

An Interpretive Paraphrase of 1 JOHN

By Greg Sidders

Please note: *This paraphrase is in no way intended to be read as a precise translation of the divinely-inspired text of John's first epistle. It is nothing more than a concise commentary which reflects my personal interpretation of John's letter. I pray that God will use it to help you better understand His word and its relevance to your life.*

Chapter 1

¹Our purpose in writing is to remind you of the message of life. It is a timeless message, and we have heard it with our own ears. More than that, we have seen it with our own eyes—and touched it with our own hands! ²We proclaim to you what we have personally witnessed: eternal life embodied in a Man—a Man who was one with God the Father and yet who appeared to us. ³We have seen Him, and we have heard His message, and now we are declaring it to you, because we want you to share in what we have. And what we have is an intimate relationship with both God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. ⁴We have no greater joy than to help you experience this Christ-centered camaraderie!

⁵The essence of Christ's message is this: God knows everything; He's not in the dark about anything at all. ⁶If we claim to be close to Him and yet we try to hide parts of our life from Him, we are living a lie. ⁷But if we have nothing to hide—as if we really could hide anything from God!—we have a special bond with fellow sinners, and the blood of Jesus washes all our sins away. ⁸Again, if we say, "I'm not a sinner," we are void of truth and full of self-deception. ⁹If, however, we openly admit our sins, God can be counted on to give us a fresh start with a clean slate. ¹⁰To say that we have not sinned is to call God a liar and to reject His word.

Chapter 2

¹Don't get me wrong, my little children; I'm not writing to condone sin. Quite the opposite! But I want to remind you that when we do sin, we have a Defense Attorney who pleads our case before God (who is not only our Judge, but

also our Father). Jesus is on our side, and He is sinless! ²It's an open-and-shut case, because Christ absorbed God's wrath for us. And He was punished not only for our sins, but for the sins of every person who has ever lived.

³Now, let me tell you how you can be sure that you have come to know Jesus personally. Obedience to His commands is the acid test. ⁴If someone claims to know Him but doesn't obey Him, that person is an out-and-out liar. ⁵But those who do obey Him bring to fruition the love of God that has been planted in their hearts.

How can we know for sure that we are Christians? ⁶By looking at our lifestyle! The claim to be a Christian must be backed up by conduct that is Christ-like.

⁷Loved ones, it all boils down to this: we are to love one another as Christ loved us. To us this is the oldest of commands, ⁸but to this dark world it is still new. And with every act of love—first by Jesus and now by you—the darkness of this world is being swallowed up by ever-intensifying light.

⁹Anyone who makes the spiritual claim to be in the family of light and yet hates another member of that family is still in the dark. ¹⁰Love for other Christians is the mark of true enlightenment—and the secret to living a sin-free life. ¹¹Hatred is spiritual blindness at its worst; whoever hates a fellow Christian is stumbling through life in pitch-black ignorance.

¹²Let me assure you, little children: The reason I am writing to you is because your sins have been erased in Jesus' name! ¹³Fathers in the faith, you have come to know—intimately—the Eternal One! Young believers, you have won your battle with Satan! ¹⁴New Christians, you have experienced real fellowship with your heavenly Father! I'll say it again: Spiritual fathers, you have communed with the eternal Son of

God! Young disciples, with the word of God as your strength, you have defeated the devil!

¹⁵Now, stop loving the things of this dark world. Love for worldly things and love for your heavenly Father are mutually exclusive, ¹⁶because every worldly thing—whether it be the passion that flares up from the embers of our old nature, the covetousness that is aroused by a simple look, or the pride that comes from focusing on externals—has its roots in the world (controlled by you-know-who); it certainly didn't come from our Father. ¹⁷This world, with all its evil cravings, is on its deathbed; but those who do what God wants are only beginning to live.

¹⁸Children, time's almost up for this world. You know the final chapter: the Anti-Christ is coming. The fact that many "anti-Christ" have already come tells us that the end is just around the corner. ¹⁹At one time these opponents of Christ were professing Christians, but now they're AWOL. They showed their true colors by their defection; obviously, they were never part of the true church in the first place.

²⁰But you are different—all of you! The Spirit of Jesus is upon you and therefore you know spiritual truth. ²¹I'm not writing to tell you something you don't know, but to reaffirm what you do know—and you know that truth never produces lies. ²²Who is a bigger liar than the person who denies that Jesus is the Messiah? To say that Jesus is not the Son of God is anti-Christ heresy. ²³You can't have the Father without the Son; it's only those who acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God who have a relationship with God the Father.

²⁴You've known this truth from the beginning; cling to it until the end. Don't let the foundational truth you were taught be uprooted from your heart, and you will never be uprooted from God the Son or God the Father. ²⁵Instead, you will receive what He has promised—immortality!

