbids the **separation of the historical person from Jesus Christ**. Jesus is the „**corner stone**“, that holds all things together. Furthermore he warns the church of a second danger: **disunity**; therefore he often encourages them to brotherly love, the surest foundation of a Christian church – and also **Paganism** and its practices (2, 15-17; 5, 21).

## **CONTENT AND DIVISION**

John **does not follow a clearly structured disposition**. His thoughts are rather random and short instead of thoroughly explained. On the other hand many threats are picked up again and explained later, so that there is not always a main threat of thought which is followed. But we can still recognize a certain division and a purpose.

<b>Introduction:</b> Content and purpose of the letter	(Chp. 1,1-4)
<b><u>1. Marks of true fellowship</u></b>	(Chp. 1,5-2, 27)
● Walk in the light!	(Chp. 1,5-10)
● Walk in His commands!	(Chp. 2,1-6)
● Walk in the brotherly love!	(Chp. 2,7-11)
● Walk in sanctification!	(Chp. 2,12-17)
● Walk in the true doctrine!	(Chp. 2,18-27)
<b><u>2. Marks of true sonship of God</u></b>	(Chp. 2,28-4,21)
● Blessed hope	(Chp. 2,28-3,3)
● Victorious faith	(Chp. 3,4-10)
● Undivided brotherly love	(Chp. 3,11-18)
● Unclouded joy	(Chp. 3,19-24)
● Truthfulness	(Chp. 4,1-6)
● True love	(Chp. 4,7-12)
● Fellowship with God and the brethren	(Chp. 4,13-21)
<b><u>3. Marks of true faith</u></b>	(Chp. 5,1-13)
● Rebirth	(Chp. 5,1-5)
● Trust in the testimony of God	(Chp. 5,6-10)
● Assurance of eternal life	(Chp. 5,11-13)
<b><u>Ending: Fruits of faith</u></b>	(Chp. 5,14-21)
● Willingness to pray	(Chp. 5,14-15)
● Loving sinners	(Chp. 5,16-17)
● Assurance of salvation	(Chp. 5,18-20)
● Watchfulness	(Chp. 5,21)

**Keyword:** „fellowship“ and **key verse:** „*When we are walking in the light, as He is light, then we have fellowship with each other*“ (1Joh 1,7a).

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

### **The love of God**

#### **The revelation of love**

- The person Jesus Christ (ch. 4,9-10)

#### **The matter of love**

- He loved us. (ch. 4,11)
- He loved us first. (ch. 4,19)

#### **The goal of love**

- Our sonship of God (ch. 3,1)
- Our reconciliation with God (ch. 4,10)
- Our fellowship with God (ch. 4,9)

#### **Characteristics of His love**

- Keeping His commands (ch. 2,5; 5,3)
- Walking in the light (ch. 2,10)
- Separation of the world (ch. 2,15)
- Fearless trust (ch. 4,18)

#### **The essence of love**

- She is a command of God. (ch. 3,11; 4,21)
- She is a need. (ch. 4,11)
- She is an urgency. (ch. 4,20; 5,1)
- She is the shadow of the love of God. (ch. 5,2)
- She is selfless. (ch. 3,16)
- She is practical and diligent. (ch. 3,17-18)
- She is evidence of our salvation. (ch. 3,14)

## Sin

- Universal sin (chp. 1, 8.10)
- The fruit of sin (chp. 1,10; 3,6)
- The father of sin (chp. 3,8)
- The confession of sin (chp. 1,9)
- The forgiveness of sin (chp. 1,9; 2,12)
- The atonement for our sins (chp. 2,2; 4,10)
- The cleansing of sins (chp. 1,7)
- The victory over sin (chp. 3,5-9)

## Blessed assurance

- We know that the Son of God has come. (chp. 5,20)
- We know that Christ is righteous. (chp. 2,29)
- We know that He has come cancel sin. (chp. 3,5)
- We know that we have come from death to life. (chp. 3,14)
- We know that we have eternal life. (chp. 5, 3)
- We know that we are of God. (chp. 5,19)
- We know that He gives us the victory (chp. 5,18)
- We know that He hears our prayer. (chp. 5,15)
- We know that we will be like Him. (chp. 3,2)

## THE SECOND AND THIRD EPISTLE OF JOHN

### MISCELLANEOUS

Quite rightly those **two epistles are called the twin epistles**“. They seem to be inseparable, therefore they are always looked at in relation with each other. Those are „**two simple letters**“ that are obviously only included in the New Testament, because they were authored by the apostle John.

“Despite of their shortness they are full of the **evangelical spirit**, so that you cannot read them without being filled with love for truth and the One who is the truth (Rochedieu).“

### AUTHOR

He calls himself the „**eldest**“ (Greek = „presbyteros“ ) and this in a two-fold meaning: an elder man and the **elder (leader) of the church**. But still this cannot be related to a local presbyterian office, it is rather a title of honor based on his age and reputation. This corresponds to the position of the **apostle John** which he had in the churches of Asia Minor. Furthermore the thoughts of the 1<sup>st</sup> epistle are so closely related to the content of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> that surely no other author could have been involved.

### RECIPIENTS...

... **of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Epistle** is a certain „**Kyria**“ (mistress) – the chosen one, an unknown woman and her children. There have been many debates about her. Some believe this is an exceptional Christian woman and other believe that this name is just a symbolic reference to this church (or the church of Jesus Christ in general) which is questionable based on verses 10 and 13.

... **of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Epistle** is a certain, unknown „**Gajus**“. This name is mentioned **five** times in the NT and always refers to different people (Act 19, 29; 20, 4/ Rom 16, 23/ 1Cor 1,14/ 3Joh 1,1).

### COMPOSITION

We do not know about the time or place of composition. However, both letters were probably written at the time of the 1<sup>st</sup> Epistle, which means around the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

### AUTHENTICITY

It hardly needs mentioning that those two letters by appearance did not draw the same attention like other longer epistles. But **Clemens of Alexandria** knew them and quoted them. Since the era of the church father **Eusebius** their authenticity was generally acknowledged.

### PURPOSE AND GOAL

As „**private letters**“ those letters do not have a certain goal, except from warning of certain false teachers and as in the 3<sup>rd</sup> epistle of a **domineering church member** (Vers 9 and 10). But we hear the heart of the wise apostle of love whose joy it is to write their Christian friends a letter of benevolence.

## DIVISION

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Epistle

Address and greeting	(Vers 1-3)
To love means to obey	(Vers 4-6)
Tempters	(Vers 7-11)
A final word	(Vers 12-13)

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Epistle

Blessings and benevolence	(Vers 1-8)
The ambitious Diotrefes	(Vers 9-11)
Final words	(Vers 12-15)

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Epistle

key word: **truth**                      key verse „**Your children who walk in the truth**“ (4).

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Epistle

key word: **faithfulness** \_key verse: „**you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers and sisters**“ (5).

## MISCELLANEOUS

### The truth

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> Epistle of John

- The love of truth (Vers 1a)
- The knowledge of truth (Vers 1b)
- The experience of truth (Vers 2-3)
- Walking in the truth (Vers 4-6)
- Fighting for the truth (Vers 7-11)

#### 3<sup>rd</sup> Epistle of John

- The nature of truth: love (Vers 1)
- The testimony of the work of truth (Vers 2)
- The ways of truth (Vers 3-4)
- The co-workers for the cause of truth (Vers 8)
- The testimony of the truth (Vers 12)

## Detailed interpretation

### 1<sup>st</sup> Epistle of John

**1Joh 1.1** – *He speaks of that which was „**from the beginning**“.* This verse reminds us of Joh 1.1, the verse which is leaning on Gen 1.1. These two verses of the NT see the incarnation of Jesus as an event which is as meaningful as creation itself. Jesus is introduced as the „**word of life**“ as the only object of the proclamations of the apostle. **Jesus** is the **word who became flesh** (Joh 1.1-14).

To John the **central event of history** is the appearance of the **person Jesus**. John is one of the **chosen witnesses** who saw, heard and touched the Lord, who had been from the beginning. These verbs defend the reality of incarnation of Jesus against all speculations which are later disproved (1Joh 2,22; 4,2).

When the apostle writes: „**In the beginning was the word**“ - he refers to “Jesus“ Himself. He describes, Jesus, the Son of God because we cannot clearly **describe** God, we can only circumscribe. John wants the readers to see Jesus not only as the „messenger of God“, a prophet, a rabbi or a saint, but to recognize Him as the **true God** who came down as man, so that we could identify, touch and feel Him. In Jesus the eternal one and eternity has come among us (Joh 5.26; 3,26).

**The 1<sup>st</sup> Epistle of John is an Epistle of the apostle John.** He does not introduce himself by name but as **eye – and ear-witness**, yes one could even say as „**hand-witness**“ of the carnal Jesus (Chp.1,1-3). The **linguistic, stylistic and textual similarities** with the Gospel of John are remarkable. Also the **tone of the epistle** tells us that it was written by a person of great spiritual **authority**. And in the same manner the 1<sup>st</sup> Epistle of John addresses the Christians with **practical instructions**.



He warns them of the dangers of false teachers and exhorts them to dedicate their lives to faithful obedience and charity. His greatest concern, however, is the fellowship with God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ.

The **1<sup>st</sup> Epistle of John** itself contains no indication to the identity or place of residence of the addresses, to whom the letter was sent. We only know that they are Christians.

The early church accounts tell us that John ministered in the **Roman province of Asia**, which means in the western area of today's Turkey. Therefore this letter must have been addressing the believers there as also the **Revelation of John** was addressing them (Rev 2-3).

In those churches false teachers showed up, which **John called the „Antichrists“** (1Joh 2,18-26). What exactly those teachers taught is controversial in biblical research. They were Gnostic and other heretics that were threatening the church. John does not repeat those false teachings, but based on his statements we can reconstruct them a little bit. John understands the **„Antichrists“ as „against Christ“**, whoever twists the central truths of Christian faith for their own benefit by denying Jesus the Sonship of God and denying that He redeemed us by His death on the cross. The accounts tell us that the Jewish Christian **Kerinth of Egypt** taught in the same area of influence as John and claimed that Jesus was only a man on whom a redeemer came upon from heaven when He was baptized but that this spiritual being left the man Jesus on the cross.

**Irenaeus** wrote about the Gnostic heresies at that time: **“So many teachers, so many redemptions!”** John **emphasizes in simple words the eternal meaning of Jesus Christ**, the incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth, His life, His suffering, His death and His resurrection. These are the historical basics redemption and the facts of the gospel.

Many of the heretics of that time **were convinced**, that Jesus **„incarnation“** was not real and that He only possessed a seemingly physical body. For John and the apostles Jesus was **„God“**, who took on the form of a man and also became fully man and laid down the „divine“ (Phil 2,5-8). This literally means He **„emptied“** Himself or made Himself **„low“** and gave up **“position“** and came as a man. **Even though He gave up His heavenly throne**, He did not lose His **„divine being“**.

John responds to this in detail in his 2<sup>nd</sup> epistle (2Joh 7, com.1Joh 4,2). The gospels show us the **human limitations of Jesus** – He was hungry (Mt 4,2), He was tired (Joh 4,6), He did not know all things (Lk 8,45-47), He was worried (Joh 11,35,38). The author of Hebrews tells us why He had to go through all the facets of **human condition** (Hebr 2,17; 4,15; 5,2,7-9).

Some Christians believe that **Jesus only pretended to be limited as a man** – for example they would say that He was omniscient and pretended like He would not know etc. They prefer to think of Jesus as some kind of **„Superman“** who is above our daily needs and only acts as if He was **„hungry“** or **„tired“**.

Jesus was a person who existed in **two natures**. When He was with God He was fully God and when He came to dwell among us He became fully man, so that He sometimes acted as God and sometimes as man. Being a man Jesus could have denied the cross, but He did not **want** to **„sin“**, therefore He was also tempted and had to decide to follow the plan of God in the garden of Gethsemane (Mt 26,42/Luk 22,42). Satan tempted Him in order for Jesus to disobey God the Father by arrogance, self-exaltation and self-revelation (Mt 4,1-11/Luk 22,28/Mk 16,23).

It is also a misunderstanding that Jesus **changed between both natures back and forth**. He would have been able to do so but He avoided to do so because otherwise God could also not expect us to fight the good fight of faith. Since the incident in the garden of Gethsemane we know how threatening and painful temptation and inner battles were for Him (Hebr 2,18). It was a **hard fight**, to bring the natural and divine nature **into accordance**. Without the help of the Holy Spirit nobody can understand the controversy between **„fully God“** and **„fully man“** and easily drifts away to different false teachings and opinions.

Because He was **fully man** Jesus was misunderstood and rejected by many of His contemporaries (1Joh 5,6). **This rejection** probably originated mainly from the **religious circles** in Judaea (1Joh 2.19), who could not imagine that God truly became man.

Further we can assume that the **recipients** of the epistle **were Gentile Christians** (view 1Joh 2,12 -14,21; 5,13). The mentioning of an **„anointing“**, which refers to the Holy Spirit they possessed (1Joh 2, 20 u. 27), could also indicate that the **addressees were leading authorities** in the churches to whom John was writing. In the Old Testament the leaders of Israel, the prophets, the priests and kings were also addressed as the anointed, because they were **anointed for an office** (1Chron 16,22/Ps 105,15).

According to the text in 2Cor 1,21 the word “**anointed**” only refers to the apostolic office of Paul. When John approaches the **recipients** of the letter as „**anointed**“ (1Joh 2,0,27), he wants to remind them of their competence and authority of their Christian church leaders and their spiritual knowledge. Therewith he confirms their true authority toward the false teachers. In the epistles of Revelation he calls the leaders of the church **angels of the church** (Rev 2-3).

**Traditionally the leaders of the church** did not need to be instructed by human teachers for they received their knowledge through the revelation of their **anointing**, which means directly by the Holy Spirit. Without a doubt John knew the people to whom he writes. Even when he was mainly thinking about the church leaders, he was yet aware that his letter would be read in front of the church. Only that way they would support and acknowledge the God-given function and authority of the teachers and leaders of the church, in order to separate them from the milling around false teachers. Through this a broader audience of listeners could hear the instructions of the letter and their trust in the the guidance of their spirit-filled leaders was strengthened. The simple and often uneducated brothers received encouragement through the old apstotle of Jesus Christ personally.

