

First John

*That which was from the beginning
is that which we heard
and saw with our eyes
and beheld and our hands—handled!
The Word of life was manifested,
and we have become acquainted with him.*

“The significance of his experience with Jesus, hasn’t dimmed one bit in his mind,” Curious observed, “and he waxes absolutely poetic about it.”

*And now we are bearing witness
and telling you about the eternal life
which was with the Father
and was made known to us.*

*We are sharing what we have seen and heard with you
in order that you may have fellowship with us,
for our fellowship is with the Father
and with his Son Jesus Christ.*

“It seems he has in mind some who have an imperfect understanding of Christ, and he wants to impress them that he knows the truth by first-hand experience.”

Naturally there were significant differences of opinion.

“I see a hint that John was at odds with the beliefs of some who would be hearing this letter read to them.”

He definitely emphasizes that the Jesus he knew in the flesh was the eternal Word of life—the same who was in the beginning of creation and one with the Father God.

These things we write, that our joy may be made full.

“Yes, he’s concerned. Shall I say ‘worried’? At least he knows there’s a problem.”

Is it significant that he’s been saying “we”? What about that, Curious?

“It’s almost like John is writing in collaboration with his beloved Jesus whom he knows is alive, having personally been with him after the resurrection and seen him ascend to heaven and promise to return.”

I like that, Curious. It’s a style you found occasionally in Paul’s letters too.

“But no doubt there were others he had in mind who agreed with him about Jesus, and he includes them as if they were co-authors.”

*This is the message we have heard from him
and announce to you:*

*God is light,
and in him is no darkness at all.*

*If we say we have fellowship with him
and walk in darkness,*

*we lie
and do not speak the truth;*

*but if we walk in the light,
as he is in the light,*

*we have fellowship one with another,
and the blood of his Son Jesus cleanses us from all sin.*

“Darkness and light—knowledge and ignorance.”

Look at that again, Curious.

“Or rather truth and and falsehood. Not all knowledge that’s supposed true is true, of course.”

*If we say we have no sin,
we deceive ourselves,
and the truth is not in us,
but if we confess our sins,
he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins
and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
If we say that we have not sinned,
we make him a liar,
and his word is not in us.*

"There's an example of knowledge being untrue."

How does one deceive one's self, Curious?

"It strikes me as being artificial, like what comes out of academia these days."

You've read most of the Bible. Sin is a big deal, isn't it?

"Thinking you're beyond sin is like tearing out hundreds of pages of Scripture."

No doubt John's audience didn't have the pages to tear out.

"Well, John is making Scripture. I tend to forget that."

Nevertheless, some say the early church is our best model.

"We wouldn't have this portion of Scripture if they weren't worrisome to John."

*My little children, I write these things to you
that you may keep from sin;
for if anyone sins,
we have an Advocate with the Father:
Jesus Christ the righteous
who is the propitiation for our sins,
and not for ours only
but also for the whole world.*

"I get it," said Curious. "You're telling me how I can effectively be sinless, but I cannot do it on my own without Jesus Christ."

In other words, that's a rhetorical *if* that really means *when*.

"There's a world of sin compensation in Jesus Christ. Is that about right, John?"

Can you imagine Jesus arguing for your righteousness?

"It gives me shivers. It's hard to believe anything could be that good."

Can you imagine the righteous indignation God had for all the sins of the world?

"I know he actually shares his righteousness with his own without being diminished himself—the finite never diminishes infinity. Yet still to have fellowship with him"

That's two amazing things, Curious, but one on top of the other.

"What's amazing is I'm not curious about it because I see it has to be that way. But as a practical matter, how do I know I'm living in his light?"

*Here is how we know that we know him:
if we keep his commandments.
Someone says, "I know him,"
and yet does not keep his commandments.
Such a person is a liar,
and the truth is not in him.
But when you keep his word,
your love of God has truly been perfected.
Hereby we know that we are in him:
we can say that he lives in us
if we walk as he walked.*

First John

"It reminds me of Psalm 119," Curious remarked, "though John repeats it only three times compared to something like 170 times in the psalm."

