

# BASIC BELIEFS ON BEING A CHRISTIAN

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*By the Book*™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study Series from Jerry Vines Ministries  
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## Let's Begin

*Despite the faithful efforts of churches, evangelists, and missionaries, studies consistently show that the average American remains confused not only about precisely what it means to be a Christian, but also how to correctly state the most basic Christian beliefs. One survey noted that over half of those who claim to be "born again" base their belief on such things as living a good life, obeying the 10 commandments, or some other "works-oriented" response. John's three short letters stand as perfectly relevant modern-day tracts which teach basic Christianity—Christian Faith 101.*

*With this in mind, chapter two nicely illustrates many of the fundamental truths the Apostle John insists the church must get right to remain spiritually healthy. Let's follow the outline below:*

- I. We Must Be Right About The Savior (vv. 1–2; cp. 24–25)
- II. We Must Be Right About Our Surety (vv. 3–14; cp. 28–29)
- III. We Must Be Right About Sin (vv. 15–17)
- IV. We Must Be Right About Satan (vv. 18–19; cp. vv. 22–23, 26)
- V. We Must Be Right About The Spirit (vv. 20–21; cp. vv. 27–29)

## I. We Must Be Right About The Savior (vv. 1–2; cp. 24–25)

Though touching briefly upon the first two verses last week since these verses are actually a natural overflow from chapter one, we do well to hear John's emphasis upon Who Jesus is. In other words, we must get it exactly right about Jesus. The Apostle writes, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (vv. 1-2). One of the major keys to understanding Who Jesus is remains tightly connected to what Jesus

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did—Christ is the propitiation for our sins. The Greek term translated "propitiation" is *hilasmos*, and signifies a means through which sin is covered and remitted. John is clear that Christ not only *propitiates* but *offers Himself* as the *propitiatory sacrifice*. The wonder of our loving Savior cannot be measured!

Therefore, on the basis of the death of Jesus as the voluntary *propitiatory sacrifice*, the guilt our sins rightly deserve has been effectively scrubbed from our account. To those who "confess" sin and turn to Jesus Christ in faith, we are cleansed from all unrighteousness. Nothing stands between us and the Father. Christ remains our heavenly Advocate Who pleads our case before the throne of God.



In addition, observe that Jesus Christ is a *universal* Savior; His sacrifice for sin could apply to every human being who has ever lived—“not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” John is not suggesting some type of universalism which suggests all people will be saved. To the contrary, hell is a real place, and the Bible clearly teaches eternal condemnation results in a horrible display of fiery, everlasting judgment to those who spurn the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ (cp. Rev. 19:20; 20:10,14,15). Rather John insists that while Christ is the exclusive Savior (no other Savior exists), nothing keeps one from benefiting from Jesus’ death but one’s own sinfully stubborn human choice. No other verse in all Scripture so explicitly denies the belief of some sincere but misguided Christians who claim “Christ died only for the elect.” After all, John ought to know; he learned it from the Lord Jesus Himself (cp. John 3:16).

## II. We Must Be Right About Our Surety (vv. 3–14; cp. 28–29)

Not only must we be accurate about Who Jesus is, we must also be correct about our *surety*. For John, assurance of one’s relationship with God remained no option. In this short letter, he uses the Greek form of the word translated “know” over 20 times! Obviously, he insists that, for the Christian, knowing one’s standing with God cannot be considered a privilege for an elite group of Christians within the church; rather assurance is available for all Christians (cp. also 2 Tim. 1:12). But how do we gauge our knowledge, our assurance about right relationship with God? John reveals in the verses that follow three specific tests to assist us in gauging our assurance.

