

# An In-Depth Study of the First Letter of Apostle John

## [Part 5]

**1 John 3:1-3** [NIV] *“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, **now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.**”*

The apostle John demands that we should constantly be thankful for great love that our Creator God has for us as His created children.

The apostle John reminds us that not only are true Christians called “*children of God,*” it is who we really are now, not just a future condition.

This process of becoming a created child of God will **not** be complete until we see Jesus Christ again, face to face, at His return to this earth.

**Philippians 3:20-21** [NIV] *“**But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.**”*

A child of God receiving their eternal body.

**1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-44** [NIV] *“**But someone may ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?”** How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. **When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body.**”* ... *“So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.”*

In this inspired scripture we receive a glimpse of what our future body and life will be like after our resurrection or change at the time of the return of Jesus Christ.

**1 Corinthians 13:12** [NIV] *“**Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.**”*

Our future will become very clear in us when we experience a “*face to face*” with our Saviour Jesus Christ.

**What must be our response to this understanding of our father/child relationship with our Creator God?**

Ensure that our life is a progress of becoming more like our Saviour, Jesus Christ, day by day.

**Romans 8:28-31** [NIV] *“**And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?**”*

Those true Christians called by God since the first coming of Jesus Christ and all who received and used the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives since the creation of human beings have the opportunity to be in the “*firstfruits*” of God’s Plan for all humanity.

### What does “*to purify ourselves*” mean?

To be pure is to be free from the corruption of sin.

God purifies us on repentance but there is also personal actions we need to take to remain pure in God’s eyes.

**James 4:6-8** [NIV] “*But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*”

James gives us a list of actions we are to take to sustain the purity that we receive from God through accepting the sacrifice of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

**1) Submit our will to our Creator God** – In all the decisions we make in our day-to-day living, make sure our actions are in harmony with the will of God as expressed in His Word, the Christian Bible.

**2) Resist the influence of Satan** – As Christians we are a prime target for Satan, he will do anything he can to cause us to sin and lose our purity in God’s eyes.

**1 Peter 5:8-10** [NIV] “*Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.*”

All Christians will experience the attacks of Satan in their lives.

**Ephesians 6:10-18** [NIV] “*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled round your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.*”

A sure defence against the attacks of Satan is to be wearing the “*spiritual armour*” that God provides. [See our article ‘*The Armour of God*’ under the general heading of ‘*Satan*’.]

**3) Ensure a close relationship with our Creator God** – We can only do this through daily prayer and study of God’s Word, the Christian Bible.

**4) Wash our hands spiritually** – To sin is to end up with the “*blood of Jesus Christ*” on our hands. Only through confession of our sins to our Creator God and our true repentance can the “*blood on our hands*” be cleansed.

**5) Purify our hearts** – The heart in scripture refers to what motivates all that we do in life. We cannot have a pure heart if we are “*double minded*.”

**Romans 12:2** [NIV] *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but **be transformed by the renewing of your mind**. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

We **cannot** cling to the ways of this Satan-influenced society and please our Creator God.

**1 Timothy 4:1-2** [NIV] *“The Spirit clearly says that **in later times** some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.”*

Even our consciences can be distorted by listening to and accepting the doctrines of false teachers.

**Hebrews 10:22** [NIV] *“let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.”*

Constant study of God’s Word, the Christian Bible, can cleanse our conscience that has been damaged by false teachers.

#### **6) Take sin seriously and seek sincere sorrow for what it has done –**

**2 Corinthians 7:8-11** [NIV] *“Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it — I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while, yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what **earnestness**, what **eagerness** to clear yourselves, what **indignation**, what **alarm**, what **longing**, what **concern**, what **readiness** to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.”*

The apostle Paul had given the church at Corinth very strong correction that had hurt them mentally and spiritually. This had caused them to be sorrowful of their sins as God intended.

Notice this list of responsive reactions that was formed in their minds and spirits.

**7) Humble ourselves** – Only when we realise just who we are compared to our Creator God can we really be humble before Him.

**Isaiah 64:8-9** [NIV] *“Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. **We are the clay, you are the potter**; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be angry beyond measure, O LORD; do not remember our sins for ever. Oh, look upon us we pray, for we are all your people.”*

This is a good example of how we should view ourselves, especially when we realise we have sinned.

**Romans 9:20-21** [NIV] *“But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? **“Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’”** Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?”*

God as our Creator, Sustainer and only Saviour has total rights to use the life He has given us in any way He chooses.

Only with such a humble attitude will God ever choose to offer us the gift of eternal life in His glorious presence.

We have now seen directly from God’s Word, the Christian Bible, how we are to purify ourselves as the apostle John, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, tells us we must, if we are to have our hope of eternal life fulfilled.