It's definitely not a new idea.

"Too bad Adam didn't impress the commandment on Eve to a better effect."

Jesus insisted that his true followers keep his commandments.

"John was echoing what Jesus said. I remember what he said about a new command: 'A new commandment I give to you: love one another—love one another just as I have loved you.' Does that supersede the old commandments, John?"

*Beloved, I write no new commandment,
for it is really an old commandment;
you had it from the beginning;
the commandment is in the word which you heard.
Yet again, I write this as a new commandment to you,
a thing which is true in him and in you
because the darkness is passing away,
and the true light already shines.
He who says he is in the light yet hates his brother
is still in the darkness;
he who loves his brother lives in the light,
and there is no occasion of stumbling in him.
He who hates his brother is in the darkness:
he walks in the darkness
and does not know where he goes
because the darkness has blinded his eyes.*

"Okay, I get it," said Curious. "It's a new way of looking at the commandment to love one another, looking at it first from the negative side—old yet new."

But Jesus said that too.

"Well, what can I say? There's nothing new under the sun."

Yes, and there's no darkness under the sun if Solomon will pardon my saying it.

"John refers to *the* darkness like it's a blight, not just the absence of light."

I think so too, and that explains a lot: there is an evil one to overcome.

"People see things variously. John must struggle with how to make it relevant."

*I write to you, my little children
because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.
I write to you, fathers
because you know him who is from the beginning.
I write to you, young men
because you have overcome the evil one.
I have written to you, children
because you know the Father.
I have written to you, fathers
because you know him who is from the beginning.
I have written to you, young men
because you are strong,
and the word of God lives in you,
and you have overcome the evil one.*

"The son of thunder must have thought he'd come on too strong," said Curious. And he never said anything to offend the women.

"But as I look at it again there's a subtle admonition for all but the children."

Curious Looks at the Bible

*Love not the world
and neither the things that are in the world.
If anyone loves 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 vainglory of life—
these are not of the Father
but are of the world.
While the world passes away and the lust thereof,
he who does the will of God lives forever.*

“There’s the thunder coming out,” said Curious. “But Jesus said it too: you cannot serve two masters; so we must hold to God and despise the world. But who attains to that?”

*Little children, it is the last hour;
and as you heard that antichrist comes,
even now many antichrists have arisen
whereby we know it is the last hour.
They are the ones who left us,
but they were not of us;
for if they had been of us,
they would have continued with us;
so now it is apparent
that none of them were of us.*

“It’s lyrical thunder,” said Curious. “John can’t help being lyrical.”
I’m not sure how you put those two together.

“He alternates. There’s the thunderclap then there’s the rain.”

He’s calling the ones who left the company of believers antichrists. Is that like striking them with lightning?

“He’s rumbling on about things to come. It came and still is coming because if there hadn’t been falling away from the truth, I wouldn’t have been ignorant of the Bible.”

It’s the climate of the last hour.

*But you, having an anointing from the Holy One,
know all things.
I have written to you
not because you do not know the truth
but because you know it,
and because no lie is of the truth.*

So the truth will never interest everyone.

“I think by ‘liars’ he means the antichrist types.”

*Who is the liar
but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?
This is the antichrist:
he who denies the Father and the Son.
Whoever denies the Son,
the same does not have the Father,
but he who confesses the Son
has the Father also.*

First John

Another name for antitrinitarians?

"It's very straightforward if you consider who the father of lies is," said Curious.

*As for you, let that which you heard from the beginning live in you.
If that which you heard from the beginning lives in you,
you are living in the Son and in the Father.*

Was it an erosion of faith or a dilution of knowledge?

"Regardless of how it came about, departure from the original doctrine has a terrible consequence—only he's saying it nicely again."

And this is the promise which he promised us: the eternal life.

"I would add that's nothing to mess with," said Curious.

You must mean the conditions on which the promise is based.

"John insists they need to pay attention to the original teaching and not be toying with new ideas about Jesus."

What do you think? Did Curious get his head around it?