*How do we gauge our knowledge, our assurance about right relationship with God?*

First, the test concerning our *attitude* (vv. 3-5). Observe John’s words, “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him” (vv. 3-5). Saved persons, according to the Apostle, will have certain kinds of attitudes, specifically attitudes of *obedience*. John begins by casting the attitude in a negative framework. If one confesses a relationship with Christ but “keepeth not” God’s moral standards, then the obvious result is dishonesty. Our attitude must be guarded to “keep” God’s commandments. John is pointing to an inner frame of reference whereby our heart is engaged with following God’s known will. And, while we cannot keep His commandments perfectly, we surely may keep a healthy attitude toward pursuing His perfect plan for us in every path of life’s journey (cp. Rom. 12:1-2).

Second, John lists the test concerning our *actions*. He writes, “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked” (v. 6). Saved persons want not only their *attitudes* but also their *actions* to please the Lord

### Reflection Connection

*Take a moment a think through whether you have an attitude which pleases the Lord. What ways would be helpful to improve your attitude and guard you heart from sin? Explain.*



Jesus. Every sphere of our walk with Christ demonstrates honor to Him through the way we behave. For John, the believer's goal is to walk "as he walked" (cp. 1 Pet. 2:21; Eph. 5:1). Christians walk in the direction Jesus travels; and our Lord travels the path of seeking always the glory of His Father. So must we.

Third, John describes the test of *affection* (vv. 7-11). Saved people possess a deep love for other saved people. By this John does not imply we *only* love saved people any more than a father saying to his son "I love you" implies he *only* loves his child but does not love his neighbor's child. John frames our affection in the form of a "new commandment" which appears strange to us when we first read it. By "new" he means a newly empowered focus, emphasizing love as the law for believers. Jesus is our example (vv. 7-8), and because of Him, we experience the same type of love he experienced (vv. 9-11).

### III. We Must Be Right About Sin (vv. 15–17)

Not only must our understanding about Jesus be secure and settled, John insists we must be right about sin. He writes, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (vv. 15-17). Christian maturity has more to do with heart commitment than years of life. Consequently, there is no substantial excuse for worldliness in the believer's life. Indeed worldliness is one of the greatest tragedies of the modern church. It plagues us and robs the people of God from genuine blessings from heaven.

Even more tragic, multitudes of unbelievers cite the hypocrisy of "church members" as the number one reason they refuse to have anything to do with the local church. And, while no excuse will be acceptable before God's throne as they stand before Him without Christ as Savior, the really sad thing is, they are all too often correct. The "world" has invaded the church, and when this happens, Gospel influence becomes diluted.

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#### Reflection Connection

*What comes to mind when you think of the term "hypocrite"? Do you think hypocrisy is a genuine problem in today's church? Explain.*

John makes clear for us the *meaning* of the world (v. 15). For him, the world is not the world of nature (cp. Acts 17:24). Nor was John pointing toward the world of humanity (cp. John 3:16) even though Jesus loved the world of lost sinners so much He gave Himself for it (Rom. 5:8). Instead John was speaking of the "world" of orderly arrangement, a system of things which are diametrically opposed to God. Hence, John could say without reservation "love not the world." Why? Because from the world we get worldliness, a way of life which displeases God. Even more, in this worldly environment is found a ruler (2 Cor. 4:4), a worldly spirit (1 Cor. 2:6), corrupt belief (2 Pet. 1:4), and haters of God (John 15:18-19). And, it is from this hopeless world our Lord has rescued us (Gal. 1:4). Satan inevitably tempts us through our fleshly "lusts" while appealing to



the one thing every fallen human being craves—*pride*. The language John uses not only reminds us of the first temptation in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1-10), but also the encounter our Lord experienced in the desert (Matt. 4:1-10). Where Adam and Eve failed, Jesus fully succeeded!

#### IV. We Must Be Right About Satan (vv. 18–19; cp. vv. 22–23, 26)

John's entire concern centers on the growth of young believers. One special way John used to assist believers in their day to day living was to teach them how to view end times. In fact, end times teaching was a common apostolic theme to protect the church from increasing hostility toward the faith (cp. 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1). In particular, John casts a profile for those who hinder God's people. At the center of their profile is Satan himself; he is their ruler, their master. According to John, they are "antichrists." He writes, "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us" (vv. 18-19).