One of **the most important tasks of the elders** of the early church was to protect the flock of spiritual wolves (Act 20,28–29/Tit 1,10-11). While the false teachers are boasting in their great spiritual wisdom and authority and claimed all of that out of arrogance, the author of 1<sup>st</sup> John wanted to express his trust concerning the appointed leaders (elders, deacons, etc) under the guidance of the Holy Spirt.

This **apostolic support** was supposed to strengthen the churches and equip them for the battle against the heretic thoughts. We must also not ignore that the **indications to the children, the fathers and the young men** in the text (1Joh 2,12-14) it points to different **spiritual levels of maturity**.

If you want to take that seriously we cannot assume that this letter was mainly addressing the **elders of the church**. On the other hand all readers are addressed as children several times, for example in the scriptures of Joh 2,1 a.18, so that it could be possible that the terms in 1Joh 2,12-14 are **simply different approaches to the same group** of people, but always from a different perspective.

The term “**children**” in the passages of 1Joh 2,1; 2,12; 2,28; 3,18; 4,4; 5,21 could indicate that the churches were established by an earlier missionary ministry of the apostle John.

Especially through those false teachers that John would name **Antichrists**, respectively **forerunners of the Antichrist**, Satan tries to gain back his dominion here on earth. He does that by igniting the wicked within people in order to **deny Jesus Godhead and sovereignty** which offends His redemptive work. In this way Satan also tempted Jesus when he said - „**IF you are the Son of God**.“ (Mt 4).

Furthermore love, confessing Christ, rebirth and separation from this world **are the main themes** which John uses to encourage the churches in the faithful perseverance in Christ. John mentions the **command of Jesus**, that love of God and for the brethren cannot be separated. We can and should practically **live out the love of God. Our love for God** is exercised in our love for the brethren, which is according to the commandments of God. The false teachers do not know or possess such love.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Epistle of John does not follow the usual ancient style of mentioning the author, addressees and greetings. He gets straight to the point, which means the main purpose of the letter. It was clear to the author that the church was going through a dangerous **time of temptation** and apostasy. John underlines his statements by claiming the authority of an apostle, which means that he is a yet alive eye- and ear-witness of Jesus (1Joh 5,21), who has truly seen the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

John had **a very intimate relationship with Jesus**. He was the disciple whom Jesus loved (Joh 21,20). Whenever John is mentioned in the gospel (Joh 13,23; 18,15; 19,26; 20,2 a. 21,7,20) **the intimacy of their relationship** is emphasized. He was with Jesus until the end, even at the cross (Joh 19,25-27) and took on responsibility for Mary, the mother of Jesus.

John starts **his gospel** and **his epistles** consciously without ceremony with the term: “**In the beginning**”. He therewith immediately points to the bible passage of Gen 1,1) – the beginning of the Old Testament of the Hebrew bible where it says: “**In the beginning there was.... God created...!**” This was his testimony, and it claims the same **authority** like the word of God, the Old Testament word of God.

John opposes the seducers **straightforwardly and with determination**; not with his own thoughts of ideas and also not on his own behalf. He rather claims all of **God's authority**. At the same time he disproves the **Gnostic speculations**, that they had discovered something **new** and exposes their human-spiritual philosophies, which stray away from the truth and are also not in alignment with the God-given revelation of the word. Powerfully John applies “**what has been from the beginning.. the word of life ...**”

It is about „**logos**“, which is more than just a subject, a thing or a simple message, it is the creative, life-giving power of God, it is about a person, it is the Christ. It is the word of God, He is the mediator of creation, He is the creative power of God (Ps 33, 6/Pro 8, 22.35/Mi 5,1/1Cor 8,6/Eph 3,9/Col 1,15/1Joh 2 13/Hebr 1,2 ff.; 11,3; 12,2/Rev 1,8; 3,14).

The Gnostics enjoyed to use the word „**Logos**“, but only as a „**term of wisdom**“ to describe their theories and to „**spiritualize**“ **their own principles**. But John also applies the term **logos** without fear and applies it with a new meaning. He fills and relates the word „**logos**“ with the God-revealed person Jesus Christ (Lk 4,4/Joh 1,14; 6,63/1Cor 1,18/Phil 2,16/1Petr 1,23/Jam 1,18/Rev 19,13). And so Jesus is Himself „**the word of life**“, for He alone is the true eternal life.

The „**word of life**“ cannot be separated from the person of Jesus Christ. Therefore the **message of Jesus** is not only some news or information, but something personified that is manifested in Jesus. His **incarnation** is and remains an **event of salvation** which brings divine and eternal life among us people. He did that in the beginning of creation and thus it also happens in the new creation, our rebirth. Jesus is not only **the life**, but also that what He says, **gives life**, like once His “divine word” in the process of creation. Jesus is the “powerful word of God” which is more than just a theoretical or theological statement.

The believer's life depends upon it (like the branches and the vine in Joh 15). By the way, the bible does not only contain the word of God, as many would say it nowadays (which is also what the catholic church teaches), but it is the word of God! It is the **word of life**, the word, the spirit of God which produces new life within us (Rom 10,17). A divine word full of perfect power, which creates life and perfects life eventually (Joh 5,39; 6,27; 6,35; 6,63; 6,68; 10,10; 10,28/ also 2Cor 5,19; 6,7/Eph 5,26; 6,17/1Petr 1,23/Jam 1,18/Hebr 4,12).

Even though John would not **introduce himself by name** in this letter, his apostolic authority is evident: He was one of those who had seen the incarnate Jesus and touched Him. The statement “**we**” is deliberately chosen. He claims to belong to the group of apostles which were acknowledged among the churches. His message is not an individual proclamation, but it is confirmed and approved in agreement by the other apostles.

This **biblical agreement** about their harmonious testimony concerning the Old and New Testament and among the apostles is the **miracle of inspiration**. They all say **the same**, even though in their own unique, personal style, but it is the same God, the same Christ, the same spirit who empowered them to be witnesses. They can only **testify of the same**, because they have heard the same, have had the same Father and experienced the same. In this way John (and also the other apostles) oppose the enemies of the gospel, who always question the **self-revelation of God** and try to deny the **incarnation of Jesus** and that He became fully man.

This is why John says: We proclaim what we have “**seen, heard and touched**” etc.

He does not **describe some kind of spiritual process**, but rather gives historical details of truth which he experienced with the carnal Jesus. They had perceived Jesus physically, visibly and with their own senses (ears and eyes).

- **They heard** ... the conversations with Jesus and the stubborn Jews (Joh 5,19ff.),
- His words about the bread of life (Joh 6,25ff.),
- His words about the light (Joh 8,12ff.),
- The parable of the good shepherd (Joh 10),
- His proclamation of His glorification (Joh 12,23ff.),
- His final words (Joh 13,31-16,33),
- The prayer of the high priest (Joh 17),
- The authorized words of the risen One (Joh 20,19ff.),
- The mission command (Mt 28,18-20) and
- His promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit (Joh 16,7ff./Act 1,8).
- **They saw** ...**Jesus**, like John the Baptist praised the lamb of God and followed Him (Joh 1,35ff.),
- His miracles where He turned water to wine in Canaan (Joh 2, 2.11),
- The feeding of the five thousand (Joh 6, 2-13),
- Jesus walking on the water (Joh 6,16-21),
- many other miracles,
- Jesus in front of the grave of Lazarus
- the risen Lazarus who came out of the tomb (Joh 11,1-45),

- how Jesus got arrested (Joh 18,1ff.),
- the risen Christ (Joh 20,19.26; 21,1ff.),
- Christ who was lifted up by the cloud to go to the Father (Act 1,9-10).

**John saw Jesus die on the cross** (Joh 19,26). **Peter, John and James saw Jesus as the glorified one on the mount** (Mk 9,2-8). **They all saw it** (Mt 13,16 u.17). They saw and heard everything in detail, kept His words and **memorized them perfectly** through the help of the Holy Spirit in order to share them with the church (Joh 2,22; 14,26).

**1Joh 1.2-4 – truths, warnings and instructions**, which are still contained for us in the bible are universal and apply to all Christians of all times, respectively are applicable to all people everywhere and all the time. The Holy Spirit Himself watched out for us that nothing unnecessary would be accounted for us. Thus these are all universal doctrines and revelations of God which are being repeated in different ways and styles. About God there cannot be anything „**new under the sun**“ (Eccl 1,9), not in good or bad. We could conclude the 1<sup>st</sup> Epistle of John under **one big theme**: **“Jesus is the Christ!”**

This epistle is a **Christ-centred letter**, which puts the Christ of God and His work in the center in **all passages**. John does not bring us a new message. He repeats the words of Jesus faithfully and applies them to the historical situation of the church. It can also not be accounted to anything that only Paul or other New Testament witnesses testified. The testimony of John is in perfect harmony with the **choir of witnesses**, there is no disharmony. John glorifies and testifies Jesus Christ in all! The Christ is the word of life. There is no other logos, no other word that saves us. His message is not an individual proclamation, but rather a testimony of pure, divine truth which was approved by the apostles.

In addition **all three Epistles of John** are in perfect **accordance** in their essential statements and terminologies such as **brotherly love**, the **new command** and the **confession of Jesus** as the Son of God.

**1Joh 1,2 - ... This is what we testify and proclaim ...** Assured and confirmed by the first witnesses (apostles) the gospel is brought to us. For John and the apostle it was all clear, Jesus was „**fully man**“ and „**fully God**“ - both in the same person. This way they have seen Jesus and experienced him. Jesus „**revealed Himself**“ or „**appeared to them**“ - and this is the foundation of their revelation of Jesus Christ. The disciples saw **in Jesus** something eternal, everlasting, not subject to death kind of life. Life of a new kind and quality that humanity has not seen before.

Until then the human life was only oriented to **birth and death**, but then Jesus made a **difference between** this life and the hereafter. With Him a new way of **life and being** had begun. Man is therefore no longer subject to time and vanity. He is space, time and eternity in one. We only have to understand the overwhelming **act of salvation of God**. God in His fullness is the Triune God and yet became **fully man** (comp. Joh 8,58/Eph 1,4/Phil 2,6).

John emphasizes: „**We have seen and experienced all of it.**“ And he is not referring to some inner, visionary or mystical events, that he wants to testify of, but real, trustworthy and historical facts.

**Their testimony is authentic**. Almost all apostles suffered because of their faith and confession for the truth and even died as martyrs to testify of God's truth and **sealed their testimony with their life**. The testimony of the apostle is a testimony of life and more than just a neutral account.

**1Joh 1.3 - ....What we have seen and heard we also proclaim ...**“ What the apostle proclaimed they had also experienced.

The **proclamation**– especially of the Jesus-inspired and personally-experienced word – is of extreme importance for living faith. Only the **word that is preached** invokes faith and results such as miracles and deliverance. Preaching is a way of **“heralding”** - it announces God (Mk16,15-18). The result of it can only be received when the presence of God is believed and received by the hearer. John speaks about „**apostolic fellowship**“ (1Joh 1,7), and about walking in the light, like it applies to living by revelation. A **consciousness of the incarnation** of Jesus is within us. The apostle uses the „**incarnation**“ of Jesus in order to introduce the actual theme of his letter, which is the fellowship of the Christians with God and the joy which comes from this fellowship IN HIM.

**1Joh 1,4 - We write this to you so that your joy may be full**. All that **comes from Jesus** spreads true, eternal life and eternal joy. Therewith John agrees with the promises of Jesus in the gospel (Joh15,11; 16,22). This statement can also be compared to the statement of 3 Joh 4: **“There is no greater joy than to hear that my children live in the truth.”** The **apostles had made the concerns of Jesus** their own, so that their joy was inseparably related to the spiritual well-being of those they served.

If the readers of 1<sup>st</sup> John would remain in fellowship with God and the apostles then nobody would be more happy than John himself. Therefore it was so important to Luke, when he wrote the Book of Acts, to emphasize that they always remained in the **teachings of the apostles** ... (Act 2,42). The most important elements of **Christian discipleship** are summarized.

Of course those were especially the **experiences** that the apostles had through their personal relationship with Jesus and had learned, especially through His **teachings**, His **person** and His **work** (comp. Mt 16,18/Lk 24,46/Mt 26,17-30/Joh 13/Mt 6,5-13/Lk 11,1-13/Joh 17). The apostle is referring to this **consistent unity in spirit** (comp. Eph 4,3).

**1Joh 1,5-7** – Just like the gospel of John the 1<sup>st</sup> Epistle of John starts with the contrast of “**light**” and “**darkness**”. The audience has the choice to “**walk in the light**” or to remain in “**darkness**”. Therewith the apostle already contradicts the Christian false teachers because they are not building on the foundation of the gospel – the origin of the new creation of God and of the powerful creative word of God: „Let there be light!“ this is how he separates darkness from light. The false teachers, that John refers to as “**Antichrists**” brought about new, unjustified ideas about Jesus, the God-sent Messiah. They all were a controversy to the incarnation of Christ and the personal experiences of the apostles, who were eye-witnesses. For the apostle the acts of God through Jesus had been **perceived by their natural senses** (2Petr 1,16).

If you take away this **historicity** reality vanishes (1Joh 4,2), and renders Christianity another **philosophy** and God in His Trinity a **philosophical God** and only lose terms. The passages of **1Joh 1,5 till 2,17** form a coherent chapter, in which the author speaks about fellowship with God through sanctification by “**transformation**” into the image of God through Jesus.

**The focal point of the chapter** deals with the **distortion of Christianity**, which started by tolerance of certain sins. For John only that person has understood Christianity who also lives as **Jesus lived** (1Joh 2,3-11). He especially emphasizes the merciful “**love**”.

