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Of John*

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BIBLE STUDY TEXTBOOK

HEREBY WE KNOW

A STUDY OF THE EPISTLES OF JOHN

by

Clinton R. Gill

Paraphrase

By J. B. Rotherham

College Press, Joplin, Missouri

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DEDICATION

to

Owen L. Crouch

Who Introduced Me To I John

and to

The Wednesday Night Bible Study Group

at

West Liberty, W. Va.

Who Were My "Guinea Pigs"

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PREFACE

THE RELEVANCE OF I JOHN

Christian life is a personal encounter with God in the person of Jesus. It was never intended by its Author to become a moralistic ethic or a legalistic religion. Nowhere is this spelled out any more clearly than in the writings of the Apostle John.

The touch-stone of the Christian life is the historic fact of the incarnation. In the presence of the incarnate Christ, a man's life is no longer a matter of ceremonial obedience to an external God. It is no longer an ethic suggested by the ethereal, insubstantial "Ultimate Ground of Being" which has no anchor and no certain base.

At a time and in a place in human history, man was visited by God on his own home ground, and neither man nor the ground has been quite the same since! To man's demand, "Show us the Father and it sufficeth us," Jesus still answers, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." (See John 14:1-ff)

It is to replace philosophical uncertainty with historic reality that John wrote both his Gospel and the Epistles which bear his name. Whether the cause of confusion be the gnosticism of the first and second centuries or the God-myth battle of twentieth century theology, the oil on troubled waters is always "What we saw and our hands handled." (I John 1:1)

Today's young adult American is an open minded agnostic. He is an inquirer. He doubts, but he is not necessarily cynical. He raises questions and he wants answers that are real. He will not listen to the pronouncements of pious platitudes which squelched the imaginative thinker of a generation ago.

Modern Young America accepts few of the old absolutes as valid. He values personal relationships above abstract or *ex officio* virtue. He wants frankness more than he wants nicety; honesty more than propriety.

Significantly, such young adults tend to be suspicious of the institutionalized churches with their preconceived and pat answers for life in the complexities of our day.

Simultaneously, this new generation of Americans, many of whom "belong to church," are acutely interested in the basic meaning of life. It is just here that the greatest challenge comes to today's Christian minister and adult teacher.

PREFACE

No writer in the Bible has supplied us with information more pertinent to this challenge than has John. It was his purpose, in another historical context, to answer the very questions Young America is asking.

John too is concerned with relationships. He experienced a personal relationship with the Incarnate Word. That relationship he presents as the revelation that God is light. To walk within the circle of that light is to come into a relationship with God and with the Word and with all other men who also walk in the light.

Moral issues are settled for those who walk in the light. It is upon this basis that the sin problem is solved.

Social relationships, as well as religious, are illuminated by this light. John says we are not to go on loving with the tongue, but in deed and in truth.

In short, a personal relationship to Jesus as the Christ, accompanied by an honest attitude toward our moral weakness, a practical love of our fellow human beings, and a firm conviction that Jesus really is more than a "sort of celestial Big Brother," . . . these things are life indeed and abundant.

This little book is sent forth with the prayer that it may help its readers to meet the challenges of our age and give those it teaches and touches a faith to live by.

INTRODUCTION

HELPFUL FEATURES

To make the best use of this book you should be familiar with several features which are designed to help you in your study of the Epistles of John.

First . . . read the preface carefully. It will help you appreciate how these epistles are as alive today as when they were written . . . their message just as needed.

Second . . . study the "Words We Must Understand." John's epistles were written in answer to a specific heresy which was beginning to be felt by the followers of the Way. They were written in koine Greek of the First Century. You will understand the epistles much more easily if these words are a part of your own vocabulary.

Third . . . The outline of this book is included as part of the text to help you follow John's thought as it unfolds. The chapter divisions are based upon the points made by John, and not upon the rather arbitrary chapter divisions of the English versions.

Fourth . . . The text is the American Standard version of 1901.

Fifth . . . Following the text in each chapter there is a list of questions. They are not questions for which you will necessarily find a definite answer. They are designed to stimulate your imagination and open your mind to what John has written.

Sixth . . . The Paraphrase is by Rotherham. It will help you in your own study of the text.

Seventh . . . The Author's Translation was originally prepared to help him glean, from the epistle, thoughts that might have otherwise been overlooked in depending upon some other English version. It is hoped that it will also help the reader in the same way.

Eighth . . . Comments on the text are included as a study guide. They are limited and are not intended as an exhaustive commentary. Rather they are designed to stimulate the reader in his own study.

Ninth . . . At the end of each chapter is a set of review questions. These are intended to help the reader remember what he has read and to furnish "pegs" upon which to hang his own thoughts and those of the Apostle.

WORDS WE MUST UNDERSTAND
IN ORDER TO STUDY I JOHN

1. Word (*logos*)

- a. The Greek *logos*, translated *Word* in the English version, meant something to the first century readers of I John that the modern English-speaking reader finds hard to grasp.
 - i. To the first century Jew, a *word* was a unit of energy. God said, and it was so. The *Word* was the master builder of the universe.
 - ii. The Greeks were also familiar with this term. To them the *Word* was the mind and reason upon which the entire creation was built. It was the *word* which made the fluxating, changing universe stable and dependable.
 - iii. Philo, an Alexandrian Jew, a philosopher and a contemporary of Jesus had much to say about the *word*. He reasoned that the *word* was God's instrument of creation. It was the imprint of God's mind upon matter. The *word* determined the course of the universe. Perhaps most important from a Christian point of view, Philo saw the *word* as the priest through whom God communicated with man.
- b. It is into this pre-Christian understanding of the *word* that John pours the rich elixir of Christian truth. In so doing, he incorporates all that is best in Jewish and Greek thinking on the subject. (See John 1:1-14)
 - i. The word was in the beginning, and so was eternal and uncreated.
 - ii. The word was with God. John's grammar (John 1:1) leaves no room for doubt. The word was *equal* with God.
 - iii. The word was *God*. That is, the word was *deity* rather than a created being.
 - iv. All things were made through Him. The word was what our scientists would refer to as "*the first cause*." He was what the modern liberal theologian, blinded by his inflated evaluation of his own scholarship, refers to as "*Ultimate Ground of Being*."
 - v. In Him, (the *word*), was *life*. (Demonstrated by the inability of the grave to hold Him.)

WORDS WE MUST UNDERSTAND

- vi. The life, (which was in the *word*) was the *light* of men. This light was (and is) constantly coming into the world, and the darkness is unable to extinguish it. It is this light which distinguishes man from the animals.
- vii. The *word* became *flesh* and dwelt among us. Jesus was not God *and* man, or *in* man. He was God *as* man.

2. Incarnation

- a. In his final statement concerning the *word*, John introduces the idea expressed by our English word "incarnation." (John 1: 14)
- b. John goes one step beyond the philosophers. The *word* which they considered an impersonal force or influence, he introduces as a person.
- c. In this statement concerning the *word*, John also solves the dilemma of modern liberal theology. Jesus is not, as one theologian cynically put it, "A divine substance . . . plunged in flesh and coated with it like chocolate . . ." He did not come into flesh, nor take on flesh. The *word became* flesh!

3. Light

- a. The Greek word is *phos* and means light as the source of illumination as opposed to reflected light. It is the light of the sun rather than the reflected light of the moon.
- b. This light was never kindled, and hence never quenched. It is eternal.
- c. Everyone who has ever studied biology knows that there is a vital relationship between light and life.
- d. As in the physical, so in the spiritual. John says in the *word* was *life*, and life was the *light* of men. The word is the source of human life as the sun is the source of plant life.
- e. In the Graeco-Roman world in which John wrote and in which his readers lived, popular thought visualized two ways of existence: The way of darkness and death and the way of light and life. John makes one's relationship to the *Word* the test of one's position in the struggle between these two ways.

4. Gnosticism

- a. Gnosticism was the false teaching against whose influence John wrote.
- b. Gnosticism was a mixture of Oriental mysticism, Greek philosophy and Christian thought.

WORDS WE MUST UNDERSTAND

- c. The practical effect of the Gnostic philosophy was to separate all spirit from all matter. The effect of Gnosticism on the Christian faith was two-fold.
 - i. It denied the incarnation. The *Word* which was spirit, and therefore good, could not become flesh which was matter, and therefore evil.
 - ii. It denied any personal guilt of sin on the part of the individual. After all, if the spirit of man is distinct from his body, then his spirit can scarcely be held accountable for what his body does.
4. Know
 - a. The gnostic claimed a special knowledge of truth. The word "gnostic" means "one who knows."
 - b. John used the word *know* in a way designed to prove that true knowledge comes from personal experience with Christ.
5. Truth
 - a. The Greek *aletheia* translated "truth" means "reality." The gnostic thought he had exclusive rights to reality.
 - b. John uses this word which means reality to describe the truth revealed in Christ.
 - c. The *word* is presented as the ultimate source of all reality.

HEREBY WE KNOW

PART I

Prologue of I John

I John 1:1-7

Life is Fellowship with God Who is Light

Chapter I

GOD IN A TEST TUBE

The Prologue 1:1-4

A. *The Text*

"That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life (2) (and the life was manifest, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare unto you the life, the eternal *life*, which was manifested unto us): (3) that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you also, that ye also may have fellowship with us; yea and our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ; (4) and these things we write that our joy may be made full."

B. *Try to Discover*

1. Is there "scientific" proof of the truth of the Christian Gospel?
2. What does the use of the verbs of hearing, seeing, and handling indicate about the author's relationship to the incarnation?
3. What does John say is his two-fold purpose of writing? (I John 1:3-4)
4. How does John's claim to sensory experience with the "word of life" answer the *gnostic problem*?
(See Introduction)
5. What other New Testament writing begins with a similar prologue?

6. What do we know about the word (logos) from John's Gospel? (Read John 1:1-14). See also Paul T. Butler, *Gospel of John*, Vol. I, College Press, 1961., pp. 19-ff.)
7. How does this writing become part of the fulfillment of John's Apostolic Commission? (Compare I John 1:2-3 and Acts 1:8)

C. *Paraphrase*

"That which was from the beginning, Which we have heard, Which we have seen with our eyes, Which we ourselves gazed upon, and our hands did handle, Concerning the Word of Life, (2) And the Life was made manifest, and we have seen, and are bearing witness, and announcing unto you, The Age-abiding Life, Which, indeed, was with the Father, and was made manifest unto us. (3) That which we have seen and heard are we announcing even unto you, in order that ye too may have fellowship with us and our own fellowship also may be with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. (4) And these things are we writing in order that our joy may be made full."

D. *Comments*

1. Preliminary Remarks

First John is especially relevant in our time. Just as the gnostics of the first century believed they had a corner on knowledge, so the modern who is awed by the phenomenal advance in technical, scientific knowledge often scoffs at the traditional faith of the Christian. Just as did the gnostic, so does the modern agnostic, consider himself and his knowledge of life too sophisticated to accept the fundamental tenets of Bible based belief.

The cry of today's skeptic is, "No one can prove there is a God. There is no scientific proof." The same doubter is often eager to accept anything he sees on his television screen as true so long as it is substantiated by the testimony of "five New York doctors." The inconsistency of these two attitudes never occurs to him.

The demand for scientific evidence is not new. Nearly two thousand years ago when Thomas heard of the resurrection of Jesus, he demanded sound proof. He would not believe until he had thrust his finger into the nail prints, and his hand into the spear scar in the side of the Master.

That which Thomas learned and which the present day skeptic must learn is that *God placed Himself in a test tube* in the incarnation. When the experiment was complete, and the evidence all presented, Thomas voiced the only honest conclusion . . . "My Lord and my God." (John 20) The incarnation presented to man, at a time and a place in history, a scientific demonstration of the fact that God is! The Gospel of John is a "lab report" of this experiment. I John is the practical application of the results to life.

The honest seeker after truth, whether he live in the first century or the twentieth, deserves to be confronted with this scientific demonstration. He needs also to understand that his own relationship to this Incarnate "God-In-A-Test-Tube," is the test by which he may know whether he himself has life or mere existence.

As in the fourth Gospel, the Apostle John begins this epistle also with a prologue. In it he lays the footings of all that will follow. The tests by which we may know we are in fellowship with God and God's people are not of human origin. They are related to the incarnation experience of the eternal word, (logos). That which He revealed about God is that by which we are to examine our own lives. In so doing, we know we are (or are not) really in the divine fellowship.

2. Translation and comments

a. John's appeal to personal, sensory experience with the incarnate Word . . . v.1

(1) "What was from (the) beginning, what we have heard and understood, what we have seen and contemplated with our own eyes, what we looked upon with amazement and our own hands handled, concerning the word of life,"

John begins his letter by presenting *life* as a collective and comprehensive whole. This he does by the use of a neuter pronoun, "*What*." We might have expected him to say "*who*" was from the beginning, "*whom*" we have seen and so on. He is not here calling attention to the Word (logos) as a person but to life which is demonstrated and made available by the Word. It was life which was from the beginning. From a study of John's Gospel we learn that this life is inherent in the person of the Word. (John 1:1-4)

In the original language, the tenses of the verbs in this verse are a kaleidoscope of vivid memory and recurrent recollection. What he has heard so many years ago is still ringing in his ears. He can close his eyes, and the voice of the Galilean still preaches the sermon on the mount.

The very ebb and flow of the Master's voice as He delivered the discourse on the bread of life and a thousand other lessons and sermons is still audible in his retrospection.

What he has seen, he still sees in the eyes of his mind. With but the slightest urging, the panorama of Cana and Gethsemane and Calvary and all the other hallowed scenes stream across his vision in vividness undimmed by time and sharpened by understanding.

What he examined with his hands . . . the breast he leaned upon at the last supper, the touch of those shop-calloused fingers on his shoulders as he walked the shores of Galilee in a communion so close it earned him the title "that disciple whom Jesus loved" . . . the tender touch of the scars in the hands and side that convinced even the most skeptical . . . in these remembrances the tips of his fingers still tingle! Such are the *permanent results* portrayed by the use of the perfect tenses.

The *historic fact* of these experiences is re-emphasized by the aorists "What we looked upon . . . and our hands felt." Here is the crisp, staccato presentation of John's credentials. What he is going to write will not be based upon speculative philosophy but upon personal experience. A fact is a thing done; it cannot be undone. The incarnation is not a matter of opinion, it is a fact of history. The entire tenor of these opening verses is designed to remind his readers that he had personal sensory experience with his subject, and is therefore infinitely more qualified to evaluate it than were the gnostics whose incomplete knowledge was at best second hand, and whose understanding was dependent upon divination rather than demonstration. John is establishing himself as an eyewitness of the incarnation, and no amount of speculation, no matter how sophisticated, can change what he heard and saw and touched.

The word translated "looked upon" (KJV) means "to view with amazement." John appreciates the magnitude of his claim that life actually stood before him in visible, tangible, audible human form. The incarnation, even in this day of space travel and polio vaccine, is still the most astounding fact of human history.

b. Parenthetical statement; the incarnation is a historical fact
 . . . v.2

(2) "(and the life was demonstrated openly, and we have investigated and are testifying and declaring unto you the life, the eternal life. This very life intimately associated with the Father and was openly demonstrated to us.")

Verse two forms a parenthesis. It is not part of the flow of thought contained in the main sentence. This is typical of John's personal writing style. (See John 1:6-8)

The parenthesis here is inserted for the sake of emphasis and clarity. John intends that his readers not miss the implications of verse one. It was *life* which was demonstrated in our time and space; set up in such a way that those who participated in the divine experiment had ample opportunity to investigate and know that truth of which they spoke and wrote.

This life was eternal . . . not created, and it was intimately associated with the Father in eternity before the incarnation. We are at once reminded of this same author's statement in the fourth Gospel, "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God." (John 1:1) . . . "And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory . . ." (John 1:14)

Life is no longer an abstract profundity dealing only with the recondite abstruse. That which was obscure has been revealed. Life, therefore, is not to be determined by philosophic speculation. Life is as real and demonstrable as a carpenter who walked and talked and ate and slept and laughed and cried and whose resurrection proved the claim that He made: "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one cometh unto the Father, but by Me." (John 14:6)

In his epistle, John will give us the tests by which we may be as certain of our relationship with the Father as was He, and thereby know we have life.

c. Primary Purpose of John's writing . . . v.3

(3) "What we have seen and heard we are also declaring to you in order that you may share friendly and familiar communion with us. And the friendly, familiar communion which is ours is also with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ."

Following the parenthesis of verse two, John resumes the original train of thought begun in verse one. Without the parenthetical interruption, the thought would run something like this: "What was from the beginning, what we have heard and understood, what we have seen and examined with our own eyes, what we looked upon with amazement and our own hands felt concerning the word of life we are also declaring to you in order that you may keep on having friendly and familiar communion with us. And the friendly familiar communion which is ours is also with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ."

The key word to I John is "fellowship." The Greek word is *koinonia*. I have translated it "friendly familiar communion," in an attempt to represent its true meaning.

The English word "fellowship" is probably adequate if it is understood. However, it has fallen into bad company. Too many think of "fellowship" in terms of bean suppers, class meetings and the like. These things may be properly considered expressions of fellowship, but fellowship itself is a much deeper experience.

Fellowship (*koinonia*), as John uses it, involves a deep and mutual sharing. That which is shared becomes the principle factor in an intimate personal affinity. Paul uses this same word in I Corinthians 10:16 to describe the close tie of the members of the body as they share in the Lord's supper. He uses this communion as the basis of an appeal for unity among the members of the congregation. In II Corinthians 6:14, this word is used (translated "agreements") from a negative point of view to demonstrate the absurdity of such a close relationship between the temple of God and idols.

Perhaps the idea of fellowship can be illustrated in this way. If a man from a distant planet were to arrive on Earth and establish any kind of rapport with Earth people, he would first of all have to find some common factor in the lives of the two worlds. Friendly and familiar communion could be had then on the basis of that which was shared.

So it is with Christian Fellowship. John says that he is declaring what he has seen and heard of the Word of life in order to provide a common ground of meeting with his readers. The present tense of "may have" (which I have rendered "may keep on having") indicates that they were indeed already having this fellowship. John's passion is that they shall continue in it. This is only possible when they share with him the reality of the Incarnation.

It is, moreover, not just fellowship with himself, as a witness of the incarnation which is at stake. It is, more significantly, fellowship with God Himself. To deny that God did indeed . . . "so love the world that He gave His *only begotten Son*," (John 3:16) is to destroy the only foundation upon which any intimate communion between God and man can be based!

Still further, this friendly and familiar communion is with the Incarnate Word, Whom we know as Jesus, God's Son. The Hebrew writer describes the basis of our fellowship with Jesus in these words:

"Since then the children are *sharers* in flesh and blood, He also Himself in like manner partook of the same; that through death he might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver them who through fear of death were all their *lifetime* subject to bondage. For verily not to angels doth He give help, but He giveth help to the seed of Abraham. Wherefore it behooved Him in all things to be made *like unto His brethren*, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted." (Hebrews 2:14-18)

It was in order to establish this fellowship that "the Word became flesh." (John 1:14) To deny the incarnation is to destroy the only basis of any intimate communion with the Word.

d. Secondary Purpose of John's writing . . . v.4

(4) "We are writing this in order that our joy may continue as it has already been fulfilled."

A great deal of personal satisfaction and spiritual pleasure comes from being instrumental in bringing lost men into the divine fellowship. Jesus claimed this joy in teaching the Apostles the medium in which successful prayer is to be said. In John 15, He intimates that a personal attachment to Him through His word establishes the communication necessary with God. With this done, they are invited to ask whatever they will for themselves in the accomplishment of the divine purpose of fruit bearing and it shall be theirs. "These things I have spoken," He said, "that my *joy* may be in you, and that your *joy* may be made full."

The joy of Jesus was fulfilled many times over as the first century church turned pagan cities upside down with the Gospel. The joy of the apostles also became full as they watched their witness spread the fellowship from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and to the uttermost part of the earth. (Cf. Acts 1:8)

Now as John writes, the first century is drawing to a close. He is the last remaining of the twelve, and he is nearly one hundred years old. On the horizon there looms the spectre of a false doctrine which threatens to destroy the fellowship for which Christ died and for which he and the other eleven have given their lives. There is a great deal of personal feeling involved as John pens the words: "We are writing this in order that our joy may continue as it has already been fulfilled."

E. *Questions for Review*

1. Why is the gnostic problem answered by John relevant in our time?
2. What is meant by "God In A Test Tube?" In what way does the experience of John with the Incarnate Word prove the fact of God's being? (See John 14:1-9)
3. What one of the twelve Apostles demanded "scientific proof" of the resurrection? (See John 20:24-25)
4. Why does John say "What" rather than "Whom" in I John 1:1?
5. Name some specific incidents in the life of Jesus which John could still see "in his mind's eye."
6. What specific incidents in John's relationship with Jesus gave him opportunity to actually touch Him?
7. What are John's qualifications to write this message?
8. What is the purpose of the parenthesis in I John 1:2?
9. What difference does the Incarnation make in the means by which we may understand life?
10. What is the key word of I John?
11. What is the real meaning of the word "*fellowship*" as used by the New Testament writers?
12. With whom do we have fellowship on the basis of the Apostolic witness to the Incarnation according to I John 1:3?
13. Does John write to bring people into the fellowship or to maintain those who are already in it?
14. What does the meaning of the word *Fellowship* teach us about the necessity of the Incarnation? (Cf. Hebrews 2:14-18)
15. In addition to his concern that his readers remain in the fellowship of the Father and the Son, what is John's personal reason for this writing?

CHAPTER II

THIS IS THE MESSAGE

I John 1:5

A. *The Text*

"And this is the message which we have heard from him and announce unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."

B. *Try to Discover*

1. Why does John change from the neuter "what" of the prologue to the masculine "him?"
2. What does John mean by "light?"
3. What does John mean by "darkness?"
4. What are the practical implications of this verse for the Christian life?

C. *Paraphrase*

"And this is the message which we have heard from him, and are reporting unto you, That God is light, And in him is no darkness at all."

D. *Translation and Comments*

Verse 5 . . . "And the message which we have heard from Him and are declaring to you is this, that God is light and darkness is absolutely not in Him at all."

1. *The summary of the Gospel*

In the fifth verse, John states in capsule the ministry of the incarnate life. All that John has seen, all that he has heard, all that he has learned from the tangible nature of the "Divine Experiment" is included. John conceives of the whole earthly life of Jesus as a message received and which he in turn must deliver. His form of expression here is reminiscent of Jesus' own statement ". . . the things which I heard from Him (the Father), these speak I unto the world." (John 8:26)

2. *It is This Which John Declares*

The Apostle's entire thesis is dependent upon the fact that his gospel

is not his own. As with Paul, so with John, he neither “. . . received it from man, nor was I (he) taught it, but it came to me (him) through revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Gal. 1:12) The philosophy of the gnostics was borrowed from the human reasonings of Graeco-Roman philosophers and oriental mystics. John’s message was given him directly by the divine revelation of the incarnation.

3. God is Light

The Old Testament writers were familiar with the metaphor used here: “God is Light.” One of the earliest manifestations of God to Israel was as light in the Shikina Glory which led them out of Egypt. (Ex. 13:21-22) By day it appeared as a pillar of cloud. By night it appeared as a pillar of fire. In either case it was divine *light* given to guide God’s people from captivity to freedom, from the ignorance of God’s will to revealing of the covenant.

The psalmist sang, “The Lord is my *light* and my salvation; whom then shall I fear . . .” (Ps. 27:1)

Isaiah wrote of the Messiah as “a covenant of the people, for a *light* of the Gentiles.” (Isaiah 42:6) Again Isaiah prophesied, “I will give thee for a *light* to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.” (Isa. 49:6) In a burst of prophetic illumination, this same prophet penned these words, “Arise, shine, for thy *light* is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.” (Isa. 60:1)

The pagans also were familiar with the term *light* applied to deity. The Zoroastrianism of Persia, father of the Oriental mystery cults, taught that the whole universe was the scene of a struggle between light and darkness. In this struggle, a man must choose which side he will be on. The issue of one’s choice was his eternal destiny.

The Greek and Roman mysteries also thought of light and darkness in a way similar to the Persians. They believed there were two ways. One was the way of darkness, and one the way of light. The way of darkness ended in death, while the way of light ended in life. The Greeks particularly identified light with deity.

The Dead Sea Scrolls from the community of Qumron contain the statement “The origin of truth lies in the fountain of light.”

In the historical setting of I John, the idea that God is light was particularly relevant. It grew out of the background from which the Gospel came, and was already acceptable to that school of religious thought at which it was aimed.

When John says, “God is light,” he does not disagree with the

gnostics whose philosophy was borrowed from these various sources. Rather he says that the affirmative *proof* that "God is light" is to be found in the incarnation which they were denying. Therefore, the evidence as to which side of this light-darkness, life-death struggle a man is on is determined by his personal relationship to Jesus as the incarnate light.

This is precisely John's own statement in the fourth Gospel, "And this is the judgment, that light is come into the world, and men have loved darkness rather than light, for their works were evil." (John 3:19)

The tests of life which John gives us in this epistle are three: 1) our attitude toward our own sin, 2) our attitude toward others in the fellowship, and 3) our attitude toward the incarnation itself.

These tests are an appeal to the nature of God revealed in Christ. To say "God is light" brings up immediately the idea of morality. If God is light, He is absolute purity and holiness. As this purity and holiness shines into our lives, it reveals that we are not pure and holy. To have fellowship with Him, we must be willing to accept this truth about ourselves in order that He may correct it.

