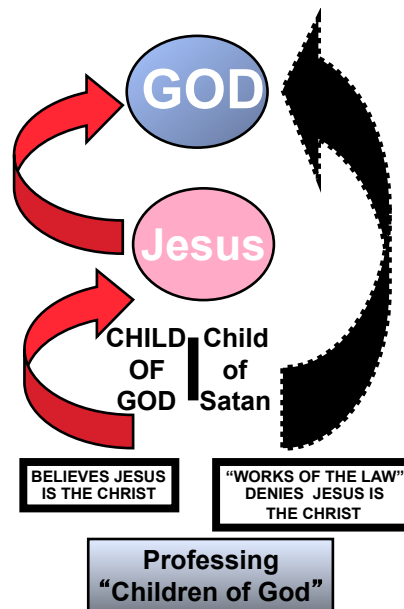


PART IV**THE CONFLICTING THEOLOGIES**

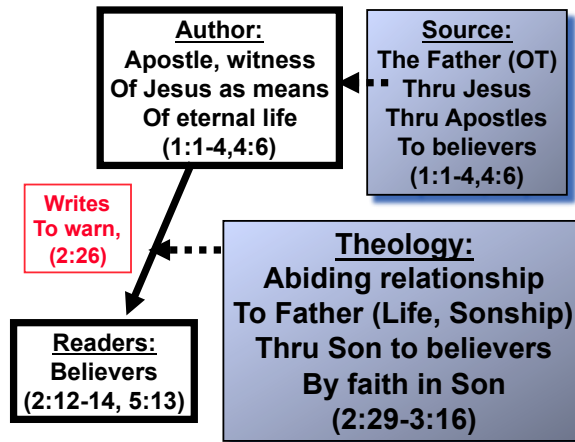
Probably the most important thing that must be established precisely is the opposing theologies. The more precise these are determined, the more precise will be one's understanding of the book's message. The more ambiguous these are the more general will be one's message.



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The Theology of the Apostles:**Belief in Jesus as the Christ
is the Only Access to the Father ("Eternal Life")**

"Eternal life" here is nothing less than the righteous character of God the Father, demonstrated in the Son (1:2). Thus, belief in the Son gives access to the Father, and the possession of His righteous character, making one born of God (3:9). It is absolutely apparent that John is saying that access to the Father and "eternal life" is granted to no one apart from the Son. Access to the Father makes one "born of God" and thus a "Child of God."



... the one who confesses the Son has the Father also. (1 John 2:23)

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God (1 John 5:1)

¹¹ And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. ¹² He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. (1 John 5:11-12)

¹³ These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:13)

The Sacrifice of Christ Gives New Life, Access to God the Father (“Child of God”)

The apostolic doctrine, which John lays out clearly, consists of two major points.

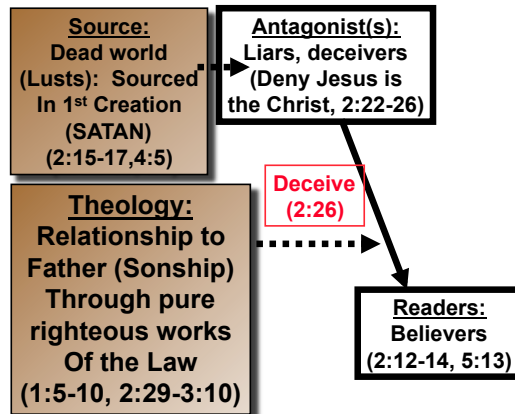
1. **That access to God the Father (“eternal life”) in the Old Testament was always and only through the coming Christ, the Son, who is the Jesus whom John eye-witnessed.**

John uses Genesis 1—4 as well as Psalm 2 (the titles, the “Christ,” the “Son of God” are from Psalm 2:2 and Psalm 2:7, 12) to show the Old Testament indicated access to God was always and only through the coming Christ. John

also uses Jeremiah 31:31-34 to show that God had replaced the Old Covenant, in which the antagonists had placed their hope (self-righteousness through the keeping of the commandments), with a new covenant that placed God's righteous character ("eternal life") within them and forgave their sins (thus avoiding the wrath). Ezekiel 36:25-27 is used by John to show that this new heart would enable them to fully "keep His statutes."

