

## THEOLOGY AND ETHICS OF JOHN OUTSIDE THE GOSPEL

Okoh Michael<sup>1</sup>, Albert Ulutorti Green<sup>2</sup>, Nganwuchu, Geoffrey Chiaz<sup>3</sup>, Umeokoli, Paul Okechukwu<sup>4</sup> & Okeke, Ebuka Ability<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Department of Religion and Human Relations, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University  
Igbariam Campus  
revmikeokoh@gmail.com*

<sup>2</sup>*Department of Religious Studies, University on the Niger*

[albert.green@uniniger.edu.ng](mailto:albert.green@uniniger.edu.ng)/<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-3641-3948>

<sup>3</sup>*Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, University of Nigeria Nsukka.*

[Geoffrey.nganwuchu@unn.edu.ng](mailto:Geoffrey.nganwuchu@unn.edu.ng)

<sup>4</sup>*St Paul's Theological College, Awka*

[revokey2007@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:revokey2007@yahoo.co.uk)

<sup>5</sup>*School: St Paul's Theological College, Awka*

[okeke.ebukaability@sptcawka.com.ng](mailto:okeke.ebukaability@sptcawka.com.ng)

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### ABSTRACT

Beyond his Gospel, John's theological and ethical contributions can be found in the Book of Revelation and his epistles (1, 2, and 3 John). These works emphasize moral values like love, truth, tenacity, and spiritual discernment while offering a comprehensive theological framework focused on Christology, divine love, the Holy Spirit, and eschatology. John's Christology presents Jesus as the victorious Lamb who defeats sin and evil, confirming His divinity, preexistence, and redeeming purpose. Love is portrayed as the distinguishing feature of both God's character and Christian discipleship, making it a central theological and ethical subject. John's teachings center on the function of the Holy Spirit in assisting believers, especially in distinguishing between truth and deceit. The contrast between truth and falsity, light and darkness, emphasizes the significance of John's writings ethically support resistance to erroneous teachings, solidarity within the church community, and selfless compassion. In addition to being a theological requirement, the command to love others is presented as a practical ethical requirement that calls on Christians to show their love via their deeds. The epistles and Revelation both emphasize the need of Christians maintaining their faith, particularly in the face of hardship and persecution. John's theology is still very applicable today when dealing with issues like moral compromise, disinformation, and divisiveness. While his teachings on discernment offer a framework for assessing truth claims in an era of disinformation, his emphasis on compassion promotes social harmony. Perseverance is encouraged by the eschatological vision in Revelation, which provides hope and certainty of God's ultimate justice. In the end, John's theological and ethical framework still serves as a guide for Christian faith and practice today, offering crucial guidelines for resolving moral and spiritual dilemmas.

**Keywords:** Theology, Ethics, John, Gospel

## Introduction

Beyond the Gospel of John, the Johannine corpus contains theological and ethical themes found in the Book of Revelation and the epistles of 1–2–3 John. The epistles support these theological ideas by concentrating on love, truth, and communal ethics (Frederick, 2019), even while the Gospel primarily portrays Jesus as the almighty Logos, highlighting his relationship with the Father and his mission of salvation. However, by depicting a cosmic conflict between good and evil that ends in divine judgment and the eventual triumph of God's kingdom (Da Silva, 2019), the Book of Revelation broadens John's theological perspective. When read collectively, these works exhibit a unique Johannine theology that combines profound Christological contemplations with moral precepts, especially the need for truth, the duty to love, and the ability to maintain one's faith in the face of adversity.

The emphasis on love as the hallmark of Christian identity is one of the main theological topics of John's letters. According to 1 John, love is an ethical duty derived from God's character rather than just an emotion (Jackson, 2021). The cornerstone of Christian behavior is the well-known statement, "God is love" (1 John 4:8), which exhorts believers to love one another as proof of their divine relationship. Love is presented as an ethical necessity and a theological truth that is inextricably linked to faith in Christ. This topic is also present in 2 John, where the elder reiterates the importance of walking in love while cautioning against false teachers. The ethical aspects of Christian hospitality are also covered in 3 John, especially with regard to aiding traveling missionaries (Pohl, 2024). John's epistles, therefore, push believers to demonstrate divine love via their deeds, extending the theoretical focus of the Gospel into practical ethics.