**1Joh 1,5 – God is light** – this is a statement about the **substance of God** in Jesus. It refers to His moral perfection, His omniscience. It is a statement about “**being**” and “**action**” of God – related to Jesus, in the way the apostle John had experienced Jesus himself (Joh 21,25). The apostles did not focus on themselves, but rather followed their role model Jesus just like He glorified “**His Father**” (Mt 6,13; 16,27; 19,28; 25,31/Joh 1,14; 11,40/ Act 7,2; 7,55/Rom 1,23; 6,4/Eph 1,17/Tit 2,13/Rev 15,8; 21,23). And therewith **Jesus also applied the tradition of the whole Old Testament** (Ps 36,10; 43,3; 44,4; 89,16; 104,2/Dan 2,22). Jesus referred to Himself as light. He therewith approved His unity with the Father (Joh 8,12; 9,5; 12,35ff.; 12,46/Lk 2,32/ Is 9,1; 42,6; 60,1. 9). All that which the apostle experienced with Jesus about Him, they faithfully gave account of (Mt 28,20).

Now this is true Christianity, “... **established upon the foundations of the apostles and prophets**, since Jesus Christ is the corner stone”. This is how the apostles summarized the proclamations of God in the New Testament as the only “standard of faith” (Eph 2,20). This unbreakable “**chain of faith**” is an expressive rebuke to all the Gnostic claims of false teachers then and now, who are claiming to have had immediate revelations of God or are claiming secret, revelational knowledge.

**1Joh 1,6 - The apostle John places great value on the „accordance“ in our life.** Therefore he says three times: “**When we say**, ...“and “**do not live accordingly**”. When we pretend to have something and actually do not have it, then we are liars, hypocrites like the Pharisees. Our lifestyle as Christians has to be in accordance with the gospel, otherwise our life does not have the **divine quality**, because we are not in line with the original, and are not yet in the “**light**” but in “**darkness**” and are lying to ourselves“ (com. Joh 3,19ff.).

**Darkness is a life sphere**, where basically evil rules (Is 42,7; 60,2/Mt 4,16; 8,12/Lk 22,53/Joh 1,5; 12,35). **Partaking in God**, the fellowship with God draws us into the sphere of truth, where all things are exposed and can be exposed. Because there nothing has to remain hidden, so that the man would rejoice to do the truth and live according to the will of God. **From the biblical point of view truth must not be theoretically known, but has to be done.** **Words** and **action** have to go hand in hand (1Joh 2,3–5).

**1Joh 1.7 - The apostle emphasizes the blood of Jesus**“, which is the only means to “**forgiveness of sins**” (Hebr 9,22) and brings us **into „relationship**” with God, where God makes us pure and true “**children of light**”. The light in its purity and truthfulness is the **fundamental reality**. This is where true believers belong to when they want to belong to God and be members in the body of Christ.

**To be a Christian** means to live in the light (Ps 56,14; 86,11; 89,16/ Is 2,5; 60,3/Joh 8,12/Rom 6,4/Gal 5,16/Col 2,6). It is also interesting to notice that John does not expect us to be just like the light, but only to live by walking in the light. A perfect likeness with the light would expect from us „**sinless**“ **perfection**. This way for the „**sinful man**“ who is a fallen creature the unity with God would be impossible.

But to “**walk in the light**” means to be open and ready to live for, with and in the divine light. The general statement of 1Joh 1,7 is that believers who walk in the light:

- *have fellowship with God.*
- *Are being purged from sin.*

As long as the believer **exposes himself to the divine truth** all of his trespasses are covered by the purging power of the blood of Christ. Only because of the redemptive work of the Saviour on the cross we have fellowship with God. Fellowship between **imperfect beings** and their perfect creator. The awareness of the our imperfection before God makes us humble and permanently dependent on Him (com. Mt 5,3/2Cor 11,30; 12,5,9-10/1Cor 1,25; 2,3). Then not only the fellowship with God is undiluted, but also our **fellowship with each other** is made possible. A reconciled fellowship with God heals all broken, inter-relational fellowship with men.

„... **To walk in the light**“ also means that we would allow **our sin to be exposed**. Which means to admit it and confess it in order to live by divine forgiveness.

**Purification by the blood of Jesus** is a description of the „**Salvation work of Golgotha**“, where Jesus shed His holy sacrificial blood for us and our sins (Mt 26,28/Joh 6,53ff./Act 20,28/Rom 5,9/Eph 1,7/Col 1,20/1Petr 1,18 ff./Hebr 9,7.14/Rev 1,5; 5,9; 7,14; 12,11). John also adds: **of His Son**. God Himself has created such purification of sin through His son, which is so thoroughly and extensive, so final and unique, that there is nothing that has to be added anymore. There is no need of further sacrifices of sin. Jesus has **redeemed us of all sin**. God Himself has finished the **chapter of „original sin“** once and for all (Is 53,6; 38,17). All we have to do is to apply this unto our life.

**1Joh 1,8-2,2** - The **thought of fellowship** is a central theme of 1<sup>st</sup> John. After the author of the epistle has explained our relationship with God in his first verses, he continues to speak about **practical advice for every day life of Christians** who can use this as a measure put their relationship with God to a test. They can use those information to find out how much they really know the God they claim to have fellowship with. Since God is light, no Christian can have true fellowship with Him **as long as they still live in darkness**, and may not really seek to have fellowship with Him.

**1Joh 1, 8 – When we say we have no sin, ...** The apostle also warns the believers of **temptation to deceive ourselves**, when a Christian starts to think that he is allegedly without sin just because he is able to have fellowship with God for a moment. For the apostle this is deception. In the second part of the verse he clearly states: „... **we fool ourselves and the truth is not within us!**“ The **human heart** is evil from our youth (Gen 8,21) which points out our **depravity**. Just because a Christian may not be consciously aware of personal sin, does not mean that he is **without sin**. But when the truth, which is God and His Holy Spirit is in Him, as a guiding and motivational power then he would not be tempted to deceive himself in such a way (comp. also Rom 5,5; 1,21,24; 2,15,29; 6,17; 8,27; 10,10/1Cor 4,5/Ma 5,8; 6,2/Act 11,23).

**The heart** of a sinful man does not even have a good core in it, so that a man could just develop differently in time and bring it to perfection or fruition. Paul said: „**nothing good dwells within me.**“ (Rom 17,20). Since our (wicked) heart still guides us and keeps us alive it must be filled by the Trinity of the **Godhead** (1Joh 3,19-21) – only then we can travel a different road (Rom 8,1).

**1Joh 1,9 – But when we confess our sins ...** God will **forgive us**, so that we must admit that we need Him. Jesus already died for the forgiveness of our sins. But through the work of Jesus at Golgotha we are all redeemed from sin and justified by gold. The work of Jesus is accounted to all who belong to God. He is our substitute. God receives us **all as righteous**. On the cross He prayed „Father **forgive them ...**“ - if someone hears those words and receives them for himself, has received forgiveness of sin. The forgiveness of sin is a free gift of grace by God.

The (namely) **confession of sin** is important in order to break the **power of sin** (Ps 32,5/Pro 28,13/Mt 3,6/Act 19,18/Jam 5,16). **Every Christian** who knows that he is sinful and from a wicked world, will always discover something that is not yet perfect in the light of God's word and in His presence. **He will be uncomfortable in his sin** and do everything in order to get rid of it and not repeat it again. With the help of the Holy Spirit Jesus will succeed to ban them from your life.

**What is once „known“ and „confessed“** does no longer have such power and cannot control us. Only the unknown, hidden and covered or unconfessed can bind us, enslave and chain us. Therefore Christians should always be prepared to confess their sins which God's light and Holy Spirit reveals to them (Joh 16,8-9).

The emphasis here lies on „**our sins**“ and not our „**original sin**“. God „forgives and cleanses us of our sins“, of „our unrighteousness“ etc. Even though God knows all of our trespasses and sins, He still wants us to be aware of it and confront it, and then confess it to our God, the Father. If someone does that then perfect cleansing is assured for him. „**God is faithful**“ to forgive us our sins. His faithfulness complies to His „**holiness**“. He makes us „**righteous**“. In the bible in 1Joh 2,1,29 & 3,7 this is the „title of the Messiah“ and stands for the „Father and the son“. God Himself makes us **like Him**.

The forgiveness that **1Joh 1,9** speaks about is forgiveness within the family. And this is nothing extraordinary for a son to ask forgiveness of his father for his mistakes. His position in the family will therefore not be affected. But a Christian who does not ask his heavenly Father for forgiveness can also not develop a sense for things that would upset his Father (also in Mt 6,11-12). Until our final perfection with the return of Jesus we remain carnal people with all the carnal desires and weaknesses, even though we have already been **perfectly renewed in our spirit perfectly** (Eph2,4-6).

When it says God forgives our sins, then it says literally: „**He sends them away**“. Because **forgiveness** is not only **a thought process with God**, but much more a mighty act of power of God (also in Is 53,4/Mi 7,19/1Petr 2,24). God is our voucher and will fulfill His promise (Gen 18,26/Ex 34,7/Ps 85,3; 103,3/Is 33,24/Jer 50,20/Ez 16,63). **We actually have no right to claim forgiveness**, because it is an act of **mercy, love, grace and the faithfulness of God**.

In His forgiveness God acts „**righteous**“, which means according to His justice. Sin is always followed by consequences. This is also righteous. But for him who confesses his sins, the punishment is on Jesus Christ who suffered the penalty of death for us (Is 53,5/1Petr 2,24).

**1Joh 1,10 – When we say we have no sin** ..., this is already a clear “contradiction” against the word of God and rebellion. This attitude alone is sin, because we make God to be „**a liar**“ (Ps14,3/Rom 3,23). And then His word (Jesus – the word) *is no longer in us*.

**1Joh 2,1 - .... if someone sins then we have a mediator with the Father** ...“ The forgiveness of sins is God's unbreakable promise in Jesus Christ for us (Is 1,18; 44,22/Ps 51,9/103,8-13). **It is God's business to forgive**. The forgiveness is not a permission for further, conscious and willful sinning. The apostle made this clear and explained: **“I am writing this to you, so that you will not sin ...”** (Rom 6,1-2) and makes it clear that it is only by grace that man, his will and his actions are changed and made acceptable before God.

The apostle John writes in a fatherly, realistic and compassionate way at the same time. He speaks to his audience as „**children**“, literally: „**newborns**“. This term is mentioned „**seven times**“ in this epistle (1Joh 2,1,12,28; 3,7; 18; 4,4; 5,21) and once in the gospel of John (Joh 13,33).

„... **We have an advocate with the Father**“. The apostle knows about the reality of sin and the human tendency or desires and that none of his readers is „**perfect**“. Therefore he speaks of an „**advocate**“ with God the Father. **John is the only one** in the New Testament who is using the term „**advocate**“ and does so four times. In his gospel he speaks of the „**Holy Spirit**“ as our advocate, respectively reports that Jesus said this (Joh 14,16 & 26; 15,26; 16,7). Some interpreters use the term: „**comforter**“.

In the passage 1Joh 2,1 the author uses this term, respectively the term „**defender**“ instead of advocate. In the sense of an advocate as a lawyer, who represents his client in court. **Therewith Jesus is our defender**. The way how Jesus defends His **sinful children** before God becomes amazingly clear in His prayers for **Peter** (Lk 22, 31-32). Jesus already knew about the coming denial of His disciple and asked the Father to sustain his faith.

There is no reason to think that Christ has to ask God **for grace for a sinner** who would be condemned for his sins otherwise. But the results of failure of a believer, his regeneration and future fruition are always object of the mediation between Jesus and the Father, conversation which are being held when a man has sinned. Jesus' own righteousness, for He is Himself perfectly righteous, is predestined in a unique way for His role as an **advocate** and defender for a Christian who has sinned.

**1Joh 2,2 - ... It is the forgiveness for our sins, of course not alone for ours but also for the sins of the world**. When God shows mercy toward a **believer who has sinned** and will protect him from experiencing the full measure of the penalty, then this is – without a question – NOT **because the believer deserved it**.

The **grace** which is bestowed upon us because of Christ, is much more the perfect fullness of grace which Christ bought for us by His death on the cross. There is no other way to obtain grace before God, than through the work of Christ. Jesus bought for us **reconciliation with God** which is permanent and does not only apply for the sins of the Christians but for **the sins of the world**.

John confirms and approves that Christ really did for **all man** (2Cor 5,14–15;19/Hebr 2, 9). Of course that does not mean that all man are going to be saved, but that everyone who hears the gospel can be saved if that is his will (Rev 22,17). In this context John especially wants to point out the unfathomability of the sacrifice of Christ in order to show them that His mediation is our defense before God, because He, being the **righteous One is in perfect unity with God's holiness**. In this chapter in 1Joh 2,1-6 the apostle John mentions again that **forgiveness** does not, however, **cancel our moral responsibility** to follow the commands of God. To know Jesus means to keep „His commands“. **Knowing**, confession and **love** always belong together in the New Testament. In 1Joh 2,5 the **knowledge of Jesus** is called **the perfect love of God** (com. Joh 17,3; 14,7-9; 21-23). The more you know someone, the more you love them and try to please them.

**1Joh 2,3 – And this is how we know, that we know Him, when we keep His commands.** With these lines John wants to cause his readers **to examine themselves**, so that they themselves would realize where they stand spiritually. The verb “**knowing**”, which is mentioned **two times** in this passage is altogether mentioned **twenty-three times**. Another corresponding synonym is mentioned **six times**. John deliberately uses a **common term of the Gnostic false teachers**, who value knowledge above all things. Knowledge, insight and extensive insider knowledge of mysteries is their goal. But with them it does not go further than thinking. **Knowing in the biblical sense** must also apply **to life in fellowship**.

Therefore it says, knowing Christ is being in fellowship with Him and living according to His will and keeping His commands. The term for commands here is: “**assignment**”, “**order**”. And “**keeping**” literally means “**adhere to**” (Joh 14,15/1Cor 7,19; 14,37/1Tim 1,5; 6,14). With the term „**His commands**“ it refers **to the whole word of God** as well as „**the command of love**“ (Mt 22,36-40/Mk 12,28,29,31/Joh 13,34; 14,15,21; 15,10,12). John's point here is the biblical principle of “**obedience**” (Rom 10,16/1Petr 5,6/Jam 4,10).