What I have written here concerns those who would lead you astray.

You may not have thought about it, Curious, but most of the world vehemently denies that Jesus Christ and the Father are one.

"The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence."

If only it were that benign, Curious.

"I would say from my own experience, we're vulnerable to being led astray. I know there's an answer to that, though."

*And as for you, the anointing which you received of him lives in you,
and you need not that anyone teach you
because his anointing teaches you concerning all things;
this is true and is no lie,
and just as it taught you, you abide in him.*

"There he goes again," said Curious.

Where's the thunder in that?

"I'm pretty sure you mean by 'anointing' the possessing of the Spirit of Christ. Is that what you had in mind, John?"

Are you thinking this is somehow a shattering thing, Curious?

"If the anointing has something to say about everything, that pretty much shatters one's self reliance."

What is your option?

"Apparently it's the only way to avoid being led astray."

Assuming your anointing is of the right kind, of course.

*And now, little children, keep living in him
so that if he appears we can be bold
and not be ashamed before him at his coming.*

"Maybe that was easy for John, but I don't know ..." said Curious.

Why would boldness be required?

"I think he had a reckoning in mind, like in Jesus' parables when the owner comes back to judge the work of his servants."

Once you know that and what he expects, you're on your way to pleasing him.

*If you know about his righteousness,
you know that everyone who does his righteousness
is living in him.*

Here is where it comes together, Curious.

"So you have to live in him to get it right."

Which means?

"And that means ... well, all of the above."

Maybe you'd better read it again.

"As soon as I finish this letter I'm going to read it again," Curious declared.

*Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us,
that we should be called children of God, and so we are.*

"That means adoption," observed Curious, "which is a permanent thing. But how am I supposed to show it?"

*The reason the world does not know us,
is because it did not know him.*

"Now there's the down side of adoption," said Curious. "Jesus was rejected by the world in his day, so we can expect the same in our day if we're his children."

*Beloved, at present we are children of God,
but it has not yet been shown what we will be.
However, we know that when he is revealed to us,
we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is.*

"But the world's rejection is balanced by the future inheritance. So that's where one would tend to focus,"

True, but living like a child of God is the business of today.

*And by having this hope within yourself you become pure,
just as he is pure.*

"Oh, I see. ... That puts it in a different light," said Curious.

*Everyone who commits sin disrespects the law,
for sin is lawlessness.*

"More thunder," said Curious. "Okay, John. But you make it sound like every sinner is like a devil."

*You know that he came to take away sins,
and yet in him there is no sin.
Therefore if you live in him you do not sin,
and whoever does sin has neither seen him nor known him.
Little children, let no one lead you astray;
only if you do righteousness are you righteous as he is righteous.
He who indulges in sin is of the devil;
for the devil originated sin.
To this end the Son of God was manifested:
to destroy the works of the devil.*

Curious paused to try to get his head around this. To be righteous you had to be like Jesus Christ, which is obviously impossible in the present mode of being. That puts everyone in the camp of the devil. But Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil.

"All right. I think this is the deal," he said at last. "You get adopted now, which removes you from the devil's camp; then you can begin having that hope of being like him when you see him, and that mindset makes you willing to get cleaned up."

*Whoever is born of God does no sin
because his seed lives in him;
in fact he cannot sin,
because he is born of God.
By this the children of God are distinguished
from the children of the devil.*

"Something else is going on too," said Curious. "There's a seed sprouting which is pure and has a visible presence. So if one is intent on righteousness it's supernatural!"

First John

*Whoever is not a doer of righteousness is not of God,
and neither is he who does not love his brother.*

"There's a real separation even if no one is perfect," said Curious.

*For this is the message you heard from the beginning,
that we should love one another—*

*not as Cain who acted like the evil one
and slew his brother.*

And why did he slay him?

Because his own works were evil

and his brother's were righteous.

Marvel not, brothers, if the world hates you.

Do you see a message hidden in that, Curious?

"It doesn't say that Cain didn't love his brother," Curious declared.

It's a curious love that comes out looking like hate.