Beyond love, the Johannine texts outside the Gospel lay a significant focus on truth as an ethical and theological category. John portrays truth as an existential reality rooted in Jesus Christ, in contrast to the Synoptic Gospels, where truth is frequently associated with faithfulness or factual correctness (Edwards, 2015; Wead, 2018). The letters issue a warning against heresy and deceit, especially the rejection of Jesus' incarnation (1 John 4:1–3). In this sense, truth is both moral living in line with Jesus' teachings and doctrinal acknowledging Jesus as the Son of God. Revelation also depicts the conflict between truth and falsehoods, contrasting the faithful with those who support the "father of lies" (Rev. 12:9). According to John, leading an ethical life entails rejecting incorrect beliefs and behaviors in addition to upholding the right philosophy.

John's theological and ethical worldview is further developed in Revelation (Barnhill, 2017), which depicts the ultimate cosmic conflict between good and evil. Revelation projects love and truth into the eschatological future, whereas the Gospel and epistles place more emphasis on these virtues in the here and now. Perseverance, holiness, and unflinching faith in the face of persecution are the ethical requirements of Revelation. John's theological principles are accomplished in the New Jerusalem vision (Revelation 21), where God's eternal reign fully embodies justice, truth, and love. All things considered, John's theology outside of the Gospel combines eschatology, ethics, and Christology to provide a comprehensive view of Christian life that necessitates both moral purity and doctrinal faithfulness.

## Theological Themes in John's Epistles and Revelation

### **A. Christology**

The pre-existence, divinity, and redemptive work of Christ are emphasized throughout Revelation and John's epistles (Luo, 2023). Christ's designation as "the Word of life" in 1 John 1:1–4 emphasizes both His eternal character and His function in creation. In 1 John 2:2 and 4:10, Jesus is portrayed as the atonement for sins, guaranteeing peace between God and humans. This idea is fundamental to these passages. By presenting Jesus as the Alpha and Omega (Rev. 22:13) and the victorious Lamb (Rev. 5:6) who defeats evil, Revelation further develops Christology by highlighting His eschatological role in the final judgment and His almighty authority. John portrays Christ in many ways as the supreme peacemaker, victor, and tyrant, whose role is essential to Christianity.

### **B. Love and Divine Fellowship**

A hallmark of Johannine theology is the emphasis on love as both a theological and ethical requirement: 1 John 4:8 states that "God is love," emphasizing that love is not just an attribute of God but His very nature; true discipleship is characterized by love (1 John 2:10, 3:14); and obedience to God's commandments is equated with love (2 John 6), further solidifying the notion that love is the cornerstone of faith. John also stresses that believers are to show love not only in words but indeed (1 John 3:18), which fosters a strong sense of community and divine fellowship. This theology culminates in Revelation, where Christ's atoning redemption and the promise of eternal fellowship with believers (Rev. 21:3–4) demonstrate divine love and guarantee that people who dwell in love will always be in God's presence.

### **C. The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Discernment**

John's letters highlight how the Holy Spirit helps believers stay true to the truth by guiding them. (Andrews, 2016; Brown & Moloney, 2017) The anointing that believers receive, which bestows upon them heavenly wisdom and discernment to discern between truth and deception, is discussed in 1 John 2:20–27. In the face of erroneous doctrines that jeopardize the integrity of the Christian faith, it is especially important to test the spirits in order to distinguish truth from deceit (1 John 4:1-3). The Spirit plays a key role in bringing heavenly messages to the seven churches in Revelation (2:7–17), imploring them to respond to God's demand for fidelity and repentance. In order to keep believers rooted in truth in the face of deceit and spiritual warfare, John's writings emphasize the importance of depending on the Spirit for direction.