²⁶All I'm trying to say is that you need to be on the lookout for liars. ²⁷Teachers of "new truth" you do not need, because the Spirit Jesus gave you still lives within you! He teaches you everything you need to know, and it's 100% truth. What He taught you before He is teaching you now: Persevere in loyalty to Christ! ²⁸My little children, stay close to Jesus, so that whenever He reappears, you'll be ready—confident rather than cowering in shame.

²⁹If we start with the indisputable premise that God is righteous, the conclusion is obvious:

God's offspring are those who display that same righteousness.

Chapter 3

¹Can you see how much love God has showered us with? Why, He calls us His children! And that we are! No wonder the world treats us like aliens; that's exactly how they treated God Himself. ²Loved ones, our status as children of God is not a future hope but a present reality. As for our future, it's like a gift waiting to be unwrapped; our only hint is that when Jesus appears, and we see Him as He really is, we'll be immediately transformed into His likeness. ³Let that promise sink in and you'll develop a passion for purity—because you know that He is pure.

⁴Let me shoot straight about sin. It's nothing less than rebellion against God's law—so those who live in sin live in lawlessness. ⁵You know that the reason Jesus came was to do away with sin. You also know that there is absolutely no sin in Him. ⁶It stands to reason that no one who is "plugged in" to Him is going to exhibit a lifestyle of sin. The truth is, habitual sin invalidates the claim to have seen or known Jesus.

⁷My little children, don't swallow a lie. This is the truth: righteousness is more than a religious label; it's a way of life—it's the way of life for children of a righteous God. ⁸Conversely, sinning is a way of life for children of the devil—because He is the original sinner. The reason the Son of God became a man was to undo what the devil has done.

⁹Let's talk genetics. The reason that none of us who are true children of God live in ongoing sin is because we have God's genes. It's not just that we don't sin continually; we can't sin continually! We have God's DNA! ¹⁰The litmus test of our spiritual parentage is our everyday behavior. If your life is not characterized by righteousness—more specifically, if it is not characterized by love—you simply are not God's child.

¹¹Go back to square one. What was the first thing you were taught to do? "Love one another!" ¹²The antithesis of love can be illustrated by Cain, that child of the devil who butchered his brother. Why did he do it? Because wickedness hates righteousness. ¹³It

was true then, and it is true now. So don't be shocked when the world hates you.

¹⁴We can know as a fact that we are no longer spiritually dead but very much alive because we love other Christians. That's the test. Those who do not love are not alive, spiritually speaking. ¹⁵In fact, hatred is embryonic murder, and you know that eternal life does not dwell in the heart of a murderer.

¹⁶How do we know what real love is? By looking at Jesus. He laid down His life for us. And we have an obligation to love each other just as selflessly as Jesus loved us. ¹⁷Let's say a so-called Christian has more than enough to live on, and he notices that another Christian doesn't, but he feels no compassion and does nothing to help. How can that man claim to have God's love in his heart? ¹⁸Little children, love is not about words; it's about works. Enough talk! Let's put love into action. ¹⁹After all, practicing true love is what gives us assurance that we're true Christians. And we'll need that assurance ²⁰when we are haunted by feelings of condemnation. (Thankfully, we have the added assurance that God knows our hearts better than we ourselves do.)

²¹Loved ones, a guilt-free heart also transforms our prayer life. Those who obey God's commands please Him, and those who please Him can pray with the confidence ²²of knowing that He will say "yes", whatever the request. ²³And all His commands can be boiled down to a single, two-step commitment. First comes the decisive commitment to believe in His Son Jesus Christ, and then comes the ongoing commitment to love one another. Remember, Jesus Himself gave us this command. ²⁴And commandment-keeping is what gives evidence that we live in union with Him—that, as well as the presence of His Spirit in our lives.

Chapter 4

¹But don't be gullible, loved ones. Not everything "spiritual" is from God. You need to be discerning, because the world is full of false prophets. ²How do you know if the source of someone's teaching is the Spirit of God? Simple: Listen to what that person says about Jesus. If the teacher confesses faith in Jesus—not a Jesus of their own making, but the true

Jesus—the Christ who came to this earth in human flesh—that teacher is speaking by the Spirit of God. ³But anyone who does not confess this Jesus is under the influence of a different spirit—the spirit of the antichrist. You heard he was coming; well, he has come. ⁴But you have nothing to fear, little children, because you belong to God and you have not succumbed to these false teachers. The spirit who controls this world is strong, but he's no match for the Spirit who indwells you. ⁵Anti-Christ teachers are from the world; no wonder they have a worldly message and a worldly audience. ⁶We who teach the truth about Jesus are from God, and so are those who welcome our message. Those who reject our message do so because they are not from God. How do we know whether someone has the Spirit of truth or the spirit of deception? By how they respond to the truth about Jesus!