### *Denying the Son of God is denying the Son's Father.*

First, they *deny* Christ—"antichrist shall come." The Bible predicts a day is coming when evil itself will be personified in human form (cp. John 5:43; Matt. 24:5). He will oppose Christ at every turn. However, preceding him who is to come are "many antichrists" who are indicative of the last days. They too will deny the Person of Jesus, spurn the Gospel, and mock His bloody sacrifice. John is powerfully clear, however, that denying the Son of God is denying the Son's Father (vv. 22-23). Jesus being the only way to the Father, rejecting Him is rejecting the Father (cp. John 5:23; 14:6).

Second, they *desert* the church (v. 19). No surprise exists concerning the result of those who deny Christ—they also desert His church. Though they were at one time a part of the congregation, the time comes when inauthentic Christians will leave the church by droves. Yet their desertion is indicative of their empty hearts, not the failure of Christ's body, the church. Consequently, because the church held their lives in moral check, when they desert the community which guarded their hearts from complete corruption, their life outside the church will cause a moral collapse both individually and collectively (cp. Jude 4). Similarly, their minds will become darkened with worldly wisdom, and they will follow Satan not God (cp. 2 Tim. 4:3-4; 2 John 9).

Finally, they *deceive* the Christian. John writes, "These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you" (v. 26). Not content to wallow in their own woes, they will purposely focus on other people—specifically weak believers—on which to prey. Their method of operation will consist of seduction and confusion with the goal of converting people to follow their father, the devil. In an atmosphere such as this, the believer's hope rests in the body of Christ, which, according to John, is the "pillar and ground" of truth (v. 19).





## V. We Must Be Right About The Spirit (vv. 20–21; cp. vv. 27–29)

John has focused upon the basic fundamentals of the faith. He is deeply concerned about Christians being properly grounded in the faith. And he is careful to insist that no real Christian growth can take place in the believer's life apart from a healthy, Biblical view of the Holy Spirit. He writes, "But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth...But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him" (vv. 20-21; 27-28). The Holy Spirit lives and dwells in every child of God. Jesus referred to Him as the "Comforter" Whom the Father sent to guide believers into all truth (John 14:16, 26). The Spirit gives the believer power to both witness (Acts 1:8) and bear the character of Christ Paul calls the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22; Eph. 5:9). The Spirit seals our relationship to God as we wait for the coming of the Son (Eph. 1:13; 4:30). And, what John dubs the "anointing" is none other than the Spirit of God Who works out the glory of God in our lives.

### Reflection Connection

*Do you think there is proper focus on the Holy Spirit in the church? Explain.*

John ends this section with an exhortation to abide in Christ. Note his words, "And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming. If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him" (vv. 28-29). Eleven times John uses the term "abide" in chapter two, making its importance assured. We must center our lives in Christ, making Him the anchor in every area. Note also the urgency John reveals concerning our abiding. In other words, our *abiding* must be pursued in light of His soon *appearing*. We look for the day of Jesus Christ (cp. Heb. 9:24-28). Indeed we long for it and even love it (2 Tim. 4:8). The Spirit works confidence into our hearts as we wait for the day assuring faithful believers they will not be ashamed at His coming.

### Golden Greek Nugget

John asserts believers have an "unction" from God's presence in our lives (v. 20). The Greek term translated "unction" is *chrisma*, which is connected to the anointing oil which was used to anoint priests and kings. In essence, the anointing established a visible mark of God's approval. The Spirit of God marks His people out, approving them and empowering them for service in Kingdom work.

### Wrap Up

*No concern demanded more energy from the Apostle John than instilling assurance in new believers. He detailed exactly what it would take for the church to remain faithful in the last days. Consequently, we remain without excuse as we stand before God. Every tool we need to excel in faith remains at our disposal. The only question we must answer is, have we committed our lives unreservedly to Jesus Christ?*

