

**PART V****TRUE MEMBERSHIP IN THE “FAMILY OF GOD”**

If one is to understand John’s purpose, the first thing that must be understood is the family motif that John uses, a motif that comes from the earliest verses in the Holy Writ. That membership in the “Family of God the Father,” is the issue (contrasted with the “family of the devil; 3:10), is clear throughout the book. Man was born into the family of Adam, corrupted and dead, and as such became a follower of Satan, from whom Adam derived his sin nature. Through the hope promised, and then brought through Messiah, man could receive the righteousness of the character of God (“eternal life”) through belief in the Son. Yet Satan continues to lie to man’s evil character, confirming in his mind that he must approach God in some other way, such as good works, or in the Jewish case, the works of the Law. John is extremely concerned since those believers listening to this secular wisdom from Satan will lose their sanctificational<sup>15</sup> relationship with God the Father. And in addition, those outside the family will never achieve access to God and entry into God’s family because this doctrine will keep them in a dead hope. Thus they are called the “children of Satan” (3:10).

There are some clear terms that are prominent in the Epistle that must be recognized for their “Family of God (the Father)” use.

- **“God, the Father:”** As the Father of the family, God will be the One who places His Seed in man so he can be “born of God” and receive His character (3:9).
- **“born of God:”** Man’s life from Adam was cursed with death and is, like the world, passing away. This makes man a “child of Satan” and as such is judged dead with respect to God. Man can live again with life from God through believing in Jesus as the Son of God (5:1).<sup>16</sup>
- **“child of God:”** Once one believes in Jesus as the Christ, he is “born of God” and enters God’s family as His “child” (2:12, 3:1-2, 10)
- **“Eternal Life”** This is the righteous character of the Father that is placed in believers. It is a quantifiable substance that reflects the exact

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<sup>15</sup> This is not speaking of their “eternal security,” since eternal life, by definition, cannot sin, die, or be taken away. It is speaking of the living, vibrant, current relationship with God the Father, walking in “life.” And, of course, beside present tense implications, there are future implications, as 1 John 2:28.

<sup>16</sup> This was what Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3:3 when He said, “You must be born from above.”

character of God (perfection, holiness). Adam's mortal life had to be replaced by God's life (character). This character (called "eternal life") is given to man when he has the new birth through belief in Jesus (1:1-3; 5:11-13). This not only includes the present new character but the future bodily resurrection (see Daniel 12:2 for the Old Testament allusion for the phrase "eternal life").

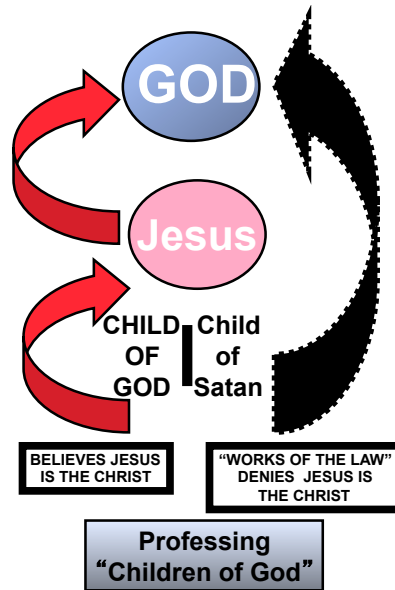
- **“Fellowship”** Anyone with “eternal life” (the righteous character of the Father) is in the family and thus they have a commonality of “life” that they share with each other, with Jesus and ultimately with God. Thus they have a shared trait, and it is the trait of God's character, eternal life (1:3, 6, 7). Only those in the family have fellowship.
- **“Brothers:”** All those who are “born of God” into God's family are brothers. Since they have the character of God, which is defined as sacrificial love, it is to be expressed in a sacrificial love for the brother<sup>17</sup> (1 John 3:16, 4:7-9). Those not “born of God” through Jesus Christ are not brothers with the true “children of God” but are “children of the devil” and will hate the true brothers (1 John 3:10-11).
- **“love of brother:”** Because those who are in the family are uniquely different from those outside the family, anyone who is in the family recognizes their brothers and sisters as being also “born of God” through belief in the Christ. Thus the sacrificial love that is in them (“eternal life,” the character of the Father) will be expressed toward those also in the family.
- **“forgiveness of sins:”** There is one difficulty for one to be in the “family of God,” and that is the problem of the identity with one's old Adamic self. This self is corrupted, being condemned to death, and must be paid for before the identity can be solely that of the New Adam and the new family of God. Thus, through the Messiah's death the old Adamic self is judged and paid for. Because of this judicial declaration, the Adamic nature is thus rendered moot. While it is still alive practically, it is judicially dead. Thus it can do nothing to judicially reject God (i.e., sin) since it is forgiven. The only life that the believer possesses as a real identity is the new life that