### **D. Dualism: Light vs. Darkness, Truth vs. Falsehood**

John frequently contrasts moral and spiritual truths using dualistic imagery (Edwards, 2015; Shin, 2018). Walking in the light and walking in the dark are contrasted in 1 John 1:5-7 to show how moral behavior is necessary to preserve divine relationship. The idea that believers are triumphant over sin and deceit because of their unshakable confidence in Christ is reinforced by the passage "Overcoming the world through faith" (1 John 5:4-5). By showing the ultimate triumph of light over darkness (Revelation 19:11–21), in which Christ vanquishes evil and establishes His everlasting kingdom, Revelation heightens this contrast. John emphasizes the significance of

upholding the truth, eschewing dishonesty, and embracing righteousness as a mark of true discipleship through these topics.

### **E. Eschatology and the Coming Judgment**

John's eschatological vision incorporates eternal life (Garton, 2019; Heil, 2016)(1 John 5:11-13), the antichrist (1 John 2:18-22), and the final judgment (Rev. 20:11-15). His epistles warn against false teachers who deny Christ, identifying them as precursors to the ultimate deception led by the antichrist. By clearly depicting the final judgment, when the faithful are rewarded and the wicked face eternal separation from God, Revelation builds upon this apocalyptic warning. The vision of a new heaven and earth (Revelation 21:1-4) is the pinnacle of John's eschatology and gives believers hope that God's justice will ultimately triumph and that His reign will be fully established (Kreitzer, 2015; Mbedzi, 2015; Menn, 2018; Moore, 2024).

### **Ethical Themes in John's Epistles and Revelation**

John's theological framework is intricately linked to his ethical teachings, which are mirrored in the Book of Revelation and his epistles (1, 2, and 3 John) (Bkhet, 2024; Sanchez, 2021). John's ethical themes are given within a theological perspective that prioritizes love, truth, obedience, and perseverance, in contrast to the more structured moral prescriptions found in Paul's works. His ethical concerns center on how Christians ought to behave toward God, other Christians, and the wider world. He advocates for unwavering faith in the face of adversity, emphasizes the importance of moral purity, and cautions against false teachings. These moral issues are given an eschatological dimension in Revelation (Lietaert Peerbolte, 2021; Wojciechowski, 2019), where John depicts a cosmic conflict between good and evil and exhorts believers to hold fast to their faith in the face of divine judgment and reward. John's writings contain ethical imperatives that are firmly anchored in his conception of God's nature and the transformational force of Christ's redeeming mission, rather than being merely external rules.

#### **1. Love as the Supreme Ethical Obligation**

One of the most prominent ethical topics in John's letters is love, which he portrays as the hallmark of Christian identity rather than as an abstract idea. As he states, "God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him," John underlines time and again in 1 John that love is a mirror of God's character (1 John 4:16). According to John, love is a moral duty that arises from one's relationship with God rather than just being an emotional or sentimental experience. As Jesus invites Christians to provide practical care for people in need in 1 John 3:17, he exemplifies this love via unselfish action. According to John's ethical system, love and following God's instructions are inseparable (Brock, 2023): "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments" (1 John 5:3).

In 2 John, he reiterates this moral obligation by urging believers to "love one another" (Heil, 2015; Thompson, 2001)(2 John 5). Love, however, is not indiscriminate acceptance; John sets limits for moral Christian friendship by cautioning against hosting false instructors (2 John 10–11). As he praises Gaius for accepting traveling missionaries and denounces Diotrephes for his self-centered ambition and lack of love, 3 John provides yet another example of love in action.

John emphasizes in these letters that divine love, which is shown in both interpersonal relationships and doctrinal integrity, must influence Christian ethics.