"Righteousness can be infuriating. I wonder how Abel demonstrated his love for his brother."

Do you mean he was virtually dwelling in death even though his works weren't evil?

"If he 'loved him to death,' it backfired."

*We know we have passed from death to life
because we love the brethren.*

He who does not love dwells in death.

Whosoever hates his brother is a murderer:

and you know that no murderer has eternal life living in him.

"So love is essential to righteous life now and hereafter," said Curious.

Obviously. But what is love?

*We know what love is because he laid down his life for us:
and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*

"I've heard parents say they would do that for their children," said Curious.

Perhaps they would. Who knows?

"Abel had an easier occupation than Cain did, so he would have had an opportunity to sacrifice something for Cain, and according to this he would have done so if he truly loved him."

Watch it, Curious. Now you're preaching to your righteous ancestor.

*But whoever has the world's goods
and sees his brother in need*

*and shuts his compassion off from him—
how does the love of God live in him?*

That's a more practical way to prove love, Curious.

"But that's not all it takes to prove you have the love of God."

It's a good exercise of it, though. Maybe you should try it.

Little children,

*let us not love in word
merely with the tongue*

but in deed and truth,

and by this we will know that we are of the truth

and will assure our heart before him;

because if our heart condemn us,

God is greater than our heart

and knows all things.

“So the proof is internal.”

Which follows the deed; don't forget that, Curious.

*Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us,
we have boldness toward God,
and whatever we ask we receive from him; ...*

“John speaks from experience.”

But I don't see where he limits it to himself, Curious.

*... because we keep his commandments
and do the things that are pleasing in his sight.*

“So it's open to anyone. It sounds like you can get anything you want by following some rules,” said Curious.

Who said anything about a rule?

*And this is his commandment:
that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ
and love one another as he commanded us to do.*

“It's circular,” said Curious. “He takes it right back to where he started.”

Is that surprising?

“I kind of like that, though. I can get my head around it.”

I think John would agree love is the beginning and the end if by love you mean God.

*And he who keeps his commandments
lives in Christ and Christ in him.
And we know that he lives in us
by the Spirit he gave us.*

Are you sure you've gotten your head around it, Curious?

“So you can't just chalk up your works of love as proof. If the Spirit is who proves everything, then it's still beyond me.”

Yes, it's a mystery.

*Beloved, do not believe every spirit,
but prove whether the spirits are of God—
because many false prophets are about in the world.*

*Hereby you know the Spirit of God:
every spirit that says that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God—
and every spirit that does not say this of Jesus is not of God (but is the
spirit of the antichrist which you have heard will come and already is in
the world.)*

“There's that heresy I suspected,” said Curious.

You mean that comment you made in the beginning? You said, “It seems he has in mind some who have an imperfect understanding of Christ, and he wants to impress them that he knows the truth by first-hand experience.”

“I don't think it's unbelieving Jews he has in mind this time because these antichrists accept Jesus as Messiah.”

So what makes them antichrist?

“Apparently they think Jesus was the manifestation of a spirit and not actually human.”

*You are of God, little children, and have overcome them
because greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world.
They are of the world;
consequently their talk is worldly and the world hears them.*

What Jesus said about himself is unacceptable to the natural man.

“Worldly thinking speaks of God but the incarnation of God is an oxymoron.”

We are of God:

*those who know God hear us; those who are not of God do not hear us—
by this we know there is a spirit of truth and a spirit of error.*

“Two kinds of spirits,” Curious remarked.

Conflicting spirits, shouldn’t you add?

“The idea that spiritual warfare is going on explains a lot,” said Curious.

*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God,
and everyone who loves is begotten of God and knows God—
he who does not love does not know God, for God is love.*

*Herein was the love of God made known among us:
God sent his only begotten Son into the world
that we might live through him.*

*And herein is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us
and sent his Son, the propitiation for our sins.*

*Beloved, if God so loved us,
we also ought to love one another.*

*No man has ever seen God,
but if we love one another, God lives in us—
and his love is completed in us.*

Curious fell strangely silent. He read those verses over again as if he were trying to wrap head around them, but why? They present nothing that is new in this letter. We know our curious one likes artistic and poetic things, so maybe that’s what gave him pause even if there’s nothing to be curious about. Or maybe it was those culminating lines.