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<sup>17</sup> This “love of brother” has often been confused to proclaim that one should love unbelievers in the same way they love believers. This is not the case. This love is a familial love toward those who share the new life. It cannot be shared with those who are not in the family. While there is a “love” for the unsaved (John 3:16), they are not seen as “brothers” in this context.

cannot sin and must please God because it is His righteous character (3:9).

Thus John will show how one may know that they are truly in the family of God, the Father (5:13), that is, through belief in God's Son. He will use the Old Testament to show that this is how it has been "from the beginning."



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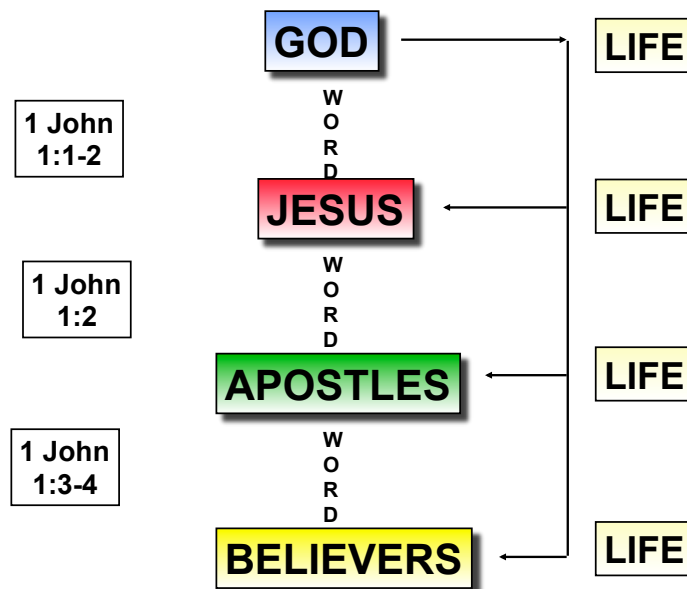
### **Identifying The Family Of Satan ("Children Of The Devil")**

Those who deny Jesus Christ are not in the family of God, but are in the family of the devil ("children of the devil" (3:10)). They abide in the death sentence on the Adamic life (3:14<sup>18</sup>) and hate the true "children of God" (3:13, 4:20).

### **The Apostles As The Determiners Of The Family**

<sup>18</sup> The verse in 3:14 states that one abides in death because he does not love. This is because he is not in the same family, the family of God. He is in the family of the enemy, the devil. He does not have the character of God, eternal life, which is love, and thus, since he hates the brother in the family of God, abides in death in the family of the devil. This originates from Genesis 3:15 where the serpent would kill and persecute the Seed of the woman and the followers.

It is very important to recognize the means by which God's revelation in Jesus (i.e., "light," 1:5) comes. The Law established that God spoke only through authorized prophets, judges, priests and kings,<sup>19</sup> and thus these Apostles had to be validated as speakers for God. This occurred in the Upper Room Discourse (John 13—17)<sup>20</sup> as well as the Book of Acts.<sup>21</sup> John will claim this in 1 John 1:1-3 and 4:1-6.



### THE APOSTLES AS MEDIATORS OF LIFE WITH GOD

These apostles (1:1-3) are the only ones who have an inspired eyewitness account of Jesus as the Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament anticipation ("from the beginning") of Messiah. But, not only did they watch and report their findings to their followers, but they trusted in His promise of eternal life and were reassured of their future resurrection through personally experiencing the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

<sup>19</sup> Deuteronomy 16—18 isolated these figures as authorized speakers for God, particularly in the application of the Pentateuch. In addition, it gave massive penalties for those who were not authorized and who did not speak from God according to the Books of Moses.