The **redemptive work of Jesus** for us does not only include **reconciliation with God**, but also our **discipleship** – to follow the Lord Jesus Christ according to His instructions. The new spiritual life of faith should be applied under the instructions of Jesus and the Holy Spirit concerning their orders for life. Those are no **arbitrary measures** but rather **protective measures** which protect us from sin and help us to live brotherly love and love of our enemies (Joh 15,10). The right love can only grow when I know the will of the beloved and want to live for Him. When you deliberately **submit to the authority of a person** then you will like to follow their instruction (also 1Sam 15,22/Jer 31,31–33).

**1Joh 2,4 – Whoever says: I know Him – and does not keep His commands, is a liar and the truth is not in him.** John is referring to words **not followed by action**. The Gnostics, for examples, said: we know God and are even insiders concerning the deepest mysteries and therefore have the highest revelation! But they were only windbags (comp Deut 32,47) and their words were „**empty**“. The **knowledge of God** always has to lead to „**acknowledgment**“ of God.

**1Joh 2,5 – Whoever keeps His word, in Him the love of God has been made perfect. This is how we know that we are in Him.** John says: “**In him the love of God is perfected**“.

„**Perfect**“ has two meanings:

- On one hand the word of God has accomplished its purpose
- and on the other hand to that person the word of the Lord has become reality.

**To keep God's word** and **to live in the love of God** belong together and cannot be separated (Joh 4,23 ff.). The goal of the divine word is to help the fallen sinners to come back into a love relationship with God. The word „**perfect**“ does not mean that it is finished, but rather describes a development to a certain level of quality. The **Christians are the newborns** because they live in this changing process of divine love. This is something new and something eternal. **To be in Him** describes the closest form of fellowship. Christian faith is a **fellowship of life and love with Christ Himself** (Joh 14,15,21,23). Out of obedience to God grows a love to God (1Joh 5,3).

The bible shows us **how Jesus, by obedience, remained under and in the love of God**. He kept the commands of His Father and therefore remained in His love. This makes it perfectly clear: **Obedience and love** belong together (comp. Ex 30,6-8/Joh 15,1-8; 17,23/Gal 2,20). John explained that to be “**in Christ**” is the characterizing and recognizable fellowship with Him. And our goal would be to stay there. Therefore John explains: “... let him live, just as He lived.” And he highlights the abiding in HIM, which means: “remain



standing", "standing firm", "resisting", or also "dwell" or "**remain firm**". This is the decisive term of John for a "**consistent discipleship**" - he uses this terminology **66 times** in the gospel of John and in the epistles. He picks up Jesus' call (Joh 6,56; 8,31; 15,4ff.). How many people have met Jesus at that time, but how few remained with Him (also Joh 6, 67). He wants them to stay so that they would walk and live with HIM. If someone wants to stay he can only do that by following the example of Jesus, living as He lived, acts and ministers as He did (also Eph 5,22-25).

**1Joh 2,6 - Who says that h is in Him, should also live as He lived.** John still talks about obedience to God, toward His plans and His will. But this obedience cannot be a result of our **own decisions** or based on our **own effort**, but only because Jesus Christ is indeed within us and the spirit of grace and the power of God is working through us. Jesus Christ, the obedient one, will cause us to be obedient.

1.Joh.2,7 – ***My beloved, I am not giving to you a new command, but the old command, which you have heard from the beginning. The old command is the word that you have heard.*** John insists that the believers would have to **fulfill the commands of God** in order to test and examine if they truly know God. Which commands this refers to is mentioned in the verse.

The apostle is not talking about new obligations or even new commands, that the recipients of the epistle have not heard before. It is the **old command**, it is the word, which they have heard from the beginning. **The term old** does not mean outdated, past or useless, because this is what the Gnostics claimed in their arrogance. For them the apostolic and biblical words were outdated, because they always claimed new and higher knowledge and new ethic guidelines, revelations that would either be very strict instructions in order to obtain holiness and perfection, or passive permissiveness. They taught that the spirit which is filled with revelation is no longer subject to the body, with which they can then do whatever they want because it will have no effect. In the bible the **understanding of the term old is rather something that has been valid for a long time**, something that was proven over the ages. The word of God lasts the longest. Through His word He did not only create the eternal cosmos. His word also showed Israel the way of life throughout all of history. The word has become flesh in Jesus Christ and came to dwell among us. And Jesus proclaims the ancient word of God.

"**New**" on the other hand has the Greek meaning of "**it has not been before.**" But the message of Christ is not new, it was already proclaimed in the Old Testament. In Him the will of God, the word of salvation comes to fulfillment and perfection. Therefore the word that John wants to preach to the hearts of the church members is the command of the old promise of salvation of God, the saving **word of redemption**.

**1Joh 2,8 – And yet I am writing to you a new command, which is true in Him and in you: for the darkness will pass and the true light will shine.** Jesus had already **mentioned this new command** (Joh 13,34), even though it was not that new (Lev. 19,18). The only thing that is new is the change from „your neighbour“ and „each other“ to „as yourself“ and „as I have loved you“.

The sacrificial love of Christ is the role model of Christian love. The fellowship of the believers is the most important relationship in which it can be shown (com. Mt 25,40/ Gal 6,10/ Eph 5,25). And John also points out that nothing has **lost its value**. It is still a truly **new command**. It is **a command fulfilled by Jesus** – a law of love that can only come true in the love among the disciples of Christ. This refers to the **next statement**: „...*For darkness will pass and the true light will shine!*“, that yet reveals something new to us. John says that **the command of love** after which Jesus and His disciples lived, belonged to the new age of righteousness, the era which was to come. They were not supposed to have anything to do with the age of darkness which has passed away. After John rejected the **Gnostic misinterpretations** with emphasis, he deliberately uses the term: "**new command**" - the command to love God and the brethren, which Jesus perfectly lived and manifested (Joh 11,36; 13,1; 15,13/ Eph 5,1ff./Rev 1,5). Through **rebirth** and **empowerment of the Holy Spirit** we can also live according to God's command (Rom 5,5/ Jer 31,33). We can live by the love of God, for it is poured out into our hearts (Rom 5,5; Jer 31,33).

**1Joh 2,9 - Who says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.** If someone claims for himself that he is „**in the light** ...“ - and this is what the Gnostics claim for themselves, but their hard and selfish judgment of others, their disrespect of others and also believers who are allegedly not as illuminated and anointed as they are, exposes them as „**hypocrites**“ and „**windbags**“. The „**light of God**“ and the „**hating the brethren**“ does not fit together. „**Hating**“ according to the NT terminology means: "to despise", "to be hostile to", "to fight against" or "seek to kill" (com. Mt 5 44; 24,10/Lk 6,22/Joh 15,18 & 19) and this is called the works of darkness (Rom 7,15; 12,9/ Rev 2,6). Biblical „hatred“ is not only a temporary emotion, but rather a certain **attitude** (Gen 26,27/Ps 44,11/Pro 13,24/Mt10,22; 24,10/Lk 6,22). With this warning the apostle submits this subject to the Christians, because the terminology „**brother**“ refers to **the brethren of faith**“ from the church.

**1Joh 2,10,11 – If someone loves his brother, he stays in the light**, and already lives **in the new age**, which had begun with Jesus, the new creation, the new world of God, according to the order of God in our hearts. A man who **loves his brother will not fall**. **Hatred and contempt** are some kind of **inner stumbling block** which also cause others to fall. But if someone loves his brother, he would see to it, that worse results of hatred would be avoided. The **love of the brothers** is the first field of practicing love – **loving God, our neighbors and enemies** (Ga. 6,10/2Petr 1,7/Joh 13,35).

**1Joh 2,12 - ... I am writing you, that your sins are forgiven because of His name**. With emphasis John explains again that **our sins are already forgiven and ransomed**, and the holy God wants to be reconciled and united with his sinful children again. The former veil between the **sinner and God** is taken away by Jesus atonement for our sins. Whoever wants to come to God now has to confess his sins to God and repent. **He has to admit** that he is lost, a slave of sin, himself and of evil, whose spirit was darkened by Satan and whose eyes did not perceive the beauty and glory of God. In order to acknowledge your won sin you will have to understand that you already existed dead and far away from God.

**And then we should allow God** to renew us from scratch **and regenerate us** so that He can have fellowship with us and we can remain in His fellowship. Our **redemption** is in no way our own work or effort but only His work alone. It can also not result from our improvement by education, reformation, upbringing, etc. **Redemption** is solely by **God's grace alone**.

„...**forgiven... in His name**“ ... The believer lives of and by the **forgiveness of sins** which happened in Jesus Christ. The term **name** refers to the whole person in His being and works. Thus Jesus is fully present in His „**name**“ and fully manifests Himself in it (Ex 3,15; 20,7/Deut 12,5/2Sam 7,13/Ps 8 2; 23,3/Jer 10,6; 14,7).

Our forgiveness of sin only rests upon the mighty sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. It says: **“for His name's sake.”**, which means at His cost, because of Him (1Cor 6,20/2Petr 2,1/Rev 5,9). Since **all that happened concerning forgiveness** is because of Jesus, independent of what we have done, all we have to do is receive it.

**1Joh 2,13-14 - „I write to you as fathers ... „** - In this passage three different age groups are addressed: **„children, young men and fathers“**. In reality this addresses the same group, the recipients of the letter, which are characterized in different ways.

- They are **„children“**, because through forgiveness they were adopted as children of God,
- **„young men“** because they have the victory by their determined repentance, comparable to the victory that Jesus achieved when He was tempted in the desert (Mt 4,1-11).
- And they are **„fathers“** because their revelation of Jesus enables them to teach this knowledge to the coming generation.

These **three characteristics correspond to their experiences** with changes and development in power, knowledge, abilities and responsibilities. Each of these life phases are their own and their privilege. Often their sphere of influence such as their authority, spiritual and mental maturity is increased and enhanced.

John explains the biblical principle of **„growth“** and **„maturity“**. Believers are supposed to grow continuously (com. Lk 2,52/1Kor 15,58/2Thes 1,3/1Ptr 2,2).

**The apostle explains three stages of spiritual life**, which is always a growing in the knowledge of Christ.

- The **first stage** (children) is when you accomplish the **sonship with God** through the forgiveness of sins.
- The **second stage** (young men) is when you remain **in the word and overcome evil**.
- The **third stage** (fathers) is when you know the One who is from the beginning (1Joh 2,13,14). When their knowledge of Christ reaches a certain level it renders them the maturity of a father.

Through their knowledge they have **a rich portion of eternal life**, and they can expect a great reward. But they are yet not more saved, more righteous or more holy than the **young men**. They are not even more righteous than the **children**, because in their sonship they are not more valuable than them and they are also not holier.

The **difference** is that the fathers who have obtained righteousness and holiness in Christ have learned how to process this knowledge into revelation and are not immature in their understanding (1Cor 14,20). Mature knowledge is the only mark of of growing members of the body of Christ.

**1Joh 2,15-17 – Do not love the world** ... The term for „**world**„ in the New Testament is different from the term of the Old Testament. Through the Christian faith the term „**world**„ gained a different dimension. This can be seen by the many different Hebrew terms or descriptions in the Old Testament, while in the New Testament the Greek word that is translated „**world**“ is always the same, which is „**cosmos**„. Generally the term „**world**“ in the Old Testament is a relatively rarely used word.

It can mostly be found **in Psalms**. One reason is that there was no clear expression in OT faith for a more or less neutral description of the universe. Because especially at this point the **Old Testament uses „personal words“**. The world in its fullness „**and everything that is therein**„ (Acts 17,24), is usually used to refer to the creation of God. You can see how heaven and earth came into being by the breath of His word as the „**work of His hands**„ (Ps 19,2).

In the **Old Testament** we find the **following descriptions for the term – the world**:

- There is the world as **foundation and space for all that was created** (1Sam 2,8/Ps 90,2);
- then there is the world as **sum total of all creation** (Ps 96,1; 98,3/Is 54,5) and
- eventually there is the world as **the whole humanity** and at the same time the reference to the earth as man has made it to be by the work of his hands (Gen. 11,1/Ps 24,7; 46,10; 50,1; 96,1/Is. 14,7/Hab 2,20).
- In addition there is the world as **embodiment of sin and depravity of all creation** (Jos 23,14/Ps 17,14; 73,12), and
- the world which is **subject to God's judgment** (Gen. 18,25/Ps 33,8).
- The **New Testament** word for „**world = cosmos**“ in the Greek has a simple, three-fold meaning:
- Firstly „**adornment and jewelry**„ (think of the word „**cosmetics**“).
- Secondly it refers to **order and world order**, which means the cosmos stands for order and not chaos.
- Finally it has the meaning of „**dwelling place of man**“ and scene for its history. It is the **inhabited globe of the earth**.

For our understanding of the term „**the world**“ we should reflect on the third meaning. The word „**cosmos**“ also refers to the „**universe**“, all of creation concerning space (Joh 21,25/Acts 17,24/1Cor 3,22/Rev 10,6). But this created world is not „**eternal**“, but perishable and temporary. It has a beginning and therefore it also has an end (Mt 24,21/Mk 13,19/Lk 11,50/1Cor 7,31).

It is the world of **this limited / temporary age** and is the counter part of the coming age of the new creation. **Remarkably** the New Testament does not use the same term „**cosmos**“ to describe the new earth which is to come, which means the term of the **temporary** world does not apply to the **new creation of God**. The world in the sense of dwelling place of men is not so much emphasized in the NT. We could think of some examples of the „**all the kingdoms of the world**“, in the story of temptation (Mt 4,8) or to „**gain all the world**„ (Mk 8,36/Lk 9,25) or sending out the disciples **in all the world**„ (Mk 16,15/comp. Act 1,8), but surely the prophecy of Jesus in (Mt 26,13 & 1Pet 5,9). This also includes the terminology of „coming into the world“ which refers to the Christ who came to all men.

The **more important and independent meaning of this term is** the world as the **deprived creation**, humanity which has fallen from God and the stage of God's story of salvation through Jesus Christ. „**World**„ means humanity – hostile to God. Therefore Paul also points out the difference between this „**world and God**“. The reason for that **is the sin of man**, which has crept into this world by man's disobedience to God (Rom 5,12). Therefore ALL men are sinners (Rom 3,19) and subject of God's judgment of this world (Rom 3,6/1Cor 6,2; 11,32).