**1 John 3:4** [NIV] *“Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.”*

The Greek word translated “sin” is “*hamartia*” meaning a failing to hit the mark, a straying from a prescribed law, by omission or commission in thought, word or deed.

The law being referred to is “*God’s Law of Love*” [see **1 John 2:7-10**].

**When we fail to show love to God or another human being we are breaking that law.**

We are missing the goal that the Creator God has set before every human being.

That goal is to become like the Creator God in character, [“*likeness*” of **Genesis 1:26**], and God’s character is depicted by one word, love [“*agapé*” – the Greek word referring to non-conditional, sacrificial love.]

To sin is to show disregard to the law of love and hence character of our Creator God, a preference for selfishness over loving service of God and other human beings.

**There is in this scripture a strong indication that the apostle John is countering the doctrine of the false teachers which was mainly Gnostic in character.**

Gnosticism is a term derived from the Greek word for knowledge. Knowledge of secrets which would ultimately serve to create a union with God, therefore the end product of this knowledge was salvation.

In Gnostic thought there is a separation of matter, which according to Greek thinking was inherently evil, and the soul which was a spark of divinity imprisoned in a physical body.

Almost every Christian doctrine is revised by such thinking.

The Old Testament was ignored, and it diminished the significance of the ministry, death and resurrection of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Creation was thought to be the result of an accident. This to me seems to accept evolution rather than creation.

Sin became a defilement of the physical body and did **not** influence the position of the soul in God’s eyes.

A person could continue to sin in their physical body as long as they believe these intellectual secrets.

The apostle John refers to Gnostic doctrine as the so-called deep secrets of Satan. [**Revelation 2:24**]

Some of the less satisfactory features of the Corinthian church life reflect terms and concepts developed in Gnosticism.

Dangerous liberalism in sexual matters. [**1 Corinthians 6:13-18**]

Denied the fact of the resurrection. [**1 Corinthians 15:12**]

Paul countered this trend towards Gnosticism. [**1 Corinthians 2:1-10**]

**We need to question if the liberal attitude, in various parts of the Christian church today, towards sexual matters, creation and the authority of scripture, is a spirit of Gnosticism becoming an influence.**

**1 John 3:5** [NIV] *“But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.”*

Under the Old Covenant sacrificial system, a male lamb without blemish was offered as a sacrifice for sin.

**John 1:29** [NIV] *“The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”*

John the Baptist identified Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of all humanity.

Because Jesus Christ was God as well as a human being His sacrifice of a perfect sin-free life can be the perfect substitute sacrifice for all humanity. [**1 John 2:1-2**]

**1 Peter 1:17-21** [NIV] *“Since you call on a Father who judges each man’s work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.”*

“Reverent fear” is a great respect and belief in and for the all-powerful Creator God.

Because our Creator God is the judge of all humanity, we dare not ignore Him or treat Him casually.

We should **not** assume that our privileged status as God’s created children gives us freedom to do whatever we wish with our lives.

We should act as grateful children who love and show great respect to our Heavenly Father.

**1 John 3:6** [NIV] *“No-one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No-one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.”*

Again the apostle John is countering the Gnostic view that a truly “spiritual” person is so filled with the spirit and mystic knowledge that their body can sin to their heart’s content and their deep relationship with God will **not** be harmed.

**Spiritual progress does not confer on a person the privilege to continue to live a sinful life.**

In contrast the purer a person has become in their spiritual life the more disciplined a person they will become.

**1 John 3:7-8** [NIV] *“Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.”*

The apostle John goes even further to counter the Gnostic view, linking continual sinning to the work of Satan in a Christian.

The apostle John condemns all who make a practice of sinning then looks for a way to justify such a lifestyle.

**1 John 3:9** [NIV] *“No-one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.”*

What is this “born again” and the “seed” mean?

**To understand this is very important for this allows us to resist temptations to continue to sin.**

**John 3:3-8** [NIV] *“In reply Jesus declared, **“I tell you the truth, no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”** “How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!” Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no-one can enter the kingdom of God **unless he is born of water and the Spirit.** Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”*

Jesus Christ tells us that entry into the Kingdom, or created family of God, is limited to those who are *“born again of water and the Spirit.”*

The *“water”* could refer to the water that is associated to a physical birth of any human being or to water baptism by total immersion that is an outward sign of the death of self and a commitment to obey our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The *“spirit”* can only refer to the entry of the Holy Spirit into our life at the time of our baptism by total immersion.

The *“seed”* referred to in **1 John 3:9** is the implantation of the Holy Spirit which then causes us to become a newly born created child of God.

### **How does the Holy Spirit bring about this dramatic change in our life?**

**Galatians 5:22-25** [NIV] *“**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.** Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”*

Our intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit will allow this character of God to *“rub off”* on us, in the same way we take on the character of our physical parents as we live intimately with them.