<sup>20</sup> John 14:25-26 and 17:8 affirms that the Holy Spirit will ensure that the apostles recalled the very words of Jesus. In John 17:20 these words through the apostles would enable men to believe in Jesus.

<sup>21</sup> The apostles were specifically chosen by Jesus (see Acts 1:3, 10:42) and their apostolic doctrine was the foundation of the church's teaching in Acts 2:42.

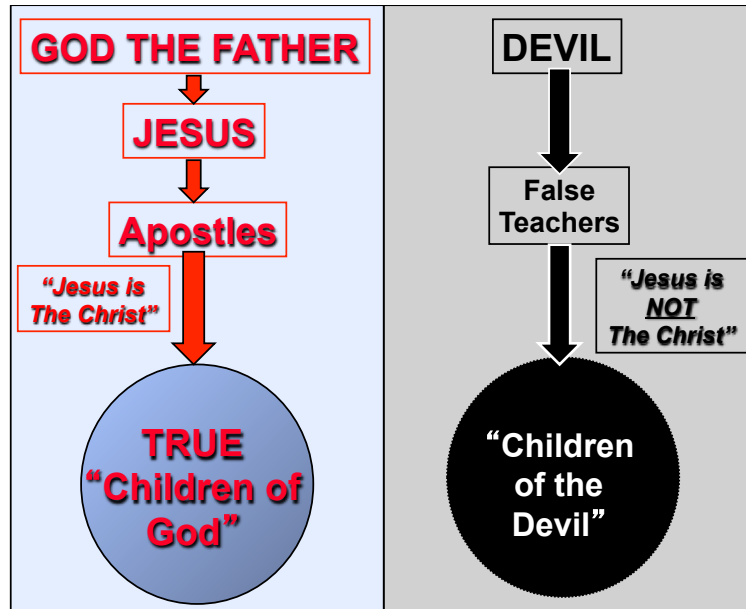
Thus a follower can identify with Jesus through the apostles' words and experience.<sup>22</sup>  
Apostles possess the following:

- Ability to understand the Old Testament<sup>23</sup> in its original intent as it showed that Messiah was the only means by which God had ever intended to bring depraved men into His family ("From the beginning," 1:1).
- Eyewitness testimony and full participation in the message of Jesus, that He was the only One who could fulfill the Old Testament anticipation (1:1-3).
- Their inspired word is the only means by which their listeners could obtain the "eternal life" that puts them in fellowship (1:3) with God (i.e., in the "Family of God"). Thus the apostles are the determiners of those who have eternal life (2:25) since they issue the apostolic word that Jesus is the Christ. If one agrees with them (4:6) then they are children of God. If they do not, then they are not children of God (4:5).

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<sup>22</sup> This can be seen by all the first person plural usages (i.e., "we," "us") throughout the epistle. It is the apostles who do these things on the basis of their eyewitness relationship with Jesus. The false teachers (antichrists) do not do these things since they have not sampled what the apostles saw, nor do they have the witness of the Old Testament to verify their behavior and words. Note that it is the apostles that receive the promise of eternal life in 2:25. In the Book of 2 Peter, Peter claims exactly the same thing, using the first person in 2 Peter 1:4, where the pronoun related to the promise is "us," and then he changes to the reader "you" to speak of the reader's benefit from the promise given to the apostles.

<sup>23</sup> This is, of necessity, the Old Testament in its originally intended meaning. Prophecy was clear in the past, and thus fulfillment becomes a proof. If the apostles are able to modify, inform, or change, the prophecy then it cannot have value as a proof, being the logical fallacy of circular reasoning, where the premise assumes the conclusion.



## WHO ARE THE “CHILDREN OF GOD?”

### Conclusion

The testimony of the First Epistle of John is simply that there is no access to the Father apart from Jesus Christ. Thus, those who are in the “Family of God” are those who confess (believe) that Jesus is the Christ. Those who are not in the “Family of God” are deniers of that doctrine. That doctrine can only be understood and embraced by listening to the apostles who were the eyewitnesses of Jesus as the One who fulfilled the Old Testament anticipation. Thus by listening to the apostles, one can enter the family of God through belief in the Christ.