Only the few chosen saints of God are saved. It is the Lord who appears as the redeemer of this creation which is subject to God's judgment.

**Through Him the world is transformed into the kingdom of God**. Therefore the church of Christ in this temporary **present age** does not belong to this world, even though they temporarily dwell therein. The Christians know God as the **creator of the world** (Acts 17,24) and live according for His regulations concerning this age (Rom 13,2). John is even more precise, because to him **this world is the stage** upon which the work of redemption takes place. Therefore for John the term world goes beyond humanity, it includes the universe, for example when he calls Christ the light of this world. This world opposes the salvation work of God (Joh 1,10; 7,7; 15,18). This rejection eventually leads to **the judgment of this world**„. John emphasizes that the believers are **not of this world**„ (Joh 15,19), for they have been chosen by Christ to be separated from it. They will encounter hatred and rebellion in this world but in the end, through the power of their Lord, they will overcome the world (1Joh 5,4 u. 5).

But first of all this **world is the place of their testimony and trial** (s. Joh 17,14–18 u. 23). But this world is not the place to which they belong (1Joh 2,15). At this point we see the same warning as in Rom 12,2 b< Paul where it says: „do not be **conformed to this world**“ Which does **not mean the same** as the Gentile-philosophical despise of the world, but it is rather a terminology of Christian faith referring to persistent following after Christ who has overcome the world, which means „**the church**“ **as the body of Christ** is something „**eternal and supernatural**“ which has its being in the eternity of the invisible world of God.

**In the kingdom of God only God has the last word** and there His eternal statutes are exercised, such as „**love**“. Everything in this world will come to an end, **only love remains** (1Cor 13,13).

This **love is an essential characteristic** of Christian life. **Love for God** shows in our obedience (Joh 14,15,21,23/1Joh 5,3). **Loving our neighbor** proves that we are willing to give our life for theirs (1Joh 3,16/Joh 15,12). Loving yourself and your brothers and sisters. This „**brotherly love**“ is deeper than just love. There is a saying which goes: „blood is thicker than water.“

**1Joh 2,16 – The things of the world are not of the Father**“ (also in Jam 4,4). The love of the world has nothing to do with the love of God and the two do not match up together. The reason is that this world and everything that is in it is **subject to vanity**. All things in this world **are vain** and will perish one day. God, however, **is eternal** and consistent. Therefore God only accepts and receives that **which is also eternal**, that which is still there after consumed with fire (1Cor 3,12-14). The world passes by and **man** dies with it, with all that he desired and wanted. **We, being part of this world also have to perish**, which means: **die**. And all who are bound to their lusts and what this world has to offer will go down with it (Lk 12,20ff.). On the day of the Lord's return the works which were done upon it will be exposed and judged (2Petr 3,10). All „**temporary**“ (such as suffering, pain and sickness, etc.) is temporary, only for a time and will not be found in the new world of God (Rev. 21,3-5; 7,16). Whoever does the will of God **“remains in eternity”** (1Joh 2.17/Joh 5,5; 8,51; 10,28; 11,26/Mt 25,46/Act 13,48/Rom 6,23/2 Cor 4,17; 5,1/Gal 6,8/1Tim 1,16).

**1Joh 2,18-27 – Those are warnings of the temptation of the Antichrist**. Since Jesus proclaimed the judgment of the world, „**the last hour**“. The apostle John refers to the time between the **first coming** and the **return of Jesus** as „**the last hour**“ (Act1,7; 2,17/1Cor 10,11), no matter how long this may take till it manifests. For the apostles the time is „**near**“ (Rev.1,3; 22,20). Besides the **general warning of the world** he mentions another warning of the phenomenons, typical for the Last days, which is the „**Antichrists**“ (1Joh 2,18), who are enemies of God. The **last Antichrist** has a lot of forerunners (2Thes 1,2-10/Rev 13,11-18). **Up till** now the apostle had only been talking about false teachers who are causing confusion in the church (1Joh 2,22; 4,3). Also the other apostles warned of such people (Act 20,29-31). But in the Last Days the **Antichrist will be a direct opponent of Christ**.

**The Antichrist** speaks against Christ and against His word in many ways: he denies the Sonship of Jesus Christ, he denies the historical facts, he declares that resurrection did not take place, he de-mythologizes the word. He teaches new, beyond-Christ kind of revelations or openly attacks Christ and all who belong to Him. All of those are **realities of the Antichrist**, which we encounter today.

„**The last hour is the age of the Antichrist**. He is the last adversary of God and His Christ (2Thess 2,3ff./Rev. 13,1ff./19,17ff.). **Satan will not show up personally yet**, but he will use a man in order to destroy the church of God in order to attack God and take away His power. Therefore Jesus warns His church of this ruler who will pretend to be like God (Mt 24), those many **lying Christs** and the numerous **lying prophets** of the last days (Mt 24,5; 11/Lk 21,20ff./Rev. 19,19/Zach 12,2–6). With the different appearances **of the many charismatic personalities** of history (such as Nero, Stalin, Hitler, etc) Satan has already practiced for the last appearance of the “Antichrist” (Lk 21, 20 ff./Rev 19,19/Zach 12,2–6). **It is disturbing** that all of those Antichrists **come from** within the church (1Joh 2,19/Mt 24,10).

**If someone leaves the church** he separates himself from the **building assignment** and plans of transformation of the Lord and starts to serve the enemy. The spirit of God is a **spirit of unity** and not of division and separation (Act 20,30/1Cor 1,11ff.; 11,19; 12,25/Joh 17,11,21,23/Eph 4,3).

**When false teachings** come up within the Christian church, no matter if it comes from saved or unsaved church members, is always a sign of **fundamental disharmony** with the spirit and the teachings of the apostles. People who live in a vivid relationship with God obey the word of God and the apostolic instructions (1Joh 4,6). On the other hand it demands a lot of **patience** from the believers to accept the **long time of waiting**, but God still wants to draw many unto repentance (2Petr 3,9), and also evil as wicked tares still have to reach their full maturity. That is why the heretics say that they do not need **anyone who teaches them** (1Joh 2,27). Patience can be „**learned**“ by applying what you know and „**standing firm**“ - holding fast to what you have already attained. This is what the apostle is trying to accomplish in his epistle (Gal 2,5).

**1Joh 2,28-3,3 – This is about the true children of God and how we can recognize them.** One of the main characteristics of sonship of God is that they „**stay**“. The false teachers and Antichrists have **left Jesus** and are therefore no longer partakers of eternity, even though they claim to fellowship with the Father and the Son (Mt 24,13/Joh 15,4 ff/Rom 8,37/Rev 2,7).

The terminology: „**Abide in Him!**“ ...

- appears in 1Joh 2,6-27 10-times.
- **112 times** in the whole NT.
- 66-times in John.
- 40-times in the gospel of John,
- 23-times in 1<sup>st</sup> John and
- 3-times in 2<sup>nd</sup> John.

This evolves around the deep fellowship with God. There is no other possibility to have intimate fellowship with **God the Father**, than through His Son, who is Jesus Christ. Without **Jesus** every „**God**“ or „**Godhead**“ remains „**an idol**“ and deception, may it be Jehova or Allah, etc. (Joh 14,6/Act 4,12/Rom 10,14/1Joh 5,12). Indeed only the one who believes in Jesus also has eternal life (Joh 5,24), and becomes a son of God. When they are filled with the Holy Spirit, believers receive a **revelation of the truth** and **life**, which is a mystery to the world and its system. The **world and depraved, sinful, unbelieving people** who all belong to the world and live in rebellion (sin) to God, cannot receive the Holy Spirit of grace and perfection (Joh 7,39; 14,17). The Holy Spirit only dwells in the believers who **belong to Jesus** and **obey Him** (1Cor 3,16;6,16,9/2Cor 6,16/Eph 2,21/Joh 3,36/Act 5,32).

**The fellowship with God**, that the apostle John refers to, expects the believer to confess Jesus as Lord and Saviour and then lead a holy life through the spirit and by faith. In 1Joh 2,29 it speaks about „**rebirth**“ for the first time.

Only the „**born again**“ „receives the kingdom of God“ (Joh 3,5-8). For this blessed person the new life is poured out from above (from God) into his heart – and becomes visible in his every day life and actions. This is followed by the instruction in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter „**Behold!**“ - *which love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we shall be called His children – and we are His children! Therefore the world does not know us, for it has also not know Him.*“ Something becomes visible in the life of the believer. The emphasis is on the „**visible**“. The believer no longer looks at himself but looks to Jesus (Hebr 12,2). He sees how Jesus works in him and strengthens him in his weakness and also has the correct „**perception**“ of his life. He does no longer look back, finds it easy to forgive and forget what is behind (Phil 3,13). And because we look to Jesus, we focus on Him and no longer focus on ourselves, circumstances or other people (com. Phil 4,13). The word - „**behold**“ - also calls us to be **grateful for** the great love of God and the grace of rebirth, that we may be called children of God – and are indeed His children. The „**world**“ does not know Christians and this „**knowing**“ in the biblical context means „**acknowledging**“ in the sense of acceptance. They cannot and will not believe, cannot understand this process with their mind or grasp it with their understanding. They can also not understand that a spiritually reborn person should suddenly be different and no longer belongs to them (Eph 2,6/Col 1,13). The „**born again**“ can also not prove it to them, because he has nothing that he could show them, unless they stayed with him and could perceive the changes throughout his life. But they avoid him, persecute or even mock him (Mt 5,12; 10,22/Joh 16,2ff.). The unbelievers and the world are blind for the „**new creation**“, because they are not able to see Jesus and salvation (Rom 8,1-2). Since the world does not know Christ, we cannot expect them to perceive the believers as children of God. Such a perception is **reserved for Christians alone**.

**1Joh 3,2 – We already are children of God** – the apostle wants to comfort them. John wants to express that a son is always the son of the Father, but that still does not mean that he is responsible and mature. **A son knows his way around the Father's house**. He knows about purposes and plans of his Father (Joh 5,20). If the Father sends away His son with an assignment, He will also give him the authority to do it. For this reason the son can always be confident and secure wherever he goes. This is also how Jesus referred to Himself.

But John also emphasized: „**Just as He was, we are in this world**“ (1Joh 4,17). **The sons of God** are like children in the house of their father when it comes to the things of God. They know their way because they are „insiders“ and have the subsequent authority and can, should and may speak and act in the name of the father. But they are also devoted to the will of their Father. It is clear that they would work and go wherever and however He works and goes. They want to do what the Father tells them to do. The opposite of the position of a son is the position of a **servant and slave**. They do not stay in the same house. A servant does not have unlimited access to the Lord of the house, a slave is not usually involved with the plans of the Master. With this statement in 1Joh 3,2 the apostle John points out that already in this age on this material

earth we are **fully children of God**. We already carry the nature of **Jesus** on the inside of us. Our life is hidden in God with Christ (comp. Col 3,3/Rom 7,24; 8,23/Joh 12,32/Rom 8,30/Eph 5,27/1Cor 15, 43/2Cor 4,17/1Thess 4,17/Rom 14,8/2Cor 5,8/Phil 3,21).

**1Joh 3,3 – Every one who sets his hope in Him, purges himself just like He is purged.** This is a call to **„sanctification“** and **„purification“** which happens through the **„word of God“**. This is where the **regulations** for our new life are settled (Joh 15,3/2Cor 7,1). This **kind of sanctification** is a free, not required by law, but given by the **Holy Spirit kind of sanctification** which makes us more and more **like our role model Jesus whom we follow**.

This is more of a **„transformation“** or **„change“ into the image of Jesus** (1Cor 15,51-52/2Cor 3,18), so that a Christian can be **„a witness of Jesus** (Acts 1,8). And so **1Joh 2.29** till **4,19** only deals with one topic: **„the fellowship with God“** and **„abiding“** in God.

**1Joh 3,4 – ... says what “sin” is.** Between the Old Testament Jewish and the New Testament Christian understanding of sin, there is interestingly an **essential difference**.

- In the **Old Testament** and especially for the Rabbinic Judaism **sin is a trespass** against God's statutes and commandments. If someone followed those laws he was righteous and not a sinner.
- For the **New Testament sin** in its root is the man-indebted **separation from God**.

**Sin is therefore a condition.** It is **the condition of distance from God** and based on that also a **trespass**. In the NT there are **no “righteous“** as in the sense of the Old Testament and Judaism, for all are sinners (Rom 3,23). **“Not one is righteous!”** (1Joh 3,10). All people are separated from God. The Old Testament speaks of the **„depravity“** of a whole people and reports how a personally innocent man would then be punished for the sin of another single person or for the whole group (Gen. 19,15/Ex 20,5/Jos 7/2Sam 21,1-9/2Kin 5,27). Also the NT teaches **the doctrine of sin** based on the foundation of the Old Testament, **but it leaves** the common starting point, where suddenly forgiveness and repentance to God is bound to the sacrificial death of the Son of God. In the New Testament there is only One who bridged for us the great divide of sin by His atonement. “Nobody can come to the Father than through me” (Joh. 14, 6). The apostle John says: **„sin“ is always acting against the law of God**, respectively against the commands of God. If someone does not respect or follow the word of God it has no cleansing power. A sinner will not receive any of the good and true things of God. He commits injustice, literally - **“lawlessness“**. Sin is where the will of God is despised and not acknowledged or respected. It is remarkable that the terms **sin, lawlessness** in 1<sup>st</sup> John are mentioned in direct relation to the **Antichrist. The Antichrist is the sinner** who deliberately refuses to obey God and His commands and does not even consider the seriousness of sin (Mi 7,23; 13,41; 24,12/2Thess 2,7). He does not only separate himself deliberately from God but also from Jesus Christ and all that is holy to God (2Joh 3,6,7). The reason for this attitude is **the sin within them** (com. Gal 5,16-26/Rom 7,20).

**1Joh 3,10 – John says that children of God and children of evil can easily be discerned.** He says it will be revealed, it will be evident for all (Mt 6,22). In the verses 10 to 15 the apostle explains what this love is not and says: “If someone does not do right, **he is not of God.**“ This terminology is mentioned **seven times** in the Epistles of John (1Joh 4,1-4, 6-7/3Joh 11).

