

# BIBLE SERIES: "EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"

by Mario Seiglie

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## 1 JOHN 2-3 THE THREE TESTS AGAIN APPLIED AGAINST MORE HERESIES

In chapter 2, John continues dealing with the serious heresies that have crept into the Church, just as Peter and Jude have done. To combat them, he repeatedly applies the three basic tests of the faith based on (1) God's true nature, (2) God's holy laws and (3) how we should treat God's people.

The first test is about knowing *what* God truly is--*the Father and the Son* (1 Jn. 1:3), with whom we have loving fellowship (and not with a third person, as taught about the Trinity). Secondly, the need to keep all of God's commandments, and thirdly, having genuine brotherly love within the church.

John, now an aged apostle, addresses them in a fatherly way. He does so, not so much by their chronological age, but by their "spiritual" age, since that is more important. He praises them for having remained faithful despite the many heresies of the false teachers, especially recently.

He lovingly says, "I write to you, little children, [probably those newly converted], because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake [at baptism]. I write to you, fathers [probably those mature in the faith], because you have known Him who is from the beginning [since they have a long-term personal relationship with God]. I write to you, young men [those in the mid-years of their conversion], because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, because you have known the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one" (1 Jn. 2:12-14).

After commending them, he also reminds them of the need to stay away and not desire the world's false values. Just because they have been overcoming does not mean they are to let up and relax. He warns them, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 Jn. 2:15-17).

Then, he covers sin's *three main temptations*, first mentioned in Gen. 3:6, with Adam and Eve, and later in Mt. 4:4-11, when Satan unsuccessfully tempted Christ. The first is *the lust of the flesh*, or the lower passions that produce sexual cravings, other vices, anger or hate. Secondly, *the lust of the eyes*--coveting and putting material and other things first. Thirdly, *the pride of life*--the vanity and arrogance hindering us from humbling ourselves before God or putting Him first.

Regarding these prophesied false teachers, who were already inside the Church and tempting the brethren to follow them, he equates with being forerunners of the Antichrist, who will come in the end times. He admonishes them, "Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that *the Antichrist is coming*, even now *many antichrists have come*, by which we know that it is the last hour" (1 Jn. 2:18). As *Vine's Expository Dictionary* notes, "Antichrist can mean *either against Christ* or *instead of Christ*, or perhaps, *combining the two*; 'one who, assuming the guise of Christ, opposes Christ' (says Westcott)" (p. 62).

These false teachers pretend they have accepted Christ as Savior but are really part of the "Antichrist" movement. As John says, "They went out *from* us, but they were *not of us*; for if they had been *of us*, they would have continued *with us*; but they went out that they might be *made manifest*, that *none of them were of us*" (1 Jn. 2:19).

Here, John explains these false teachers had at one time been part of the true Church but had left. Some would found false religious systems, such as what would become the Catholic Church. It would have, on the surface, many teachings similar to the true Church, thus becoming even more dangerous and difficult to identify, but in Rev. 17 John describes her as a rich and fallen woman (church).

This is why John continues to apply the three tests of the faith to expose them. He is refuting the policy that brethren should remain inside the Church at all costs, no matter what they believe.

He explains there will always be some who are "with us" in the Church, but are "not of us." God is always pruning (John 15:1-4) and testing His Church to show who are those approved by Him (1

Cor. 11:19). These false teachers and brethren are either unconverted or not fully converted persons, who allow themselves to be deceived. Sooner or later, they will show by their fruits who they truly are (Mt. 7:15-20). God knows His own.

John then explains that a true member who has God's Holy Spirit guiding him will remain in the true Church, not because the people there are perfect or that everything is to his liking, but because that is where there exists three things: (1) God's truths are taught and kept, (2) there is a true attitude of godly respect for God and of humility through God's Spirit, and (3) because the Work of God is being done to take the true gospel as a testimony to all nations (Mt. 24:14; 28:19-20).

As John explains, "But *you* have an anointing [since they have received God's Spirit, symbolized by oil (Acts 10:38)] from the Holy One [God], and you know all things [your mind has been opened to God's truths (1 Cor. 2:10:14)]. I have not written to you because you do not know *the truth*, but because *you know it*, and that *no lie is of the truth*" (1 Jn. 2:20-21). This is a vital point—that *no lie is of the truth*. So, if we go against God's Word, including His laws, *the truth is not in us and we lie*.

Then, John again applies the *first test about what is God* to another false teaching circulating about God the Father and Christ. He says, "Who is a *liar* but he who *denies* that Jesus is the Christ? He is *antichrist* who *denies the Father and the Son*. Whoever denies the Son *does not have the Father* either; he who acknowledges *the Son has the Father also*. Therefore let that [teaching] abide in you, which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also *will abide in the Son and in the Father* [notice again, no idea of the Trinity here]. And this is the promise that He has promised us—*eternal life*. These things I have written to you concerning *those who try to deceive you*" (1 Jn. 2:22-26).