The light of God in Jesus probes into the depths of our souls. Beneath the veneer of social propriety it reveals a vicious selfishness which corrupts and destroys. No amount of excuse making or philosophic sophistication can alter the fact that, when Jesus was "tempted in all points like as we are tempted, yet was without sin" (Heb. 4:15) His sinlessness condemned everyone who has ever yielded to temptation. The Gnostic denial of the personal guilt of sin is thus put to route by the fact that God Himself met and overcame temptation as a human being. John will say shortly, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

The second test that John will give by which we may know we have eternal life is the test of love. This also answers to the nature of God revealed in Jesus.

When John uses the word "love" he is not referring to a soft sentimentalism. Love is the self-giving which faced the rugged reality of the cross in order to give life to the lost. This test, like the first, takes its meaning from the message, "God is light."

The life giving qualities of light are perhaps best illustrated by the light of the sun as it brings life to the earth. Ultimately all physical life is produced and sustained by the light of the sun. The fundamental truth of botany is that all animate life on earth is traceable to photo-

synthesis. This is the process by which green plants transform the nutrients from the soil into food in the presence of sunlight. Light gives *physical* life by the process of photosynthesis.

Love, rather than photosynthesis, is the process by which God, as light, gives spiritual life. As we test ourselves by the light of the Gospel, we find that those who love give themselves as God gives, *in order to sustain life*. John will say later, "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer . . ." Just as darkness is the absence of light, so hate is the absence of love. Just as plant life cannot survive the absence of light, so the life of man cannot survive the absence of love. If we do not share this life giving love, we do not have eternal life.

The third test which John will give by which we are to determine our possession of eternal life is belief. So far as John is concerned, belief is the acceptance of the historic incarnation as the medium through which light reveals itself.

Here again, we must remember that the test grows out of the nature of God as light. God is all knowledge, and the source of all knowledge. To have eternal life we must accept truth as revealed by God Who is light. The revelation was made in Jesus as Christ.

If God is indeed light, then no intellectual ignorance can darken His all-embracing knowledge of truth. God is the source of *all* truth, not just that which we have blindly termed "religious truth."

There is an area of truth which man has been able to discover within himself. It is referred to by the term "humanities." This truth is expressed in literature, history and the branches of learning concerned with human thought and relations. If God is light, He is the ultimate source of *this* truth. The light "lights every man coming into the world." (John 1:9) The psalmist wrote, "O Lord thou hast searched me and known me . . . such knowledge is too high, I cannot attain unto it." (Ps. 139:1-ff) God knows what is in man. (John 2:24-25)

There is a second area of truth which man discovers by observing and experimenting with his environment. This area of truth is called science. Since God is light, He is also the ultimate source of *this* truth. Man spends billions to learn a small part of the scientific knowledge possessed by the Architect of the universe. "He telleth the number of the stars; He calleth them all by their names." (Ps. 147:4)

There is an area of truth which man will never discover within himself, and which he will never discover by exploring his time-space environment. We can only know it as it is revealed by God. The hu-

manist may tell what man is as a "social animal." The scientist may discover where man is by studying the circumstances of man's physical existence. Neither will ever discover *why* man is or where he is going!

The inspired scriptures, with their account of the "scheme of redemption," record God's revelation of spiritual reality in Jesus Christ. The Old Testament, like a rheostat, gradually increased the available light as it prepared the spiritual eyes of men, blinded by ignorance, for the full brilliance of God's self-revelation in the Christ. The New Testament records the time when the sunburst of God's very express image, the effulgence of His glory stood before us. (Cf. Hebrews 1:1-4)

To deny the incarnation of Christ is therefore to deny the ultimate truth of the entire universe. Divine revelation alone gives meaning to human and scientific truth. To deny revelation is to live in darkness and have only warped concepts of reality.

For this reason, John gives us *belief* in the Incarnate Word as the final test of eternal life. "We know that the Son of God is come . . . and hath given us understanding, that we know Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ." (I John 5:20)

E. Questions for Review

1. What is the basis of John's argument in I John?
2. What statement by John summarizes the entire ministry of Jesus, including both His doings and teachings?
3. What was the Shaking of the Kingdom? (Read Exodus 24:17, 40:34 and I Kings 8:11)
4. What did the oriental mystery cults teach about light and darkness?
5. What did the Greek and Roman religions teach about light and darkness?
6. What do the Dead Sea Scrolls teach about the origin of truth?
7. When John says "God is light," does He agree or disagree with the pagan religions of the day? Explain.
8. What three "tests of life" constitute the frame work of I John?
9. What does the light of God reveal about personal sin?

10. What is love in John's writings? What does love give and why?
11. How does John know God is light?
12. How does the truth revealed by Jesus differ from truth in other areas of investigation? How is it similar?
13. What gives meaning to truth discovered by man in the areas of science and the humanities?

CHAPTER III

IF WE WALK IN THE LIGHT

I John 1:6-7

A. The Text

"If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth; 7) but if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin."

B. *Try to Discover*

1. How is it possible for sinful men to "walk in the light as He is in the light?"
2. Why does John say "... we are not doing the truth," instead of saying "... we are not telling the truth?"
3. Why does John change from "... have fellowship with Him . . ." in verse 6 to "... have fellowship one with another . . ." in verse 7?

C. *Paraphrase*

"If we say We have fellowship with Him and in darkness are walking we are dealing falsely and not doing the truth; 7) whereas if in the light we are walking, as he is in the light we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son is cleansing us from all sin."

D. *Comments*

1. Preliminary Remarks

In the two verses before us, John makes the individual's attitude toward the incarnation the test of eternal life considered as (a) *fellowship* and (b) *cleansing* from sin. In the prologue, he has established the incarnation experience of Jesus as that which made life known to men. In verse five, he has said that the meaning of that experience is "God is light."

The light of God came into the world in the person of Jesus. It became and ever shall remain, the acid test of life. Whoever comes to and remains in the light of God, shall not know condemnation, no matter how sinful he is. He who refuses to come into that light does so because his deeds are evil, and consequently he is already condemned. (Read John 3:16-21) So far as John is concerned, the *Christless* life is lived in darkness, is stained by sin, and ends in death.

2. Translation and comments

a. The negative . . . v. 6

(6) "If we should say that we are having friendly, familiar communion with Him and we are walking in the darkness, we are lying, and we are not doing that which is real."

The saying of a lie and the doing of a lie are the same. Whoever *says* he is having fellowship with God while he is walking in darkness (i.e. while denying the incarnation) is not *doing* the truth. For John there is no middle ground. Truth is that which Jesus began both to *do* and to *teach*. (Acts 1:1) To deny it is to deny ultimate reality.

John has said (v.3) that the reason he is writing the message, which he both *saw* Jesus *do* and *heard* Jesus *speak*, is in order that his readers may go on having fellowship with God, *and* with His Son Jesus Christ. In chapter two, verse 23, he will say "whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father." There is no fellowship with God aside from Jesus as the incarnate light of God.

Jesus made this same claim for Himself when He said, "No one cometh unto the Father but by me." (John 14:6) To claim otherwise is to both speak and act contrary to that which is real.

To walk in the light is to walk with Christ, to order one's life according to that which He *did* as an example and *taught* as rules of conduct. *This does not imply moral perfection!* On the contrary, it involves the recognition to ourselves before God that we are guilty of sin. (I John 1:8)

However, truth as it is revealed in Christ is never *just* intellectual. It is always moral. It is not concerned so much with abstract accuracy as with concrete living. It is not just something to think about as the philosophers. It is something to *do*. A man who walks in the light as He is in the light will spend his whole time in the awareness of an obligation to make his deeds match his words. He will recognize his need of divine cleansing, and never think that sin does not matter. The nearer one comes to the understanding of God, the more terrible sin seems, as God's light reveals its evil nature. The whole universe has a moral base.

b. The positive . . . v. 7

(7) "If we go on walking in the light as He is in the light, we are continuing to have friendly familiar communion with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son goes on cleansing us from all sins."

In verse seven, we have the positive side of the negative statement made in verse six. When our lives are lived in the light of God made available in Jesus, two things happen.

First, we have fellowship with one another. Notice that the phrase, "have fellowship with *Him*" of verse six changes here to "have fellowship *one with another*." The phrases are virtually synonymous. Just as men at war with God are at war with one another, so men reconciled to God are reconciled to one another.

We may illustrate like this: Suppose a group of people are confined in a strange room which is cast in pitch darkness. They do not know the shape of the room. They do not know where the furnishings are or what their purpose is. As these people begin to grope about in the darkness they stumble over the furniture. They hurt themselves against what they cannot see. In their frustration and discomfort they bump into one another. They strike out at one another in anger and animosity.

Suppose now that someone turns on the light. Each occupant of the room sees the others not as strange beings contributing to his discomfort, but as human beings, pretty much like himself. He sees the shape of the room as it was designed for human tenancy. He sees the furnishings not as obstacles over which to stumble, but as items created for his own use. So he sits down and begins to share with his fellows the blessings which the light has brought to all.

So it is with the fellowship of the redeemed. When we were outside of Christ we did not understand the moral laws of the world in which we lived. We banged ourselves against the spiritual realities which were

created for our benefit, and in our bafflement we struck out at each other. But in Christ, when we walk in the light as He brings it, we realize that the world in which we live was ordered for our occupancy to the glory to God. We understand that the moral laws of God are not designed to make us miserable and filled with guilt complexes, but are rather for our spiritual benefit. By the light of Christ we see that all men are created in the image of God, that all are lost in and victims of the same darkness, that aside from God's light there is no hope for any, but that in it there is hope for all. (See II. Cor. 5:14-21) In these realizations we become reconciled to one another and begin to share the blessings which Christ has revealed.

The person who walks in darkness, and especially one who leaves the light and returns to the darkness, cannot have fellowship with those who remain in the light. (II. Cor. 6:14-16) So, to be outside the proper relationship with those who are in the light is evidence that one is also cut off from God. Truth begets fellowship with both God and man.

The *second* result of walking in the light is that the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, continues to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. From this, it is apparent that "walking in the light as He is in the light" does not indicate a state of moral perfection equal to that of God. On the contrary, the first thing the life of Jesus says to us is that we are sinners, and personally responsible for the guilt of our own sin. By His sinlessness, He reveals our sin.

The reason no child of God has any right to a guilt complex is that, just as surely as the light reveals our guilt, so does the blood of Jesus cleanse us from it, so long as we remain in the light! One of the greatest blessings of the Christian life is *realized forgiveness*. (Rom. 8:1)

We fail often in our attempt to follow the example of Jesus' sinless life, but it is not the following of His example that removes the guilt of sin. It is His blood! Cleansing is *not* affected by having the right attitude toward sin. However, when one comes, in the light of God, to have the correct attitude toward sin, he is then within the scope of the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus.

Nothing could be more diametrically opposed to the Gnostic than this statement about the blood of Jesus. It is the most "anti-Gnostic" terminology possible. It is also repugnant to today's "liberal" theologian.

The summary statement of these two verses is intended by John to set the tenor of the remainder of the epistle. From this point on he begins to demonstrate precisely *how* we may know we are remaining in

God's fellowship by the application of God's light to our personal lives. *Hereby we know we have life.*

The affirmation of these verses is very relevant to the religious atmosphere of our day. There are those who would say that fellowship with God is determined solely by God's love. There are those to whom the "Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man" are completely divorced from the identity of Jesus as God's only begotten son. These assumptions, according to John's factual declaration here, are not made in accordance with the reality brought to light in the incarnation. Men are at war with men because they are at war with God, and the only Prince of Peace is the Word Who became flesh.

Similarly, there are those modern theologians who tell us that the "blood" belongs to a primitive "slaughterhouse religion" and has no place in the socially adept Christianity of modern man. The person who thinks thus of the blood walks in the darkness. As in the first century, so today, the person who says he is a Christian while denying the truth of the Word lies and does not think or live according to that which is real.

E. *Questions for Review*

1. What are the two practical results of walking in the light as He is in the light?
2. How does the Light of God come into our lives?
3. Why do men refuse to walk in this light? (John 3:16-21)
4. Verse six and verse seven represent the _____ and the _____ side of the same truth.
5. Does "walking in the light" imply moral perfection equal to that of God? Explain.
6. How is the truth of I John 1:6 related to that of John 14:6?
7. To walk in the light as He is in the light is to _____.
8. Reality as it is revealed in Christ is never just _____ but always _____.
9. What does God's light in Christ reveal about personal guilt?
10. Men are at war with men because _____.
11. In what practical way does God's revelation of the nature of sin bring about fellowship among those who walk in the light?
12. To leave the fellowship of those who walk in the light results in broken fellowship also with _____.

13. The first thing the Gospel message says to anyone is what?
14. How does the life of Jesus reveal the guilt of others?
15. One of the greatest blessings of the Christian life is _____ forgiveness.
16. What is meant by the statement, "Nothing could be more diametrically opposed to the Gnostic than John's statement about the blood?" How is this the most "anti-Gnostic" terminology possible? (See Words We Must Understand . . . Gnosticism)
17. How is the summary statement of I John 1:6-7 relevant to the religious atmosphere of our day?

HEREBY WE KNOW

PART II

I John 1:8—2:29

God Is Light . . . To Walk In The Light
Is To Have Fellowship With Him
Fellowship Is Tested By Our Sharing
of God's Attitude Toward:

1. Personal Guilt
2. Our Brothers
3. His Son

TO WALK IN THE LIGHT IS TO SHARE
GOD'S ATTITUDE TOWARD SIN AND OBEDIENCE

(The First Test . . . The First Time)

I John 1:8—2:6

A. *The Text*

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (9) If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (10) If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us." (2:1) My little children, these things write I unto you that ye may not sin. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: (2) and He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world. (3) And hereby we know that we know him, if we keep His commandments. (4) He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; (5) but whoso keepeth his word, in him verily hath the love of God been perfected. Hereby we know that we are in him: (6) he that saith he abideth in him ought himself also to walk even as he walked."

B. *Try to Discover*

1. Is it possible for a child of God to sin?
2. What should a Christian do if he does sin?
3. What are the consequences of claiming we do not sin?
4. What is the relationship of Jesus *now* to a Christian who does sin?
5. What does it mean to "*know*" God?
6. Does the claim to know God in any way obligate the one making the claim?
7. What is the intended end of God's love to man?

C. *Paraphrase*

"(1:8) If we say—Sin have we none! we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. (9) If we are confessing our sins faithful is

he and righteous that he should forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteous. (10) If we say—We have not sinned! false are we making him and his word is not in us. (2:1) My dear children! these things am I writing unto you in order that ye may not be committing sin. And if anyone should commit sin An Advocate have we with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous; (2) and he is a propitiation concerning our sins, and not concerning our own only but also concerning those of the whole world. (3) And hereby perceive we that we understand him, if his commandments we are keeping. (4) He that saith—I understand him! and his commandments is not keeping is false, and in him the truth is not! (5) But whosoever may be keeping his word of a truth in this man the love of God hath been made perfect. Hereby perceive we that in him we are. (6) He that saith that in him he abideth ought just as He walked himself also to be walking.”

D. Comments

1. Preliminary Remarks

Eternal life is here considered as fellowship with God. To walk in the light as God is in the light is first to share God's attitude toward sin. This is the initial test of life presented by John after he has established the base (God is light) from which the tests are to be set forth.

To share God's attitude toward sin is to face reality. To deny it is to participate in that which is unreal and therefore to act our as well as speak a lie.

2. Translation and Comments

a. Sin denied as guilt . . . v. 8

(8) “If we should say that we are not having sin we are deceiving ourselves and sincerity is not in us.”

Sharing the attitude of God toward sin begins with the realization of personal guilt. If we should claim that we personally have no guilt we are deceiving ourselves.

We cannot deceive God in whom is no darkness at all. (V.5) To deceive man is ultimately pointless. In the vast beyond that is eternity it will not matter that we have been able to hide our guilt from men behind a facade of sophistication, social propriety, or pseudo-intellectualism. Fundamentally, it is the deceiver himself who is deceived.

The colossal ignorance which prompts the denial of personal guilt is measured by the fact that it removes the one who denies his guilt from

all that is real. The *sine qua non* of God's entire approach to man in the person of Jesus is the basic reality of human guilt! This is born out by virtually every writer of divine scripture.

For example, in Genesis 42:21, the brothers of Joseph recognized their *guilt* in the mis-treatment of him. In Numbers 21:7, the people of Israel came before Moses to confess their *guilt* in that they had spoken against the Lord. In Ezra 9:6, the prophet blushes to lift his face before the Lord because of the *guilt* of the people. Psalm 40:12, records David's recognition of his own *guilt* as being so great he is not able to look up. In Acts 2:37, those who had cried out for the blood of Jesus were cut to their heart by the *guilt* of what they had done and cried out for some means of deliverance. In Acts 24:25, Felix, the Roman governor, trembled in terror at the awareness of his guilt.

The last word on the matter is recorded by Paul in Romans 3:9-22. The passage begins with a quotation from Psalm 14 to the effect that *none are righteous* and ends with ". . . there is no distinction; for *all have sinned* and come short of the glory of God . . ."

Therefore, to deny the personal guilt of sin is to speak that which is contrary to the primary revelation of God. When men have attempted to discover the truth about guilt in their own wisdom, they have called it complexes. They have explained away the guilt of it on the basis of environmental handicaps, and they have tried to treat it by blasting it out of memory with electrotherapy and insulin shock.

God's solution to the problem begins with facing the reality of personal guilt by bringing it into the strong light of revealed truth.

b. Sin confessed as guilt . . . v. 9

(9) "If we are confessing the sins that are ours, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

The recognition of guilt by the Christian results immediately and constantly in the divine therapeutic of forgiveness. It is for just this purpose that Jesus came to seek and save that which was lost. (Luke 19:10)

The tense of John's verb "confess" indicates that the confessing of sin is not a mechanical ceremony or ritual. Rather, this confessing is a constant attitude toward self before God, which faces the reality of personal guilt in the light of divine revelation.

Homologeō, here translated "confess," means literally "to speak as one." When our attitude toward ourselves is one of recognition of guilt; we are speaking as one, or agreeing with God about our sin.

The result of this attitude toward guilt is not, in the life of a Christian, a guilt complex or manic-depression, but rather the realization of forgiveness. God, through Isaiah, wrote: "Come now, let us reason together . . . though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." (Isaiah 1:18)

There is no greater blessing in the Christian life than that of *realized forgiveness!* It can only come to one who will stop rationalizing and realize his own personal responsibility, his own guilt, for his own misdeeds.

The realization of forgiveness depends upon personal confidence in the incarnate Word. It is through *His* blood that we have cleansing from sin. Just as we constantly maintain an attitude of personal responsibility for our guilt, so God, by Jesus' blood, is constantly cleansing us from all unrighteousness. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1)

When the fact of this forgiveness is realized, it brings peace that nothing else can give, and a boldness to stand straight and tall as a child of God.

c. Sin denied as fact . . . v. 10

(10) "If we should say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us."

From the consideration of sin as *guilt*, John turns our attention to sin as *fact*. Again we are to test the honesty of our claim to walk in the light, this time by our attitude toward the *fact* of sin.

If we deny the fact of sin (expressed here by the Greek aorist tense) we make God a liar! This challenges the imagination. For the creature to dispute the Creator's knowledge of reality to the extent that he actually makes God out as acting according to that which is not real staggers the faculties of perception! Yet this, says John, is precisely what one does say when he claims to know God and at the same time to deny that he does in fact commit sins.

In such an attitude, the word of God simply does not exist. His word is not in us, when we deny the fact that we sin. Whether we take this to mean the written word or the incarnate Word, the end result is the same. The written word is the record of God's revelation of truth. This revelation reaches its zenith in the person of Jesus, the incarnate Word.

Everything God has revealed about man in his present environment indicates that man does not do as God would have him do; that man does what God would not have him do. This is perhaps *the* primary truth

of human experience. To deny this is true in the individual life is to remove from that life the entire revelation of God concerning human behavior.

d. Sin confessed as fact . . . 2:1-2

(2:1) "My little children, I am writing these things in order that you may stop committing sins. But if one should sin, we have one called to our side toward the Father, Jesus as righteous Christ (2) and He is a covering on account of the sins which are ours and not just concerning ours, but also concerning those of the whole world."

It is only in the recognition of sin and the sinfulness of it that there is any hope of eliminating it from ones life. So, says John to those he considers as dear little ones in God's family, "I am writing this to you in order that you may stop committing sins."

If we will recognize that there is such a thing as acting contrary to God's will, and that when we do so act, we are personally guilty, we will have come a long way toward the expelling of sinful activity from our daily lives. This stands out in contrast to the modern popular idea that there is no moral absolute. God has revealed right. The opposite of right is wrong.

If we will recognize the cost of our guilt by remembering that only Calvary is equal to it, we will have come close to seeing the tremendous seriousness of the matter. To know that the blood of God's only Son is required each day to cleanse us from the normal daily guilt of "well-adjusted" lives, is to realize the phenomenal deadliness of sin. This will go far toward changing the pattern of our behavior and the sinful acts will become less and less frequent.

But let us not be so blind as to believe that we will ever reach the point of perfection at which we do not need the blood. If we do sin, we have an Advocate.

The English word "Advocate" is used here to translate the Greek "*paraklete*." *Paraklete* means literally, "one who is called along side." The *reason* for calling is the primary concern. The idea seems to be "one who lends his presence to assist His friends."

The most precious idea of Jesus to be found in the Bible is that He is simply our friend! A great deal is made, in Hebrews chapter two, of the fact that Jesus shared flesh and blood with those he came to save. He has felt the tug of temptation as only a human being can feel it. While He does not approve of sin in the life of any child of God, he does understand the pressures of life which often bring it about.

It is just here that the real meaning of Jesus' incarnation experience begins to be seen in the life of a Christian. To the person who has committed his life to God on this ground, who constantly accepts not only the fact of his own sin but also its guilt, there is the blessed comfort of knowing that an understanding Friend intercedes for him before God. There is no need to make excuses. There is no need to deny or explain away sin. One who knows Jesus as a personal Friend can face up to his guilt in the awareness that ". . . He ever liveth and maketh intercession for them." (Heb. 7:25)

The word, *hilasmos*, (propitiation) in verse two is deserving of special attention. This friend who is our advocate or *paraklete* is also our propitiation for sins.

Hilasmos, (propitiation) has at its root the idea of appeasing and conciliation. The fundamental problem in any religion is that of personal relationship to God. The difficulty is brought about by sin.

To solve this problem of divine-human relationship, the idea of sacrifice is introduced. Every sacrifice ever offered by every human religion has been for the purpose of appeasing the wrath and currying the favor of a god or gods.

The idea of restoring divine-human relationships broken by sin is not strange to the Christian Gospel. We have already seen, in I John, chapter one, that the whole purpose of the incarnation is to establish fellowship between man and God, and consequently, between man and man.

What makes the *Christian* sacrifice unique among sacrifices is that *God* has offered the sacrifice to *man*! In II Cor. 5:19, we learn that ". . . God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself . . ." Thus, while we would contradict scripture should we deny the wrath of God is released against sin, we gain in Christ a much deeper insight into both the wrath and the mercy of God. God's wrath is not appeased by sacrifices of human origin. It is rather conciliated through our acceptance of the sacrifice which He Himself has provided!

In brief, we are brought back into fellowship with God, not because we desire it to the point of offering sacrifices, but because He desires it to the point of sending His only Son as the propitiation, the covering for our guilt. It is, therefore, impossible to even discuss, much less to comprehend the love of God apart from the fact of sin and His sacrifice of Jesus for it. (John 3:16)

John further adds that this sacrifice is not only a sin covering for us, but for the whole world also. Hebrews 2:9 tells us Christ tasted death

"for every man." The Gnostic fancied himself to be part of an exclusive few in whom God took special interest. This interest included endowment with special knowledge, and the knowledge revealed in Jesus was the choicest of it all. Not so, says John! Jesus is not the means whereby a few are brought into a special relationship with God; He is the propitiation of the entire world.

This ought not be construed as supposing universalism, or the doctrine that all men are automatically saved by Christ, and that, therefore, none will be lost. The tests being presented by John are evidence that those who do not meet the tests do not have life, much less fellowship with God.

e. Hereby we know we know Him . . . v. 3

(3) "And in this we are knowing that we come to know and still do know Him, if we are keeping His commandments."

"Know" is the favorite word of the gnostic. John here turns their own word on them, and will do so many times throughout the remainder of the epistle. *Hereby we know!*

There is a play on the tenses in verse three which is not apparent in the English versions. John, quite literally, says, "In this we are knowing that we got to know, and still do know, Him; that we are keeping His commandments." Here is a challenge to the claim of *special* knowledge by an appeal to *experimental* knowledge. The person, who really got acquainted with God and to whom knowing Him is the way of life, has the habit of keeping God's commandments. "Not my will, thine be done" is more than poetry, it is the touch stone of practical Christian life.

James says, ". . . faith apart from works is barren." (James 2:20) John here makes virtually the same claim for knowledge. Knowledge apart from obedience is no knowledge at all! Perhaps a timely application of the truth can be made by saying that a knowledge of God's word is meaningless in the life of one who does not practice obeying it. Such a person may "really know the Bible," and not know the God of the Bible at all!

What commandments does John have in mind? The moral precepts of the ten commandments? Perhaps. Certainly, John includes obedience to that which Jesus identifies as the first and second commandments: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Upon these depend all God's commandments. (Matthew 22:40)

He who does not love does not know God, no matter what his claim to special enlightenment.

Safely, we may assume that John's test includes the willingness, and the effort to obey "all things, whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matt. 28:20) When love meets command, the result is obedience.

f. To say we know God, but not keep His commandments . . . v. 4 (4) "whoever is saying, "I know Him," and is not keeping His commandments, is a liar, and reality is not in him."

Here is a terrible indictment. It is but the negative side of the test presented in verse three. If keeping His commandments proves we *do* know God, failing to keep His commandments proves we *do not* know Him.

