

EPISTLE: 1 JOHN

2



MP3

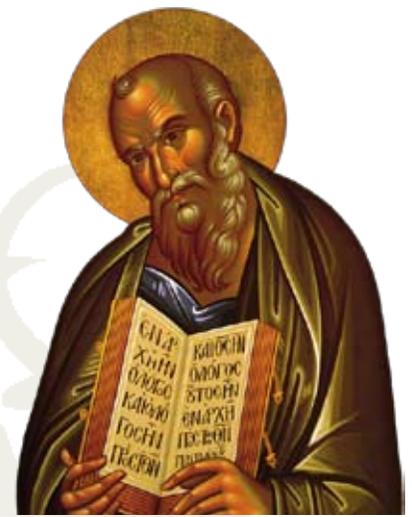
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PRACTICE QUIZ

Take a quiz to test your knowledge of 1 John chapter 2.

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Contrary to a popular view in contemporary Christianity, Orthodox Christians know that not only is there such a thing as sin, but also that we can—and do—engage in sin. The Holy Apostle John finished 1 John 1 with a reminder of this, and continues in the beginning of chapter two that, while we should avoid sin, we nonetheless have an advocate on our behalf with God the Father: Jesus Christ (2:1).

Since the apostle talks about false teachings regarding sin—and therefore the fact that there are people who only appear to be Christian—how can we know that we ourselves are Christians? St. John answers very simply: we are Christians if we keep Christ's commandments (2:3). In fact, the love of God will be perfected in us if we keep Christ's word (2:5). As St. Ephrem the Syrian says, "Beloved, are you a Christian through God's grace? Keep the commandments of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The commandment St. John gives is both old and new: old, because it is the commandment they long ago received (2:7); and new, because this commandment is lived in and

through Christ and His followers (2:8). And what is this commandment? To love one another (see John 13:34-35). Hating each other means walking in darkness, whereas loving one another means walking in the light of Christ (2:9-11; see 1:5-7).

The apostle then writes a set of admonitions to three general groups of Christians: "children" (meaning all believers), "fathers" (meaning those who had been Christians for many years), and "young men" (meaning those who were newer to the faith). The "children" must all remember that their sins have been forgiven, and that they know God the Father; the "fathers" must recall their years of faithfulness to Christ, and therefore not be misled by new, false teachings; and the "young men" must rely on the strength God has given them to continue overcoming the wicked one (2:12-14).

Love, however, has limits: Christians are not to love "the world or the things in the world"—which Blessed Augustine says means avoiding "the universal lust" that moves our attention from God to our material desires—but instead are to adhere to the permanence that comes from following the will of God (2:15-17). St. Symeon the New Theologian puts it like this:

*Let us flee the world.
For what have we got
in common with it?
Let us run and pursue
until we have laid hold
of something which is
permanent and does not
pass away, for all things
perish and pass away like a
dream, and nothing is lasting*

or certain among the things which are seen.

St. John goes on to warn that "the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come" (2:18). It is difficult to determine precisely what St. John means by "the Antichrist" (in fact, some texts do not even have the preposition "the"); while the term "Antichrist" is often understood to refer to an individual who in the future will persecute the Church—this same understanding can be found as early as such second-century writers as Ss. Justin the Philosopher and Ireneus—it more commonly refers to those who reject the deity of Christ (see verse 22, as well as 1 John 4:13 and 2 John 1:7). Fr. Lawrence Farley therefore says regarding verses 18-27, "What St. John means here...is that they have heard of the rise of heretical teaching, Satan's counterfeit and opposition to the work of Christ." The other antichrists mentioned by the apostle are false teachers who rejected the deity of Christ and are now no longer part of the Church (2:19).

Christians should therefore reject these false teachers and their antichrist doctrine, and instead allow the truth about God the Father and God the Son to abide in them—doing so will ensure that they then abide in the Father and Son, and receive the promise of eternal life (2:24-25, 28).

LIFE TIP

St. John of Damascus says not to fear the antichrist: "We firmly believe that the Church will never fall, will never waiver and will not be destroyed...The Antichrist will lure to himself those who have a weak and feeble mind, will seduce and will tear them away from the living God."