“In the beginning it was said that the human was made in the image of God,” said Curious at last.

Yes, and what about now?

“I’m looking at that ‘but if.’ Is John implying that only if God’s love is completed in us do we bear his image?”

That’s something to think about, I dare say. Let’s move on, Curious. Maybe your question will be answered.

*We know that we live in him and he in us
because he has given us of his Spirit.*

*And we have beheld and bear witness
that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.*

“John is referring to himself there,” said Curious.

Exclusively?

“Well, having a measure of the Spirit of God is not just about him.”

*Whoever will confess that Jesus is the Son of God,
God lives in him and he in God.*

*And we know and have believed the love which God has in us.
God is love, and whoever lives in love lives in God—
and God lives in him.*

“But then he extends the essential benefit to whoever.”

There’s more to it than that, Curious.

“I love the love of God—ever since I encountered it in Genesis.”

Isn’t there a question of participation?

“It’s a very high standard,” said Curious.

*Love is now being perfected with us,
in order that we may have boldness in the day of judgment—
because as he is, even so are we who are in this world.*

"If I'm not mistaken, that verse includes the whole thing," said Curious.

Be a little more specific, please.

"I'm not saying I've gotten my head around it, but I see the whole program in it."

What is the "whole program"?

"It's about the purpose of the love of God lifting us up out of sin."

And everything that that accomplishes?

"It satisfies the judgment against sinners."

Good so far, but what about the last line?

"And that's not all; it implies the lifting up also leads to heaven."

It's more particular than that, is it not?

"I say 'implies' because I haven't gotten my head around it."

I hope you're still wrapping. You sensed that this verse has the "whole thing" in view.

"That 'as he is, even so are we' is a nut I can't crack; I'm afraid I'd wreck it if I tried."

(Apparently he's going to leave it us to figure out on our own.)

*There is no fear in love;
perfect love casts out fear.*

"If that got out on its own" said Curious, and he shook his head.

So you think it needs its context.

"If someone took that as a general principle, it could lead to the opposite."

Like having guilt feelings about having fear?

"It's supposed to be about not having guilt."

*In fear there is a fear of punishment,
so he who fears has not been made perfect in love—
not knowing that we love because he first loved us.*

"There's the other half," said Curious, "which it needs even in the context."

So this is specifically about not having fear of being punished by God. But isn't it interesting that knowledge perfects this love?

"I'm seeing that this love comes from God," said Curious.

Like it's not our love but his love being reflected in us.

"Which is perfectly fitting. And what a relief that we're not expected to produce it!"

*If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he lies;
because he who does not love his brother whom he has seen
cannot love God whom he has not seen.*

"And there's the test for it. I like that. It's very practical," said Curious.

*This commandment we have from him:
whoever loves God must love his brother also.*

So it's a commandment. I thought we said this love is a gift from God.

"Oh. Its not the sort of test I thought it was."

We're not like machines that simply run on divine fuel.

"I hope you back that up with a good explanation, John," said Curious.

You should know by now that's very likely, Curious.

*Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ
is begotten of God.*

*And whoever loves him who begat him
also loves him who is begotten of him.*

First John

"But one doesn't always love one's brother! That was established in the very beginning with Cain and Abel," said Curious.

When born of sinful seed, yes.

"Okay, I get it. This is not natural brotherhood. The parent here is God."

So why is the commandment needed?

"Is there a real difference? How is one to know that, John?"

*So hereby we know that we love the children of God:
we love God and do his commandments.*

*For loving God is keeping his commandments,
and his commandments are not burdensome.*

"I think I've stumbled on the key," said Curious.

Let me guess. The commandment light-bulb went on.

"It's so simple, and I know I've seen it before, but I never really got my head half-way around it.

Forget you head, Curious. For a little while, at least. You're more than head.