Perhaps a word should be said just here about the meaning of the word *ginosko* (know). A synonym is *oida*, and it is in the contrast between the two that the real meaning becomes apparent. *Oida*, also translated "know," means to know through reflected study, and mental deduction. *Ginosko* (know) means to know by observation and experience. *Ginosko* is properly called "experimental knowledge."

It is only the constant day by day experience of keeping God's commandments that gives one this experimental knowledge. The claim to know God aside from this day by day experience is unreal. Consequently, John says whoever makes the claim is lying and the truth (reality) is not in him!

If failure to keep His commandments proves we do not know Him, it is also evidence we do not have life. "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." (John 3:36)

g. The intended end of divine love . . . v. 5 (a) (5) "But whoever goes on keeping His word, truly in that one the love of God has reached its intended end."

The love of God toward man reaches the completeness of its purpose when an individual habitually keeps God's word. To keep His word is to obey Him faithfully, not by loud claims contradicted by lives inconsistent with the claim. Rather such obedience becomes more and more habitual in the life of one who lives daily in the awareness that Christ is Lord.

Everyone is familiar with John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him

might not perish, but have everlasting life." It was the love of God from the beginning which brought Jesus into the world. The long years of preparation recorded in the Old Testament were overtures of this divine love.

In Luke 24:44-ff, Jesus pointed out to His apostles; it stands written in the "Law and the Prophets and the Psalms" that the Christ must suffer and be slain and be raised again the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached to the whole world in His name. God did not *begin* to love the world the night Jesus was born. He loved the world when he called Abram and made with him a covenant through which He would bless all the nations of the earth. Everything that went before the birth of Jesus was preparation for the manifestation of His love on Calvary.

One cannot read the Gospel accounts of the crucifixion without being moved by the demonstration of God's love for a world which was deserving of anything but love. The insults, the shame, the humiliation, the pain of the cross, bespeak a love beyond human comprehension. The *controlling factor* of this love in God's people is that Christ died for all. (II. Cor. 5:14) The *aim* of this love is that ". . . repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all the nations." (Luke 24:47)

All the plan of God, all the call of the covenant, all the ages of preparation, all the agony of the cross are meaningless until they produce in the individual heart the "obedience of faith." (Romans 16:26) So, John writes, ". . . whoever goes on keeping His word, truly in that one the love of God has reached its intended end."

h. Hereby we know we are in Him . . . v. 5 (b)

(5) "In this we are knowing from experience that we are in Him:"

It is not "hereby we know," as though this were the only test necessary. John will present two other tests equally significant in testing eternal life as fellowship with God. Rather, "*in this*" we are knowing. (See on 2:4 concerning "know") The habitual keeping of His commandments is an experience had only by those who walk in the light as He is in the light. Thus keeping His commandments becomes to the individual evidence that he is indeed "in Him."

i. Moral obligation and proof of the claim to know God . . . v. 6

(6) "The one claiming to remain in Him is morally obligated himself to keep on walking just as that one walked."

In His prayer, recorded in John 17, Jesus identifies eternal life as

knowledge of God and His Son, "And this is eternal life, that they should know thee, the only true God, and Him whom thou didst send, Jesus Christ." (John 17:3)

The word translated "know" in John 17:3 is the word *ginosko* (experiential knowledge—see on v.4 above) This knowledge which results from experience is here presented as resulting from fulfilling the moral obligation which comes from claiming such knowledge of God. Whoever says he knows God is morally obligated to walk as Jesus walked. It was His commitment to God's will which substantiated His claim to know the Father! (John 6:38) Here is the practical meaning of walking in the light. (I John 1:7)

This entire passage (I John 1:8-2:6) deals in phrases familiar to the ancient world. As is typical of John's style, he takes well known phrases and pours them full of Christian meaning. The one of these with which we are especially concerned here is "knowing God."

The Ancient Greeks of the pre-Christian era were convinced that they could arrive at the knowledge of God by the sheer process of intellectual reasoning, argument, and thought. This concept is reminiscent of the "modern liberal" theologian who believes he can deduce the nature of God (whom he prefers to call the "Ground of Being") through dialogue, counsel, and the sharing of various religious traditions.

Obviously, such an academic approach to God has no essential bearing at all on human behaviour. It is not necessarily ethical. A man may "know" God in this sense, if indeed God can be known in this way at all, and it makes no difference in his life.

The later Greeks, who were contemporary with John and Jesus, sought to find God through an emotional experience. They re-enacted the myths of martyred gods in public services in such a way that the worshiper identified himself emotionally with the suffering god. Special lighting effects, sensual music and such were used to bring about this emotional experience. Once the desired emotion was produced, the worshiper believed that he shared the victory and immortality of his slain deity.

This practice at once calls to mind many of the devices used by some present day revivalists to produce a "Christian experience." The purpose of such revivalism, whether it be practiced in a marble hall in Greece or in a tent on Main Street, U.S.A., is to produce a knowledge of God through emotional experience.

The emotional approach to God shares, at its base, the same failure

as does the intellectual. It does not carry with it any necessary change in the moral and ethical life of the individual. The "Christian experience" which proves salvation is obedience!

John's contention here is that the test of validity for the claim to know God is that the one making the claim must necessarily act as Jesus acted. Whether it be based on academic deduction or revivalistic emotion, the failure to produce a new life puts the lie to the claim. There is no knowledge of God that does not issue in obedience to Him! It is by the experience of obedience that we know we know Him, and thereby, we know we have life eternal . . . for eternal life is to know Him!

E. *Review Questions*

1. What does the claim not to sin reveal about the sincerity of the one making the claim? (I John 1:8)
2. What is meant by "If we confess our sins?" (I John 1:9)
3. What is the attitude toward God of one who claims he has not sinned? (I John 1:10)
4. Why does John say he is writing these things? (I John 2:1)
5. If one should sin, we have an advocate with the Father. Explain. (I John 2:1)
6. Jesus is our propitiation for our sin. Explain. (I John 2:2)
7. In what sense is Jesus also a propitiation for the sins of the whole world? (I John 2:2, compare I John 2:5)
8. How does I John 2:3 challenge the claim of the gnostic to special knowledge of God?
9. How is keeping God's commandments evidence that we know Him? (I John 2:4)
10. How does the love of God reach its intended end in the life of the individual believer? (I John 2:5)
11. What does it mean to "walk as That One walked?" (I John 2:6)
12. What is the moral obligation of one who claims to know God? (I John 2:6)
13. State in your own words, in a single sentence, the first test presented in I John whereby we may assure ourselves that we have eternal life.

CHAPTER V

TO WALK IN THE LIGHT IS TO SHARE
GOD'S ATTITUDE TOWARD OUR BROTHERS IN CHRIST

(The Second Test . . . The First Time)

I John 2:7-17

A. *The Text*

"Beloved, no new commandment write I unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning: the old commandment is the word which ye heard. (8) Again, a new commandment write I unto you, which thing is true in him and in you; because the darkness is passing away, and the true light already shineth. (9) He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother, is in the darkness even until now. (10) He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is no occasion of stumbling in him. (11) But he that hateth his brother is in the darkness, and walketh in the darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because the darkness hath blinded his eyes. (12) I write unto you, my little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. (13) I write unto you, fathers, because ye know him who is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the evil one. I have written unto you, little children, because ye know the Father. (14) I have written unto you, fathers, because ye know him who is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the evil one. (15) Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (16) For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. (17) And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."

B. *Try to Discover*

1. The relationship between spiritual darkness and hatred.
2. The relationship between light and love.

3. How a commandment can be both new and old.
4. How our relationship to our brothers in Christ indicates our relationship to God.
5. How the proper direction of love is essential to life.
6. Why one cannot love God and the world at once.

C. *Paraphrase*

"Beloved!" 'no new commandment am I writing unto you; but an old commandment which ye have been holding from the beginning; The old commandment is the word which ye have heard. (8) Again a new commandment am I writing unto you, which thing is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the real light already is shining. (9) He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brothers is in the darkness until even now! (10) He that loveth his brother is abiding in the light, and cause of stumbling in him is there none! (11) Whereas he that hateth his brother in the darkness dwelleth and in the darkness walketh; and knoweth not whither he is drifting, because the darkness hath blinded his eyes. (12) I write unto you, dear children, Because your sins have been forgiven you for the sake of his name: (13) I write unto you, fathers, Because ye understand him who was from the beginning: I write unto you, young men, Because ye have overcome the wicked one. I have written unto you, little children, Because ye understand the Father: (14) I have written unto you, fathers, Because ye understand him who was from the beginning: I have written you, young men, Because ye are strong and the word of God within you abideth and ye have overcome the wicked one. (15) Be not loving the world Nor yet the things that are in the world: If anyone be loving the world The love of the Father is not in him. (16) Because all that is in the world—The coveting of the flesh, The coveting of the eyes, And the vain grandeur of life—Is not of the Father, but is of the world; (17) And the world passeth away and the coveting thereof, But he that doeth the will of God endureth unto times age-abiding."

D. *Comments and Translation*

1. The new commandment is old . . . v. 7
- (7) "Beloved, I am writing no new kind of commandment to you but an ancient commandment which you were having from the beginning: the ancient commandment is the word which you heard."

John's language reveals his motive in writing. He addresses his readers as "Beloved." I John is written as a test and a warning. It contains much criticism and harsh language concerning the gnostics; those who were denying the faith. But John had learned the lesson many present day preachers and teachers have not learned. While he detested the false teaching, he loved those being misled by it. While his denunciation of error is pointed and at times scathing and blunt, there is no, "You're wrong and you're lost and I'm glad!"

The commandment which this loving apostle is about to pen is not new. His readers have heard it from the very first. It stands written in the law of Moses. Jesus made it part of the "eternal triangle," upon which hang all the law and the prophets and the psalms. (Matt. 22:34-ff) Love of God, love of man and love of self are the entire burden of everything God requires of His children.

The command, or at least the human necessity which calls it forth, is as old as life itself. Jesus taught that His act of love was the message of the Old Testament. (Luke 24:44-ff) He also taught that love of fellowman is second only in importance to love of God. (Matt. 22:39) We know also from Him that upon this "eternal triangle" hang all the law and the prophets and the psalms, which take their meaning from Him. (Matt. 22:40) In the preceding verses John has said that the perfection of this love is reached when men obey God's commandments. Now he will spell it out. The commandment, which is both old and new, is that we love!

2. The paradox of love . . . v. 8

(8) "Paradoxically, I am writing to you a new kind of commandment, which is real in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the genuine light already is shining."

Paradoxically, the commandment which is old is also new. It is old in that it is the beginning of the old covenant. It is new in that it is the perfection of the new covenant.

To appreciate what John is saying about the newness of this commandment, attention must be given to the word which is translated "new." It is a synonym, and, as with most synonyms, its meaning stands out most sharply in contrast. The word is *kainos*. Its synonym is *neos*. Both are translated "new" in our English versions. *Kainos* (used here) means new in reference to quality while *neos* means new in reference to time.

This year's automobile is new in reference to time. This is expressed in the Greek by *neos*. When the automobile replaced the horse, it was revolutionary newness; a completely new kind or quality of transportation. This newness of kind is the meaning of *kainos* (new) in this verse.

John, by his use of *kainos* (new), indicates that love, as a way of life, is revolutionary. It is old, in that it was commanded long ago, but it is new in Jesus and in those who walk as He walked because it has never been seen in practice before. The Jews, who had love as a commandment, spoke of the Samaritans as dogs, and considered the Gentiles as unfit for social intercourse. The Christian, whose life is controlled by love, knows "no man after the flesh." (II Cor. 5:16)

It is the light in which we walk that reveals love as the essential stuff of life. Therefore, whoever loves as He loved walks in the light as He is in the light. It is the light of God in Christ as Calvary which made love known. Whoever would order his life in the light of the cross must do so by loving.

3. The light focused in love . . . v. 9-11

(9) "The one claiming to be in the light and hating his brother is still in darkness. (10) The one loving his brother is remaining in the light, and in him is no cause of stumbling. (11) However, the one hating his brother is in darkness and is walking in the darkness and is not knowing where he is going, because the darkness blinded his eyes."

The light of God reaches its sharpest focus in the Christian's love for his brother in Christ. It is true that Jesus commanded us to love our enemies, but is equally true that the reason we love an enemy is in order that he may become our brother! Hence, the end perfection of both God's love for the world and our love for our enemies is reached, when we love as a brother, him who was previously our enemy.

This truth is revealed by God's light in Jesus, and he, who does not love one who becomes a child of God, is himself not a child of God, but is still in darkness. B. F. Wescott has said this very succinctly, "A man is either walking in the light of love or the darkness of hatred." This is the application of John's second test by which we know we are in fellowship with God and have eternal life.

Love is the result of walking in the light. Consequently, the presence of love is evidence that one is so walking.

In such a person's life there is no occasion of stumbling. The root idea of the word *skandalon*, here translated "occasion of stumbling,"

is two-fold. It can refer to either a stumbling block or a snare trap. In either case it is made effective by darkness.

There is some question in this passage as to whether John means that darkness causes one to stumble, or that one in darkness has in his life that which causes others to stumble. A good case can be made for either interpretation.

Consider first that darkness causes one to stumble: What could be more true? Who is not familiar with the pathetic sight of a blind man tapping his way along the curb with his red-tipped cane to avoid stumbling. A blind man lives in perpetual darkness.

So also does the one who is spiritually blind live in darkness and in danger of stumbling. That over which such a person most frequently stumbles is human relations! Hence the absence of love is evidence of walking in darkness.

Paul's entreaty in Romans 14 that we do nothing whereby we cause one another to stumble, and other such passages, may be quoted to support the alternative interpretation of I John 2:10. He who walks in the light of God's truth has as his first concern the spiritual welfare of others. Such a person does not have in his life that over which his brother may stumble.

Actually, *both* the danger of stumbling, and of being the occasion by which others stumble are in the life of one who walks in darkness, ignorant of or ignoring the truth of life revealed in Christ. No matter how sound his "doctrine," nor how accurate his theological speculations, the person who does not love his brother is blinded by darkness and has no idea where he is going. (Cf. II Cor. 4:4) Those who live as Christ, who love as He loved, have, according to I John 2:5, already reached the boarders of Canaan!

4. A parenthetical aside . . . v. 12-14

(12) "I am writing to you, dear children, because you are forgiven sins through His name. (13) I am writing to you, fathers, because you have come to know from experience the one who was from the beginning. I am writing you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. (14) I wrote to you, little children, because you have come to know the Father. I wrote to you, fathers, because you have come to know from experience the one who was from the beginning. I wrote to you, young men, because you are strong and the word of God is remaining in you and you have overcome the evil one."

a. Children . . . v. 12 & 14 (a)

It has been suggested that the repetition in these verses is perhaps

due to John's being interrupted as he wrote. There is no way to know this certainly, but to one who has done any writing it seems very plausible. In any event, John addresses three age groups in the church with a personal message for each, and in each case the message is in two sections.

The forgiveness of sin in the name of Christ is the common experience of all Christians. It is the overwhelming awareness of one who is a child in Christ, either by virtue of age or recent conversion. Indeed, forgiveness is many times the only blessing of which a new born babe in Christ is aware. But it is enough.

The companion awareness, accompanying that of forgiven sin, is Divine Sonship. To the new-fledged Christian, this, too, is an overpowering realization. The Almighty Creator and Sustainer of all is *my Father!* I'm a child of the King!

While the time ought never come when any Christian forgets the forgiveness of his sins or his sonship to God, these are the special blessings of those who are new in the faith.

b. Fathers . . . v. 13(a) & 14(b)

In contrast to the neophyte Christian and his blessings are those whose years with the Master are many and whose realized blessings are even more profound. John writes to the fathers because they have, through years of experience, come to a personal acquaintance with the eternal *logos!*

In Chapter one, John speaks of life as abstract and impersonal. Here, as in the prologue of the fourth gospel, he speaks of the eternal word, "The One Who was from the beginning."

Personal intimate knowledge of this One Who "sticketh closer than a brother," (Prov. 18:24) increases and deepens with the passage of years.

c. Young Men . . . v. 13(b) & 14(c)

In addressing the young adults, John is aware of their vigor and consecrated energy. He is also aware of the temptations that are strongest in early adulthood. His motive in addressing them with the tests of life is his awareness of their strength, the presence of the Word in their lives and their conquest of Satan, the "evil one."

It seems perhaps more appropriate to young adulthood than any other age that a Christian be able to conquer evil and resist youthful temptations (Cf. II Timothy 2:22) by the consciousness of the Word in his life. Paul's claim, "I can do all things through Him that strengtheneth me," (Phil. 4:13) seems particularly applicable to young men.

5. Incompatibility of love for the world and love of the Father . . .
v. 15

(15) "Do not have the habit of loving the world nor the things in the world. If one should be loving the things of the world, the love of the Father is not in him:"

Love is essentially the giving of self. In the Greek language there are three synonyms, all of which are translated "love." They do not represent three "kinds of love," but three motives for self-giving.

The first, *eros*, is the giving of self for the sake of what one gets in return. The second, *phileo*, is the giving of self to that which is attractive, as to a person with whom we are personally, naturally compatible. In modern parlance, this word is more accurately represented with "like" than "love." The third, *agape*, is the love of the will. It gives self because it decides to do so, regardless of what it may or may not get in return and regardless of whether it is personally attracted to its object.

This third motive, *agape*, is the only one of the three that can be commanded. Indeed it is the only one that, in the Bible, *is* commanded! The other motives, *eros* and *phileo*, are only controlled by the willful direction of *agape*.

Agape is the word translated "love" in this present text. It is also the "love" of John 3:16 and of I Corinthians 13. It is the "love" of I John 4:8 which says "God is love."

Since God is love, and man is made in the image of God, man can not but love something.

Since love is essentially the giving of self, I give myself to that which I decide to love. It is impossible to give self to two opposing masters. Therefore, if I love the world, I cannot love the Father. This conclusion is supported by such statements as James! . . . "friendship with the world is enmity with God," (James 4:4) and Jesus' ". . . No man can serve two masters." (Matt. 6:24) Service is love in action.

John makes no claim that the "things of the world" are in and of themselves sinful. Indeed, Paul claims such is not the case. (Romans 14:14)

Human reason supports the sinlessness of the things of the world *per se*. As we look more closely at John's identification of them, it becomes apparent that they are important, and often even essential to life in this time and space set up of ours.

John's plea is not to condemn the things of the world, or to pretend that we do not need or ought not to use them. His entreaty is "Do not

have the habit of loving," (of giving yourself regardless of the consequences) to these things.

It is rather startling to realize that love, which is the very essence of life when directed properly, is also the cause of death when mis-directed!

6. Things of the world identified . . . they are not of the Father . . .
v. 16

(16) "because everything in the world, the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the empty boastfulness of this temporal life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."

The things of the world fall into three categories; the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the empty boastfulness of this temporal life.

In the first two instances, the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes, our English versions read "lust." This is unfortunate. The word "lust," while it literally means merely a desire to gratify the senses and appetites, has fallen into bad usage. It has come to be associated, in modern parlance, almost exclusively with excessive and unrestrained sexual gratification.

The word, *epithumia*, which John uses and which I have translated "desires" does not denote that which is of itself wrong, nor is it particularly concerned with sex *per se*. Rather, the word describes all natural, God-given drives that are common to man.

"Desires," in this sense, includes sex, but it also includes the other normal appetites. When applied to the flesh, it includes the appetite for food, for sleep, for drink, —for those things generally called "the necessities of life."

There is nothing essentially wrong with any of these normal desires of the flesh. On the contrary, it is doubtful if one can remain physically healthy for long without them. *But* . . . John insists we must not have the habit, that is it must not be the course of our lives, to give ourselves regardless of the consequences to these desires of the flesh.

Many illustrations of such excessive concern with the desires of the flesh could be cited. The corruption of the English word "lust" is itself a case in point. It is the result of over-attention, by our English speaking society, to sex.

A similar illustration can be made of the deterioration of the Greek *eros*, which in classic times described the love of beauty and was used

in marriage ceremonies. The word now has come to such vulgar usage as to be unspeakable in mixed company in modern Greek.

The so-called New Morality of our day also illustrates the way in which non-Christian society gives itself to the desires of the flesh. And lest those who are older take this as an indictment of the "younger generation," we might also mention the motto of the "roaring Twenties," "Obey that impulse!"

When applied, as John applies it in verse 16, to "the desires of the eyes," the word *epithumia* shifts in emphasis from those appetites and drives associated with the physical body to the externals of which we are aware by the use of our perceptive senses. C. H. Dodd calls this "the tendency to be captivated by outward show." It would seem that we are confronted here with those things which usually answer to the name "culture."

Culture is many things to many people. To some it is the acquiring of polish and graciousness. One important facet of education, beyond the acquiring of knowledge, is the process of *becoming* which takes place while one is *learning*. This is good. If we can take His hasty manufacture of clothing for Adam and Eve as an indication, the desire for culture is a God-given instinct which makes our living together here a little more pleasant than it might otherwise be. (Gen. 3:21)

To others, culture may be the avoidance of those very things which seem so desirable to polite society. Who does not know some individual who spends a great deal of time convincing his fellows that he has not become a "dude" or a "sissy" or whatever else he may call those who have acquired the niceties of social grace?

In either case, the one as much as the other, it is possible to spend one's entire life in search of culture, of one form or another, for its own sake. This, John would have us not do. His plea again is that we "Do not have the habit of loving" (of giving ourselves to) these normal desires.

In the third instance, John changes his terminology in defining the things of the world. The final appeal is to not love or give self to the empty boastfulness of this temporal life.

The word which our English versions render "vainglory" or "pride" is *aladzonia*. Its literal meaning is derived from *aladzon*, meaning a purposeless wanderer or imposter and hence a boaster. One who pre-

tends to be that which he is not! One who loves, or gives himself to such emptiness has not the love of the Father.

It is not surprising to find Paul using a derivative of this same word to describe one who does not love with Christian love. Paul says that one without Christian love is become "sounding brass or a clanging symbol." The word rendered symbol in I Cor. 13:1 is *alaladzon*, a form of *aladzonia* which is used in I John 2:16. It was originally a Greek battle cry, shouted at the enemy to strike fear during a charge. It was a hollow boastful noise which meant absolutely *nothing!*

There are those who love, who give themselves to the nothingness, the boastful noise, of this world. Vance Packard's, *The Status Seekers* is an indictment of a people who all their lives claw and scratch after the baubles which will set them just one notch above their neighbors. It is the old cliché of "keeping up with the Joneses."

There are multiplied illustrations of such pretentious egoism. There is the man whose car is the very best model of the best make, no matter what he happens to be driving at the moment. And when he trades, no matter what he gets, *it* will then be the best model of the best make.

There are the young people whose energies are spent in the purposeless pursuit of a "hot rod Ford and a two dollar bill." You'll find them risking their lives and the lives of others in the desperate attempt to leave a strip of rubber on the road every time they drive away, or in the equally desperate attempt to get to the next stop light ahead of another purposeless vagabond.

There are those mothers whose children grow up undisciplined because they must hold an extra job. Not that their husbands are unable to provide the necessities, but because of their own insatiable craving for status symbols.

Christians are to have a more meaningful set of values. Right love, the love of the Father, is for people; not for appetites, desires, or things! John entreats us not to give ourselves to these empty pursuits. Those who live for the things of the world are not of the Father, but are of the world.

7. Contrasting results of contrasting loves . . . v. 17

(17) "And the world is passing away and the desires of it; but the one doing the will of God is remaining into eternity."

The misdirection of love against which we are warned in this paragraph is the negative side of the same test which is presented in the

preceding verses. If we do love our brothers, we are of God. If we love the things of the world, we are not of God.

In verse 17, we are confronted with the contrasting results of these two opposing loves. One becomes more and more like that which he loves. If he loves the world, he takes on more and more the nature of the world. If he loves the Father, and expresses that love in love of his brothers, he becomes more and more like the Father.

The consequences are eternal. The world is passing away, and the things of it. The one who loves the world becomes temporal as the world is temporal, and so will also pass away. In contrast, the Father is eternal. The one who loves as He loves becomes more and more like Him, and so will remain into eternity.

One of the most pathetic utterances in modern language is that which says some Christian person has "passed away." This is very apt at the death of one who has loved the things of the world, but it is nothing short of dishonest at the funeral of one who has directed his love toward his brothers in Christ.

Christians do not pass away . . . the world passes away and those who love it!

E. *Questions for Review*

1. I John 2:7-11
 - a. To what commandment does John refer in vs. 7 & 8?
 - b. How can this commandment be both new and old?
 - c. What is the significance of "beloved" in v. 7?
 - d. Explain why John here commands to love our brothers rather than our enemies. (Compare v. 5)
 - e. What is the source of brotherhood?
 - f. How is the absence of love proof that one is "walking in darkness?"
 - g. What are the two possible interpretations of v. 10?
 - h. Which of these two seems most likely to be John's real meaning? Support your answer.
2. I John 2:12-14
 - a. What is one possible explanation of John's repetition in these verses?
 - b. Of what blessing is the new Christian likely to be most aware?

- c. What is the significance of John's writing to the older men of the church "because you know Him Who is from the beginning?"
 - d. Why does John address the young men, "Because ye are strong, and the Word of God abideth in you, and you have overcome the evil one?"
3. I John 2:15-17
- a. What is the meaning of "love" as John uses it here?
 - b. What is the basis of the conclusion, "Man cannot but love something?"
 - c. What three classifications does John use for the "things of the world?"
 - d. What is the meaning of the word for lust . . . vs. 16 & 17
 - e. What is the meaning of "the lusts of the flesh?"
 - f. What is the meaning of "the lusts of the eyes?"
 - g. What is the meaning of the "vainglory of life?"
 - h. If there is nothing essentially wrong with these things, why does John demand that we not love them?
 - i. What is the result of loving God?
 - j. What is the result of loving the things of the world?
 - k. How does the statement that a Christian has "passed away" reflect fuzzy thinking about the results of love?