**John 16:7-9** [NIV] *“But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, **the Counsellor** will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. **When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment:** in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me;”*

Here we see the work of the Holy Spirit in us, all of which prepares us to become a created child of God.

**1 John 3:10** [NIV] *“This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does **not** do what is right is **not** a child of God; nor is anyone who does **not** love his brother.”*

The apostle John gives a clear definition of who is a created child of God or just an influenced child of Satan.

**We are either one or the other, there is no middle ground. The way we live our lives will reveal as to who’s child we are.**

**1 John 3:11-13** [NIV] *“This is the message you heard from the beginning: **We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother.** And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother’s were righteous. Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you.”*

Abel’s offering pleased God because it showed Him that Abel accepted the need of a Saviour’s sacrifice.

Cain did **not** accept the need of God in his life by offering the fruit of his own labour.

Cain was filled with jealous anger that drove him to murder.

Christians who are morally upright expose and shame those who are not.

Christians make non-Christians painfully aware of their immoral lifestyle which causes them to hate Christians.

**Christianity is a religion of the heart, outward obedience to a set of rules is not enough.**

Bitterness against someone who has wronged you is an evil cancer that will eventually kill you eternally.

**Hebrews 12:15 [NIV]** *“See to it that no-one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.”*

A Christian who allows bitterness to prevail in their life is a very poor example to non-Christians and may turn them away from Jesus Christ and His church.

**1 John 3:14 [NIV]** *“We know that we have **passed from death to life**, because we love our brothers. **Anyone who does not love remains in death.**”*

**How do we pass from death to life?**

Belief in Jesus Christ and the message that He brought from the Father.

**John 5:24-25 [NIV]** *“I tell you the truth, **whoever hears my word and believes** him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he **has crossed over from death to life**. I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.”*

All humanity will have this chance to move from death to life.

All who believe and trust in Jesus Christ since His first coming but all the rest of humanity who have died and never even heard of Jesus Christ, through a resurrection back to physical life.

**1 John 3:15 [NIV]** *“Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.”*

The apostle John is repeating the very teaching of Jesus Christ.

**Matthew 5:21-22 [NIV]** *“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is **angry** with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘**Raca,**’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘**You fool!**’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”*

**Anger towards or contempt for another human being is murder in God’s eyes because you are allowing yourself to be an instrument in the hands of Satan.**

**John 8:42-44 [NIV]** *“Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. **You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire.** He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”*

Giving in to anger or contempt allows Satan to blind us with his lies, to the very reason we have been given life as a human being.

**Hebrews 2:14** [NIV] *“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death, that is, the devil,”*

This is how Satan has the power of death over a human being, he is stopping that person from passing from death to life through acceptance of Jesus Christ and the message He brought from God the Father.

**1 John 3:16** [NIV] *“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.”*

Real love is **not** a feeling, it is action.

Real love is shown through selfless, sacrificial giving of ourselves.

How can we follow the example of Jesus Christ in the expressing of this real love?

By serving other people with no thought of receiving anything in return.

**Romans 12:1** [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship.”*

This is what Paul was teaching the Christian church in Rome.

Sometimes it is easier to say we will die for a person than to truly live for them, for this involves a continual dying day-by-day through putting other people’s needs and desires before our own.

**John 15:13** [NIV] *“Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”*

This is what Jesus Christ lived out in His own life as well as taught us through His disciples.

**1 John 3:17-18** [NIV] *“If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, **let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.**”*

The apostle makes sure that we understand exactly what he meant by “*laying down our lives,*” he showed just how practical this must be.

**James 2:14-20** [NIV] *“What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, **faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.** But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that, and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that **faith without deeds is useless?**”*

James links this laying down of our lives to serve others to the proof of our faith.

**True faith has to be linked with sacrificial action or it is of no value.**

Belief in God has to be expressed in sacrificial action if it is to be more than what Satan and his demons believe.

**1 Timothy 5:8** [NIV] *“If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”*

Paul reminds Timothy that if we do **not** work to provide for our family and others in need we are worse than a person who has rejected Jesus Christ as their Saviour and are without God’s influence in their lives.

**1 John 3:19-20** [Phillips Translation] *“If we live like this, we shall know that we are children of the truth and can reassure ourselves in the sight of God, even if our own hearts make us feel guilty. For God is infinitely greater than our hearts, and **He knows everything.**”*

If we do not believe this I suggest you read and meditate on **Psalms 139:1-18**.

**1 John 3:21-24** [NIV] *“Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, **we have confidence** before God and receive from him anything we ask, **because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.** And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: **We know it by the Spirit he gave us.**”*

These last verses in this part of the apostle John’s sermon bring together all that has been said before and outlines the life of a true Holy Spirit empowered Christian.

We can use this a checklist, for each attitude of heart, mind and human spirit mentioned is an essential part of the whole Christian way of life.