## **2. Truth and Ethical Integrity**

The connection between moral integrity and truth is another important ethical subject in John's writings (Neufeld, 2021). According to his writings, truth is a way of living that is consistent with God's nature rather than just a collection of righteous ideas. In contrast to the darkness of sin and deceit, Jesus compares walking in truth to walking in light (1 John 1:5-7). This focus on truth is both an ethical requirement and a theological tenet. A life that embodies divine truth is necessary to support a person's claim to know God: "If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth" (1 John 1:6).

John's concern for truth also extends to doctrinal purity, as he calls out those who deny the incarnation of Christ as antichrists (1 John 2:22; 4:1-3), reiterates in 2 John that love must be based on truth, and cautions against welcoming those who propagate false doctrine. In 3 John, he contrasts Gaius, who walks in truth, with Diotrephes, who rejects apostolic authority and behaves unethically. The ethical implication is clear: walking in truth means not only believing righteously, but also living righteously, upholding honesty, integrity, and faithfulness in all facets of life (Andrews, 2016; Bembry, 2018).

## **3. Moral Purity and Righteousness**

According to John, believers have fundamental ethical duties to uphold holiness and moral purity. As he states in 1 John 3:4, "Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness (Cook, 2018); sin is lawlessness," he demands that individuals who dwell in Christ make an effort to live moral lives. He emphasizes that moral behavior is a defining characteristic of true religion by drawing a sharp distinction between the children of God and the children of the devil: "Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother" (1 John 3:10).

Revelation emphasizes the importance of moral purity even more. Those who stay true to Christ are said to have "not defiled themselves" (Rev. 14:4) and will inherit the New Jerusalem, while the immoral, liars, and idolaters will be judged by God (Rev. 21:8). In the midst of a persecuted and corrupt society, Revelation offers an ethical appeal for purity (Schwöbel, 2020). John exhorts believers to maintain their moral and spiritual purity by avoiding the temptations of Babylon, which stands for worldly corruption.

## **4. Perseverance and Faithfulness in the Face of Persecution**

The necessity of persistence in the face of adversity is a major ethical issue that is covered in both Revelation and John's epistles (Resseguie, 2009). He admits in 1 John that believers and the world are at odds spiritually and warns that the world will despise them in the same way that it detested Christ (1 John 3:13). Assuring them that "greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world," he exhorts them to hold fast (1 John 4:4).

John's cosmic vision of the final conflict between good and evil in Revelation significantly broadens this topic. There are several exhortations to endure through hardships and be faithful in the letters to the seven churches (Revelation 2–3), along with assurances of eternal

reward for those who do. For example, the church in Philadelphia is instructed to "hold fast" to all they have so that no one may take their crown (Rev. 3:11), while the church in Smyrna is exhorted to "be faithful unto death" in order to obtain the crown of life (Rev. 2:10).

In Revelation, John presents an ethical vision of perseverance in the face of persecution. Believers are cautioned to stick to Christ at all costs (Bonhoeffer, 2012; Williams, 2010), even if it means compromising with the corrupt institutions of the world, symbolized by Babylon. According to Revelation 20:4-6, those who reject the beast and bear its mark will endure hardships here on Earth before joining Christ on his throne. John thus portrays perseverance as a way to take part in the ultimate triumph of God's kingdom, rather than just as an ethical obligation.

John's theological views on God's character, Christ's atoning activity, and the ultimate triumph of righteousness are intricately entwined with the ethical themes found in his epistles and Revelation. John's ethics are based on love, but this love is characterized by truthfulness and adherence to God's commands. Maintaining moral purity, rejecting lies, and walking in the truth are all necessary for ethical living (Gray et al., 2023; Kupperman, 2007; Rae, 2018). John also emphasizes the importance of tenacity, particularly under tribulation, and exhorts believers to hold fast to their faith in the face of God's final triumph. These ethical precepts are not offered as legalistic regulations but as an outworking of a transformed life in Christ. John presents a powerful vision of Christian ethics in his epistles and Revelation, urging followers of Christ to uphold moral and doctrinal integrity, embody divine love, and endure in righteousness until God's kingdom is finally realized.