CHAPTER VI

TO WALK IN THE LIGHT IS TO SHARE GOD'S ATTITUDE TOWARD JESUS

(The Third Test . . . The First Time)

I John 2:18-28

A. *The Text*

"Little children, it is the last hour: and as ye heard that anti-christ cometh, even now have there arisen many anti-christs; whereby we know that it is the last hour, (19) They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they all are not of us. (20) And ye have an anointing from the Holy One, and ye

know all things. (21) I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and because no lie is of the truth. (22) Who is the liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? This is the anti-christ, even he that denieth the Father and the Son. (23) Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also. (24) As for you, let that abide in you which ye heard from the beginning. If that which ye heard from the beginning abide in you, ye also shall abide in the Son, and in the Father. (25) And this is the promise which he promised us, even the life eternal. (26) These things have I written unto you concerning them that would lead you astray. (27) And as for you, the anointing which ye received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any one teach you; but as his anointing teacheth you concerning all things, and is true, and is no lie, and even as it taught you, ye abide in him. (28) And now, my little children, abide in him; that, if he shall be manifested, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed before him at his coming."

B. *Try to Discover*

1. How our faith in Jesus as God's only begotten Son is evidence that we are in fellowship with God.
2. What is the meaning of anti-christ.
3. What does our anointing from the Holy Spirit have to do with the truth that Jesus is the Christ.
4. Who are those who "went out from us."
5. How does the promise of eternal life relate to our holding fast the message of the Gospel.
6. How does being mindful of our anointing keep us from denying Jesus.

C. *Paraphrase*

"Little children! it is the last hour; And just as you have heard that an antichrist is coming. Even now antichrists have become many, Whence we perceive that it is the last hour: (19) From among us they went out, But they were not of us; For if of us they had been they would in that case have abode with us; But it came to pass in order that they might be made manifest, because all are not of us. (20) And ye have an anointing from The Holy One, Ye all know: (21) I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, But because ye know

it, And because no falsehood is of the truth. (22) Who is the False One; Save he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? The same is the anti-christ. He that denieth the Father and the Son. (23) Whosoever denieth the Son neither hath he the Father: he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also. (24) As for you what ye have heard from the beginning in you let it abide. If in you shall abide that which from the beginning ye have heard ye also in the Son and in the Father shall abide. (25) And this is the promise which he hath promised unto us, the age-abiding life. (26) These things have I written unto you concerning them who would lead you astray. (27) And as for you the anointing which ye have received from him abideth in you, and ye have no need that anyone be teaching you; but as his anointing is teaching you, and is true and is no falsehood even just as it hath taught you abide ye in him. (28) And now dear children abide ye in him, in order that if he be made manifest we may have boldness and not be shamed away from him by his presence."

D. *Comments*

1. Preliminary Remarks

The argument of John in this passage was a simple one to himself and his first century audience. It is not so simple to us in the twentieth century. We have lost much of the theological background against which it was presented.

Briefly stated, John's logic is this; we know it is the last hour. We know this because many antichrists have come. The reason the presence of the antichrists proves it is the last hour is that the antichrists are against Christ. Had He not come, they could not oppose Him. Their presence is proof He has come, and therefore, proof it is the last hour.

The Jews divided all time into two ages. The present age, which preceded the coming of the Messiah, and the "last time" or "Day of the Lord," which would be ushered in with the coming of the Messiah. John here contends that the fact of the last hour is proven by the presence of antichrists. What he does not say, but what was, nevertheless, inherent in his use of the term "last hour" is that the presence of the last hour is proof that Christ has come.

This is the fact denied by the gnostics. It was their denial that Jesus is the Christ that made them antichrists.

The third test by which one may know that he has eternal life and is in fellowship with the Father is his attitude toward the Christ. To

deny that He has come in the person of Jesus is to demonstrate an attitude that is antichrist. To confess that He has indeed come marks one as a child of God and in His fellowship.

2. Translation and comments

2. a. Evidence of a last hour . . . v. 18

(18) "Little children, it is a last hour, and just as you heard that an antichrist is coming, so also now many antichrists have become: whereby we know it is a last hour."

Today, no subject presented in the entire Bible is the object of more confusion than "the last hour." To avoid becoming embroiled in this chaos, we must set aside all preconceptions and remember the historical purpose of John's writing of this letter. We must let the author say, in his own language, what he would have us hear.

There is no "the" with "last hour" here. John describes that which has the nature of a "last hour," rather than a particular "last hour."

The terms "last hour" and "last days" seem to be closely related, sometimes interchangeable, throughout the Bible. In the early part of the Old Testament, they referred to the time when Israel would enter the Promised Land. In the prophets, these same terms are used for the time of the coming of the Messiah. In Acts 2:16-ff, Peter applies this language, as employed by the prophet Joel, to the birthday of the church. This theme is repeated frequently through the Old Testament, and was a chief topic of speculation during the four hundred silent years between the Old and New Testaments.

Over the years of these usages, the phrase "last hour" came to have significance which was familiar to those who first read John's letter. It is another of those well-known terms which John delights in pouring full of Christian meaning.

"Last hour" indicated, to them, the end of one era and the beginning of another. "A last hour" marked more than the time of annihilation. Destruction was followed by re-creating.

A "last hour" denoted a time of consummation. It was the time when an epoch of history reached that end toward which the providence of God had been moving it. The accomplishment of the one was also the beginning of another.

It is in this same vein that the Hebrew writer says, "God . . . hath at the end of these days, spoken unto us in His Son . . ." "*These days*" are the days when God "spoke unto the fathers by the prophets." The con-

summation, the intended end of these days, was reached when, *at the end of these days*, God spoke to us in His Son. This also marked the beginning of the new age of grace as well as the end of the old age of law.

Paul says much the same things in Galatians 3:6-29. What God began in Abraham reached its intended end in the coming of the Christ. His coming, at the same time, marked the beginning of the new covenant age.

Luke 24:44-47 leaves no doubt that Jesus saw His crucifixion and resurrection as the end of "the Law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms." At the same time He saw it as the beginning of a new era when "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem."

The crux of John's letter is: will an individual, in *this* last hour identify himself with that which is passing away or that which is new and eternal? I John 2:15-17, which immediately precedes this statement concerning the last hour, sets the choice clearly before us.

In recent years a great deal has been made of the assumption that the first century Christians, including the writers of the New Testament, were mistakenly anxious about the second coming of Christ. It has been said that their insistence upon preparation for His momentary return indicates they did not know whereof they spoke on the matter.

This is not a necessary conclusion. It *is* true that the New Testament writers had much to say about the second coming of Christ. It is equally true, however, that they saw this life as a period of preparation for that which would be ushered in in its fullness by His second coming. Since this preparation ends for the individual, either at the second coming or at his own death (depending entirely upon which comes first), it is just as important for one to be ready for the second coming *now* (in case of his own death) as *then* when He actually does come. This life of preparation is also the beginning of eternal life.

The passage of more than eighteen hundred years since John wrote "it is a last hour," does not alter the necessity to realize that the final word of God concerning life and death has been spoken in Christ. John's intention is that we treat every hour of the Christian age as a last hour. It has been five minutes until midnight since Pentecost!

As proof that it is "last hour," John calls attention to the presence of many antichrists. Be alert here for a play on words: Christ, antichrist and christma (the anointing of believers.)

Some have supposed that "The Antichrist" is to be expected in the closing days of the Christian Era. Perhaps so. However, it is more reasonable to conclude from Scripture that the presence of antichrist indicates the Christian Era itself is a last hour. It is the end toward which God's providence in human history has moved. It will issue in the beginning of whatever lies beyond in the age of ages.

It is significant that the designation "antichrist" is used only in the epistles of John; and nowhere else in the entire Bible. John mentions it in this passage twice, in 4:3 once and in II John 7 once. Some have identified Antichrist as an individual person with the "Man of Sin," II Thessalonians 2, and the Beast of Revelation 13. *The Bible does not make this identification!*

There are those who believe that "the Antichrist" is to be expected in the time just preceding the second coming of Christ. Perhaps so. John does not use the term in this way. On the contrary, it would seem he calls attention to the many antichrists so as to correct a false teaching which made an individual Antichrist some sort of super monster. John says "You have heard that Antichrist is coming," and immediately adds, "... many antichrists have come."

Historically, the term *antichristos* in pre-Christian language meant either an opponent or adversary of Christ, or one who sought to put himself in Christ's place. In the latter sense, the opposition is not open and clear cut. Rather, as in the case of the Gnostics against whose influence John wrote, it was insidious and subtle.

It has been the hallmark of devoted Protestantism from its inception to identify "The Antichrist" with the Pope. During, and just prior to, World War II, a number of Fundamentalist radio preachers were able to support their programs on the air by playing to the appetites of their listeners for the sensational satisfaction of their curiosity. This was done by identifying first Mussolini and then Hitler as "The Antichrist." This they presented as proof that "the last hour" was upon us and the end of the world was imminent.

Many popes, as well as Hitler and Mussolini have long since passed from the scene. The end is not yet, but the subtle, insidious attempt of false teachers to lead astray the disciples of the Christ is still with us. Hereby we know that it is *still* a last hour!

To John, the subtle denial of the deity of Jesus, the false teaching which separated the human from the divine in Him and so opened the way to all sorts of sensualism in those who claimed to follow Him, was

antichrist. Today's "liberalism," and "new morality" fit perfectly John's understanding of antichrist. They are not *new*, but are present, in varied forms, in every age.

Antichrist is the subtle but deadly denial of His deity by those who claim to follow Him. It is the removal of all moral absolutes, the opening of the gates of licentiousness for those who dare to wear His name!

b. The antichrists and the anointed ones . . . v. 19

(19) "They went out of us, but they were not of us: for if they were of us they would have remained with us: but (they went out) in order that they might be manifest that they all are not of us."

The *gnostics*, with their claim to superior enlightenment, were not really Christians. No one *can* be who denies Jesus as Christ.

The antichrists left the Christians fellowship because they were not all to be found in the ranks of the church. John's statement is that even those who had been in the fellowship had left, which was proof that "*all* of them were not of us." (We would have said "*none* of them are of us.") Neither the gnostic in the church nor the gnostic outside the church is really of us. The physical presence of a false teacher in the assembly does not make him a Christian! The proof is that those who have been in the fellowship are leaving. They have not been excommunicated. They are simply not at home among people who believe in the deity of Jesus.

How timely this is for our day! We live in times which are historically the most significant for the church since the beginning of the Reformation. Old denominational lines are fading. Cutting across them all is the modern "spirit of antichrist," which denies the inspiration of scripture, the deity of Christ and His Lordship.

It is not necessary to "excommunicate" these radicals of the left. It takes but little serious thought to recognize that "they are not of us." Perhaps it is time for those who do believe the Gospel to simply acknowledge the situation which exists. Some who claim to be Christians, simply aren't!

c. The anointed ones know they are anointed . . . v. 20

(20) "And you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know it."

The most prominent concept of the church presented in the New Testament is that it is the continuing presence of Christ, the Anointed One, on earth. The church is "His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all. (Eph. 1:23) As such, it is to continue that which "Jesus began, both to do and to teach." (Acts 1:1)

Individually, what we church members endure for His sake is to "fill up that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ . . . for His body's sake, which is the church." (Col. 1:24) It is the church "to whom God was pleased to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of Glory." (Col. 1:27) All that God has revealed or hopes to accomplish in Human history is now the stewardship of the church which John considers as the fellowship of anointed ones.

This conviction is in John's reminder: "You have an anointing." The word *Christos*, translated Christ, means "Anointed One." It is not strange that those who are in fellowship with Him, who are the full-filling fellowship (Eph. 1:23) called His body, should also share the anointing! Christians also are "anointed ones!" The word *chrisma* (anointed) has the same root as *Christos* (Christ).

Peter recognized this truth when, on Pentecost, he applied the prophecy of Joel 2:28-ff to the church. "And it shall be in the last days, saith God, I will pour forth my Spirit upon all flesh . . .," is fulfilled in ". . . ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call unto Him." (Acts 2:17-ff) As A. T. Robertson puts it, "This anointing is open to all Christians, not just a select few." Antichrists are against those anointed, both Jesus and His disciples! Saul of Tarsus learned this on the Damascus road.

The English version is misleading when it says "ye know all things." The preferred reading is "you all know it." That is, you all know (and this is the knowledge of experience) that you have the anointing. It is impossible to persuade one, who shares the anointing, that Jesus is not the Anointed One!

d. The anointing is associated with truth . . . v. 21 (21) "I did not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because every lie is not of the truth."

Paul intimates that John here affirms, "Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things . . ." (I Cor. 2:14-15)

John is not writing because his readers do *not* know the truth but because they *do* know it. No matter that self-acclaimed intellectuals make lofty claims to special knowledge. Those who share the anointing of Christ through the gift of the Holy Spirit have done so because they first accepted the truth. They have known it from the beginning. The

most unlettered Christian need not shrink before the self-proclaimed scholarship of anyone who denies the deity of Jesus! The knowledge of experience is more reliable than that gained by philosophical deduction.

e. The decisive proof of falsehood . . . v. 22 & 23

(22) "Who is the liar if not the one denying, "Jesus is not the Christ?" This is the antichrist, the one denying the Father and the Son. (23) Everyone denying the Son is not having the Father."

When John says, "Who is the liar if not the one denying, 'Jesus is not the Christ?'" He has not stooped to name calling. The question is vastly more profound than that! Whoever denies the deity of the man, Jesus, has denied the fundamental reality of the universe. (Cf. John 1:1-4)

Anyone making this denial is antichrist! (See on verses 18 and 19 above) Whoever denies the deity of Jesus denies the Father also! Jesus said as much Himself, as John records in His Gospel. (John 5:19-ff)

There are those today, as there were in John's day, who believe they can share the Christian belief in God as Father without acknowledging that Jesus is His Son . . . not just a Son but the Only Begotten Son. John's contention is that this is impossible.

Men know God, as Father, only through Jesus (John 14:6-9). If Jesus is no more than a sort of super-philosopher, then men do not really *know* that God is Father at all. The idea that God even wanted to be Father came from Him.

Take away the divine Sonship of Jesus and you have destroyed Christianity at its base. The entire concept of brotherhood between men begins with the Fatherhood of God. If God is not the "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," He is not the Father of anyone!

f. The test of eternal life . . . v. 24 & 25

(24) "As for you, what you heard from the beginning, let it remain in you. If in you is remaining what you heard from the beginning, you are also in the Son and are remaining in the Father."

What you heard from the beginning . . . The author calls us back beyond the rise of false teachers. He entreats us to set aside the confusion introduced by falsehood. We are to allow that to remain in us which was the original message. God is Light (See above on I John 1:5).

Since God is light, and all truth comes from Him, darkness and falsehood are dispelled from the one who holds firm this message. The mes-

senger was the Son. We cannot hold fast the message without holding fast the messenger. "Whosoever receiveth me, receiveth Him that sent me . . ." (Luke 9:48) These are Jesus' words, and they are part of "that which we have heard." (I John 1:1) This is the standard by which truth is determined. Anyone denying it denies truth, and so is a liar.

To know God is to have eternal life. (John 17:3) The promise is conditioned by the knowledge of Him whom the Son revealed. To deny Jesus is God's Son is to forfeit all claim to the promise.

g. Reminder of the anointing . . . v. 26 & 27

(26) "These things I wrote to you concerning the ones leading you astray. (27) And the anointing which you received from Him is remaining you, (and you have no need that one keep on teaching you: but as His anointing is teaching you concerning all things, and it is true and is not a lie), and just as He taught you, you remain in Him."

Those who hold fast the message which they heard before the rise of the antichrists still have the anointing of the Holy Spirit. They are still the continuing presence of the Christ (the Anointed One) in the world of men. If this real presence of the Holy Spirit is kept in mind, it is "the earnest of our inheritance . . ." (Eph. 1:14) It is the down payment. In receiving this anointing we have already received the "first installment" of the eternal life which God has promised. With this in mind it becomes extremely difficult to reject the promise itself. So the anointing becomes a point of appeal by John for his readers to hold fast the truth that Jesus is the Christ.

Again, parenthetically, John underscores his claim that the consciousness of what they have already experienced is theirs. They have no real need to be reminded.

h. Recurrent plea for persistence . . . v. 28

(28) "And now, dear children, remain in Him, in order that if He should be manifest we may achieve boldness from before Him and not be shamed off from Him."

John's convictions about Jesus are real. He *is* God's Son. He *is* alive. He *is* coming again. Soon or late, "and every eye shall see Him . . ." (Rev. 1:7)

There will be no greater shame at His coming than that of those who once knew Him and then denied Him. There will be no greater joy than that experienced by the faithful at His coming.

E. Questions for Review

1. What is the significance of the fact that there is no "the" with last hour? . . . v. 18
2. What is the purpose of I John?
3. What do the terms "last hour" and "last day" seem to indicate in pre-Christian usage?
4. In what sense may the entire Christian era be considered a last hour?
5. What light do Acts 2:16-ff and Galatians 3:6-29 throw on John's discussion of a last hour in connection with the Christian's anointing of the Holy Spirit?
6. What is the literal meaning of the word Christ?
7. If one is against Christ, is he not opposed to all those who are anointed of God?
8. Who, besides Jesus, may be called "anointed ones?"
9. Does the Bible anywhere identify antichrist with the "Man of Sin?"
10. If the coming of Christ is the beginning of a last hour, is not the coming of those who oppose Him and His anointed ones also proof of the same?
11. Are there antichrists in the world today? Explain.
12. What proves that the antichrists were not "of us?" . . . v. 19
13. What is the relationship of the church to the presence of Christ on earth today? . . . v. 20
14. Who receives the anointing of the Holy Spirit?
15. Is "scholarship" to be feared by the uneducated Christian? Explain . . . v. 21
16. What is the decisive proof of falsehood? . . . v. 22-23
17. Can one claim honestly to know God as Father while denying the deity of Jesus?
18. Who first presented the idea that God is Father?
19. What is the condition of eternal life presented by John in this passage? . . . v. 24-25
20. What is the standard by which all truth is determined?
21. What is the relationship between knowledge of God and presence of eternal life?

22. How does the awareness of the presence of the Holy Spirit make the denial of Christ less likely?
23. Who has most reason to be afraid and ashamed in the presence of Jesus? . . . v. 28

HEREBY WE KNOW

PART III

I John 2:29—4:6

Fellowship With God Considered
As Divine Sonship
Tested by The Outward Demonstration In Us
Of God's Attitude Toward:

1. The Guiltless Life
2. Love For His Children
3. His Son

CHAPTER VII

DIVINE SONSHIP INTRODUCED

I John 2:29

A. *The Text*

“If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one also that doeth righteousness is begotten of him.”

B. *Try to Discover*

1. The meaning of righteous and righteousness.
2. The relationship of divine sonship to personal righteousness in terms of cause and effect.
3. How righteousness is an unavoidable test of truth for the claim to be a son of God.

C. *Paraphrase*

"If ye know that he is righteous Ye perceive that—Whosoever doeth righteousness he hath been born."

D. *Comments*

1. Preliminary Remarks

The fellowship which John has tested as walking in the light, he now tests as divine sonship. The three-fold test is to be the same. Just as one's attitude toward his own sin, his brothers and Jesus as the Christ affirm or deny that he is walking in the light, so the practical outworking of these attitudes in personal living will affirm or deny the claim that one is begotten of God.

As with the former, so with the latter, John is answering a specific claim of the gnostics. They claimed to have special enlightenment from God, and John has challenged their claim with truth as it is revealed in Christ. If we walk in this light, then we have fellowship.

They claimed to have been begotten of God. John will turn this favorite gnostic phrase also against its users. If they are indeed begotten of God, what they do about personal righteousness, what they do in deed and truth toward their brothers, and what they confess about Jesus will prove it.

The last verse of chapter two is a preface to the first test of sonship, and at the same time serves as the springboard by which the idea of sonship is introduced for the first time.

It is well to remember John's statement in the prologue concerning the purpose of his writing, (i.e.) that his readers may "have fellowship with us . . . and with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." (I John 1:3) This fellowship is eternal life. John considers it first as conformity of personal attitude to revealed truth, and secondly, as conformity of personal behavior to the same truth.

2. Translation and Comments

(2:29) "If you have come to know that He is righteous, you know also that everyone doing righteousness has been begotten of Him."

Briefly stated, the tests set forth in Part II correspond to those set forth in Part III in the following ways:

In the first cycle, presented in Part II, the author tests fellowship as walking in the light. Here the second cycle of the same tests considers fellowship as divine sonship.

Fellowship, considered as walking in the light is tested by our *attitudes*. In testing fellowship as divine sonship, the proof lies in our *actions*. The outward test of righteous behavior corresponds to our inward attitude toward sin. The outward test of loving behavior toward our brothers corresponds to our inward attitude of love for them. Our open confession of Jesus as the Christ corresponds to our inward faith in Him.

This is a direct denial of the separation of spirit from matter. The abstract spiritual attitudes of the heart are proven by the outward action of the body. *Together* they give evidence of life.

John's symphonic play on the two synonymns for possession of information is beautiful in this verse! The first used (if you know) is *oida*. It means to possess knowledge by reflection, intuition or acquired information. The second is our old friend *ginosko* (see above on 2:4), the knowledge of experience.

The gnostics' major premise was a neatly packaged and absolute dualism which placed an irreconcilable gulf between what they considered "spiritual" and what they saw as "material."

According to the gnostic, all spirit was good, all matter was evil. Since God is spirit, they arrived by deduction at the knowledge that God is also righteous.

John's challenge is in effect, "If God is righteous, and you are begotten of Him, then you know by experience, even in this world of matter, that the sons of God are also righteous." This strikes at the heart of the gnostic's conclusion that the physical behavior of the individual was unrelated to his spiritual relationship to God.

For the sake of testing our own claim to Divine Sonship, we must give special attention to the word *dikaios*, righteous. It is conformity to the Divine Standard of right.

No man by his own strength ever succeeded in conforming to the perfect morality prescribed in the law. ". . . for to will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not." (Rom. 7:18) This is the lot of all men. (Cf. Rom. 3:23) It is only by being begotten of God that any person measures up to the divine standard of righteousness. Righteous behavior proves that one has been begotten of the Righteous God.

The "new morality" of our day does not accept the moral absolutes established by God and taught in the ten commandments. Its standard of right is rather a tolerant and considerate attitude toward others in any given set of circumstances. John's language in this verse will not allow one who is begotten of God to forfeit the divine standard for his own.

The contrast between the divine standard of morality and the subjective existentialism of the new morality is seen in the contrast of two Greek synonyms for moral goodness, *Dikaios*, is righteousness measured by divine standard, *agathos*, is goodness regarded as perfect in its own kind, so as to produce pleasure and satisfaction for the advantage of the person coming in contact with it.

The "new morality" is not new at all. It is the "walk of the Gentiles," (Eph. 2:2) determined by what is popular. The behavior of one begotten of God is determined rather by the awareness that "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them." (Eph. 2:10)

E. *Questions for Review*

1. In the first cycle of tests presented in I John, the author tests fellowship with God as _____.
2. In the present cycle of tests, introduced in Chapter two, verse 29, he tests fellowship with God as _____.
3. In testing fellowship as walking in the light, the proof lies in our _____.
4. In testing fellowship as divine sonship, the proof lies in our outward _____.
5. The outward test of personal righteousness corresponds to our attitude toward _____.
6. The outward test of behavior toward our brothers corresponds to our inward attitude of _____ for them.
7. Our open confession of Jesus as the Christ corresponds to our inward _____.
8. In chapter two, verse 29, the idea of _____ is introduced for the first time in I John.
9. The fellowship with which John is concerned in this book is another word for _____.
10. What is the proof presented in Chapter two, verse 29 as the natural result of having been begotten of God?
11. What is the meaning of righteousness as used in this verse?
12. What is the difference between the righteousness practiced by the sons of God and the subjective "goodness" of the "new morality?"

CHAPTER VIII

*DIVINE SONSHIP TESTED BY
PRACTICING RIGHTEOUSNESS*

(The First Test . . . The Second Time)

I John 3:1-3

A. *The Text*

"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are. For this cause the world knoweth us not, because it knew not him. (2) Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is. (3) And every one that hath this hope set on him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."

B. *Try to Discover*

1. What "manner of love" has God bestowed upon us?
1. Why does the world not know the sons of God?
3. How will seeing Him as He is make us to become like Him?

C. *Paraphrase*

"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us That children of God we should be called, And such we are! Therefore the world understandeth us not, Because it understood not him. (2) Beloved! now are we children of God; And not yet hath it been made manifest what we shall be, We know that if it should be made manifest Like unto him shall we be, Because we shall see him just as he is. (3) And whosoever hath this hope on him Is purifying himself, just as He is pure."

D. *Translation and Comments*

1. Sonship produced by divine love . . . v. 1
- (1) "See what sort of love the Father has given in our behalf, that

we should be called children of God, and we are. On account of this the world is not knowing us, because it did not know Him."

The opening exclamation here, "See what sort of love the Father has given on our behalf" is reminiscent of John 3:16. There John concludes from Jesus' preceding conversation with Nicodemus concerning the new birth; "For God loved the world like this, so that He gave His only begotten Son . . ."

Neither of these verses can be taken as a measure of *how much* God loved. Rather they set forth the *manner* in which that love was brought to bear on our need. John 3:16 concludes that it was "in order that we might not go on perishing but have eternal life." I John 3:1 treats this eternal life in terms of divine sonship resulting from the same manifestation of God's love.