2. The Christ, Jesus, provides atonement for sins (the cross), which appeases the wrath of God and gives new life (righteous character and a resurrected body).

Jesus' life, death and resurrection fulfilled the Old Testament requirement (4:4) of atonement for sins (1:7) and the requirement of the new life (5:1) from God. (This directly contradicts the antagonists' perception of gaining righteousness and life through the keeping of the Law.) This forgiveness of sins would remove them from the wrath of God and the new life (character of God) would guarantee them a place in the kingdom to come.

The Theology of the Antagonists:

Works of the Law Give Access to the Father (“Child of God”)

The antagonists are claiming two diametrically opposed things:

1. **Access to God⁸ (“life”) is gained, and always has been, through one’s own works (no need for the Christ⁹), and it is this “keeping of the commands” which delivers one from the wrath of God.**

⁸ That the Jews had a concept of a Christ is seen in John 7:31. But, while they recognized the prophecy of the Christ, they did not believe He was not necessary to give them eternal life, since they thought they gained it through the works of the Law. Their concept of Messiah was that He would be One who established Jews as righteous and conquered non-Jews. He was not One who would sacrifice Himself, nor would He be required for them to receive righteousness. Thus what John is doing is showing that a substitutionary Christ is needed, and that no one ever had, has, or will have, access to the Father any other way.

⁹ This was exactly the case of the Pharisees who argued that their access was through Moses (i.e., the Law) and not through a “Christ” (see John 9:28).

The antagonists are attempting to access God on a self-righteous basis, always through self-improvement or asceticism (i.e., the works of the Law”). Thus they do not see the need for forgiveness of sins through the Christ, but instead they pursue good works and say either that they “do not sin,” or that they “have not sinned” (1:8, 10, 2:23).¹⁰ They do not perceive that they need forgiveness of sins since they feel they have adequate self-righteousness as the way to access the Father. Thus Jesus, as the means of forgiveness of sins that gives access to the Father, is also not needed. They aver that the “keeping of the commandments” (see 2:3-4¹¹, 4:17-18) allows one to avoid God’s wrath and conversely anyone who abandons this self-performance (like the Christ-followers) should “fear” the judgment of God (see 4:17-18).

2. Self-righteousness gained through the Law delivers from the wrath of God (not the atonement through Jesus).

These antagonists felt that that the keeping of the Law avoided God’s wrath.¹² By contrast, the apostolic doctrine promoted Jesus’ atonement as the only means of propitiation, or the appeasement of God’s wrath.¹³ Thus to trust in

¹⁰ When the apostle accuses these false claimants by what they “say,” as in “if someone says . . .” (1:6,8,10; 2:4,6,9; 4:20), it is always that they are claiming a relationship with God the Father, not with Jesus. Thus, in this conditional clause, the protasis, “if someone says they know Him (God) . . .” indicates the antagonist is claiming a relationship with God, not Jesus.

¹¹ Refer to the explanation of this verse to come later in this article in terms of the Old Testament fulfillment given in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:26-27. In short, it will have somewhat of a polemical use against these antagonists by pointing out that without imputed righteousness through the Christ they cannot accomplish this. Thus the point of the Old Testament was that the total one hundred percent righteous requirement of the Law was needed to enter the Kingdom (see Matthew 5:17-20), and thus one needed to “keep the commandments.” The way this is done is by Messiah only, who will impute that righteousness to believers (1 John 3:23) through belief. This enables the believer to fulfill the Law (Romans 8:4).

¹² Generally speaking their source for this is Deuteronomy 28--29, where they interpreted that obedience to the Law was rewarded with material blessing, while disobedience resulted in physical cursing.