*For whatever is begotten of God overcomes the world,
and faith is the victory that has overcome the world.*

*And who is the one who overcomes the world
but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*

Now John is digging down to the foundation, Curious.

"Faith. ... This is the first time he mentioned the need for faith in this letter."

What else do you call it when you have read this far?

"Love. I thought that was the key," said Curious.

Yes, but there are many loves built on many foundations.

"But I see he has a point because the world offers many idols."

People love their various religions.

"So faith comes first. But I trust love more than faith."

That's a remarkable statement coming from you, Curious.

"Honestly, though, I know what he will do now. John is very practical."

*This man Jesus Christ came with water and blood;
not with the water only but with the water and with the blood.*

Then tell us what he means by "water."

"John the Baptist was the first human witness. Maybe he says 'water' because he has the same name. Even to put 'the witness of the Baptist' in place of 'water' would ruin that beautiful line."

Well, that's an interesting perspective, Curious.

"The 'blood' refers to the cross—the sacrifice."

Now tell us what it means that he "came with" the blood.

"So this is what faith rests on: that Jesus came to die for the sins of the world. That I remember well."

So he wasn't just another prophet murdered by the establishment.

"That's what it boils down to."

Is that enough?

"But anyone could say that about any martyr."

So far, yes, but there is more to go on.

*The Spirit bears witness of this,
because the Spirit is the truth.*

*These three bear witness:
the Spirit, the water, and the blood—
and the three agree as one.*

See? Now he puts the Spirit first. Isn't that interesting, Curious?

"Of all the people John was baptizing, the Spirit marked out only one."

And how did the Baptist interpret that?

"Behold, the Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world!, in the Baptist's words."

You got that right. It wasn't just the witness of one prophet, John the Baptist, it was the witness of the Spirit of God.

*If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater;
for the witness of God is this, that he bore witness concerning his Son.*

So is that all it takes to build one's faith, Curious?

"That was then. So if today I have faith that it's true, it's a bit mysterious."

*He who believes on the Son of God has the witness in him;
he who does not believe has been made a liar by God—
because he has not believed the witness God gave us about his Son.*

"Whoa, there's no zero," Curious grumbled.

I'm not sure I know what you mean. Well, I do know, but you need to tell us.

"I never thought of it that way. One can't be neutral."

The world doesn't believe the testimony in the Word of God. Is that fair to say?

"The fixed point of reference is Creator God, so he can't be the liar, obviously."

Is unbelief the same as lying then?

"It seems that unbelief has become lying at least for some people."

What made that happen?

"It could only mean that they know better."

You mean the truth is obvious so to deny it is a lie?

"Even I can see that John has to be writing the truth about Jesus."

*And the witness is this:
The eternal life that God gave us is in his Son.
He who has the Son has the life;
he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.
This I write to you that you may know that you have eternal life—
to you who believe on the name of the Son of God.*

"So having the Son is believing on the name."

You seem puzzled, Curious. Are you wondering why 'the name of' and not 'Jesus Christ'?

"I guess it addresses the doubts."

Yes? ... Tell us what you're thinking.

"Jews had a hard time believing that Messiah when he came would be God, because they had finally learned to reject names other than Yahweh. So they had to learn both that Christ is God and that Jesus is an acceptable name for him."

But isn't that the lesser of the adjustments they had to make?

"Also that an individual's eternal life depended on Messiah was a new concept."

*And we have this boldness toward him:
if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.
If we know that he hears us in whatever we ask,
we know that we have been granted the petitions we asked of him.*

Let's see if Curious identifies the key phrase.

"So the 'boldness' and the 'according to his will' are tied together," said Curious.

Wouldn't it be possible to ask according to his will without boldness?

"Am I reading this right? Does this imply it is a sin not to ask for something if you know it is his will?"

*If any man see his brother sinning—that is a sin not unto death—
he shall ask, and life will be given the one who sinned not unto death.*

Curious shook his head. He wasn't going to try to wrap it around that one.

"It isn't really a prayer to save a life," he said finally, "because there was no danger of dying as a result of that type of sin."