It is not just Calvary, but the entire incarnation experience which brought this love to meet our need and give us the right to become the sons of God. (Cf. John 1:12) The eternal Word of God left the gold-decked streets of Heaven where His praises are sung continually for the stinking disease-ridden streets of a fifth-rate planet. Here he was mocked and betrayed and denied and spit upon by those whose best are not worthy to stoop down and untie His sandals! And He did it that we might be called and indeed become the children of His Father!

How ridiculous it is that the emptying of Himself (Phil. 2:6-8) should become the very reason for His being rejected by those for whom He emptied Himself! But it has ever been so. His contemporary countrymen rejected Him because they could not accept a Galilean carpenter as the Son of God. The gnostic could not accept His humanity without rejecting His deity. And today's pseudo-intellectual denies His unique Sonship to go in quest of "the Jesus of history."

If God's sense of humor is as great as His love, He must double over with laughter at the stupidity of those who profess themselves to be wise!

Looking back on some sixty years as a child of God, John is still astounded at the privilege. The humility of Christ in the incarnation, as well as the awful price paid in the cross to grant this privilege remains beyond human comprehension.

This amazement on the part of the apostle stands out in vivid contrast to the self-asserting assumption by many of our day that all men are the children of God. In the presence of such pious platitudes as the "fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man," it is well to remind

ourselves that brotherhood is the result of a common fatherhood, rather than an easy going tolerance. We need also to remember that divine sonship does not rest upon "the will of the flesh, nor the will of man, but of God." (John 1:13)

To be a child of God one must receive Jesus. (John 1:12) This is precisely what the gnostic could not do. His prejudice concerning the incompatibility of spirit and matter made it impossible for him to believe that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1:14)

It sounds lofty today to talk about God's love to all men, and to assume that all men are therefore His sons. However, to remain outside the pale of this love, as it is focused upon our need of redemption in the incarnation, is to fall into the same trap as the gnostic and hence, fail ever to become a child of God!

2. Present situation and future hope . . . v. 2

(2) "Beloved now we are children of God, and it is not yet demonstrated what we shall be. We know that as He shall be openly demonstrated we shall get to be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is."

One of the weakest areas of understanding in the minds of most modern Christians about eternal life is the failure to realize that it is a present reality. How many times we hear faithful men pray, "At last in Heaven save us."

The final hope of Heaven is not to be decried, but we gravely err when we assume that salvation and eternal life are something for which we must wait until death puts an end to everything else.

We are *now* the sons of God. The life that vibrated in the being of the Incarnate Word and could not be held by death is ours *here*. It begins when we are begotten of God through faith (I John 1:5). It begins to grow toward fruition when we are born again. (John 3:5) We have here and now ceased being mere creatures of God as Creator and have become sons of God as Father.

It is true that this present situation is only the beginning, but it is the beginning. We are *now* the sons of God. Eternal life *has begun* for those begotten of God.

"... it is not yet made manifest what we shall be." (I John 3:2) "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." (II Cor. 2:9) We are indeed presently His children, but what we shall be in eternity is not yet made known.

The answer to Job's question, "If a man die shall he live again," is ours. Paul's passage in I Cor. 15:35-ff assures us that in the real world these bodies now limited by corruption and dishonor and weakness shall be raised in incorruption and glory and power. As we have borne the image of Adam, so shall we bear the image of the risen Christ. As we have experienced the natural, so shall we experience the spiritual. We shall be raised incorruptible or we shall be changed at His coming. But to what? Paul's statement leaves us with a rather negative understanding as to what we shall not be. But what shall we be?

John, as Paul, had seen the risen Christ, yet neither could tell what He was like. It was enough to know that He was real, that He had conquered death, and that those who remain faithful to Him shall also overcome death. But what lies beyond?

We only know that ". . . if He shall be revealed, we shall get to be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is." He became as we are that we might become as He is.

The seed is planted in our hearts. It sprouts and grows and buds here and now. But in eternity in His presence it shall blossom into full glory, incorruptible, undefiled and unfading. (Cf. I Peter 1:4)

3. The result of the hope . . . v. 3

(3) "And everyone having this hope resting upon his is purifying himself just as that one is pure."

Whoever lives in the awareness of this future glory portrays in his moral conduct a purity corresponding to the hope. As our eternal lives begin here and now, so does our reflection of the image of God in Christ. (Cf. Rom. 8:29) Not even the Apostles could boast that they had already attained this image perfectly. (Cf. Phil. 3:13) But the hope set upon us by Divine Sonship and the promise of even richer blessings in the future life causes us to consider all else as loss. (Cf. Phil. 3:7) Moral purity becomes our constant goal because we are God's sons.

This is in striking opposition to the gnostic idea that one who was begotten of God could, perhaps should, live a life of debauchery in order to demonstrate that his spirit was not to be touched by physical behavior. Divine Sonship that is real rather than imaginary, that results from total commitment to the Incarnate Word, always produces an increasingly purer manner of life.

E. *Questions for Review*

1. Neither I John 3:1 nor John 3:16 can be taken as a measure of

how much God loves us. They are rather intended to set forth the

2. Eternal life, here tested as divine sonship, results from the same _____.
3. Not just Calvary, but the entire _____ brought God's love to bear upon our need.
4. The contemporary countrymen of Jesus rejected Him because they could not accept a _____ as God's Son.
5. The gnostic could accept the humanity of Jesus without rejecting His _____.
6. How does the modern "pseudo-intellectual" rejection of the deity of Jesus follow the same pattern as the Jews and the gnostics?
7. What is John's constant reaction to the awareness that he is a son of God?
8. How is this amazement contrasted to the modern philosophy of the "fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man?"
9. Brotherhood results from common_____.
10. To become a child of God one must _____ (John 1:12)
11. When does eternal life begin?
12. When do we begin to be the sons of God?
13. What light does I Cor. 15:35-ff throw on I John 3:2?
14. How does the awareness of present sonship and future glory affect the lives of the children of God?
15. Is one a child of God because he is righteous, or is righteousness the result of divine sonship?

CHAPTER IX

FURTHER APPLICATION OF THE FIRST TEST

I John 3:4-10

A. The Text

"Every one that doeth sin doeth also lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. (5) And ye know that he was manifested to take away sins; and in him is no sin. (6) Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither knoweth him. (7) My little children,

let no man lead you astray: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous: (8) he that doeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. To this end was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. (9) Whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin, because his seed abideth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is begotten of God. (10) In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother."

B. *Try to Discover*

1. If we are not under law, how is sin considered lawlessness?
2. Is it impossible for a child of God to sin?
3. How does the "seed" of God remain in the child of God?
4. Who are the children of the devil?
5. What is the basic moral contrast between the life of sin and the life of Divine Sonship?

C. *Paraphrase*

"Whosoever is committing sin Lawlessness he is also committing, and sin is lawlessness; (5) And ye know that He was made manifest—In order that our sins He should take away, And sin in Him is there none. (6) Whosoever in Him doth abide Is not sinning: Whosoever is sinning Hath not seen Him and doth not understand Him. (7) Dear children! let no one lead you astray! He that is doing righteousness is righteous, Just as He is righteous: (8) He that is committing sin is of the adversary, Because from the beginning the adversary is sinning. To this end was the Son of God made manifest, In order that He might undo the works of the adversary. (9) Whosoever hath been born of God is not committing sin, Because a seed of Him within him abideth; And he cannot be committing sin, Because of God hath he been born. (10) Herein are manifest the children of God and the children of the adversary: Whosoever is not doing righteousness is not of God, Nor yet he that is not loving his brother."

D. *Translation and Comments*

1. Divine Sonship contrary to sin on the basis of God's authority . . . v.4

(4) "Everyone doing sin is also doing lawlessness."

All sin is contrary to the authority of God. It may be in open rebellion against that authority expressed in law or it may be completely without regard to the law. In either case sin is fundamentally "I want" rather than "Thy will be done."

God's original plan for man was that man should be "holy and without blemish." (Eph. 1:4) To be holy (Greek: *hagios*) is to be committed, dedicated or set apart to God. To be without blemish is to be morally pure as a result of this holiness.

Lawlessness is the opposite of holiness. It is disregard for the will and authority of God. It always results in immoral behavior, which is the opposite of being without blemish.

God's plan was that man, being completely committed to Himself and consequently pure, should be His children. (Eph. 1:5) This sonship was to be by adoption rather than by right of natural birth.

There is an element of choice in adoption that is lacking in natural birth. This choice is the choice of love. Consequently Divine Sonship results from God's love rather than from necessity.

Here, as Barclay so aptly points out, is the difference between paternity and fatherhood. Paternity indicates a father's responsibility for a child's physical existence. Fatherhood indicates a relationship based on love and circumscribed by parental authority.

Since sin is lawlessness, it is opposed to the fundamental idea of holiness upon which the adoption to Divine Sonship depends. Therefore, anyone claiming to be a child of God is morally obligated to avoid sin.

2. The purpose of Jesus' mission, as well as His character forbids sin in the life of a child of God . . . v. 5-7

a. The purpose for which the Word was manifested . . . v. 5

(5) "And you know that that One revealed in order that He might take away sins, and sin is not in Him."

The purpose for which "the Word was manifested" (I John 1:2) was in order that He might take away sins.

When man chose to place his will at the center of his behavior, either in direct disobedience to God's authority or without regard for it; he was no longer "without blemish." With his holiness and purity destroyed man was no longer qualified for the adoption to Divine Sonship. The entire purpose of God in man stood in jeopardy.

God's plan, made in eternity "before the foundation of the world,"

was made "in Him." (Eph. 1:4) The eternal Christ was responsible for the accomplishment of God's purpose.

When sin entered the human stream and became a road-block in the way of accomplishment for the Divine purpose, the Christ must remove it. This is the meaning of Calvary. This is the purpose of His coming, "that He might take away sin."

In order to accomplish this purpose, He must Himself remain unstained by sin. Thus, the character of the only begotten Son became a clear demonstration that sin is incompatible with Divine Sonship.

b. The secret of sinless life . . . v.6

(6) "Everyone remaining in Him does not go on sinning. Everyone going on sinning has not seen Him nor known Him."

The secret of Jesus' sinless life is revealed in His prayer in Gethsemane, "Not my will, thine be done." This is genuine holiness, and always issues in a pure life.

The secret of sinless living for the children of God is *remaining in Him*. This is John's term for total commitment. So long as our actions are governed by this commitment we do not sin. The moment we forget His presence and begin to seek our own will in the slightest matter we do sin.

Since Divine Sonship depends upon commitment to God's will, one who is His child can not have sin as a habit of his life. John does not deny either the possibility or the fact of occasional sins. He has already said that the denial of such is not according to truth. (Cf. I John 1:8, 10) What he does intend is that sin cannot be the manner of life for a child of God.

Anyone whose life is characterized by habitual sin, who regularly disregards the will and authority of God in his life, has neither seen nor known Jesus.

John *had* seen and known Jesus, and so is able to appeal to experiential knowledge. The gnostics claimed to know Him, but their position in regards to sin was contrary to what John knew from personal experience.

As A. T. Robertson has it, "The habit of sin is proof that one has not the vision or the knowledge of Christ."

c. Righteousness is not theory but practice . . . v.7

(7) "Little children, let no one keep on leading you astray; the one doing righteousness is righteous just as that One is righteous."

Righteousness to John is not theory but practice. Whoever does righteousness is righteous, just as Jesus is righteous.

This ought not be taken as meaning that anyone has attained that standard of moral perfection exemplified by Jesus. Remember, righteousness is concerned with commitment to the standard revealed by God. It is possible to be as committed as was He. It is doubtful that we will ever attain the perfect here, as He attained it.

The important point of this verse is that anyone, who says righteousness consists of anything less than righteous actions, is deceitful. John is concerned that we not be led astray by any philosophy which divorces righteousness from the deeds of our everyday living.

3. Contrast of origins between sin and Divine Sonship . . . v. 8-9

a. The origin of sin . . . v.8

(8) "the one who keeps on sinning is of the devil, because from the beginning the devil is sinning. For this purpose the Son of God was revealed, in order that He might loose the works of the devil."

Sin originates in the devil. This is not an original thought expressed by John; it is as old as the experience of Adam and Eve, perhaps older. John makes no attempt to prove this, he simply reiterates it.

Insight into this truth may be gained by reading Jesus' statement to the Jews; "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do . . ." (John 8:44) In that context it was the Jews who were refusing to accept Jesus for who He is while making the claim to be the people of God. The basis upon which Jesus calls them the sons of the devil is that they were willing to do the desires of the devil. As with God, so with the devil, sonship is circumscribed by parental authority. Those who do the will of the devil are the devil's children just as those who do the will of God are the children of God. The Bible knows no neutral ground between these two opposites.

The devil sins as a matter of principle, or as John has it, "from the beginning." No one can claim to be a child of God while acting like the devil!

Once more John comes back to the purpose of the incarnation. He has just said that Jesus' purpose was to "take away sin." (v.5) Now he says it was "to loose the works of the devil." These are two sides of the same coin. That which is sin is lawlessness (i.e.) contrary to the will and authority of God. The devil is the epitome of such contrary self will. All sin originates in the devil. So to take away sin is to loose the works of the devil. It is the removal of all which stands in the way of God's eternal purpose to have a holy, blemishless family in Christ. Divine

Sonship, then, is clearly seen as opposed to sin in light of the origin of sin.

b. The origin of Divine Sonship . . . v.9

(9) "Everyone having been begotten of God is not doing sin, because His seed is remaining in him and to go on sinning is not possible to him, because he has been begotten of God."

Just as sin originates in the devil and so is the manner of life for the devil's children, so righteousness originates in God and is the manner of life for God's children. Those who have been begotten of God do not have sin as a manner of life.

Once again we must remember that John does not say it is impossible for a child of God to commit a sin. Rather he does say that sin cannot be the habit of life for one whose actions find their source in God as Father. This is clearly seen in the use of the present tense here by John.

Just as James said, "Doth the same fountain send forth from the same opening sweet water and bitter?" (James 3:11) So the life which takes its source in the divine begetting cannot issue in actions based on disregard for the authority of God.

4. Contrast between lives of sin and righteousness reveal children of God and the devil . . . v. 10

(10) "In this is revealed the children of God and the children of the devil. Everyone not doing righteousness is not of God; also everyone not loving his brother."

"By their fruits ye shall know them." (Matt. 7:16) This lesson taught by Jesus was well-learned by His friend, John. Any individual whose life shows disregard for God's will and authority as a matter of basic principle, is not of God. High and lofty claims such as those made by the gnostic are not the test. A man's everyday life reveals him to be either a child of God or a child of the devil.

This is not a very popular doctrine in an age which is trying desperately to remove all distinction between the Christian life and the life of the world. It is still true, nevertheless.

Since righteousness is fundamentally the doing of God's will, the keeping of His commandments, it is not strange to find John including love of one's brothers as a matter of moral righteousness. He has already established love as the supreme commandment of God. (I John 2:7-11) Failure to love one's Christian brother is as unrighteous and

immoral as adultery, murder, or the overt infraction of any of God's other commandments!

E. *Questions for Review*

1. All sin is contrary to God's authority. It may be either _____ or without _____.
2. God's original plan was to have a family of children who were _____ and without _____. (Eph. 1:4)
3. The word holy as used in the N.T. means _____.
4. To be without blemish is to be _____ as a result of holiness.
5. The opposite of holiness is _____.
6. Lawlessness always results in _____ behavior.
7. What is the difference between paternity and fatherhood?
8. The purpose for which Christ came is stated two ways in this passage. What are they?
9. Who was originally responsible for the accomplishment of God's purpose in man?
10. How does the character of Jesus demonstrate the need for righteousness in the lives of God's children?
11. What is the secret of Jesus' sinless life?
12. Total commitment always issues in a _____ life.
13. What does John mean by "remaining in Him?"
14. Righteousness to John is not theory but _____.
15. What is the origin of all sin?
16. Does the Bible attempt to prove there is a devil?
17. What is the basis upon which Jesus said some are children of the devil? (John 8:44)
18. What is the origin of righteousness?

DIVINE SONSHIP PROVEN BY ACTIVE LOVE

(The Second Test . . . The Second Time)

I John 3:11-24

A. *The Text*

“For this is the message which ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another: (12) not as Cain was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his works were evil, and his brother’s righteous. (13) Marvel not, brethren, if the world hateth you. (14) We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the bretheren. He that loveth not abideth in death. (15) Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. (16) Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (17) But whoso hath the world’s goods and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him? (18) My little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth. (19) Hereby shall we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before him: (20) because if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. (21) Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, we have boldness toward God; (22) and whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight. (23) And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, even as he gave us commandment. (24) And he that keepeth his commandments abideth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he gave us.”

B. *Try to Discover*

1. What is the relation of command to love (3:11), to God as light (1:5) since both are presented as summary of the divine message?

2. How does the first murder demonstrate the effect of hate on the one hating?
3. Can a Christian ever be liked by the world? Explain. (Compare I John 3:13 and Acts 2:47)
4. When do Christians pass from death to life?
5. How can one be a murderer without killing anyone?
6. What is the relationship of love to need?
7. How do one's actions prove or disprove one's claim to Divine Sonship?
8. Should a Christian ever feel guilty to the point of self-condemnation?
9. Why are so many prayers seemingly unanswered?
10. What is Christian behavior in matters where there is no express commandment of God?
11. How does the experience of answered prayer have any bearing on John's argument that Jesus is indeed the Christ?
12. How does the habit of believing Christ and loving our brothers affirm the deity of Christ?
13. How does the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives affirm the deity of Christ?

C. *Paraphrase*

"Because this is the message which ye have heard from the beginning—That we should be loving one another, (12) Not just as Cain was of the wicked one and slew his brother! And for what cause slew he him? Because his works were wicked, Whereas those of his brother were righteous. (13) Be not marvelling, Brethren, if the world is hating you (14) We know that we have passed over out of death into life, Because we love the brethren: He that loveth not abideth in death. (15) Whosoever is hating his brother is a murderer; And ye know that no murderer hath life age-during within him abiding. (16) Hereby have we come to understand love: In that He for us His life laid down, And we ought for the brethren our lives to lay down. (17) But whoso hath this world's goods And beholdeth his brother having need, And shutteth up his tender affections from him How is the love of God abiding in him? (18) Dear children! Let us not be loving in word nor yet with the tongue, But in deed and truth. (19) Hereby shall we get to know that of the truth we are, And before Him shall persuade our heart; (20)

Because if our own heart condemn us Greater is God than our heart, and perceiveth all things. (21) Beloved! if our heart be not condemning us Boldness have we towards God; (22) And whatsoever we are asking we are receiving from Him, Because his commandments are we keeping And the things that are pleasing before Him are we doing. (23) And this is His commandment, That we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ And be loving one another—Just as He gave a commandment unto us. (24) And he that keepeth His commandments In Him abideth And He in him. And hereby perceive we That He abideth in us, By reason of the Spirit which unto us He hath given.”

D. *Translation and Comments*

1. Reiteration of the Gospel in summary . . . v.11

(11) “Because this is the message which you heard from (the) beginning, that we should be loving one another;”

This is the second time in I John that the entire meaning of the incarnation has been condensed as a single message. In 1:5, the summary is: “God is light.” Here the message is summarized: “That we should love one another.”

In the first instance, the summary concerns the nature of God. In this present text the abbreviated message concerns the practical outworking of God-likeness in His children. Just as God as light is the source of life to those who walk in the light, so we are to practice love in such a way as to bring and sustain life in others. (See comment on I John 1:5. *i.e.*, love illustrated by the process of photo-synthesis)

It is the nature of the life which we have in God to become as source of life to others. (Cf. John 4:14) This is done only when we love one another.

“From the beginning,” in this verse, goes back at least to the time of Cain and Abel. The new commandment is indeed old! (Cf. I John 2:7-8)

2. The example of Cain proves the world hates those who practice righteousness . . . v. 12-13

a. The example of Cain . . . reason for the first murder . . . v. 12

(12) “not as Cain was of the evil one and slaughtered his brother. And for what reason did he slaughter him? Because his works were evil, and the ones of his brother righteous.”

Note the interplay here between love and righteousness. Righteous-

ness keeps God's commandments: the commandment is to love. No one is righteous who does not love!

There is nothing so violent as the inter-reaction which takes place when righteousness and sin meet. When the righteousness of God meets the sin of man, the result is called the wrath of God. (Cf. Romans 1:18-ff) When righteousness in men meets unrighteousness in men, the result is murder!

The first demonstration of this truth is in the murder of Abel by Cain. John says it explicitly, "And for what reason did he slay him? Because his works were evil and the ones of his brother righteous."

b. The world may hate us also . . . v. 13

(13) "Stop marveling, brothers, if the world is hating you."

Since the confrontation between righteousness and unrighteousness normally results in murder, we ought not be surprised if the world hates us. John will shortly show that hate is, after all, tantamount to murder. Since love is righteousness because it is obedience to God's command, love may be expected to be crucified! Is not this what happened to our Lord?

John does not say that everyone in the world will always hate everyone who practices Christian love. Indeed many instances may be cited from the scriptures to prove otherwise. However, since hate is the natural reaction of unrighteousness to love, we ought not be surprised when it happens.

3. Love is evidence of life . . . v. 14

(14) "We know that we have passed over out of death into life, because we are loving the brothers. The one not loving is remaining in death."

The practice of loving the children of God is evidence that we have *already* passed out of death into life. To state it another way; when we have, as the normal course of our lives, the giving of ourselves to our brothers in such a way as to sustain life in them, we know we have passed out of death into life.

Here, again, is testimony of scripture that eternal life is not something that takes place *only* on the other side of physical death. Rather it begins here and now. Love for one another proves eternal life is a present reality.

A word of caution is needed here. Love as *evidence* of life does not mean our own loving *causes* us to live. We do not live *because* we love;

we love because we live in Him. A man who does not love is a dead man. The man who does love, and so gives life to others, is alive.

4. Just as loving gives life; hating takes life . . . v. 15-18

- a. Whoever hates is a manslayer and does not have eternal life . . . v. 15

(15) "Everyone who is hating his brother is a manslayer, and you already know that every manslayer is not having eternal life remaining in him."

Just as darkness is the absence of light; hate is the absence of love. As does the absence of light, so does the absence of love result in death.

One does not need to uproot or chop down a plant to kill it, he need merely shut off the light. Likewise, one need not actually shoot or stab his brother to become a killer. He need only withhold the love which gives life.

Meseo, here translated hate, means simply *indifference*. It is the absence of the self-giving concern called love. It is the failure to become involved in the *needs* of our brothers.

In realizing that one who hates his brother is a manslayer, a taker of human life, we must bear in mind that the tests of life presented in I John are subjective. John is primarily concerned with what the absence of love does to the person who fails to practice it. The effect of hate is subjectively the same whether one actually kills or merely withholds the means of life.

John's point here is that the failure to love is proof of the absence of life. A murderer is not only a taker or withholder of life, he is himself a dead man!

- b. The proof of love is not words but deeds . . . v. 16-18

(16) "In this we have come to know love, because He, in our behalf, laid down His life; we ought also, in behalf of the brothers, to go on laying down our lives. (17) Whoever may be having the necessities of the life of the world and may see his brother having need and shuts up his affections from him, how is the love of God remaining in Him? (18) Children, let us not go on loving by word, neither with the tongue, but in work and reality."

We know love only through the incarnation, and especially through Calvary. In all the pre-Christian Papiri on which Koine Greek was written, the word *agape* (love) has been found less than ten times. Such

self-effacement to meet the needs of others, regardless of their response, was virtually unknown before Christ.

Our awareness of this love, and especially since we have come to know it as the supreme will of God for man, carries with it the moral obligation to demonstrate it as He demonstrated it. The world of men will only come to know love as we know it when they see it in us as we saw it in Him.

How are we to do this? John says we are to be constantly ready to lay down our lives as He laid down His; not as a martyr, but in the presence of need and for the purpose of giving and sustaining life. Laying down our lives, in this sense, involves *living* for others more than *dying* for them.

Giving our lives, which must be themselves redeemed by His life, obviously cannot be the means of atonement for others. Only Christ can do this. However, the same love which motivated Him can be shown to the world when we give what we possess of the necessities of life to sustain the temporal life of others.

What He did on the higher plain in His atoning death, we do on the lower plain when we give our means of livelihood to assure the necessities of temporal life to others. John's question is rhetorical. The life of Christ does not remain in the person who withholds the necessities of life from another.

John is not talking about the giving of our surplus to meet the needs of others. That is not love. It is not even giving. It is only when we give the means of sustaining our own lives to sustain the lives of others that we are following the example of Christ.

Jesus did not give a spare life, He gave the only one He had. The widow who gave the mite had learned the lesson of love. She gave what she needed to meet the needs of others.

The reason this is so necessary in assuring our own life is made clear in Jesus statement, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these, my brethren, (*even*) these least, ye did it unto me." (Matt. 25:40) When we consider that this statement was made by Jesus in reference to the final judgment, it becomes evident that giving is literally a matter of life and death; life and death, not only for the recipient, but for the giver also. It really is "more blessed to give than to receive!"

According to Matthew 25:44, there are going to be some surprised people at the judgment; lost because they never learned to demonstrate their love by giving treasure rather than talk.

The word "children" in verse 18 is intended to call attention to the claim of Divine Sonship. This claim is proven by active love for our brothers in His family. If it is not so proven, Divine Sonship does not, in fact, exist at all.

5. Love of our brothers issues in full confidence of our own sonship . . . v. 19-22

a. Knowledge of our own situation, and consequent assurance before God results from love rather than words . . . v. 19

(19) "In this we shall get to know that we are of reality and before Him we shall assure our heart."

Contemplation of one's actual relationship to God, in terms of eternal life and eternal death is a staggering experience. It can result either in the most hollow dismay or the most joyous confidence of the future.