¹³ To the antagonists’ thinking, to trust in Jesus would put them under the wrath of God, since they must abandon their own visible works as valid. Thus Christians had to give up keeping the Law as an avoidance of the wrath of God, trusting in Christ alone. In 2:3-4, John alludes to the “keeping of the commandments.” The way that this statement is understood separates the antagonist from John. The antagonist sees it as

Christ was apostate for an unbelieving legalistic Jew, since it would disallow the visible good works of the Law as a means of appeasement of God's wrath (not to mention abandoning the nation Israel). Instead they would have to trust (i.e., faith) in the unseen Christ to act as the propitiation (2:1-2). This law-keeping Jew would tell those who trusted Christ, as the sole access to God, that they would be under judgment for not keeping the Law (2:22, 4:3, 18).¹⁴

John's Theology and the Theology of Genesis 3:15

Probably the easiest way to show John's theology is by going to the source of it, Genesis 3:15 played out into Genesis 4 (Cain and Abel).

Following the sin of Adam and Eve, God came on the scene to announce how He, the Hero of the Bible, was going to rectify the situation and enable all mankind to be reconciled back to Him, as was His desire in the beginning, that is, that man would represent His character fully (Genesis 1:26).

Enmity between

- **those following the Revelation of God in the Coming Messiah ("the Seed of the Woman")**
-
- **and those who follow the deceit of Satan in human perception ("the seed of the serpent")**

Generally speaking God makes a clear difference between those who are on the side of His coming Messiah, His Son (representative), that is, those who believe in Him . . . and those who reject Him for their own perception of what is good and what is evil (the serpent's philosophy). These two philosophies will not overlap, and in fact, will contradict one another. Those who follow Messiah will hold firmly to their beliefs which are as follows:

works based some partial "keeping." John sees perfect "keeping" through imputation as being done through belief in Christ (i.e., imputation, see 3:23).

¹⁴ This is the problem that the false teachers in Galatians feared. They had trusted Christ but felt they needed to be circumcised and keep the Law else they would fall under judgment. So they mixed Christ and the Law. Paul expresses clearly the massive contradiction of trying to have both in Galatians 2:21, "if righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Christ died needlessly." Here the antagonist sees that contradiction and does not want to be under the wrath of the Law so he tries to keep it through his own deeds. He is claiming that the Law is the access to God, not Christ.

- **A new life coming in the Messiah**, who is the character of God, to those who believe which will ultimately be realized in a resurrection into a new creation.
- **Judicial Judgment on the Old Creation Coming in Messiah**, the serpent and his followers will be judicially demonstrated in the perfect Messiah who will unjustly die for sins (at the hands of the serpent and his followers) and substitute for the sins of the old creation.
- **Final judgment on the Old Creation, Coming in Messiah**, will be delayed until after the Seed of the Woman has appeared and substituted for sin, been resurrected and returns to execute judgment.

This is contrasted with the diametrically opposed followers of the serpent.

- **Life is in the here and now in one's prosperity**, within the old creation, which has been judged and is dying. Yet the perspective of human perception is that one's prosperity on this earth is life.
- **The followers of Satan will execute hatred and judgment on Messiah and His Followers:** They believe those who trust in Messiah should be eliminated as they oppose their "goodness" in human perception and condemn "good" people..
- **There is no future absolute judgment in Messiah:** There is no final judgment by the Seed of the Woman. All judgments are in the present life based on one's prosperity or failure.

Summary: The "Children of God" Are Established by "Confession that Jesus is the Christ"

Thus, based on Genesis prophecy, John tells the believers not to be surprised (3:13). The identity of the true "children of God" is confirmed by their belief in Jesus Christ as the apostles have testified. The unbelievers will hate them because of the condemnation of their self-righteousness and will not love the believers since they are different and name them as self-righteous and dead ("Children of the Devil").

On the other hand, the believers cannot take wrath on the unbelievers. They must wait for the coming of the Christ to return and judge the unbelievers. Until then, the "Children of God" are identified by their confession of belief in the Christ. Based on this belief they are not under wrath because of the propitiatory sacrifice.

Thus the unbelievers are trying to influence the believers in Christ to abandon Him and return to the keeping of the Law to avoid the wrath of God. John is warning the believers that their faith in Christ has given them "eternal life," forgiveness of sins, and entry to the eternal kingdom.