So what is the purpose of the prayer?

"He says, 'Life will be given to the one who sinned.' Some additional kind of life."

Could it be the life hereafter?

"This is a brother, presumably one who has eternal life but fell into sin."

Why doesn't John recommend confronting the brother about the sin?

"John obviously believes in prayer being more powerful than persuasion."

He also believes that sin stifles life somehow.

"The way he sees it, being free of habitual sin is being alive."

(There is a sin unto death, and I do not say he should ask concerning that.

All unrighteousness is sin, but there are sins not unto death.)

Doesn't that cast a different light on it?

"Now I'm thinking both of these are about crossing a line."

The fact that there is a line is scary, is it not?

"The question is, what kind of line is it?"

*We know that any begotten child of God is not a sinner,
for he who is begotten of God is careful—
the evil one stays away from him.*

"Back to square one," said Curious.

It sounds like the "brother" who sins unto death is not a brother.

"I like the looks of it from this side much better."

Really? Even though the evil one is mentioned?

"And it makes sense now: the line is between being a child of God and being in the house of the evil one."

If Curious thinks it's a one-way street that crosses the line, I agree.

*We know that we are of God
while the whole world resides in the evil one.*

"Perspective," said Curious.

I assume you mean that's what the whole world lacks.

"It's where the light comes in."

What if someone says there is no evil one?

"Without that perspective one could cross over and not know it."

Then would that person still be of God?

"Obviously they do not know they are of God regardless of what they say."

*And we know that the Son of God has come
and given us the understanding that,
1) we know him who is true,
and 2) we are in him who is true—
in his Son Jesus Christ.*

So knowing about him is not enough.

"It's still a bit mysterious."

Then you're not going to get your head around it?

"One could easily fool oneself."

*This is the true God and eternal life;
so guard yourselves from idols, little children.*

"Everything else amounts to idolatry. I'm going to read this letter again."

On his second reading of First John, Curious paused at verse eight in chapter three:

*He who indulges in sin is of the devil;
for the devil originated sin.*

*To this end the Son of God was manifested:
to destroy the works of the devil.*

"I've often wondered why the devil wasn't simply gotten rid of," said Curious.

Whatever he has going for him, it hasn't failed him yet.

"Is there a promise God made to him?"

That doesn't sound like wisdom.

"Or maybe Satan claims he's not at fault."

Isn't every creature who disobeys God at fault?

"I think of Job," said Curious. "Satan was sure that Job would criticize his Maker if put to a severe test."

And did Job question the wisdom of God?

"Satan was right, as far as that goes. But Job didn't curse God as Satan had predicted he would."

Nevertheless, Job was not quite as good as Yahweh saw him: it turned out he was not perfect in all his ways.

"If you're free to contradict God you're bound to do so at some point," said Curious.

Then you would agree with Satan?

"I don't see any way to get around that. We all miss the mark."

But the verse you just read implies that Satan was wrong and wrong in the beginning. What was he wrong about?

"Starting back with Eve, we missed the mark. Satan was wrong when he told her she'd benefit from disobeying God."

Isn't that rather trivial, Curious? Would that be a serious point of contention? Would God waste his breath declaring Satan wrong on account of his practices?

"But he wasn't wrong about Eve falling for his lie, so that couldn't be it."

So if everyone is susceptible to sin, then what right does God have to pardon humans but not Satan?

"God reserved the right to substitute his Son. That's the gospel. So Satan was wrong about sin being necessarily permanent, at least."

No doubt Satan loves it when forgiven sinners keep on sinning.

"I'll have to admit, though, that he's right about everyone missing the the mark and disobeying the first commandment. Oh, I get it: in the next stage of life there's a new body and the old nature with its tendency to sin will be out of the picture. So Satan might be wrong if he denies that will work."

But remember Adam and Eve. God declared them good when he created them. Yet Eve decided to side with Satan and Adam sided with Eve.

"Even in the pristine Garden they fell into sin, so God will have to bind Satan in order to destroy his corrupting work."

I have to agree: It is curious that God has not completely done away with Satan.