**1Joh 3,11 – This becomes evident in the brotherly love** (Joh 13,34; 15,12+17). **Love is** not only a part of the Gospel but it is the reason and content of the divine word. Without love faith would only be an ideology (com. Mt 24,12; 22,37). **Unkindness** is always a sign of depravity of God (com. Rev 2,4). If someone hates his brother he is as a murderer (1Joh 3,15/Mt 5,22).

**1Joh 3,12 – Cain is mentioned** – who killed his brother because of wickedness, hatred and jealousy (Gen 4,5-7/Hebr 11,4). He was **„a child of the devil“**, and that is why he killed his brother.

**1Joh 3,13 – The children of the devil cannot “love” for they are led by hatred.** Christians are not supposed to wonder about it and look at it “ (comp Joh 7.7). We cannot escape the hate of the world **towards the believer** because by their love the wickedness of the world is exposed. The **attacks of the world** are a burden for them, but it also helps them to **know** that they are not of this world (1Joh 3,14). They are **born again** and live according to different statutes (Mt 8,22/1Tim 5,6).

**1Joh 3,16 – is about the biblical Christian love**, agape, the love that God has for us, which is so strong that it has become the source of love for us Christians.

**Agape love** can be seen in Jesus, His coming, life, suffering and death. His whole life and He as a person was given for us in His incarnation and sacrificial death on the cross of Golgotha(Phil 2,5–8/Joh 3,16).

**John abandons the topic of rebirth at this point and picks it up again in chapter 4,7.** Already around chapter 2, vers 28 John has described the purpose of his epistle and treated two points of it in detail. He speaks about righteousness which is displayed in the **brotherly love**. He emphasizes: **“If you keep His commands you abide in God and God in you.”** This important fellowship with God is also explained in the **parable of the vine** and the branches (s. Joh 15,4; 5 & 7). The second and new motive is the first indication of altogether six **indications to the Holy Spirit** (1Joh 4,2; 6; 13; 5,6; 8). The way a Christian can prove that **God abides in Him**, lies in the **work of the Holy Spirit** in his life. John clearly shows that this divine spirit is a spirit of faith and love (1Joh 4,1–6). John makes it evident that a Christian who does not love his brother is still in darkness, which means that he is still living in the same sphere of the world as before.

**Since in his heart he would still be a murderer like the devil**, he cannot have close fellowship with God and with Christ. On the opposite the **brotherly love and the love of God** manifests especially in every day life (1Joh 3,17) through practical deeds and helping others (1Joh 3.18).

If you are **acting out love in a practical way**, such as meeting the needs of other brethren, you will know as a Christian who is a partaker of the truth (1Joh 3,19,20). The **brotherly love** encourages us as Christians to **„love our neighbor”** and then also to **„love our enemies”**. John perceives salvation very sober and factual. **If our „assurance of salvation”** would only be founded on the way we live, however, it would be severely threatened. Especially as Christians we experience over and over again that our heart condemns, accuses and judges us. The apostle is using the word heart instead of conscience, which has to be convicted by God and put to silence (Ps 24,4/Is 29,13/Hebr 13,9/Rev 2,23).

**God is greater than our heart** and our conscience (1Joh 3.21,22). **„Who keeps his commands** abides in God and God in him. And this is how we know that He abides in us – through the spirit He has given us” (1Joh 3,24). At this point the apostle is referring to the discernment **between the spirit of God and other spirits**. The church of Jesus **has a profile** for all things that appear in the spirit of God, and all that is said and taught (Acts 17,11/Rom 12,2/1Cor 14,29/Eph 5,10/Phil 1,10/1Thess 5,21). If they do not recognize the profile they are tempted by Satan. Already in the Old Testament there were such false prophets and a profile that **Israel could discern as the Spirit of God** (Deut 13,2ff.; 18,18ff./1Chr 22, 22/Is. 9,14/Jer 5,31; 14,14; 23,25ff.; 27,10; 27,14 ff.; 29, 9.21/Zach 13,3).

**1Joh 4,3 – ... tells us how we can know the Antichrist and the false prophet**, because they do not confess or acknowledge Jesus as God (com. Joh 14,9). But the believers live through God, His power and strength which was revealed in Jesus. And this is what will overcome the false prophets and teachers. The **false prophets** have success and influence but not in the church of Jesus and the children of God (1Joh 4,5). The **world speaks with words** of so-called human, perishable wisdom (1 Cor 1,19 &.25; 2,1-16). Those are often lofty religious thoughts and strongly impressive words. The **world** eventually always talks about **itself, boasts therein**, praises itself and justifies itself. The people of the world also like to hear it and receive it with admiration.

**1Joh 4,6 – „Who knows God, hears our voice.”** The apostle emphasizes: **“We** (the apostle of Jesus) are of God” - which means they were chosen, taught and marked with His power and His character. All for the sake of the Gospel and they were **persecuted by the world** and died as **„martyrs”** - as blood-witnesses for the Kingdom of God (2Cor 2,15 u.16/Rev 1,9). Thus the spirit of truth and the spirit of error can be discerned. The new **reality of joint property** is **where the spirit of God reigns**. But where the holy word of truth is rejected by criticism, reinterpreted, divided, weakened and relativized, there the spirit of error, you can also call it **spirit of confusion** and spirit of deception, is present. The wrong path will eventually lead us into lies and deception (vgl. Lk 13,34; 19,41ff.).

In this chapter the apostle talks about the exposition of the Antichristian, satanic **lying spirit**. John emphasized in his letter the eternal **spirit of God, love** and rebirth, followed by discipleship (1Joh 4,7). He therewith gave his readers **the necessary tool to expose the false spirits** – the spirit of the Antichrist (Eph 2,2).

**1Joh 4,7-21 - Our love is our “soul barometer” reveals our innermost part.** This does not refer to a general human soul related emotions, but rather a spiritual, pure and bright love that is of God. A compassionate, merciful love that is free of every selfish desire. Such pure and passionate love cannot be produced out of ourselves or be sought after with our own strength. This precious heavenly home can only be attained by the new birth in spirit and in truth.

**Divine love** and the natural human love **is different in its essence**. Where God **„recreates”**, the **divine seed** of His kind, which corresponds to His essence, is placed in our heart and revived. Then we have the perfect divine nature and God within us. This **new life** has to grow within us and unfold (Phil 2,5) until it becomes

**perfect love** within us, which then manifests on the outside in **brotherly and general love**. This message (Vers 11-19) is the **center of the Epistle of John**.

**1Joh 4,20** - ... **speaks of loving God for the first time**.“ Loving our **invisible God** can only be concretely expressed in our love for our **visible brother**. Finally God Himself in His command summarized those two kinds of love, which is summarized in **the love of God and our love for our brothers**.

**1Joh 5** - ... **speaks about the true faith and its fruit**. Man is not a „**being created for singleness**“, who was made to be alone. God has purposed that we live in families, neighborhoods, communities, countries and different races, yet humanity is one unity and every man is a member of this unity. God wanted perfect harmony in this great organism.

**God's plan and will was** the establishment of human society that lives in harmony of God's creation – in this order – **God, your neighbor and yourself**. Sin has reversed that order. **Selfishness abolished love**. And up to this day the whole system of human society is severely threatened. **In Christ** and only in Him man can come into the right relationship with God, himself and his fellow men in order to restore the original order of God. The apostle emphasizes in this chapter that **Christian life is a community** which is rooted in faith and maintained by love. Here he concludes the different themes and aspects of this letter and also summarizes them.

Those themes are, faith, confession of Christ and love. He points out that true faith is solely a work of God alone in His Trinity (Matt 16,17). He goes on to say that we were created and reborn by God and through that have received His nature, so that the new life requires **perfect transformation**. The **natural man** lives isolated and only for himself because **he loves himself above all**, while the **spiritual man** lives for God and now **loves God above all** – and is even ready to sacrifice all for God, abandon it and would even die for Him. This burning passion for God will also cause him to love his fellow men, **especially his brothers** which are children of God (1Joh 5,2).

The love for the community is a test of our **relationship with God**. The apostle John urges his readers to „**keep his commands – Jesus commands**“, and is again referring to the one „**two commands**“ (Mt 22,36-40;12,50/Joh 15,10/1Joh 5,3) which should go together hand in hand (Mt 11,28,29), which has a very positive sound. Since 1<sup>st</sup> John is lacking signature and greetings we must assume that **this letter** is some kind of sermon. But it could also be a Christian book of instruction or an amendment of **the Gospel of John** where the message of Jesus finds application in every day life of Christianity and His teachings can then be applied. This letter emphasizes and judges the Christian **way of life** as the most evident contrast to that of the allegedly illuminated Gnostics, false prophets and Antichrists. No matter how apostle John describes the religious **revelation**, he always refuses to **present it independent of the historical Jesus**. His message is “christianitized” and he warns the church of „**disunity**“ and „**pagan excesses**“.

**1Joh 5,4-5** - „**All that is born of God, overcomes the world**“ Jesus was born of God. He overcame Satan and the world and fought this fight in victory. Now we are the „**newborns**“ and born of God, who follow in His footsteps because this is why He saved us of the oppression of darkness and the power of Satan.

**According to Rev12,11 we receive 3 strong weapons** for this battle:

- The children of God overcome by the **blood of Christ**;
- and by the **word of their testimony**
- and did not love their life even up to death - (the emphasis is on **devotion**).

The apostle and the disciples of Jesus have loved this world, the things of God and their fellow men, that they were ready – just like Jesus – to sacrifice their life on the cross or on the stake.

**1Joh 5,6-13** - **Here a theme of the Gospel of John is picked up** (Joh 19,34), where it is about the testimony of God's son Jesus Christ. The key word „**word and blood**“ the whole God-approved life of Jesus is described. „**Water**“ refers to the first **public testimony of God** of Jesus in His **baptism at the Jordan river**. „**Blood**“ refers to His agony and His death on the cross, which started with the glorification on the mount (Mt 17,2-5/Lk 9,31) and ended with an earth quake and solar eclipse (Lk 23,44-45).

It should be noticed that the apostle John was the only disciple of Jesus who had been with Him from the beginning and stayed with Him till the end on the cross (Joh 19,26). He witnessed the **agony of Jesus** first hand, how he sweated „**water and blood**“ (Lk 22,44) and finally there came only water from His side. Also the guard and the other people at the cross can confirm this – this was truly the Son of God (Lk 23,47,48). Also the soldier who pierced His side saw that blood and water flowed from Him (Joh 19,34).



And then John mentions a **third witness**, the **Holy Spirit** which was poured out as a prompt answer to the prayer of Jesus (Joh 14,16-17; 15,26).

**1Joh 5,16-17 – A serious warning of the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.** It is the „deadly sin“, which cannot be forgiven (Mk 3,28-30). Jesus had talked to a Pharisee, John is referring to the Gnostic **false teachers**, because they were known to **blaspheme** against the Holy Spirit (s. 2Joh 10). John said, they have went out from us even though they had tasted the heavenly gift, the good word of God and the powers of the coming world. Now they publicly appeared and denied Jesus by saying that He is not the Son of god. Their sin is so serious, that not even intercession should be made for them (1Joh 5,16). One thing is for sure, **this is not about a single act** but rather an **attitude**, the nature of the man. Who blasphemes the **spirit of God**, like some of the religious Jews (Mk 3,29ff.), can be someone with a high moral standard (like the Pharisees) but on the **inside** be far away from God.

**1Joh 5,18 – Who is born of God does not sin, but keeps him and evil cannot harm him.** John is firmly convinced of what he is saying. Actually it should say **WHAT** is born by or **of** God, that „*does not sin*“ or that „*no one who is a child of God would commit such a sin*“, which is mentioned in 16 and 17 referring to the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. **Because the One who is born of God (literally: who was created by God) keeps us – and that is „Jesus“.** This refers to a one-time and completed task.

This scripture can also be applied to: „**The One God created in us** – Jesus Christ – **keeps us from sinning**“ and especially not to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit. John also speaks about „**rebirth**“ and refers to our **new life as believers**, which is no longer under the authority of sin. It is grace and the work of Jesus alone which keeps us from the evil one and sustains us in the way of God. The evil one, Satan, cannot **harm us**; literally: „**touch us**“ (s. also Joh 10,27-9).

**1Joh 5,19 – We know that we are of God and that the whole world is in a sorry state.** The „newborn“ now carries God's nature on the inside and this automatically separates him from this wicked and perishable world. This whole world is enslaved to the authority of evil. This simple sentence **surpasses the highest revelation of the Gnostics**, who always boast with their knowledge. In the last two verses (1Joh 5,20 u. 21) the apostle John summarizes all of **Christian revelation**. Their God is with them, all the time. Their God seeks, saves, sustains them and secures them. Our dear Jesus is the only pure truth and reality of God. He is the creation mediator, the redeemer, the savior, the first of the new creation and perfecter of human world history (Col 1.16).

**1Joh 5,21 – This letter closes with a surprising “exhortation”** - *“Children keep yourselves from idols!”* In the **Greek – Roman world** at the time of the apostle John almost all made compromises with the world in some form of **idolatry** which was a basic substance of society. **All and each thing had a religious and mystical or magical occult symbolic and meaning.** Everything was somehow directly or indirectly related to idols and served their worship and use (1Cor 12,2/Matt 24,24).

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Epistle of John**

This letter was written by the **apostle John** who is calling himself „**elder**“ in multiple ways, who is very old and **lived with Jesus**.

With this self-reference he introduces himself as one of **the last living disciples** of Jesus. This term „**elder**“ was only used for the **apostles** who were „**eye-witnesses of the risen Jesus**“ (Acts 11.30/1Petr 5,1). Also this letter has many similarities with the **Gospel of John**.

While the **1<sup>st</sup> Epistle of John** addresses the family of God, both other letters of the apostle address **family members personally** and shows beautiful amendments to the first epistle, concerning how **love and truth** work and in which way pure love for divine truth should be expressed in different situations.