Arrival at a reassuring conclusion in such vital personal invoice is determined by facts rather than fancy. If we actually give beyond our means for the sake of bringing life to others, we have tangible evidence that our own situation is as it ought to be. The conclusion can now be reached on the basis of fact instead of philosophy or feeling.

This assurance is not intended to bring us to a smug self-righteousness, but to a calm inner confidence which John calls boldness. The experience of loving is the expeller of doubts.

b. God's infinite knowledge linked with His mercy and compassion . . . v. 20

(20) "because if our heart should know (something) against us, God is greater than our heart and is knowing everything."

Any honest person can think of a million reasons why God should not claim him as His child. For this reason, many people will never say "I am a Christian." When asked if he is a Christian, such a person will reply, "I hope so" or "I'd like to be." This fearful and negative evaluation of self by one who actually does strive to obey God, to face his own guilt, to love his brothers, and to hold fast his faith in Jesus Christ, is totally unnecessary.

No child of God has any right to a guilt complex. Even though he may hold in the recesses of his heart the remembrance of the most heinous sin, one begotten of Him need not live in constant horror of death or terror of facing God.

Even if our heart knows something real and terrible against us, God is greater than our hearts. God knows both the deed and the reason. He does not make excuses for our guilt, and neither should we. But He

does make propitiation for our guilt in the blood of Christ, and we cannot but accept it. No matter how terrible the sin nor how far reaching the hurt, when it is given over to God to be washed away by the blood of Calvary, we have no right to hold it any longer as our own.

We said earlier that one of the greatest blessings of the Christian life is realized forgiveness. In verse 20, we have come face to face with the reason this is so.

The incidence of suicide among church members is evidence of how desperately we need to realize the mercy and compassion of God toward one who is acutely aware of his own guilt. How desperately we need to practice this mercy and compassion toward one another! Otherwise how does the love of God abide in us?

c. Understanding of verse 20 results in assurance before God . . .
v. 21

(21) "Beloved, if our heart should not know anything against us, we are having boldness toward God,"

Because all have sinned, there is no basis upon which an honest person's heart can keep from condemning him, save in the realization of the mercy and compassion of God. When we do realize this, our hearts no longer condemn us.

We must not delude ourselves. The *mercy* and *compassion* of God, as well as the *cleansing* from that for which our hearts condemn us, are to be had only in the confession of our guilt. (I John 1:8-9) We ought never assume that forgiveness is ours because we have rationalized away our guilt by blaming the pressures of life for our sins.

Nevertheless, when, in the realization of forgiveness, our hearts no longer condemn us, we may indeed walk tall and straight as children of God. There are no second class sons in His family!

d. The fact of answered prayer is evidence of the deity of Jesus
. . . v. 22

(22) "and whatever we may ask we are receiving from Him because we are keeping His commandments and the things pleasing in His sight we are doing."

If prayer in His name is answered, it is evidence that Jesus is indeed who He claimed to be. If Jesus is not God, and therefore unable to answer prayer, it is absurd to pray in His name.

To the first century Christian, answered prayer was a common occurrence. It was an experience so normal that it could be cited as evidence

of Jesus' deity. This is obviously not the case among modern Christians, so John's argument here is weakened.

Perhaps the reason real prayer is a rare commodity in the average "New Testament" congregation today is that we have lost sight of the conditions upon which prayer is answered. Too much contemporary prayer is merely the vain repetition of pious platitudes and selfish desires. Often our prayers sound more like ordering a meal in a restaurant than they sound like "letting our request be made known of God." (Phil. 4:6)

John reminds his readers that the two-fold circumstance within which prayer is answered has to do with the life of the one praying rather than the form of the prayer. The common attitude of one's everyday life must seek the will of God in all things.

First, it must be the predisposition of our lives to keep His commandments. Whenever we are confronted with a specific command, our immediate response must be willing obedience.

Secondly, in areas of life where there is no "thus saith the Lord," the habitual course of action must be motivated by the desire to be well pleasing to God.

With these two conditions fulfilled, prayer in Jesus' name becomes a mighty means, not of getting our will done in Heaven, but God's will done on earth, and particularly in our own personal lives. When a totally committed person goes to his knees in such an attitude, he can rise from prayer with the full assurance that whatever he has asked is his.

Such prayer is so common an everyday experience of those totally committed to God in Christ that the experience can be used as evidence of the truth of the Gospel. There is no question whether prayer will be answered. Rather the frequency of answered prayer becomes a confirmation of faith. Where this is not true, total commitment is obviously lacking.

A. T. Robertson has summed it up incisively, "In form no limitations are placed here (on prayer) save that of complete fellowship, which means complete surrender of our will to that of God our Father."

e. The two-fold commandment confronting Christians in the context of the gnostic crisis . . . v. 23-24

(23) "and this is the commandment of Him, that we should believe the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and that we should love one another

just as He gave us commandment. (24) And the one keeping His commandments is remaining in Him and He in him; and in this we are knowing that we are remaining in Him, from the spirit which He has given us."

Repeatedly in I John we are reminded that the child of God must habitually "keep His commandments." Obedience is to be the normal response of his life to his Father. This was easily understood in the patriarchal society of that day. The father's word was law in any household, and to say that God was Father brought to mind first of all His authority.

This is in contrast to the image of sentimental overindulgence which so often comes to mind when the word "father" is mentioned in our society. We have unseated the father, where authority is concerned, and have replaced him with the unfettered self-expression of the individual. In so doing we have made it very difficult to think of God as Father in the way the first century Christian thought of Him in this role.

Nevertheless, it is required in all ages that the child of God, confronted with a command from the Father, obey at once and without question.

In the gnostic crisis, the commands which the Father sets before His children are *believe* and *love*. Obedience to the first is necessary if the Christian Gospel is to survive at all. Obedience to the second is necessary if the family of God is to remain united rather than torn asunder by the quarrel over the gnostic heresy.

Faith must have an object. The Christian faith has as its object the personal identity of Jesus of Nazareth as the Eternal Christ, the Son of God. "The name" of a person stands for all that he is. To believe "the name of His Son Jesus Christ," is to believe that He is Who He is and Who He has ever been from eternity.

It is very popular, in some pseudo-intellectual circles among present day theologians, to say that the important thing is to confront men with the question, "Whom say *Ye* that I am;" that the answer is entirely subjective and therefore of secondary importance.

John will have none of this. Rather, he informs us, we are commanded to believe "the name of His Son Jesus Christ."

The translation of this verse which reads, ". . . that we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ," is unfortunate. The phrase *to onomati tou hui ou* (translated "in the name of") does not contain the preposition *en* (in). The construction is in the dative case! The case of

personal interest. When it is used, as here, as the direct object of a verb it is done for a reason, since the normal case of the direct object is the accusative.

Other passages, where the English has *in*, or *on* His name, use the Greek *eis*, (literally into). (For examples, read I John 5:13, John 1:12, 2:23, and 3:18) The point is that John's grammar in this verse makes the command a very personal matter. He is not concerned with formal creedal statements drawn up by councils, as was done at Nicea some time later to settle the gnostic controversy. John is concerned with personal individual conviction that the man, Jesus of Nazareth, is *de facto*, the unique Son of God.

The second command confronting the child of God in the gnostic crisis is that we love one another. To understand the vital necessity of obedience to this command, we must keep in mind the prayer of Christ (John 17) and the insistence of the apostles, (eg. Eph. 4:1-5) that the church must be united if it is ever to do the will of God or be worthy of the call of the Gospel.

The controversy brought about by the introduction of gnosticism was furious, and a century after John wrote it, threatened to tear the church permanently asunder. John insists that the protagonists must love one another.

The command obviously applies first of all to those who are on the side of truth! This is no easy command to heed in the face of false teaching, especially when we remember that love is the complete giving of one's self to another for the other's benefit and regardless of his reaction to us.

Nevertheless, love is still the only hope of healing the breaches which have been brought about in the family of God by the introduction of false teaching. And the command must be first of all obeyed by those who are on the side of truth. I Corinthians 13 is particularly apropos in controversy. It is in such a situation that love is evidence of Divine Sonship.

It is only in the keeping of these two commandments, to *believe* and to *love*, that we remain in Him. Except we believe He is Who He is and our attitude toward our brothers is what His is, we are not actually in Him at all.

Being in Him and He in us recalls at once the truth mentioned above in connection with I John 2:18-27. He is the Anointed One. We have also been anointed by the gift of the Spirit when we were baptized into

Him. (Compare Acts 2:38-39 and Galatian 3:27) We share with Him in the Family of God through this anointing. So, says John, "We are knowing that we are remaining in Him, from the Spirit which He has given us."

E. Questions for Review

1. The second summary of the message of the incarnation in I John 3:11 is _____.
2. It is the nature of the life which we have in Christ to become a source of _____ to others.
3. This is accomplished when we _____.
4. How does the murder of Abel by Cain demonstrate that the world is prone to hate those who practice righteousness?
5. The confrontation of righteousness by unrighteousness *normally* results in _____.
6. Because love is obedience to God it is also _____.
7. When does a Christian "pass out of death into life?"
8. Do we love because we have eternal life, or do we have eternal life because we love?
9. Hate is the absence of _____ just as _____ is the absence of light.
10. The word translated hate in I John 3:15 means _____.
11. Failure to love is proof of the absence of _____.
12. How does the world become aware of love as we know it in Christ?
13. How do we demonstrate divine love in such a way that it is recognizable?
14. Just as He brought eternal life in the presence of our need, so we are to give _____ in the presence of temporal needs.
15. Does giving what we can afford demonstrate divine love? Explain.
16. Many will be surprised in the judgment, who expect to be saved, because they have not learned to give _____ rather than _____.
17. How may we have assurance before God, even when our hearts condemn us?

18. Explain the statement, "No Christian has any right to a guilt complex."
19. One of the greatest blessings of the Christian life is realized forgiveness. Explain this statement in light of I John 3:20.
20. The only basis upon which one's heart can fail to condemn him is _____.
21. The experience of answered prayer is evidence of _____ according to I John 3:22.
22. What are the two conditions which must be present in our lives in order to pray effectively?
23. When the word "father" was mentioned in the society of the first century, the first impression was of parental _____.
24. Why does the term "father" not suggest authority to us today?
25. Which is more important, the question, "Who is Jesus," or our personal belief in the answer, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God?"
26. _____ is still the only hope of healing the divisions caused by false teaching.
27. How does the anointing of the Spirit demonstrate that we are in the Christ?

CHAPTER XI

DIVINE SONSHIP DEMONSTRATED BY CONFESSION OF CHRIST AND ATTENTION TO TRUTH

(The Third Test . . . The Second Time)

I John 4:1-6

A. *The Text*

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world. (2) Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: (3) and every

spirit that confesseth not Jesus is not of God: and this is the spirit of the antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it cometh; and now it is in the world already. (4) Ye are of God, my little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. (5) They are of the world: therefore speak they as of the world, and the world heareth them. (6) We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he who is not of God heareth us not. By this we know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error."

B. *Try to Discover*

1. How does the presence of the Spirit prove we have been begotten of God?
2. Are there preachers (or prophets) who deliberately and knowingly preach what they know to be false?
3. Are men today as conscious of the "spirit world" as they were in the first century?
4. Why is the Spirit apparently not as active in the church today as in John's time?
5. When one denies Jesus as Christ, what is he actually denying?
6. Why will false teachers not listen to truth?
7. Are there people whose concept of life and reality are such that the preaching of the Gospel to them is useless?

C. *Paraphrase*

"Beloved! not in every spirit believe ye, But test the spirits whether they are of God; Because many false prophets have gone out into the world. (2) Hereby do ye perceive the Spirit of God:—Every spirit that confesseth Jesus Christ as having come in flesh Is of God; (3) And every spirit that does not confess Jesus Of God is not. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, Touching which ye have heard that it cometh: Even now is it in the world already. (4) Ye are of God dear children, and have overcome them; Because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. (5) They are of the world: For this cause of the world they speak, And the world unto them doth hearken. (6) We are of God: He that is getting to understand God hearkeneth unto us, Whose is not of God hearkeneth not unto us: From this perceive we—The spirit of truth And the spirit of error."

D. *Comments*

1. Preliminary Remarks

"*Ek tou theou* is translated *of God* in most English versions. The idea is source or origin. Hence I have rendered it *from God*. Literally it may almost be translated *out of God*.

In essence, the phrase expresses the result of having been begotten of God. One who has been begotten of God possesses a life which is from, or out of God. It takes its source or origin in Him and issues from Him.

When John says certain people are not *from God*, we must conclude they they are not begotten of God. When He says certain ones are *from God*, we are to remember that they are begotten of God.

2. Translation and Comments

a. Call from credulity . . . v. 1

(1) "Beloved, stop believing every spirit, but test the spirit if it is from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

The practice of love by a Christian ought never take the form of gullibility. The sons of God are never to be tolerant to the point of being credulous. There *are* false teachers and preachers.

In verse one, John uses the term "beloved" for the third time in this letter. It is not a cliché, but rather expresses genuine endearment. It is John's love for God's children that causes him to warn them of false teachers. Modern disciples of love may well profit from his example!

The outward evidence of the Spirit in the church was much more apparent in John's day than ours. The manifestations of the spirit were so numerous that Paul lists among them the ability to *discern* spirits. (I Cor. 12:10)

In such a situation, the gnostic heresy might pass as another manifestation of the spirit. The claim to special knowledge might be taken as knowing all mysteries and having all knowledge. (I Cor. 13:2) Indeed, such seems to be the case, for John's aorist imperative is "stop believing every spirit."

Attention must be given to the Scriptural meaning of "prophet." Too many have mistakenly thought a prophet to be a glorified fortune teller; a sort of divine crystal ball gazer. Such is not the case, either in the Old Testament or the New.

To be sure, the prophet, in performing his mission often referred to the future. The workings of God in man are primarily future oriented.

However, the watchword of the prophet of God is not "It shall come to pass," but "thus saith the Lord!" The prophet in both the Old and New Testament was to make the will of God known to His people. John's command here is that, before we do what a prophet says God wants us to do, we are to determine if the prophet is actually from God.

The relevancy of I John to our modern theological climate becomes vividly obvious in this verse. The need today for a divine standard by which to determine the truth or falsehood of religious teaching is great. As then, so today, many false prophets have gone out into the world.

b. The acid test . . . v. 2 & 3

(2) "Know in this the Spirit of God; every spirit confessing Jesus as Christ has come in flesh is of God, (3) and every spirit not confessing Jesus is not from God; and this is the one of antichrist, the one of which you have heard that it is coming."

The abundance of spiritual activity in the first century demanded a test, a criterion by which the child of God might determine the validity of any spirit's claim to divine origin. The demand of our present theological climate for such a test is much more subtle but no less urgent.

The acid test supplied by John is the sharp contrast between denying and confessing the co-existent deity and humanity of Jesus. "Every spirit confessing Jesus as Christ has come in flesh is of God."

Contained in this confession is everything that makes the Christian faith unique. The ethical teachings of Jesus can be reproduced, albeit somewhat crudely, from the great pagan religions of the world, but none of these claim for their leaders the incarnate deity which John claims for the Man of Galilee.

To confess Jesus as Christ is to say that Jesus is anointed by God to fill the office of Messiah. He is therefore recognized as prophet; the One Who is to make God's will known to God's people. He is recognized as priest; the One Who offers sacrifice and mediates between God and man. He is King; the final and absolute Ruler Whose word is law for God's people.

It is not enough to confess that a man named Jesus lived, and lived a sinless life, and died rather than renounce His own teaching. He is to be confessed as Christ; the long awaited fulfillment of the covenant.

Nor is it enough to confess that a man named Jesus was anointed as Messiah. He is to be confessed as having come in flesh. John 1:14 is perhaps the most concise statement possible of the essence of Christian

faith. The man Jesus, whom we confess as Christ, is not of human origin.

He is eternal, He was with God in the relationship of an equal, He is Himself Deity. (Cf. John 1:1) In order to accomplish the eternal purpose of God in man, He bought man's redemption with His own blood. (Cf. Eph. 1:7) To do this He became flesh, (Cf. John 1:14), thus identifying Himself with those He came to redeem. (Cf. Hebrews 2:14-18)

It is in the capacity of Divine Redeemer that He voluntarily submitted Himself to learn obedience as a servant (Cf. Hebrews 5:8), emptying Himself of His Heavenly nature to die as a man for men. (Phil. 2:6-8)

To be recognized as originating in God; to be Christian, the message of a prophet must set forth this vital truth about the personal identity of Jesus of Nazareth. It is not enough that the prophet *claim* special enlightenment, either in the form of gnosticism or in the form of intellectual snobbery which refuses to recognize scholarship in anyone who still clings to the good confession.

The testing of the spirits is not, on the other hand, to be made on the basis of what may pass for spiritual activity. The fact that someone may speak in a tongue or heal by the laying on of hands is not proof of divine origin. The test is in the submission of the activity to the Christhood and especially the authority of Jesus as recorded in the inspired record. No matter what a person's spiritual exercise, if he does not recognize and submit to revealed doctrine, his message is not of God.

Again John returns to the spirit of antichrist as the antithesis of Divine Sonship. Again we are reminded of Jesus' own words, "He that is not with me is against me." (Matthew 12:30) (a) Whoever is not confessing that Jesus as Christ has come in flesh is against the anointed ones of God. (See above on I John 2:18-19)

Significantly, in light of modern confusion concerning "The Anti-Christ," John here employs the neuter "it" in reference to the spirit of antichrist, rather than the masculine "he." This would seem to indicate that the spirit of antichrist is the predisposition on the part of all false prophets to oppose God's anointed ones, rather than a personal monster who is to make a dramatic appearance at the end of the present age.

c. Contrast of origins and the consequent contrast of responses
 ... v. 4 & 5

(4) "You are from God, children, and you have overcome them, because the One in you is greater than the one in the world. (5) They are from the world: on account of this they are speaking of worldly (things), and the world is hearing them."

The living Spirit of God is greater than the spirit of the world which in fact is no spirit at all! The Spirit in the children of God is the Holy Spirit; the Third Person of the Godhead. The spirit in the world is, at best, a prejudiced opposition to God's anointed ones on the basis of ignorance and self-worship.

Consequently, the children of God have the assistance of God Himself in their stand against the false prophets, whereas the false prophets are "on their own." It is small wonder that Christians are instructed in the Scripture to be confident of certain victory so long as they remain faithful to Him who sent the Spirit. (Cf. John 16:33)

Just as our anointing guards us from the doctrines of false teachers, (see above on 2:27) so the same anointing guarantees us victory over them. The reason for this is seen in the phrase "from God" as contrasted with "from the world." The diverse destinies of the contrasting kinds of life are inherent in their contrasting origins. The child of God originates in eternity through the divine begetting. Consequently, the child of God is destined for eternity. As the song says:

*"The soul of man is like a waiting falcon;
 When it's released, it's destined for the skies."*

Conversely, the false teacher (and those who believe him) are from the world. Their begetting is not "of God" but "of blood . . . the will of the flesh . . . the will of man." (Cf. John 1:13) Rather than being "destined for the skies" as are those whose lives find their source in God, they are destined to "pass away." (I John 2:17)

The cliché, "birds of a feather flock together", is proven by the fact that the world gives a ready ear to the false teachers whose origin it shares. The Greek philosophy, the oriental mysticism and the corruption of the Gospel of which gnosticism formed a synthesis all found their origin in the world; not in divine revelation. No wonder, then, that the world heard them gladly.

It is ever so with false teachers. Today's "Christian Atheism—God is Dead" theology finds its origin in German rationalism, obsolete modernism, and Neo-orthodoxy's "crisis theology." These are the speculations

of befuddled, bewildered men. Their origins are in the world, not in Divine revelation.

It is no great marvel, then, that these materialistic babblings are readily accepted by the world. The real tragedy lies in the fact that such teachings are able to make inroads into, and often destroy, congregations where once the Gospel of Christ was center. It is because such congregations have failed to heed the warning of John to "test the spirits" by the tests set forth in these verses.

Contemporary left-wing theology began with the denial of the authenticity of the Bible. The Scriptures are "they which bear witness" of Jesus as Christ having come as flesh. The present denial of a transcendent God is the logical conclusion.

Materialism begets materialistic religion, just as surely as God Who is Spirit begets Spiritual life in His children. Theology which takes its source in a competitive world cannot preach a crucified Christ. Doctrine which begins in the exaltation of self may teach a soft petulant tolerance, but it cannot teach a self-crucifying love. A tenet which comes from a philosophy accepting the concept of the survival of the fittest cannot set forth a life which expects to reach its full glory in eternity.

d. False teachers revealed in their refusal to hear truth . . . v. 6
(6) "We are from God: the one who is knowing God is hearing us. The one who is not from God is not hearing us. From this we are knowing the spirit of reality and the spirit of error."

Just as failure to confess Jesus as the incarnate Christ is proof of worldly origin, so refusal to hear the truth is demonstration of the same.

The person who refuses to hear the teaching that the incarnation is indeed historic fact, who sees the acceptance of this truth as "naive and unscholarly" is simply not from God. He has not been begotten of the Father. Not only is his teaching in error, he is himself a fake of the first order!

Those who are of God listen to those who are of God. Those who are of the world listen to those who are of the world. Those who have an increasing experiential knowledge of God hear the truth.

Perhaps the term "Christian Atheism," as it is used to describe the latest Protestant theology is the most vivid present day demonstration of what John is saying. The term is itself contradictory.

The adjective "Christian" comes from the noun Christ. None who

know the meaning of the noun can attach the adjective to atheism. How can the Anointed One of God be in any way related to the denial of God?

It is time the people of God forgot "tolerance" for a moment and apply the test of truth to those claiming to preach the Gospel.

B. Questions for Review

1. What is the meaning of the phrase "of God" or "from God" as used in this passage of I John?
2. At what point does Christian tolerance become gullibility?
3. How do you account for the fact that the outward demonstration of the Spirit was more evident in the first century Church than today?
4. What is the test by which we are to "prove the spirits whether they are of God?"
5. What is the primary work of a prophet?
6. Why do prophets often refer to future events in revealing the present will of God?
7. What does John's test prove about the claim of modern liberals that the Ecumenical Movement is led by the Spirit of God? Explain.
8. Does the *fact* of spiritual activity prove that the activity originates in God? What is the test of Divine origin for such activity?
9. What is the one unique truth of the Christian faith? How does it relate to the uniquely Christian teaching that God is Father to His people?
10. To recognize Jesus as Messiah is to recognize Him as _____, _____ and _____.
11. As Prophet, the Christ is the One Who _____.
12. As Priest, the Christ is the One Who _____.
13. As King, Christ is the One Who is _____.
14. What is the difference between confessing that Jesus as Christ came as flesh and confessing simply that Jesus is the Christ?
15. The man, Jesus, whom we confess as Christ, is not of human origin. Explain.
16. John 1:1 teaches three things about Jesus that have a direct bearing on the confession here presented as a test of false teaching. What are those three things?

17. In order to accomplish the purpose of God in man, Jesus _____ with His own blood.
18. To do this He became flesh, thus _____ with those He came to redeem.
19. It is in the capacity of Divine Redeemer that He voluntarily submitted Himself to learn _____.
20. To be recognized as originating in God, to be Christian, the message of a prophet must _____.
21. Why does John refer to the spirit of antichrist as "it" rather than "he?"
22. What is meant by the statement, "The children of God have the assistance of God Himself . . . whereas the false prophets are "on their own?"

HEREBY WE KNOW

PART IV

I John 4:7—5:21

God Is Love

Divine Sonship Tested By

The Inter-Relationship Of:

1. Love
2. Faith
3. Righteousness

CHAPTER XII

THE SOURCE OF LOVE

I John 4:7-12

A. *The Text*

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God. (8) He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. (9) Herein was the love of God manifested in us, that God hath sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him. (10) Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (11) Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (12) No man hath beheld God at any time: if we love one another, God abideth in us, and his love is perfected in us."

B. *Try to Discover*

1. How can John say "everyone loving has been begotten of God," and then refer to Jesus as "the Son, the only begotten One?"
2. How is the practice of loving evidence of knowing God?
3. How can John say "God is light" (I John 1:5) and then say "God is love" in this passage?
4. How is God's love for us related to our loving one another?
5. What is the end perfection of God's love?

C. *Paraphrase*

"Beloved! let us be loving one another; Because love is of God, And whosoever loveth Of God hath been born And is getting to understand God: He that doth not love Doth not understand God, Because God is love. (9) Herein hath the love of God in us been made manifest, That His only begotten son God sent into the world, In order that we might live through him. (10) Herein is love: Not that we have loved God, But that He loved us And sent forth His son as a propitiation concerning our sins. (11) Beloved! if in this way God loved us We also

ought to love one another. (12) Upon God hath no one at any time gazed: If we love one another God in us abideth, And his love hath been perfected within us."

D. *Comment*

1. Preliminary Remarks

In Part II, John presents the three tests of eternal life in the abstract. He deals with them in terms of attitude toward personal guilt, toward our brothers in Christ, and toward Jesus.

In Part III, John shows us the practical application of these tests, as righteousness, love and belief become the active demonstration of the attitude.

As attitudes, these tests are considered evidences of "walking in the light." Practically applied, they are considered proofs of Divine Sonship.

In this last section of I John, which we shall cover in Part IV, these same tests are shown to be inter-related. Eternal life, manifested as righteousness, love and belief, is one grand whole.

2. Translation and comments

a. Love is imperative because God is love . . . v.7-8

(7) "Beloved, continue loving one another, because love is from God, and everyone loving has been begotten from God and is knowing God.

(8) The one who goes on not loving never did get to know God, because God is love."

God came to know experimentally, through the incarnation, what it is like to be a human being. (Hebrews 2:14-18) We get to know Him experimentally through the experience of loving. Loving is the only experience totally common to both God and man. The person who does not love does not know God because no other experience which is possible to man is identical to anything else God does.