⁷Loved ones, let's never stop loving one another. How could we, since God is the Source of love? It's our love that proves that God is our Father and that we know Him intimately. ⁸Conversely, it is the absence of love that marks a person as a stranger to God. After all, God is love! ⁹And He unveiled His love in an amazing way—by giving His only Son to this world so that through His death we might have life! ¹⁰You want to know what love looks like? Don't look at yourselves; look at God! Look at Jesus, hanging on the cross, satisfying God's wrath, paying for our sins! That's love! ¹¹And if that is how God loved us, that is how we must love one another—on an ongoing basis. ¹²God is invisible, but His love is not. It is when we love one another that others can see God—in us! That's His intention—for us to be, not only recipients of His love, but also channels of His love to others. Until that happens, His love is incomplete.

¹³How do we know for sure that God has made us one with Him and has taken up residence in our life? First, we know it because we have experienced the unmistakable activity of His Spirit in our lives. ¹⁴And we know it because we testify to what we have seen with our own eyes: God the Father sent God the Son to save the world! This confession—"Jesus is the Son of God"—is the overflow of a heart that is plugged into and possessed by God. ¹⁶Both by faith and by experience, we know that God loves us. Truly, God is love!

And thus it is love that marks the person who is connected to God and indwelt by Him. ¹⁷It is when we love that His love reaches its intended destination, and passing on His love to others is what gives us confidence that He will be pleased with us on the Day of Judgment. What better way to prepare for that Day than by living in love, just like Jesus did? ¹⁸Love is the antidote to fear; when we love one another, the fear of facing God is gone! Are you still living in fear of judgment? Then pass on to others the love that God has poured into your life, and your fear will dissipate. ¹⁹Never forget, though, that the only reason we can love one another is because God loved us first.

²⁰ Words are cheap. A person can say, “I love God!”, but if that person does not love his Christian brother or sister, he’s not kidding anybody. If he doesn’t love someone he can see, he can’t possibly love Someone he cannot see, no matter what he says. ²¹After all, God said that love for Him must be coupled with love for our Christian brothers and sisters. That’s not a suggestion; it’s a command!

Chapter 5

¹Everyone who believes that Jesus is Messiah is God’s child, and, naturally, if you love your Father you’ll also love your brothers and sisters. ²But how do we know for sure that we are loving God’s children? It happens naturally when we love God. How do we do that? By obeying His commands! ³You see, obedience to God’s commands is how we say to Him, “I love You.” And His commands are not a burden, ⁴because we who have been born again have the Spirit’s world-conquering power within us. And this power is unleashed through simple faith. ⁵All it takes to win the battle against the evils of this world is the belief that Jesus is the Son of God. ⁶How do we know that Jesus is the Christ? Look at His baptism, where God the Father said, “This is My Son.” Look at the cross, where human blood was shed. The water and the blood together testify that Jesus was the God-man. And so does the Spirit, who whispers the truth to our hearts. ⁷All three—⁸Spirit, water and blood—speak in harmony. ⁹If we accept the testimony of human witnesses, how could we be skeptical when God is the One on the

witness stand, testifying about His Son?

¹⁰Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Son of God (deity wrapped in humanity) has internalized God’s testimony. Everyone who does not believe calls God a liar. After all, they have rejected His testimony concerning His Son!

¹¹Read the transcript of God’s testimony: “The gift of never-ending life is yours for the taking. This gift is packaged in My Son. ¹²If you receive My Son, you get life. If you reject My Son, you forfeit life.”

¹³Why have I written all these things to you? Because I want you to know, beyond a shadow a doubt, that you possess eternal life! If you believe in Jesus, the Son of God, you do!

¹⁴And, as believers, we can pray with great confidence. We can ask Him for anything—absolutely anything—and, assuming that our request is in alignment with His will, we can know for a fact that He is listening. ¹⁵And if we know He is listening, we know it’s as good as done. That’s a promise!

¹⁶Let me give you a specific example. If you see a Christian brother or sister commit a sin, you can pray for them, and God will forgive them, preserving their life. That’s His will—unless, of course, they have committed the one unforgivable sin—defection from the faith. This is the one sin for which no pardon from the death penalty is possible. To pray for God’s forgiveness in such cases would be inappropriate (because it is contrary to His will). ¹⁷Sin, of course, is anything less than absolute righteousness—but not all sin is the same, because not all sin results in eternal death.

¹⁸We know for a fact that no true child of God lives a sin-saturated life. The devil cannot lay a finger on us—because our big Brother, Jesus, protects us from him. ¹⁹We know for a fact that we are the God’s children, and that everybody else in this world is Satan’s slave. ²⁰We know for a fact that the Son of God has come into this world and has opened our minds so that we might know—personally and intimately—the one true God. We do know Him—indeed we are in Him—because we are in His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus is the one true God! Jesus is life—eternal life!

²¹Don’t settle for anything less, little children. Steer clear of man-made gods.