The great issues of this letter are **the love**, which is **determined by truth** and how **to react to** error, false teachings and people who reject the salvation work of Jesus. You are not supposed to work with them and also not „**receive**“ them. This letter is unique in the NT because it was clearly **written to a woman and her children**. Maybe because it is about all or nothing – for Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God – is the price. You can only encounter Him with bright love for the pure truth, an obedient love which is expressed when we walk according to His commands. Paul warned them in 2Tim 3,6ff. that **referred to tempters who especially approached the women** when the men were not at home. Maybe we can also think of 1 Tim 2,14 ).

**2Joh 1 - 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Epistles of John are two private letters** and **“twin letters”**, who actually have to be considered **inseparable** from each other. Despite of their brevity those two „N.T.-letters“ are **full of the spirit of the New Testament** and fulfill the „**love for truth**“. Even though this epistle is addressing a **woman** called (**Kyria**) „**Mistress**“ this letter is to be read **to the whole church**.

Some Greek bible scholars would assume this refers to „**the church**“ and „**her children**“ because it does not contain specific names of people. The **personification** of people and cities in the form of **female names** is not uncommon, as for example the **“daughter of Zion”**. Also the Christian church is often called the **bride of Christ** (2 Cor 11,2/Eph 5,22-33/Rev 19,7).

Others assume that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Epistle is a personal letter to **a highly respected Christian woman** who is the **“chosen mistress**(Lk 1,42) maybe a **widow with several children**. This reminds us of the **words of Jesus on the cross**, as John received on the cross, to take care of **Mary, the mother of Jesus** (Joh 19,25-27), who was a widow with several children (Joh 2,12). „**Mary**“ is again a picture of the church of Jesus.

In this letter the apostle **„urges us to stay watchful”** and calls us to **„oppose false teachers”** whom you should **not even greet** because they should not be **received** among the children of God.

It may be amazing that the apostle of love would speak such harsh words. But love must speak so **clearly in true love** if it does not want to be degraded to a love which is also guilty of temptation.

**John also supports this Christian woman in spirit**, who was surely grateful for such support. This was also the assignment of God: to help the **„widows and orphans”** (Jam 1,27). In this letter we get to know the apostle **John as a counselor** like we can all see in his love and how he is clear concerning the false teacher. He shares his mature and tested faith with personal care.

**2Joh 1-3 - ... speaks of “election”, the center of the Gospel** which says that it is God alone who chooses and saves a person. You don't just become a Christian, but only by election and action of God (s. Joh 15,16). It is our assignment and responsibility to confirm our election (2Petr 1.10).

**Election is not a forceful act** but a totally **„free act”** from both sides, God and man, because God takes us seriously as a people. However, the **sinner** with his **enslaved will** out of **his own strength cannot make that decision**. Only the proclamation of the **word of God** – and that is **His divine power** – delivers our will to make a choice. Then we can reach out for that which the Lord has prepared. We as Christians do not live by our own actions, but always out of **God's grace**. This is what keeps us humble.

The **term “repentance”** refers to his own effort, but also characterizes an answer from our side which is **empowered and made possible by God**. His gracious offer to us. Those who are **in the divine truth**, understand and love each other and are always connected with each other through love in Christ. Therefore John also uses the words: **“Not me alone, but all who have known the truth.”** This God-given love is beyond any selfish (personal) and material desire.

**The truth is more**, than just to recognize and more than just a thought process, it rather describes the deep **encounter of the risen Christ** (Joh 14,6). All who have **encountered the risen Christ once**, have a mutual experience, a mutual knowledge and **belong** to one body as working members, united through the Holy Spirit with a divine body, **where Christ is the head** (1Joh 1.6).

**You cannot know more than Him, the Lord of truth**. This argument takes down the ideas of the Gnostics who were praising their abilities. The believer who is born again by the Holy Spirit had a personal experience with God. But the **Gnostics** were hardened **in their piety**. Their rituals and prayers were just **„empty words”** (Joh 4,23.24). True divine life only happens when the **„word”** (disis), (Joh 1.14-18) becomes flesh on the inside of us. Then we can surely abide in Jesus and His Holy Spirit (Joh 8,31,32 16,13;17,17). In his gospel and epistles John presumes strong evidence of Christological truths, coming from the **Old Testament promise of revelation on mount Sinai**, which takes us straight to the New Testament promise of revelation in the person of Christ. In the NT everything is fulfilled that started in the Old Testament.

All the laws, commands and symbols and shadows of the Old Testament point to Jesus, which He then fulfilled and perfected. The apostle John calls **Jesus the personified truth** (Joh 14,6). When Jesus Christ personally faces Pontius Pilate, he asked Jesus what the truth is (Joh 18,37), because Jesus cannot be understood with our logical and human mind. You need the **„spirit of truth”** (Joh 14,17; 15,26; 16,13), which is the **„spirit of Jesus”** - which represents the mind and character of Jesus.

**When we speak of the word of God as the word of truth**, this is never just a **lyrical** or dogmatic summary **but a general life reality**.

**What truth really is**, the substantial truth, we learn by the truth **in Jesus Christ** (Joh 1,14). Therefore it also says in the NT that the **law** was given by **Moses**; **grace** and **truth** have now come through Jesus (Joh 1,17). Who is „**acknowledging**“ Jesus, embraces God's divine truth of salvation. There is no other opportunity to have fellowship with God. The goal of the way of salvation of **God** or the **truth in Jesus** draws the people into the **reality of God** (s.1Joh 5,20). This is also the assignment of the Holy Spirit who is guiding us as **the spirit of truth** on the way to the whole truth (Joh 16,13), because He comes from the Father and witnesses of Jesus (Joh 15,26). He leads us to the **reality in Jesus Christ** (Eph 4,21). This is not only a Dogma.

The tool that the **Holy Spirit** uses to make **the reality of God** alive is the **word of God**, the word of truth (Jam 1,18/ Eph 1,13/Col 1,5). Only that way the rebirth can be **experienced as reality of God**.

If someone experiences the reality of God every day anew, his life will be more and more a life of truth. And **this truth is the contrary of** unrighteousness, evil, wickedness and lies, lots of negative terms that are not real in substance. The **divine truth** is the positive, the living, the eternal.

Therefore **Christian love** is something different than **just sentimentality** or **human kindness**. That **Christian love** grows out of the **experienced and lived truth** of the community with Jesus in their hearts, the origin of the revealed truth and their knowledge. As long as Jesus remains in us, **the truth also remains in us** (Mt 28,20), the same applies for the „**true doctrine**“, the revealed divine truth (Mt 24,35).

Thus John sees **love and truth** as closely connected which cannot just be separated. Concerning the desire that the truth remains with the recipients, the apostle also adds „**grace, mercy and the peace of God, the Father and Jesus Christ ...**“ (Vers 3). Peter and Paul usually close their letters with „grace and peace“ (except for 1.and 2.Tim). That all those blessings come „**the Father and the Son**“ confirms the **Godhead of Jesus**.

The term „**Son of the Father**“ is **untypical** for the New Testament and the apostle John who describes **Jesus with his own words**.

**2Joh 4-6** – The apostle John is **happy** that there are church members who are still faithful to the gospel and Jesus. This faithfulness works „**grace**“ (Eph 1,6,7/1Tim 1,14). This divine „**grace event**“ was confirmed by the sign of the cross (Gal 2,15-21/Rom 3,21-24; 5,10 a.11). **By grace we are** justified and our sins are forgiven unto righteousness before God which is a promise to every **new creature** (Act 15,11/Gal 1,6/Eph 2,5/1Petr 2,10).

**In Jesus grace became flesh**. In His coming, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ worked **grace** and HE gave it to all who belong to Him.

Also the next greeting term „**peace**“ is a typical **Hebrew – Aramaic word** and has a deep spiritual meaning. This term originated from a life of the **Bedouines and Nomads** and means a condition in that u can remain **undamaged and unspoiled**, where you are not **exposed to hostile attacks**. On the other hand this world also has the meaning of a good **agreement**, an **ally**, a close **fellowship** with friends, neighbors and with covenant partners.

Even today the greeting in the Orient is: „**peace be with you**.“ It is understandable that among Nomads of Arabia and Palestine this greeting became a custom, as her life was always under continuous **restlessness**. Threatened by danger and exposed to unexpected attacks at any time it is easy to understand that the sons of the desert carried this desperate desire to have some rest and peace at least for a season.

At the same time they probably also developed a desire to find faithful **friends** and **covenant partners** who would support them, someone they can share with and trust. Based on this background we must understand the greeting: “Peace be with you!” **Peace**, however, is much more.

It is not the calming of the **soul**, but the peace of the comfort of man in the presence of God. The peace, that the Orientals refer to, is not just a mood or something that is only going on in the mind of people.

**To wish someone peace** means that you would not want them to be attacked by enemies or if they would be attacked they might still be saved. **To speak peace** means to wish someone support, protection, help and provision among neighbors.

**Peace is something** that happens **on the outside of man** and then enters his mind. This is the way the New Testament refers to peace. Peace is referring to the condition where hostile, or demonic powers are no longer dominating or you are so shielded and protected that they **cannot harm you**.

**To have peace means:** to have the Almighty God as patron, covenant partner and being in close fellowship with Him. **Having peace with God** (Rom 5,1) refers to a direct relationship, a vivid connection in close proximity, sharing your life with Him. The **peace of God is provided by God** and it is a divine banner.

And again John emphasizes his point: **Jesus Christ is our peace** (Eph 2,14). Through Jesus man is delivered from all demonic and dark spheres and has peace with Him (s. Joh 16,33/Rom 8,6/Mt 10,12-14/Ps 34,8). The true peace is **a divine intervention** and more than just a nice greeting.

When Jesus says: „**Peace be with you**“, the hearer is automatically drawn into God's presence (Joh 14,27). Therefore the term „**peace**“ according to its biblical meaning a term referring to **a person**.

Therefore „**Shalom**“ is the Old Testament **promised gift of salvation**, which is a result of the new covenant (Numb. 25,12/Ju 6,24/Ps 29,11; 119,165/Is 27,5).

In his greeting the apostle also adds the term – “**mercy**”. This is also one of God's attributes: to show mercy to those who deserve it and also those who do not deserve it (s. Exod 34,6/Ps 51,3; 78,38/John 4,2/Mi 7,18-19/Lk 18,13/Exo 34,6/Rom 12,1/2Cor 1,3).

To this term **divine mercy** there is no comparison or synonym. It means **undeserved gift**, restoration of fellowship, continuous forgiveness, etc. (s. Deut 13,18; 30,3/2Sam 24,14/Is 14,1/Mt 9,27/Mk 10,47-48/Rom 9,15/1Tim 1,2/Tit 3,5/Hebr 4,16). John also mentions grace, mercy and peace as works of salvation- **and gifts of God** (Jam 5,11/Hebr 4,16/Is 49,15/Lk 15,1-24; 50; 6,36/Rom 15,9/2Cor 1,3).

**2Joh 4 – How are your children?**“ It seems like the apostle had met some of them. The **doctrine of faith** was the starting point of his thoughts and exhortations.

**2Joh 5 – And now I ask you ...** - straightforwardly John starts to speak about his **favorite topic** - the „**new command**“ of love. He tells her that this is not something that happens without effort.

**Divine love is always seen in its works.** He reminds and urges them (1Thes 4,10). And he is not writing to them **something new** (Joh 14,24; 15,12,17). He always talks about „**brotherly love**“, which is more than just a sentimental and mere feeling (2Joh 6). It is a command according to which u should consequently live (Joh 14,15; 15,10/1Joh 2,3,5). The Christian love **loves the will of God** and wants to please God. Therefore John says we should “live” respectively “walk” in it.

**2Joh 7-8** – Just like in his first letter the apostle John encourages his readers to stay faithful to **the right way of life** and tries to encourage them in their resistance of the new movement of the Antichrist (2Joh 7). Those are the same thoughts like in (1Joh 2,7; 5,2,3). The Christian (brotherly) **love** is an important **part of obedience of God in the New Testament**. It is the **only sacrifice**, that God would ask of us and commanded us to bring.

**Love can never be on behalf of the truth** – which remains an important topic for John. The temptation of false doctrines already started in the beginning of the establishment of the Christian church. Satan does not give up without a fight. **He tries with all his might** to stop the spreading of the Gospel and the gathering of the body of Christ. Many tempters have gone out into the world. **Tempters** are literally such who are leading us astray. They praise their ways as the **ways to perfect obedience of God** (s. 2Cor 11,14), but they deceive their fellow men into darkness and deception with their human, false wisdom because in their **confession** they deny the incarnation of Jesus (Col 2,9) and deny His Godhead.

**They cannot accept** that Jesus would die as a man, suffering as a substitute for our sins. This is too primitive for them. They do not need **a redeemer** because they are so convinced of themselves. They believe in an overly „**spiritualized Christ**“, who is instructing them in higher knowledge which we can then perfect. The only sin they know is „**lack of knowledge**“. Their denial of the incarnation of the Son of God is rooted in the tactics of **Satan himself** (Gen. 3,5). The **Gnostic false teachers** still deny Christ with their words. But the Antichrist will **seat himself personally on the throne of Christ** (Mt 24,15/Rev 13).

**2Joh 8 – Be careful not to lose what you have worked for ...** this refers to all that Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the apostle and the witnesses have **worked, fought and suffered for**. If the false teachers and Antichrists should succeed with their attempts to spread their false teachings among the believers, then **all of those mentioned have labored in vain** (1Cor 3,11-15). Then all who believed and held on to their reward (literally their “ransom”), would lose their crown / inheritance of God.

**2Joh 9-13 – More warnings of tempting false teachings.** Starting from verse 4 John emphasizes the importance of “love”. He picks up well-known terms such as “truth”, “command” or “from the beginning” etc and puts it back in our focus. The **peak** is the end of verse 5. - „... that the brethren should love each other“.

**2Joh 9 – Who goes beyond that does not remain in the teachings of Christ and does not have God, but who remains in those doctrines has the Father and the Son.** The Gnostics and false teachers went beyond the teachings of Christ.

The false teachers **went their own ways** and that which Jesus had shown and preached (Matt 28,20). Only the one who remains in the way **that Jesus taught** will also stay in „**fellowship with God**“. This expression is mentioned **23-times** in John and is picked up again here. If someone would go astray from this truth he would automatically leave the presence of God and has **no more fellowship** with Him.