Man has tried to share in the experience of God by doing his own will. This is a privilege which God has reserved for Himself, and when man does it, it is sin and lawlessness. God does not allow us to do our own will, but demands that we do His will.

Man has tried to share God's intellectual experience, and in so doing has succeeded only in making a fool of himself. (Cf. Romans 1:22) Man at his best is pitifully ignorant as compared to God. "The foolishness of God is indeed wiser than the wisdom of man!"

Knowing God is eternal life. (John 17:3) God's desire for man is that we shall get to know Him by loving as He loves. In giving ourselves for the purpose of providing life to others we may come to know "what's it's like to be God" without harming ourselves in the process.

Love takes its source in God, and only those whose lives originate in Him through the divine begetting can love as He loves. Consequently, when we do love in this way, we give evidence that our life finds its source in Him.

Our loving proves that we are His children and that we know Him. It is not our love which produces kinship to God; it is kinship to God which produces love in us.

Perhaps some special attention should be given to the statement that God *is* love. John does not say love is God. In 1:5, he informs us that God is also light, but he does not say that light is God.

The ancients often did worship light as god, and we call it idolatry. The modern American practice of falling in love with love is the same idolatry in new garb.

b. God sent His Son to demonstrate love . . . v.9-10

(9) "In this was openly demonstrated the love of God in us, because His Son the Only Begotten One, God sent into the world in order that we might live through Him. (10) In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as a covering on account of our sins."

John is aware of the virgin birth. Jesus is not merely *a* son, but the *Only Begotten One*. What we may become through adoption, He is by right of eternal identity. What we may be by right of re-birth, He is by right of birth.

We are begotten of God by grace through obedient trust. He is the only one actually begotten in the customary sense of the word. He alone is *Son of God* by right. All others who are God's children are so by grace through adoption. (Cf. Gal. 4:4-6)

In the fourth Gospel, John refers to Jesus, the Incarnate Word, in a phrase unique and definitive. John 1:18 calls Him as "God, only-begotten."

Our English versions read "the only begotten Son," in John 1:18. However, the footnote of the American Standard Version (1901) refers to "certain very ancient authorities" as reading *God only begotten*.

Wescott points out that these are "two readings of equal antiquity" and that there is "no ancient Greek authority for the reading, *the only begotten Son*" in John 1:8.

It is not within the scope of this present writing to present manuscript evidence sufficient to support one manuscript reading over against the other. However, many trusted scholars have done so and have concluded that *God only-begotten* is the correct reading of John 1:18.

Such a claim to deity for Jesus by John is not surprising. Both the fourth Gospel and the first epistle of John are written to reaffirm, in the face of philosophic denial, that He is indeed God as man.

John 1:1 makes the claim, "the word was *God*." In the original language of the New Testament, the meaning was clear. The claim is not that Jesus and the Father are the same person, but that they are of the same nature. That which is the real nature of God is also the real nature of the Word. The true constitution of both is Deity.

That two persons have the same nature as Deity ought not give us any more trouble in acceptance than that two people can have the same nature as humans. This does not violate the fundamental faith of Israel expressed in ". . . Jehovah, He is God, there is none other than He alone." (Cf. Deut. 4:35) There is but one Deity, as opposed to humanity, just as there is one humanity as opposed to animal. The Father and the Son share this divine essence.

The term "*Son of God*," as used multitudinous times in the New Testament in reference to Jesus does not deny that He is God. On the contrary, it rather describes the limits placed on His revelation of Deity. It is true that ". . . in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." It could not be otherwise if He is indeed *God only-begotten*. But we ought never assume that, as a man, Jesus revealed the entire infinite essence of Deity.

That such is not the case is evident from such statements as that made by Paul that "He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant . . ." (Phil. 2:7) As J. B. Phillips so patly puts it, deity was "focused" in the man Jesus. This is perhaps the most powerfully significant fact with which the human mind can be confronted. The Creator of the universe, the Source of life itself actually stooped to take the form of one of His creatures.

This is precisely the truth denied by the gnostics, and is the focal point of everything John wrote in the fourth Gospel and I John.

The supreme function of this Incarnate Deity was to give life. The most quoted (and perhaps least understood) verse in the Bible is John 3:16. It is restated in I John 4:9. The extreme to which love will go to bring life to its object is only seen in the crucifixion of Incarnate Deity, God only-begotten, the Son of the Father.

To deny the Deity of Jesus is to set aside the only adequate demonstration of love, and consequently to "short circuit" the only source of life.

This is, as well, the meaning of the virgin birth. There is no other way in which Deity can become human and still be God. The unique birth of Jesus, seen in this light, is not a miracle but a scientific necessity. To bring life to man, God must love to the fullest. The martyr death of one who is only human is not equal to the requirements of such love. Deity must die if humanity is to live.

Here is the heart of the Christian Gospel. The philosophies of men, past and present, advocate a reverence for God as they understand Him, which amounts to love as they understand love. Real love is not demonstrated in this way but in the death of the Incarnate Word as a covering for human guilt. We cannot but cry out, as indeed John did, "look what sort of love the Father has given in our behalf . . . !" (I John 3:1)

c. The obligation to love . . . v.11

(11) "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also are morally obligated to keep on loving one another."

Failure to love our Christian brothers is as immoral as adultery or murder or the infraction of any other commandment of God. It is for this reason that "enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions, parties, and envyings" which show the absence of love are listed in the same inspired sentence as "fornications, uncleanness, lasciviousness . . . drunkenness, revelings and such like." (Gal. 3:19-ff)

No person can claim to have eternal life who does not love others having the same life by virtue of the same divine blood. No matter how correct the doctrine, no matter how pious the demeanor, no matter how stained-glass the personality, one who does not love has no life in Christ.

It is Jesus' own sacrifice which carries the moral obligation to so love our brothers. We cannot claim to "have that mind" in us "which was also in Christ Jesus," (Phil. 2:5) until we have emptied ourselves of ourselves and given ourselves for the sake of bringing and sustaining life in the children of God.

The readiness of many church members to cut and slash and assassinate the character of a fallen brother is a far cry from the love which demands that he bear a cross in his brother's behalf, not in spite of his brother's weakness, but because of it. True spiritual life is demonstrated when love acts to "restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness . . ." (Gal. 6:1)

d. The perfection of divine love . . . v.12

(12) "No one has ever seen God at any time; if we go on loving one another, God is remaining in us and His love is having been perfected in us."

The love of God reaches its intended end when God lives in us. His presence is demonstrated by our love for one another. Where this love is absent, God is absent, and therefore, experientially unknown.

The boldest claim of the gnostic was that he knew God. While making this claim he denied that Jesus was really God as man. In making the denial, he removed the only demonstration, in the comprehensible human experience of love, of what God is like. He thus put the lie to his own claim.

The proof of this is that no one has ever seen God *as God*. In the Old Testament, God was seen in various manifestations called *theophanies*. In Jesus, men saw God *as man*.

No one can, therefore, claim to know God from having seen Him fully as He is, in all the splendor of His glory. We can only know God experimentally as He lives in us and thus brings us to experience what He is like by empowering us to love as He loves. This cannot happen outside of Christ. "No one cometh unto the Father" but by Him. (John 14:6)

This is the purpose for which the Word became flesh. The love of God reaches its end perfection, the accomplishment of His self-revelation to us, when He lives in us and teaches us to love one another as He loves us.

Paul's prayer for the church was ". . . that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, that you may be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inward man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; to the end that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled to the fulness of God." (Eph. 3:16-19) Paul too was aware that love is the demon-

stration of God's perfected purpose in man. It was he who wrote, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging symbol." (I Cor. 13:1)

Small wonder that Jesus said that on this "hangeth all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:40)

E. *Questions for Review*

1. Why does John say we are to love one another?
2. What is the source of Christian love?
3. God got to know what it is like to be human through _____.
4. The experience by which we get to know "what it is like to be God" is the experience of _____.
5. _____ is the only experience common to both God and man.
6. Loving your brothers proves that we are _____.
7. Does John say that love is God? Explain.
8. What evidence is there in I John 4:9-10 that John is familiar with the virgin birth of Jesus?
9. Jesus is God's Son by _____ while we may become God's sons through _____.
10. How do you reconcile the claim that Jesus is God as man with the statement, "Jehovah, He is God, there is none other than He alone?"
11. The term Son of God applied to Jesus describes _____.
12. The supreme function of the Incarnate Deity was to _____.
13. What is the only way in which God can become a man and still be God?
14. Our acceptance of God's love for us carries with it the moral obligation to _____.
15. One who does not love has no _____.
16. The love of God reaches its intended end when God _____.
17. Evidence of God in us is that we _____.
18. The ultimate knowledge that man can have of God comes from the experience of _____. When this happens, the love of God has reached its intended end in a person's life.

FAITH—THE GROUND OF LOVE

I John 4:13-16

A. *The Text*

“Hereby we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. (14) And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father hath sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. (15) Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abideth in him, and he in God. (16) And we know and have believed the love which God hath in us. God is love; and he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him.”

B. *Try to Discover*

1. How the Spirit of God in us is evidence that we are in Him and He in us.
2. The significance of John's reference here to his eyewitness experience with Jesus.
3. How confession of Jesus as the Son of God is evidence we are in God and God in us.
4. How can love be the object of belief?
5. Why John repeats here what he has already said in 4:8, that “God is love?”

C. *Paraphrase*

“Hereby perceive we—That in him are we abiding, And he in us, In that of his Spirit hath he given unto us. (14) And we for ourselves have gazed, and are bearing witness That the Father sent forth the Son as Saviour of the world. (15) Whosoever shall confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, God in him abideth And he in God. (16) And we have come to understand and to trust the love which God hath in us. God is love; And he that abideth in love in God abideth, And God in him abideth.”

D. *Comments*

1. Preliminary Remarks

John presents a further synthesis of *love* and *belief* as evidence of continued fellowship with God. John appeals to his own experience with Jesus to re-affirm the fact of the incarnation. He then strongly re-asserts that Jesus, the man, is indeed the son of God and the Saviour of the world. If we believe this historic demonstration of God's love, then we continue in the divine fellowship which is life eternal.

2. Translation and comments

a. The presence of the Spirit and the memory of personal experience are assurance of continued fellowship . . . v.13-14

(13) "In this we are knowing that we are remaining in Him and He in us because of the Spirit He has given to us. (14) and we have seen and are bearing witness that the Father has sent His Son as Saviour of the world."

There is some question in verse 13 as to whether John intends to refer to the Spirit in all believers, as he has previously, or to the unique inspiration of the Spirit which was his as an apostle. His immediate referral to his own eye-witness experience may indicate the latter.

In either case, the testimony of the Spirit of God is to the deity of Jesus as the object of Christian faith. It is that faith which is the ground of the love we have for one another as the fulfillment of God's love for us.

In verse 14, John again employs the Greek tenses in such a way as to indicate vivid memory. What he has seen, as set forth in the prologue, (I John 1:1-4) is the basis of his faith and his testimony. When he walked and talked with Jesus of Nazareth, he came to believe that this Carpenter is indeed the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. That conviction has not mellowed with age. It is still the touch stone of his faith. It ought to be so with us today.

Voltaire set forth the following as tests by which any phenomenon may be confirmed as historic fact:

- i. *There must be witnesses*
- ii. *Witnesses must be in substantial agreement*
- iii. *The witnesses must have had opportunity to know, (ie. investigate)*
- iv. *The witnesses must be honest*
- v. *Hume adds: The more unusual the event, the greater the body of evidence needed to establish it as historical fact.*

The great events in the life of Jesus, which establish His claim to be the Son of God and the Saviour of the world may be subjected to these tests. If they fail to meet the tests, then we are justified in questioning them, as some have. On the other hand, if they do meet the tests, then to be intellectually honest we must cry out with Thomas, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28)

Space will not permit us here to subject all the essential phenomena of Jesus' life to these tests. We shall consider the ultimate demonstration of His deity as an example. Can it be proven, as other facts of history are proven, that Jesus rose bodily from the dead?

Were there witnesses to the resurrection? Whom shall we call first? *The Roman guard?* These denied that Jesus had risen, but said that His disciples had stolen Him. They admitted the body was gone.

Mary Magdalene? She saw an empty tomb and ran to tell the others.

Simon Peter? He ran to the tomb in utter disbelief and stopped at the entrance. In the intervening forty days He was confronted with the bodily presence of Jesus until he became so convinced, his proclamation of the resurrection converted three thousand of those who had clamored for Jesus' blood!

John the Beloved? He ran past Peter, who hesitated at the door of the tomb. It was he who saw the grave clothes lying as though some huge moth had burst forth from his cocoon in full glory.

The two on the road to Emmaus? They were so completely disillusioned as they talked about the hopes that lay crushed on the hill of the skull. But their hearts burned within them as He revealed Himself to them at supper.

Saul of Tarsus? To him the death of the Nazarene was the just execution of a blasphemer who dared call Himself Son of God. But when Saul came face to face with history on the road to Damascus, the love of Christ constrained him with the conclusion that Christ had died for all, that all might live in Him.

The five hundred Brethren of I Corinthians fifteen? Paul challenged his doubting readers to go to them rather than take his word for the fact of the resurrection. There is no record that any one of the five hundred ever denied what he had seen.

Yes, there were witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus.

Are the witnesses in substantial agreement? There are those who say that the Gospel accounts of the resurrection vary a great deal. None has

ever claimed, however, that the *substance* of what is reported is that the Galilean who was crucified actually rose from the tomb.

The witnesses *are* in substantial agreement!

Did the witnesses have opportunity to investigate? According to the record, Jesus appeared to them at various times and in various places. He not only gave them opportunity to investigate, but challenged them to do so. He ate fish in their presence to show that He was not merely an apparition. He challenged them to thrust their fingers into the nail scars and the spear mark and feel as well as see for themselves. Their conclusion from this investigation was voiced in the words of the greatest doubter of them all, "My Lord and my God!"

The witnesses had ample opportunity to know!

Were the witnesses honest? Not all of them were. The Roman guards, to save their own skins for sleeping on duty, accepted a bribe to say that the body had been stolen.

What about the others, and especially what about the ones who left the written record? Were they honest? How else can we account for the change that took place in them? When Jesus was led away to be killed they "followed afar off." They cringed in the shadows, afraid for their own lives. Fifty days later they stood up publicly and virtually dared the ones who had put Him to death to prevent them from telling that He is risen!

How can men who were cowards, when He was alive and in His moment of deepest need, suddenly become heroes when He is dead? Are we to conclude that, to the man, these all died for what they knew to be a lie? All they had to do to escape execution was admit they had lied about the resurrection. Not one of them did.

Yes, the witnesses were honest!

Is the body of evidence great enough? In a court of law, two or three eye-witnesses who are honest and in substantial agreement are all that is necessary to establish a thing as a fact. In the case of the resurrection, the event is so extremely unusual that an honest inquirer is justified in asking how many witnesses actually saw Jesus alive after His death. In I Corinthians 15, when confronted with those who doubted that He had risen, Paul challenged the doubters to contact *five hundred* individuals who were alive at the time of his writing and ask them what they had seen.

There were indeed sufficient reliable witnesses!

Any person who is intellectually honest can prove to himself the truth of what the apostles claim; even the most unusual claim of all. All he needs to do is subject their claims to the same tests by which he accepts other phenomena of the past as true.

John, in I John 4:14, concludes from what he saw that the Father has sent His Son as the Saviour of the world. He presents his testimony as evidence by which we may test our claim to fellowship with God. He who denies that which is historically true is living according to phantasy. His life is based on a lie. He cannot, therefore, have fellowship with God who is the author of all truth. To accept the deity of Jesus is to simply face reality.

b. Confession of Jesus, manifestation of Divine love, is evidence we are in God and He in us . . . v. 15-16

(15) "Whoever may confess that Jesus is the Son of God is remaining in Him and He in God. (16) And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has in us. God is love, and the one remaining in love is remaining in God and God is remaining in him."

Whoever confesses that Jesus is the source of all known truth about God is remaining in God and God is remaining in Him. Likewise, when we believe the love which His coming demonstrated among us, we move into the only area where the experience of God and the experience of man merge. As we saw in 4:7-9, intimate personal knowledge of God comes from sharing His experience of loving.

Since this love was first brought to light and then made available for us to experience by Jesus, His demonstration of love becomes the object of our faith. This coalescence of love and belief are here presented as evidence that we are intimately related to God. The one believing and loving is remaining in God. God is also remaining in him.

To keep this truth in perspective, we must remember that John is not discussing the *means* by which we come initially into this relationship with God. This is not intended as an answer to "what must I do to be saved?" He is rather, concerned with the evidences by which we may reassure ourselves individually that the relationship does in fact exist. However, whatever is necessary to the initiating of this relationship, or to put it simply, whatever one must do to be saved will in no way violate or contradict the essential role played by faith and love. On the contrary, the rudiments by which one begins the new life in God will be found to be the embryonic expression of precisely these very elements.

E. *Questions for Review*

1. What are the two alternatives concerning John's reference in v. 13 to "the Spirit He has given us?"
2. What is the essential testimony of the Spirit?
3. To what does John appeal in v. 14 as the basis of his claim that Jesus is God's Son and the Saviour of the world?
4. What are the tests by which phenomena of the past are established as historical?
5. How does the resurrection prove the claim of Jesus to be the Son of God and Saviour of the world?
6. Does the resurrection, as recorded in the New Testament, meet the tests of historicity? Explain your answer.
7. Can you suggest other events in the life of Jesus which may be put to the same test?
8. What is meant by "the area where the experience of God and the experience of man merge?" (See comments on I John 4:7-9)
9. The love which we share with God was first brought to light by _____
10. In what way is the love of God said to be the object of the Christian's faith?
11. Is John here discussing the means by which we come to salvation? Explain your answer.
12. Can the "steps to salvation" contradict the evidences that we are indeed in a saving relationship to God? Explain.

CHAPTER XIV

RIGHTEOUSNESS — DEMONSTRATION OF LOVE

I John 4:17—5:3

A. *The Text*

"Herein is love made perfect with us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgement; because as he is even so are we in this world. (18) There is no fear in love: but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath punishment; and he that feareth is not made perfect in love. (19) We love, because he first loved us. (20) If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for that loveth not his brother whom

he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen. (21) And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also. (5:1) Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God and whosoever loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. (2) Hereby we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and do his commandments. (3) For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous."

B. *Try to Discover*

1. What is the relationship of obedience to righteousness?
2. What is the relationship of righteousness to love?
3. Why do Christians love their brothers in Christ?
4. Who is my brother in Christ?
5. How may I know that I am fulfilling the commandment to love my brother?

C. *Paraphrase*

"Herein hath love with us been made perfect, In order that boldness we might have in the day of judgment, In that just as He is We also are in this world. (18) Fear existeth not in love, But perfect casteth fear outside; Because fear hath correction: He that feareth hath not been made perfect in love. (19) We love, because he first loved us: (20) If one should say I love God and should be hating his brother, false is he: For he that doth not love his brother whom he hath seen God whom he hath not seen he cannot love! (21) And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also. (5:1) Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ Of God hath been born: And whosoever loveth him that begat Loveth him that hath been begotten of him. (2) Hereby perceive we that we love the children of God As soon as God we love And his commandments we are doing. (3) For this is the love of God That his commandments we are keeping, And his commandments are not burdensome;"

D. *Comments*

1. Preliminary Remarks

Righteousness is obedience to God's commands. Love is commanded.

When we love we are obeying God and therefore are doing righteousness. Righteousness, in this sense, is seen as a manifestation of love.

2. Translation and comments

a. The perfection of love . . . v.17-18

(17) "In this love is being perfected with us, in order that we may have confidence in the day of judgement; because just as that one, we are also in this world. (18) Fear is not in love, but perfect love is casting out fear, because fear is having punishment. The one fearing is not being perfected in love."

Just as God's love for us reaches its intended end when we keep His commandments and love our brothers (see on 2:5), so our love is perfected when we no longer fear the judgement. The basis of boldness in the judgement is that we have lived as Jesus lived, by loving as Jesus loved.

No one has so lived who does not love his brother. To such a one the fear of judgement is well-founded!

Some have seen in the preaching of love a softening or watering down of the sternness of the Gospel. Not so! The reason we *must* obey the command to love is "it is appointed to men once to die, and after this cometh judgement." (Hebrews 9:27)

It is possible to counterfeit obedience to every other commandment of God; to deceive others and even ourselves. The only *sure* confidence in facing judgment comes in the unmistakable experience of sacrificing my life that others may live. When we love in "deed and truth" rather than "in word . . . with the tongue," we may indeed "assure our hearts before Him." (I John 3:18-19)

The Hebrew writer informs us, ". . . He also Himself in like manner partook of the same (flesh and blood), that through death He might . . . deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." (Hebrews 2:14-15) In other words, the Word became flesh in order to die; and he died to free us from the fear of death. When we keep the commandments of God in His name, that divine demonstration of love reaches its end perfection. So also, our love, when it is perfected, (ie. when it reaches its intended end) frees us from the fear of the judgement. We have the confidence which comes from knowing that we have lived as That One lived who overcame death and was seated at the right hand of God.

We shall never have the confidence which comes from being "as good" as He, but we may have confidence which comes from knowing our lives were motivated by the same life giving love.

b. The motive of love . . . v.19

(19) "We are loving, because He first loved us."

The hymn writer has said.

"I love Him because He first loved me,
and died on the cross of Calvary!"

If we omit one word, "Him," as the object of love in this poem, we shall have captured John's inspired thought concerning the motive of Christian love. We do not love *just* Him, as John will soon show. The presence of love in our lives as His children is because He loved us first. Otherwise, we would have continued to prostitute our love on the things of the world and have perished as the consequence. (See on 2:15-17)

Again John echoes Paul at the heart of Christian life. "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they that live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who for their sakes died and rose again. Wherefore, we henceforth know no man after the flesh." (II Cor. 5:14-16,

Because it has burst upon us that God loves all men, regardless of their station, we no longer recognize the artificial distinctions imposed by men upon men. Because He loved us and bought us with His life, we are constrained to also "lay down our lives for the brethren." (I John 3:16, The love of Christ thus becomes the motivating force of love in our own lives.

c. The object of love . . . v.20

(20) "If any one should say, I love God, and should hate his brother, he is a liar; for the one who goes on not loving his brother whom he has seen, does not have power to be loving God whom he has not seen."

The claim of love for God in the life of one who does not love his brother is a fraudulent claim. It is simply unreal.

Such unreal love offered to the real God is as useless as the real sacrifices offered to unreal gods. No one has the ability to love God without demonstrating that love in love of his brother. To attempt to do so it to ". . . love in word" and "with the tongue." (I John 3:18)

d. Love demonstrates righteousness . . . v.21

(21) "And this is the commandment we are having from Him, that the one loving God also love his brother."

In attempting to maintain the perspective of the overall evidence of life presented in I John, it is a good idea to re-read I John 2:3-11 in connection with this verse.

In both passages there is a definite relationship between righteousness, considered as keeping God's commandments, and love which is the first of those commandments. In short, no one can lay claim to righteousness who does not love his brother. The moral obligation to "walk as He walked," Who kept the commandments perfectly, comes into its sharpest focus in love. Without love, all other righteousness is "as filthy rags."

e. Who is my brother? . . . 5:1

(1) "Everyone believing that Jesus is the Christ has been begotten from God, and everyone loving the One Who begat loves the one having been begotten from Him."

The tests of life and fellowship presented by John are intended to be subjective. They are to tell the individual personally whether he himself is in fellowship with God and thereby possesses life eternal. In I John 5:1, we find the single exception. Here is the objective test by which we may know whether someone else is a child of God and so our brother. Since love of our brother is essential to our own life, this test is necessary.

The test is the same as was presented in 4:1 as the standard by which to "prove the spirits whether they are of God." There the evidence was the confession of Jesus Christ as having come in the flesh. Here the same evidence is concerned with the belief which is the content of that confession. Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ has been begotten of God, and is, therefore, my brother as we share a common Father.

In the rather involved discussion below concerning the begetting and birth of God's children, we must hold fast to John's chief concern in this verse. He has just reminded us that we are commanded to love our brothers. The necessity is thus placed upon him to answer the very pertinent question, "who is my brother?" The answer to this question forms the *only legitimate test of fellowship* for the Christian.

The main emphasis of the verse is focused on the verb *gegennetai*, from *gemmao*. It is not an easy word to translate. *Gemmao* is used by John for the first time in John 1:12, where the American Standard Version

renders it "*born*," with the footnote, "*or begotten*." The problem of the translator is to know which of these meanings to write down. It doesn't take a Ph.D. in zoology to recognize there is a difference between being begotten and being born.

Is John saying here that everyone who believes has been *born* from God or has been *begotten*? If *born* is intended, then being a child of God depends entirely on belief. If *begotten* is John's intention here, then belief marks only the beginning of the process by which one becomes a child of God.

The problem of translation is complicated further by the diversity of renderings of *gennaō* in the accepted English versions. Limiting ourselves to only two passages, both from John's writings, we are confronted with no fewer than four different English words used to translate this single Greek word.

The King James Version has "*born*" in both John 3:3, 5 and I John 5:1. However, in I John 5:1, when the word appears the second time, the King James Version has "*begotten*." Here are two different meanings attributed to the same word in the same verse!

The American Standard Version (1901) was "*born*" in John 3 and "*begotten*" in I John 5:1.

The Revised Standard Version has "*born*" in John 3 but begs the issue by paraphrasing I John 5:1 with "*is a child*."

Phillips follows the example of the Revised Standard by using "*born*" in John 3 and "*one of God's family*" in I John 5:1.

The New English Bible repeats the rendering of the Revised Standard Version.

Turning to the commentaries helps a little, but not much. Barnes notes the distinction between "*born*" and "*begotten*" and indicates a preference for the latter.