### **Contemporary Relevance and Application**

John's theology is still applicable today when discussing issues like moral tenacity, disinformation, and division (Pihlström, 2020). His teachings on discernment, love, truth, and eschatological hope help believers make sense of today's moral conundrums. In a time of growing social disintegration, the emphasis on love as the cornerstone of Christian ethics is essential. The caution against erroneous teachings emphasizes how crucial solid doctrine and theological purity are to maintaining unadulterated faith. The idea of enduring hardships inspires believers to hold fast to their faith in the face of injustice, persecution, or adversity (Kekes, 2020; Lewis, 2018). Furthermore, John's eschatological vision gives Christians hope and a sense of direction by serving as a reminder that God's ultimate justice will triumph and that their present hardships are only transitory. For churches looking to promote authentic fellowship and witness in the modern world, John's epistles' exhortation to moral behavior, hospitality, and communal unity continues to serve as a compass.

### **Conclusion**

A unified picture of Christian life that is firmly anchored in divine love, truth, holiness, and persistence is presented by John's theology and ethics outside of his Gospel, as seen in his epistles and Revelation. The main tenets of John's theology are the character of God, the atoning work of Christ, and the close relationship that a believer has with God via faith. This theological basis gives rise to his ethical teachings, which emphasize that moral purity, devotion to divine truth, and love for God and one another are the hallmarks of real Christian living. John's moral

requirements, in contrast to legalistic ethical systems, originate from a changed heart in which obedience is the normal reaction to God's love and omnipresence.

Furthermore, John's writings tackle the problems of persecutors, moral decay, and false doctrine, offering Christians moral direction in a perverse world. His letters emphasize the significance of walking in righteousness, recognizing the difference between truth and falsehood, and continuing to have unwavering faith in Christ's promises. Revelation illustrates the final victory of good over evil by extending these moral concepts into an eschatological framework. The book exhorts Christians to hold fast to their spiritual purity in the face of adversity, fending off the world's corrupt systems, and waiting for Christ to return.

In the end, John's ethics and theology are intertwined, creating a comprehensive picture in which action and belief must coincide. He presents ethical living as an expression of divine change rather than an external duty, with love, truth, and tenacity characterizing the life of a true disciple. Since eternal communion with God is the ultimate reward, his works continue to provide Christians with a strong moral and theological foundation, encouraging them to live in the light of God's truth, uphold spiritual purity, and remain steadfast in their faith.

### **Recommendations**

1. Churches should consistently elevate teachings on love as a central theme, since love is the foundation of genuine Christian community. Emphasizing passages like 1 Corinthians 13 and John 13:34–35 reminds believers that love is not optional but the defining mark of discipleship. When believers learn to embody love in action through forgiveness, kindness, patience, and humility they create an environment of sincere camaraderie and solidarity.
2. In an era overwhelmed with half-truths, conspiracy theories, and sensationalism, believers need solid grounding in Scripture to discern truth from error. Churches should invest in structured Bible studies, apologetics training, and discipleship programs that help members develop a biblical worldview. Beyond knowing isolated verses, believers must be taught how to interpret Scripture faithfully, compare it with cultural messages, and apply it to daily decisions.
3. The global church has a moral responsibility to strengthen those facing persecution for their faith. This support goes beyond prayer; it should include providing practical resources like safe spaces, legal aid, education for children of persecuted families, and financial assistance. Churches in freer contexts can build partnerships with ministries operating in restricted regions to offer encouragement through letters, visits, and advocacy.
4. Sermons and teachings should regularly highlight the Christian hope of the new creation, where Christ's return will bring justice, restoration, and eternal fellowship with God. This eschatological vision not only comforts believers in times of suffering but also motivates purposeful living in the present. Emphasizing hope helps Christians resist despair and apathy, reminding them that their labor "in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

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