The **apostate** will not lose his salvation, but he is like a **rebellious child** and has not vivid and protective fellowship with God (Joh 8,31; 15,1-7). The „**abiding**“ and „**obedience**“ cannot be separated according to John's opinion.

**2Joh 10,11 – If someone comes to you and does not bring this teaching...** - we should not receive them and not even greet them because their works are evil. When you greet them you would perhaps share in their wickedness and identify with them. Those are harsh words, you also have to consider that it was an **Oriental custom of hospitality** to open up even your own home for a temporary period of time which would also lead to close fellowship. But we must not have this kind of fellowship with them (Ps 26,4/1Cor 10,20; 16,22/2Cor 6,14/Rom 16,17/2Thess 3,6/Tit 3,10).

For our **understanding** today this instruction sounds **unreasonably hard and intolerant**. But a big part of our problems today is that we ignore religious diversity with too much tolerance. As a matter of fact, the authors of the New Testament do not **share this opinion**. Their obligation is to pure truth and their knowledge of the dangers of religious error made them respond with eager severity.

**For the Orientals** to greet someone means „**to be happy to see him**“ or „**to be happy about his coming**“ in the sense of: **I am happy to see you** (Act 15,23; 23,26/Jam 1,1). In addition the believer would also put himself **on the same level as the false teacher**. If he **identifies** with them he also **blesses their evil deeds** and participates in it without knowledge and might also lead others into believing the false teaching, since he publicly greeted the false teacher and **opens his doors for him**.

**God wants a clear separation** from the false teachers. Separation from them is also protection from them. We must know that the **rejection was not against the man**, but against their attitude, life style and their teachings – just like God hates sin but loves the sinner.

**Especially true love** can and must also speak stern, also on behalf of the false teachers themselves. Acting in love is when you separate yourself and others from that which is wicked. It would be a **false love**, if you cover up that wickedness.

**Of course, if a false teacher had an urgent need or problem**, we would still offer merciful help. But **since he is a teacher** you would have to **distance yourself from him**. A true believer should be greeted with great hospitality (3 Joh 5 u. 8). But already a **simple greeting** can already make the **false teacher** believe that **he is accepted**.

**This behavior towards them by the Christians** should make it clear to them that they do not accept or support or receive false teachers, would not even consider to work with them. This sharp request of the apostle John was an **apostolic exhortation** to the whole church, not to make room for those **miracle-working false teachers** and provide foundation for them to work. The apostle wants all to know that nobody can **establish the church of Jesus** and at the same time **support the work of the destroyer**.

**2Joh 12 - I have so much to write to you.** The Christian **love** always has much to say. Just like a conversation between **people who love each other would not cease** – because if it would it would demonstrate a growing indifference – so it is between Christians.

**2Joh 13 – The children of your chosen sister greet you.** This is a very awkward final greeting. Both are in female forms „**personified churches**“, who can be called chosen based on their divine grace. This could refer to Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. It seems to be more than just **two sisters** and their children. This is an indirect **greeting of one church to another** which represents and demonstrates the unity.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Epistle of John

The recipients of 3<sup>rd</sup> John is a certain, but unknown Gajus. This name is mentioned five times in the New Testament and refers to 5 different people (Acts 19,29; 20,4/Rom 16,23/1Cor 1,14). „Gajus“ means „earthly“. Dimeters (Vers 12) seems to be the messenger of the letter. His reference and also the namely mention of the recipient was necessary to make sure that this letter would not be perverted by people like Diotrephes (Vers 9). In his third letter John says a praise to their hospitality. He praises the generous hospitality of Gajus (V.1-15). This letter is addressed only to Gajus, a member of those churches who are under the oversight of the apostle John. He also mentions another letter that he lately wrote to the church. Diotrephes (translated: „nourished by Zeus“) was a very charismatic leader in the church with a strong ambition and he did not accept the letter of the apostle (3Joh 9-10). It may look as if he would act „spiritually“, but he was acting up like a small „pope“. It seems as if the teaching of the apostle was not received (Vers 9) and he probably also made use of scripture to justify his position.

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> Epistle of John it is also about „defamation“. John wrote that he (Diotrephes) accuses us with evil words. This does not refer to false teaching but to „reputation“. Diotrephes wants to shut down the apostle and those who support him. Every one who spoke against him he tried to silence.

He was a small „church dictator“, and practiced sharp „church discipline“ with all who did not agree with him. He stood out because of his strong egoism and need for attention. He was such who wanted to be the first in all gatherings.

He refused to receive certain brothers and excluded others from the gatherings. These are the first signs of „clericalism“ in the church. The example of Diotrephes proves that a man can have either God-given or self-assigned power. His whole personality was full of pride and ambition and he wanted to be in charge of everything.

His carnal attitude said: „I want to be exalted“, resp.: „I love to be the first.“, so that even the apostle was supposed to step back behind him. He spoke evil of the apostle John (Vers 10), even though he was the most faithful and loving disciple of Jesus Christ and highly respected in the whole church. He wanted to be the „boss“ and „the greatest“. This was against the teaching and role model of Jesus (Mt 18,1/Phil 2.1).

Paul calls Diotrephes' attitude towards the apostle as „wickedness“. He is only trying to „distinguish himself“. Diotrephes was motivated by pride instead of humbling himself and being a servant of all (Col 1,18). The apostle John was a threat to him, because John had the authority of an apostle. Just like the apostle Peter (Act 8,9-24) became a threat to the sorcerer Simon. Whenever an authorized servant of God enters the scene, Satan is exposed and his servants defeated (Act 16.16-22).

Diotrephes probably knew that as soon as apostle John would arrive, he would be lost. In this letter the apostle shows us how to treat apostates in the church, who are not following a false teaching but are no longer in the spirit of God's love (2Cor 6.14ff./Rom 16,17-19).

Diotrephes was a dictator in the church and really believed that he was still a servant of God. He is the exact opposite of Gajus, who was very hospitable. People like Diotrephes always had their enthusiastic followers, many upright, but immature, uneducated and unspiritual believers seem to enjoy following such leaders.

There may, however, be a reason for the denial of „hospitality“ that caused such serious tensions and problems. It might be the differences or different customs of the Jewish and Non-Jewish Christians – similar to the tensions in the church of Jerusalem (Act 6,1). Then the other purpose of the letter would be the unity of the church between the Jewish and Gentile Christians. The Jewish Christians did not accept the Gentile Christians and now the Gentile Christians did not want to accept the Jewish Christians.

The message of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Epistle of John had a totally different meaning and circulated around the old problem between „Jewish and Gentile Christians“. Already the name of Diotrephes - „nourished by Zeus“, respectively „a son of Zeus“ and is of Greek origin – tells us that he had a Hellenistic back round and „Gentile thinking“ and just like the Jewish Christians were still full of „Judaism“. Therefore they had to call in the Apostolic counsel (Act 15). Paul had warned of Judaism and the missionaries of Judaea. The apostle John was also one with a Jewish back round who came from Judea. The attitude of Diotrephes obviously points in this direction. He does not welcome „us“, who are Jewish, and all who would welcome us are excluded from church (Vers 10).

This has nothing to do with a **personal egoistic attitude**. The apostle John wants to come and settle this issue at the church and restore the fellowship (relationship between the Jewish and Gentile Christians). John wants to remind them that what they are doing is wrong.

Just like some **Jewish Christians treated the Gentile Christians** wrong, Diotrephes sets a wrong example for the **Gentile Christians** toward the „**Jewish Christians**“ and thwarts the plans and purposes of God through his actions. God wants all people to be helped.

**3Joh 12** – In comparison to him **Demetrius** (translated: one who belongs to goddess Demeter) is also a Hellenist but at the same time a faithful servant and excellent role model for the church.

The **key word** in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Epistle would be - “**the truth**” and the 3<sup>rd</sup> - “**faithfulness**”. The special thing about the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Epistles of John is their brevity. The content of both letters would fit on a single sheet of papyrus without problems.

With this letter **the apostle announces his soon coming**. He encourages and **teaches Gajus**, a leader of the church and recipient of this letter, by pointing out negative and positive examples, what the marks of true spiritual leadership are.

John also uses the same term **for his person** like in the second letter and refers to himself as the „**elder**“. This 3<sup>rd</sup> letter was probably composed by John shortly after the 2<sup>nd</sup> letter and is very similar in structure style and vocabulary. For example: (V.1 [2Joh 1]; V.4 [2Joh 4]; V.13 [2Joh 12]; V.14 [2Joh 12]).

#### **The third one is perhaps the most personal of the three Epistles of John**

- While the 1<sup>st</sup> Epistle seems to be a very general letter to the churches in Asia Minor,
- and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Epistle was addressing a woman and their family (2Joh 1),
- the apostle mentions names in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Epistle which is addressing a single recipient, »the beloved Gajus« (V. 1). The name »**Gajus**« was widely spread in the 1<sup>st</sup> century (i.e. Act 19,29; 20,4/Rom 16,23/1Cor 1,14), but there is nothing known about this person that John is addressing.

#### **Key doctrines in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Epistle of John:**

- **Hospitality** – should be shown to every servant of God (V. 9-10/Gen 14,18; 18,3-8/Exo 2,20/1Sam 9,22/2Ki 6,22.23/Hi 31,32/Is 58,7/Lk 14,13.14/Rom 12,13.20/1Tim 3,2; 5,10/Tit 1,8/Hebr 13,2/1Pt 4,9).
- The **nature of God** – God is good (Vers 11).

**It is remarkable** that in 3<sup>rd</sup> John the **name Jesus Christ** is not mentioned. Only in verse seven John calls the missionaries Christians “who have gone out for the sake of His name” (com. Rom 1,5).

In 3<sup>rd</sup> John it is only about **the church and the fellowship** (Verse 6,9-10). John encourages and also gives **exhortation to hospitality**. He mentions several reasons why the Christian hospitality should be practiced in a way that is »honoring God« (V.6).

We should **first show hospitality to them who have pure motives ...**

- Those travelling missionaries went out »**on behalf of His name**« (V. 7/ Rom 1,5).
- They have to do their **ministry for the honor of God and not their own**.
- You have to show hospitality to those who do not do their service **because of the money**. Since the missionaries did not receive their wages from the »**unbelievers**« the church was their only support.
- Such who practice hospitality **have their share** in the ministry of their guests (V.8).

John speaks to **Gajus about Diotrephes** in order to point out the negative aspects of his attitude. Diotrephes' actions **were in contrast to the teachings of Jesus** and the New Testament concerning church ministry (Mt 20,20-28/Phil 2,5-11/1Tim 3,3/1Pt 5,3). He ignored the rules of **Christian hospitality**.

John emphasizes some negative aspects of Diotrephes' actions and wants to warn others not to make the same mistakes:

- He loved to be the first (V. 9).
- He **did not accept the authority of John**, which means he rejected the authority of the word of God by refusing to listen to the words of John in his letters (V. 9).
- He »**slanders against us**«. The word »**slander**« originates from a word that means to »bubble« and refers to useless, vain babbling, which means to talk nonsense (V.10).
- His accusations against John **were totally unjustified** - »with evil words« (V.10). Diotrephes' accusations were not only wrong but also evil.

- He »**does not receive his brother**« (V. 10). He did not only slander John but also rejected other believers and refused to welcome them.
- He »**puts them out of the church**«. The Greek language tells us that Diotrephes excludes all from the church who did not submit to his authority (V.10).

The **brothers came to John** (V.3) and reported about Gajus and the conditions of the church. This is what caused John to write this letter and announce his visit to speak to them face to face and take care of this issue (V.14).

A **biblical indication** – Christians should rather **orally and directly** (personally) talk to each other in love - then there would be less arguments, separation and division in the church.

**3Joh 15 – Peace be with you!** With the **peace greeting of Israel** „Shalom“ John closes this letter. It is the **greeting of the risen Christ** that He said when He greeted those who belong to Him (Lk 24,36/Joh 20,19 &.21). The greeting is also the confirmation of this gift of God and the presence of Jesus Christ.

**Christ is our peace** (Eph 2,14). And this peace, the presence of the Lord brought Gajus in the midst of the distress that Diotrephes brought to the church. **Because only those who can live in peace can also bring peace.**

Gajus also receives greetings from friends who are close to the apostle John, perhaps Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians.

### **Test questions**

1. What is the main theme of 1<sup>st</sup> John?
2. How does John deal with moral trespasses?
3. Why does John fight against the “Gnostics”? What is their problem?
4. What does 1<sup>st</sup> John deal with in detail?
5. How does John refer to himself and why?
6. What does John mean by - „walking in the light“?
7. Why is “love” so important to John?
8. What and who is the Antichrist in the Epistles of John?
9. What does John say about the forgiveness of sin?
10. Who commits the unforgivable sin (sin of death)?
11. What does John mean by the term “the world”?
12. What is rebirth – according to John?
13. What is the sign of sonship of God?
14. What is the foundation of Christian life?
15. Why does John talk so much about fellowship?
16. What and who is John referring to in 2.Joh by „chosen mistress“?
17. Why should we not greet a false teacher?
18. What does „Shalom“ mean and why?
19. What is the greeting of peace in the epistles of John?
20. What are the highs and lows of 3<sup>rd</sup> John?
21. To whom should we show Christian hospitality and why is it so important?
22. Which character traits caused problems in the church that John was leading?
23. Which attributes and deeds did apostle John praise about Gajus and Demetrius?

**Please send the answers** to [pastor@matutis.de](mailto:pastor@matutis.de)

- or to the church bible school, PO box. 65 06 65, D-13306 Berlin
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## **Nest lesson – 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians**

And now may the Lord bless you richly with your bible studies.

May prayers are with you.

**Pastor Joh.W.Matutis**

**Another request.** Please recommend this bible training to your friends and relatives, respectively other Christians (cell group leaders, pastors, preachers, youth leaders, counselors, bible students, etc.) Or you could also start your own private bible school based on this material and establish your own bible study group. (Overview of prior material: review <http://www.preach-in.de/content/view/219/83/> )

You could also forward this material to other Christians who are interested in the bible and would like to grow strong in the word of God. Encourage them to participate. It is for free and you don't have make a firm commitment. It can help you to gain great spiritual insight and blessings and also deepen your knowledge of the bible. Thank you.