These three heresies that John denounces still exist today in different forms. (1) There are some who believe in Jesus as Savior, but teach *He is not divine*. For example, the Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe Jesus is divine, but that He was created by God. (2) Another take on this heresy is the Trinity, believing the Holy Spirit is a divine person and denying that one abides only "in the Son and in the

Father" (John 14:23). (3) The third heresy is about *the immortality of the soul*, for John makes it clear that *the promise* of God is to *receive* eternal life, not that one *already* has it in him.

John warns the brethren not to believe these lies, saying: "And now, little children, *abide* in Him, [His teachings] that *when He appears*, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him *at His coming*. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who *practices* righteousness is born of Him" (1 Jn. 2:28-29).

The biblical definition of "righteousness" is found in Psalm 119:172, "All Your commandments our righteousness." This term in the Gk. is *dikaosiune* and means, "conformity to *all that He commands or appoints*" (*Word Study Dictionary*). So John urges them and us to retain these original truths taught by Jesus and His apostles, so when Christ returns, we can be part of that first resurrection (Rev. 20:4) and not be left out-causing us great embarrassment and shame.

Next, he explains the true process of entering the kingdom of God since these false leaders were teaching otherwise. He says, "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it *has not yet been revealed* what we shall be, but we know that *when He is revealed, we shall be like Him*, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 Jn. 3:1-2).

John is describing the two stages of salvation—something not taught by traditional Christianity.

The first stage begins with baptism, when we initiate the conversion process and become children of God by having God's Spirit in us. But it is only *the first deposit* of the Holy Spirit given to us (2 Cor. 1:22) since we must *persevere to the end* to enter into His kingdom (Mt. 24:12-13).

Yet, the second stage of salvation only takes place at Christ's return, when we are truly *born* into the kingdom of God as glorified children. Then we will finally be "like Him," meaning we will have the same type of glorious spiritual body that Jesus has (Phil. 3:21) and will become younger siblings of Him and the divine children of God the Father for ever and ever.

John adds that in order to enter this kingdom, we must also pass *the second test of faith*—keeping all the commandments of God. He says, “And everyone who has this hope in Him *purifies* himself, just as He is pure. Whoever commits *sin* [Gk. *hamartia*] also commits *lawlessness* [Gk. *anomia*], and sin [*hamartia*] is lawlessness [*anomia*]. And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins [*hamartia*], and in Him there is no sin [*hamartia*]” (1 Jn. 3:3-5).

John uses these two Gk. terms to define sin—*hamartia* or “missing the mark.” In this case, it means, “missing the keeping of God’s laws.” The second term for sin is *anomia*, literally meaning “without God’s law...the contempt and violation of it” (*New Testament Lexicon*). While *hamartia* normally refers to the breaking of a *specific law* of God, *anomia* means *ignoring it altogether* as a way of life, which is even a worse sin than *hamartia*.

John also explains that no one who *habitually practices* sin or breaks God’s law in this way, and be a true Christian. He says, “Whoever abides in Him does not sin [Gk. *hamartia*]. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him” (1 Jn. 3:6).

As *Wiersbe Commentary* mentions, “When you read 1 John 3:1-10 in the Authorized Version, you may be startled by 1 Jn. 3:6 and 1 Jn. 3:9, which seemed to contradict 1 Jn. 1:8-9. The Authorized translation of the verbs here *is not accurate*. What the *Greek text* really says is: ‘No one who abides in Him *practices sin*; no one who *practices* sin has seen Him or knows Him’ (1 Jn. 3:6). ‘No one who is born of God *practices sin*...he cannot practice sin because he is born of God’ (1 Jn. 3:9). To ‘practice’ sin is to *sin consistently and as a way of life*. It does *not* refer to committing an occasional sin. It is clear that no Christian is sinless (1 Jn. 1:8-9), but God expects a true believer to sin less, not to sin habitually.”

John continues, “Little children, *let no one deceive you*. He who *practices* righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed [His spirit] remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God” (1 Jn.

3:7-9). In this second test about righteousness and keeping of God’s commandments, we see that the true Christian will constantly contend against sin, cast it out, and obey God’s laws as a way of life.

John then reminds them of the *third test of faith*—that of practicing genuine fellowship in the Church. He says, “For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that *we should love one another*, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother’s righteous. Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, *because we love the brethren*. He who *does not love his brother* abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (1 Jn. 3:11-15).

So this love, John emphasizes, must be shown not only in words *but in deeds*. “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees *his brother in need*, and *shuts up his heart from him*, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 Jn. 3:16-18).

We see the same principle in James 2:14-26, that true faith is shown by deeds or works. We will see those works that God does in us by caring especially for our sick or needy brethren. If we keep His commandments and love the brethren, God will answer our prayers. John says: “And by this we know that we are *of the truth*, and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And *whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight*” (1 Jn. 3:19-22).

So, God will answer our prayers, but sometimes, not how we expect. Remember, His answer is not based on our will, but His, which is far wiser in the long run (Rom. 8:28-29). As John later explains, “Now this is the *confidence* that *we have in Him*, that if we ask anything *according to His will*, He hears us” (1 Jn. 5:14).