"Apparently God has to prove Satan wrong before he can get rid of him permanently."

How so?

"It's simply justice. God is just according to this Bible."

Suppose Satan is bound and denied his tempter role for a period of time.

"Satan started it all in the garden, so if he were disabled somehow, I can see that people given a fresh start in new bodies would have no reason to disobey God."

But Satan fell into sin without reason in the first place.

First John

"Hmm. I wonder if he would do it again, knowing what he knows now," said Curious. So that knowledge of good and evil that Eve acquired in her "advanced studies" might be useful after all?

"Yes. Yes indeed. ... That's a good point. With a reminder of the horrors caused by disobedience, there would be no temptation to disobey God. I see now what that verse is about. Satan was wrong in the beginning because of the way it turned out."

The way it turned out? Curious, have you learned nothing?

"Oh. Forgive me. It didn't turn out: it was planned. I'm starting to understand. This is what Paul was getting at in Colossians chapter one. This whole creation is Jesus Christ's doing because it's his plan to rid heaven of Satan and satisfy justice at the same time. So the principle in all creation is the glory of God specifically to contrast the tarnished glory of Satan. And those whom Jesus has legally made good with his own suffering gives him the right to give them glorified bodies. In that state they will demonstrate to Satan that free will does not have to lead to disobedience."

Surely someone could have been found before now who would be that proof - some glorified soul in heaven.

"The body is the problem. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."

Then do you think Satan has a body?

"I got the impression that Satan was a very beautiful creature. Than sounds like a body to me—maybe a heavenly type of body."

Humans are not complete beings without bodies.

"I see why the resurrection life is necessary to prove that obedience is possible with free will and with a myriad of potential temptations to go off on tangents from God's will."

What would it take for Satan to concede that he was wrong?

"It would take a statistically significant number. Jesus in his grand plan may have hand picked some. Say a few million perfectly obedient people over a long period of time would be significant for something this important."

Curious saw Jesus in a new light after this thought exercise. It was like the Son of God came to the Father and said, "If it be your will to send me, I will make free-willed beings in our image within a separate universe in which we will demonstrate to Satan that disobedience is not a necessary result of free will. We will love them being in our image, and that will enable me to actually suffer for them and they will come to love me on that account with the love they will share when they appropriate my sacrifice for them. Out of this we will have living proof that our making beings with free will to love us or not and obey us or not was not a mistake. But in the end I will have all these souls so dependent on me that we will have to adopt them into our family permanently."

"The whole idea of free will is on trial!" Curious declared.

Not really. Is that what your reasoning actually led to?

"Well, it will be love that pulls them through."

So Satan was wrong about that?

"In the beginning Satan's love went sour, obviously. Satan if he has a leg to stand on will claim that the love he was endowed with was faulty."

How did it fail?

"Satan must have trusted himself more than he did God."

Was it his free will that caused him to do so?

"Self love, I think is the problem—and the desire to explore his own capabilities."

Isn't that an exercise of free will?

"Satan inevitably turned love toward himself that belonged to God is the way I'm looking at it now."

Curious Looks at the Bible

Perhaps his gripe should be that he was made too beautiful.

"That's what it boils down to. Like Eve and her daughters, Satan was created too beautiful."

Does that give you hope?

"For some people that seems to be their hangup too."

What about you, Curious?

"I'm afraid it could be mine too. But I'm learning."

Learning to love God?

"That is learning to love Jesus for coming up with this plan and sacrificing himself."

Doesn't that give you confidence?

"Perfect love casts out fear of judgment, but how is it made perfect?"

Just think, Curious, of the privilege of being part of the proof that Satan is wrong.

"I could be proud of helping to prove Satan wrong, but then I wouldn't be qualified. I'm afraid I might be on the wrong side of that dilemma. I haven't even gotten to square one. What must I do to be saved?"

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

"I know what Peter told the jailer, but I'm afraid my belief isn't substantial enough. I'm pretty new at this."

Keep reading, Curious. Just keep reading.

"I'll just keep reading and hope the answer for me comes up."