B. F. Wescott prefers "*born*" in commenting on John 3. However, his interpretation includes the whole process of regeneration.

Turning to Abbott-Smith's Greek lexicon, we learn that *gennaō* is to be translated "*beget*" when referring to a *father's* contribution to new life. In reference to a *mother*, the same word means "*to bring forth*."

Considered passively, from the standpoint of the child, it may be accurately rendered either "*born*" or "*begotten*." However, even the lexicons seems rather arbitrary in their translations of this word when it refers to the means by which one *becomes* a child of God!

In our concern for the distinction between the *begetting* of God in the progeneration of spiritual life and the *act of birth* (re-birth), we are seeking to determine the point at which the individual is actually brought into the family of God as a brother.

From a purely linguistic view point, the preferred translation of *genmao* in its perfect passive form, (as in I John 1:5), is *has been begotten*, rather than *has been born*. However, John is not concerned with linguistics, but with the test by which one may know who his brother is. It would be tragic indeed to mislead some sincere seeker after salvation with a false rendering of so vital a word. How *does* one become a child of God?

Obviously, the fundamental answer to this question is faith. In John 1:12, where the writer presents the idea of re-generation for the first time, he says it is accomplished when one *receives* the Incarnate Word.

This receiving is accomplished according to the terms set forth in the following verse. To translate again, without regard for theology, one who receives the Word is, "the one begotten, not from bloods, nor from fleshly will nor of a man's will, but from God." (John 1:13)

But, *how* is one begotten from the will of God. The question is as old as Nicodemus.

In John 3:3 Jesus confronted Nicodemus with the necessity of being born (or begotten) from above. When Nicodemus asked "how," Jesus answered ". . . if one is not born (or begotten) from water and spirit, he does not have the power to enter into the kingdom of God." Here we are at the nub of the matter.

Obviously a *begetting* without subsequent birth is tragically futile. On the other hand, *birth* without begetting is impossible.

Perhaps the need for this entire discussion would have never arisen had the church not lost sight of the true nature of Christian baptism. Some have become so repelled at the sacerdotal doctrine of salvation by works that they have swung to the opposite extreme and said all that is necessary to become a child of God is to believe; that nothing else is involved in receiving Jesus.

That to which they are reacting is the sacramental holy water concept which treats baptism as a rite, a sacrament by which one is ushered into the family of God as if by magic, even in the absence of belief. (This is especially apparent in the practice of "infant baptism")

The matter of Divine Sonship, with which John is concerned in I

John, and entrance into the kingdom of God, which Jesus is concerned in John 3, are much too vital to be settled on the basis of prejudice for or against "baptismal regeneration."

Perhaps we can come to some conclusions concerning John's meaning in his use of this term *gennaō* by beginning with that upon which all are agreed. No one denies that John sets forth belief as absolutely necessary to regeneration. In John 1:12, it is those who "believe on His name" who are given the power to become the sons of God. In I John 5:1, it is "whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ."

Secondly, we need to understand that baptism is not a religious "work," so far as the candidate is concerned. Baptism is not something he *does*; it is something done *to him*. He submits to it in the Name of Christ; he *receives* it. To say that baptism saves us, as indeed Peter does say (I Peter 3:21), is not to say we are saved by works. Peter's own comment on the matter is that we are saved ". . . through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." (I Peter 3:21)

The grammar of John 3:5 will not allow a separation of water from spirit. In that verse, *hudates* (water) and *pneumatōs* (spirit) are inseparably joined by the co-ordinating conjunction *kai* (and). Whatever Jesus says of the spirit in this verse, He also says of the water, and *vice versa*. This verse is vital, for it is Jesus' own answer to our dilemma.

How can a man become a child of God? He must be begotten from above. How can this be? He must be born from (both) water and spirit. If we let "spirit" answer to faith, and "water" to the outward act of immersion, we have our answer. Faith is always obedient. John deals with obedience conclusively in the verses immediately following. Faith and love always submit, in full surrender, to be united with the life of the risen Lord. This is done for the first time in baptism (Cf. Rom. 6:3-ff). From that point on, obedient faith becomes the hallmark of sonship for the child of God. Both *belief* and *obedience* constitute faith. They are two sides of the same coin where *Christian* faith is concerned.

In none of the references we have cited from John is the inspired author concerned with baptism *per se*. His concern is for the entire process of regeneration. *Birth* begins with *begetting*. *Begetting* issues in *birth*. When one has experienced the regeneration which takes its source in God, he is a child of God. The physical act involved is immersion in and resurrection from water.

The word "except" as it is employed by Jesus in John 3:5 is too

narrow for some today. To John it is trust in and obedience to the divine revelation which marked a person as a child of God. No one else is to be considered a brother in Christ.

Just as Divine Sonship depends upon divine regeneration, so divine brotherhood depends upon Divine Fatherhood. One's relationship to a child of God is determined by mutual parentage. No one becomes a brother in Christ by "blood, or of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

When a person is one's brother by right of common Fatherhood, one has no choice but to love him, just as one loves the common Father. Today's divisions in Christianity can only be divinely healed on this basis. Love is not of party, but of persons. Christian unity can only be had by every Christian recognizing every other Christian as a brother, and loving him for the Father's sake. It cannot, however, be fostered by considering those to be Christian brothers who have not been begotten from God through obedient faith!

f. Hereby we know we love . . . v.2-3

(2) "In this we are knowing that we are loving the children of God, when we are loving God and doing His commandments. (3) For this is the love of God, that we shall keep His commandments; and His commandments are not distressing."

The urgent necessity of loving our brother fairly glows in this passage! In 4:21, John re-emphasizes the vital necessity of loving our brother. In 5:1, he sets forth the test by which we may recognize our brother. Now he will tell us how we know we are keeping this commandment.

Divine love is not recognized in God's children by *feeling* but by *obedience*. There are those who are children of God whose personalities clash with our own. It is absurd to think we will ever come to the place where we "feel good" toward them. Is this proof that we do not love them? Are such feelings contrary to the love which we must have for our brothers in Christ? John does not say so.

We *are* commanded to love *every* one who is a child of God. When we remember what love is, this is not as impossible as it might at first seem.

It is from the example of Jesus that we learn the true nature of such love. He gave His life not only for His friends, but for His enemies. He prayed between clenched teeth for those who drove the spikes in His hands and feet. When other men would have kicked and cursed, He voluntarily lay down to be nailed on the cross for those who accused

Him falsely, who spit in His face, and who scoffed at His claim to be God's Son.

If we love as He loved we will also lay down our lives willingly for those who treat us ill. Shortly, John will instruct us to pray for those Christians whom we see sinning. There is no greater sin than the failure of our brothers to lay down their lives for us, but we are to pray for the one who does this sin as well as other sins!

We know we love our brothers when we keep God's commandments. If the habit of our life is to respond with instant obedience to any command of His, we will love those we cannot like before considering our feelings toward them. (See on 2:17 for the difference between *phileo* (like) and *agape* (love).)

Perhaps we should note here a favorite theme of the popular psychologist, Dr. George Crane. Dr. Crane is fond of saying that if we act like we love someone long enough and sincerely enough, we will learn to actually love them. In John's language, we would paraphrase, "if we *love* someone long enough and sincerely enough, we may even get to *like* them!"

This, indeed, is the love of God! That the keeping of His commandments is not distressing to us. There is no other way to prove our love to anyone than to do that which is for his benefit. If we love God, we will do that by which His purpose is moved forward in man. This immediately necessitates the keeping of His command to love one another. God's purpose in man is only accomplished when men are united in Christ by the bond of love.

John does not say that the keeping of God's commands is easy. It is a cross, not a cushion, to which we are called! The idea is that the commandments of God do not seem unreasonable to one who loves Him.

Jesus expresses the same idea when He says, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," and then immediately invites; "take my yoke upon you and learn of me . . . for my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

E. *Questions for Review*

1. How is righteousness said to be a demonstration of love?
2. What is the intended end of our love for our brothers?
3. Does one who loves his brother fear death? Explain.

4. Is the preaching of love "soft pedaling" the Gospel? Explain.
5. What is the one command of God which cannot be counterfeited?
6. What is the difference between these two statements:
 (a) "I love Him because He first loved me."
 (b) "I love because He first loved me?"
7. How may I know who is my Christian brother?
8. What is the difference between being begotten and being born, in terms of entrance into the family of God?
9. Explain how "regeneration" covers both of these ideas.
10. Explain why the teaching that baptism is essential to salvation is not the same as teaching salvation by works.
11. Faith is always _____.
12. Divine love in God's children is not recognized by feeling but by _____.
13. If we learn to love our brothers, and practice this love, we may even learn to _____.
14. Explain how God's commandments are not distressing to one who loves Him.

CHAPTER XV

FAITH—THE POWER OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

I John 5:4-12

A. *The Text*

"For whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith. (5) And who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? (6) This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ, not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. (7) And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth. (8) For there are three who bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and the three agree in one. (9) If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for the witness of God is this, that he hath borne witness concerning His Son. (10) He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in him: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he hath not believed

in the witness that God hath borne concerning his Son. (11) And the witness is this, that God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. (12) He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life."

B. *Try to Discover*

1. What does John mean by "overcome the world?"
2. How does faith that Jesus is the Christ enable one to overcome the world?
3. How does the Spirit testify that Jesus is the Son of God?
4. What should be the Bible believer's attitude toward textual problems such as the one found in some versions of I John 5:7(b)?
5. What has God testified concerning His Son?
6. Is it possible to have eternal life and not believe that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Son of God? Explain your answer.

C. *Paraphrase*

"Because whatsoever hath been born of God overcometh the world; And this is the victory that hath overcome the world—Our faith. (5) Who is he that overcometh the world, Save he that believeth That Jesus is the Son of God? (6) This is he that came through means of water and blood Jesus Christ: Not by the water only But by the water and by the blood, And the Spirit it is that is bearing witness, Because the Spirit is the truth. (7) Because three there are who are bearing witness (8) The Spirit and the Water and the Blood; And the three are witnesses unto one thing. (9) If the witness of men we receive The witness of God is greater. Because this is the witness of God—In that he hath borne witness concerning his Son, (10) He that believeth on the Son of God Hath the witness within himself: He that doth not believe God False hath made him, Because he hath not believed on the witness which God hath witnessed concerning his Son—(11) And this is the witness: That life age-abiding hath God given unto us, And this life is in his Son: (12) He that hath the Son hath the life,—He that hath not the Son of God hath not the life."

D. *Comments*

1. Preliminary Remarks

In the late third or early fourth century A.D., a scribe who was copying this scripture probably inserted (in v.7) a sentence which reads, "for there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost." (King James Version)

It is not within the scope of this present work to discuss the relative merits of this sentence. It is a matter of record that it appears first, not in the original Greek of the New Testament, but in the Latin translation. The earliest manuscript in which it appears in Greek is a copy made in the sixteenth century.

It is not needed to complete John's argument concerning the divine proofs of Jesus' identity as the Christ, the Son of God. Since we are following the text of the American Standard Version which omits this sentence, we shall not comment on it.

2. Translation and Comments

a. The source of Christian strength . . . v.4-5

(4) "For everyone having been begotten from God is overcoming the world. And this is the victory which gets the world overcome; our faith. (5) Who is the one overcoming the world if not the one believing that Jesus is the Son of God?"

"For" in this verse refers us back to 5:3. The reason the commands of God are not distressing to His children is that they *are* indeed His children. There is a power which comes through regeneration which is not available to the unregenerate. (Compare Acts 2:38-39 and Eph. 3:14ff) To put it bluntly, no one ever lived a Christian life without first becoming a Christian. There is a new kind of life to be had in Christ that is completely unknown outside of Him. It is identified with spirit rather than flesh.

The child of God is to expect victory. Much of the power of the early church found its source in this expectancy. They had stepped into a new kind of *life*, rather than merely adopting a new *religion*. The unseen things of eternity had become more real to them than the three dimensional materialism of this earthly existence. Friends marvelled at it, enemies trembled at it, and emperors went mad trying to understand the dynamic with which the first century Christians faced both *life* and *death*.

Most of the crisis which now face civilization result from the loss of this eternal awareness, and its accompanying power. Karl Marx looked about him at the downtrodden masses of Europe; hungry, miserable, defeated creatures, who for centuries had been communicants in the ritualistic sacerdotalism which passed for Christianity. He concluded that religion was to blame for most of the economic woes of a civilization dominated by "The Church."

In his *Communist Manifesto*, Marx declared the only path to meaningful fulfillment was to abandon Christianity for pragmatic, materialistic atheism. Religion, he said, is "the opiate of the people."

Much of what passes for Christianity today seems to support the creed of Karl Marx! The defeated, frustrated existence of the average church member does little to deny it. When the first glow of conversion has dimmed, we seem to soon forget that the inalienable birth-right of every born-again child of God is *victorious* life.

In our worship, the staid formalism has replaced heartfelt, awe. Spirit and reality so typical of the first century, also testifies against that for which it ostensibly stands. We have allowed the new life to become largely a spectator religion. We have placed faith in a liturgical straight jacket.

In the verses before us, John pin-points the source of power. It is our faith. Faith in the firm conviction that, in Jesus, the word of power by which God sustains the worlds, became flesh! It is a personal trust in Him that makes His power our own, His victory ours.

New Testament faith is more than mental assent to a proposition. It is more than mere belief. It is more than the acceptance of theological dogma or conformity to doctrine. Faith is the assurance of our hope; a conviction of unseen realities. (Cf. Hebrews 11:1) The child of God knows from experience that the real values of life, both here and hereafter, lie in an other-worldly realm. We are "not in the flesh, but in the spirit." (Romans 8:9) We no longer live "according to the course of this world," (Eph. 2:2) but according to the purpose and direction given those who are "looking ever to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." (Hebrews 12:2) As He "endured the cross, despising the shame," (Hebrews 12:2) so we learn in whatever our lot, "therein to be content" (Phil. 4:11). Not as those who have been stupefied by "the opiate of the people," but as those who know that whatever the outward circumstances of life, "in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." (Romans 8:37)

The sons of God are not the victims of circumstance! When the eternal Word of God rose from the grave as a man, He demonstrated that God's love for His human children is inviolable. He gave Himself to us, both in body and in spirit. He conquered both life and death, and He has promised to be with us to the culmination of human history. (Cf. Matthew 28:20)

No power in either the seen or the unseen world can prevent us from being victorious *excepting our own failure to recognize that this is what He wants for us!*

The present world struggle with materialism in the guise of Communism will be won if Christians will recapture a real trusting awareness in Him Who came into the *seen* to demonstrate the reality of the *unseen*. It will be lost if Christians continue to cower before the great god Science and to believe the answer to materialistic communism is to be found in materialistic Americanism. We stamp the means of victory on our coins. We must stamp it on our hearts. "In God We Trust!"

b. The object of faith . . . v.6

(6) "This is the one who came through water and blood, "Jesus Christ; not in water only, but in the water and the blood,"

In the American revival which filled the church houses just following World War II, signs could be seen on every major highway entreating passersby to, "*find yourself through faith.*" Perhaps the revival proved to be more a bust than a boom because the signs failed to tell us "faith in what?"

Faith is not merely a positive attitude toward life. It is more than self-confidence. Faith must have an object. It is a trusting-awareness of that object.

The object of the Christian faith is a Galilean Carpenter, who, through certain phenomenal events in His life, was revealed to be the uniquely begotten Son of God; a visitor to this demension from another arena of activity. Of these phenomena, John selects two which suit the purpose of this epistle: His baptism and His death.

One form of gnosticism, propounded by the followers of a philosopher named Cerinthus, claimed that whatever was divine about Jesus came upon Him at His baptism and left Him on the cross. This John flatly denies. This One did not come *from* water to blood, that is, *from* His baptism *to* the cross. He came *through* both.

He was Deity incarnate before His baptism, and when He shed His

blood on the cross, He was still *God as man*. Otherwise, the death of Jesus loses its meaning. If Jesus was not God from the beginning, before His baptism, the Word was not *as man* but *in man* and Jesus' victorious life of obedience to God was a farce. If He did not remain God as man when He died, then God did not express His love to the world on Calvary.

c. Evidences of faith . . . v.7-10

(7) "And the Spirit is the one testifying, because the Spirit is truth. (8) For they are three, the ones testifying; the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are for the one thing. (9) If the testimony of men we are receiving, the testimony of God is greater; because this is the testimony of God, for He has testified concerning His Son. (10) The one believing in the Son of God is having His testimony in him. The one not believing God has made Him a liar because he has not believed in the testimony which God has testified concerning His Son."

To the evidence of Jesus' baptism and death, John now adds the testimony of the Spirit. Perhaps the most obvious allusion here is to the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus at His baptism. To the sceptic this is no evidence at all, but to the one who has been begotten of God and himself been anointed by the Spirit (See on I John 2:20) this argument is nearly conclusive in itself. It will never make sense to the one who thinks as a materialist, refusing to accept anything as real unless he can understand it through the physical senses. But the testimony of the Spirit is conclusive proof to the one who has learned from Christ that the realm of the spirit is the real world.

The testimony of all these three witnesses is for one thing: "That ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye may have life in His name." (John 20:31)

In our day the testimony of the Spirit includes not only our awareness that He is within us as well as His testimony throughout the life of Jesus; it includes the written word which He inspired John and the others to write.

Such evidence is also meaningless to the person who must subject everything to the test of human reason. Inspired scripture is unacceptable to one who will not believe what he cannot dissect in a laboratory or analyze chemically. But it is the precious proof to the one who is in tune with the infinite.

The attack of modern rationalism against the deity of Jesus began with

an attack on the *written* testimony of the Spirit. The claim that Jesus was a deceiver rather than a deliverer depends upon the destruction of Scriptural evidence to the contrary.

For this reason we are told that the Bible is a collection of forgeries and myths. No honest scholar can deny that the writings of the Scripture claim for Jesus exactly what the rationalist (as well as the gnostic) cannot accept; that He is God as man. Since this is obviously the claim of these writings, it becomes necessary to disprove the reliability of the writings themselves. To do so is to deny the inspiration, or to use John's term, the testimony, of the Spirit in the Bible, and especially the New Testament.

To the child of God, the most meaningful evidence available to prove the incarnate nature of Jesus is the testimony of the Spirit in written word.

John's statement, in verse 10, that the believer has God's testimony in him is another allusion to the presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer. Perhaps the greatest need among modern Christians, in this respect, is to realize that the Holy Spirit is not simply a divine influence, but a person. The Bible never refers to the Holy Spirit as "It", but always as "He" or "Him." The presence of this Divine Guest within our lives is evidence of the Deity of Jesus, for it was Jesus Who promised Him to us. (Cf. John 16:7-ff) It is upon obedience to Jesus that the Spirit comes to us. (Cf. Acts 2:38-39)

The person who does not believe that Jesus is the Incarnate Son of God has made the Spirit a liar. It is impossible to imagine any greater sin. It is impossible to imagine any more certain assurance of being eternally lost than this denial of what the Holy Spirit has claimed to be true. This is the epitome of self-worshipping egoism.

It is through the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the child of God that faith becomes power. Firm conviction, even personal trust, *alone* is not enough to bring about victory over what John calls the world.

Real victory comes through an acute awareness of unseen reality. The awareness must be deep-seated within the heart of a person. It is not something which can be understood academically and then clung to tenaciously in the face of apparent contradiction. Awareness of the kind necessary to give us victory over the limitations of physical senses is ours only when our trust opens our hearts and allows the Divine Repre-

sentative to live in us. One is less likely to doubt the reality of spiritual life when the Spirit Himself is his constant companion.

To put it another way, a great deal of our failure to overcome the world is our inability to keep to the spiritual point of view. We can see and feel and smell the things of the world. The awareness of temporal values is so strong we seem ever able to rationalize the control they have over our behavior. Only when, through faith, the unseen is constantly real because the Holy Spirit is in us, can we overcome the inclination to act as though the physical world were more real than the spiritual.

Perhaps a word of caution is needed here. The distinction drawn between the seen and the unseen as well as the insistence that the spirit dimension is "more real" than the physical are for the sake of blasting away the scales from our spiritual eyes. We must not be deluded into believing a dualism in which the physical is separate from and irreconcilable to the spirit. This was the fundamental error of gnosticism.

What we must realize is the meaning of victory over the world. The physical is intended to be the servant, not the master. The body is to be used as a dwelling place of the soul. The physical senses are the means by which we maintain contact with the present environment. We simply must not let "the tail wag the dog" by reversing the divine order. This we do when the world, with its materialistic values, rather than God's Spirit, becomes the motivating force of our lives.

Although John does not deal with the matter directly, he has laid down the reason God requires His children to give money to the church as an act of worship. It is not "as though He needed anything." (Acts 17:25) Rather, we are required to give for our own good, because in so doing we learn to subject material values to spiritual. As Jesus put it, "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Matthew 6:21)

d. The testimony identified . . . v.11-12

(11) "And this is the testimony, that life eternal God gave to us, and this life is in His Son. (12) The one having life; the one not having the Son of God is not having life."

That to which the witnesses testify, indeed the entire message of the Bible, is brought into sharp focus in these verses. God gave us eternal life; eternal life is in His Son, those, and only those, having the Son have eternal life.

There is no hesitancy, no philosophical "perhaps." The issue is life and death. The declaration is straightforward and simple.

Nothing is more needful today than the reiteration of this same vital truth. The institutionalized church, muscle bound by over-organization and flabby from too much material wealth, has offered to the world a cheap substitute for this faith, and a counterfeit for the life only this faith can bring.

The materialistic rationalism so prevalent among today's protestant theologians has done nothing to restore the life-giving power of the Gospel to its rightful position as the focal point of the Christian message.

Stripped of its liturgical and creedal straight jacket, and purged of the nauseous egoism represented in materialistic, rationalistic theology, the Gospel, God's glad news of life, is still the power of God unto salvation to all those who believe!

E. *Questions for Review*

1. Why is the statement concerning the three witnesses which is found in the King James Version of I John omitted from more recent versions? (v.7)
2. Why are the commands of God not distressing to the children of God?
3. What is the source of victorious power in the life of a Christian which is not available to the world?
4. How does the life of the "average church member" today support the doctrine of Karl Marx that "religion is the opiate of the people?"
5. Give a definition of "faith" as John uses the word in I John 5:4.
6. Explain the statement, "The sons of God are not the victims of circumstance."
7. Faith must have an _____. It is not just a positive attitude toward life.
8. One form of Gnosticism called Cerenthic claimed that whatever was divine about Jesus came upon Him at _____ and left Him at _____.
9. What is John's answer to this claim?
10. The Spirit and the water and the blood all testify to one thing. What is the purpose of their testimony?

11. In our day, the testimony of the Spirit includes the _____ as well as His testament in the life of Jesus and His presence in our own lives.
12. In order for rationalism to destroy belief in the deity of Jesus it must first destroy the _____ of Scripture.
13. The person who does not believe in the deity of Jesus as the Incarnate Son of God has made the Spirit a _____.
14. Real victory over the world comes from faith which gives us a constant awareness of _____.
15. A great deal of our failure to overcome the world comes from our inability to keep to _____.
16. To have victory over the world is to make _____ the master and _____ the servant.
17. How does our giving to the church aid in our overcoming the world in our personal lives?

CHAPTER XVI

HEREBY WE KNOW

I John 5:13-21

A. *The text*

"These things have I written unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, even unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God. (14) And this is the boldness which we have toward him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us; (15) and if we know that he heareth us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of him. (16) If any man see his brother sinning as sin not unto death, he shall ask and God will give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: not concerning this do I say that he should make request. (17) All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death. (18) We know that whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not; but he that was begotten of God keepeth himself, and the evil one toucheth him not. (19) We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the evil one. (20) And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. (21) My little children, guard yourselves from idols."

B. *Try to Discover*

1. How does one remove the "maybes" concerning his hope of eternal life?
2. What is the source of confidence in prayer?
3. If no one who is born of God sins, why does John ask that we pray for a brother when we see him sinning?
4. What is "the sin unto death?"
5. Does I John 5:18 support the doctrine of "eternal security?"
6. How is idolatry related to the danger of gnosticism against which this letter was written?

C. *Paraphrase*

"These things have I written unto you—In order that ye may know that ye have Life Age-abiding—Unto you who believe on the name of the Son of God. (14) And this is the boldness which we have towards him: That if anything we ask according to his will He doth hearken unto us. (15) And if we know that he doth hearken unto us Whatsoever we ask We know that we have the things asked Which we have asked of him, (16) If one should see his brother committing a sin not unto death He shall ask and He will grant unto him life, For them who are sinning not unto death There is a sin unto death: Not concerning that am I saying that he should make request. (17) All unrighteousness is sin, And there is a sin not unto death. (18) We know that whosoever hath been born of God Is not committing sin, Nay he that hath been born of God He keepeth him, And the wicked one doth not touch him. (19) We know that of God are we; And the whole world in the wicked one is lying. (20) We know moreover that the Son of God hath come, And hath given us insight So that we are getting to understand him that is Real, And we are in him that is Real, In his Son Jesus Christ. This is the Real God, and life age-abiding. (21) Dear children! Guard yourselves from idols."

D. *Comments*

1. Preliminary Remarks

In this paragraph, the author uses the synonym *oida* for *know* with emphatic repetition. He has not previously avoided it; but has used it sparingly; preferring its synonym, *ginosko*.

As was indicated in "Words We Must Understand," and in the comments on I John 2:4, the Greek *ginosko* (know) was a favorite word of the gnostic. As opposed to the word employed here, *oida* (know), it emphasizes the part played by experience in gaining knowledge, whereas, *oida* (know) means to know through reflection, study and mental deduction.

John's repeated use of *oida* (know) here is intended to call the readers' attention to the authority of what he has written. He introduces this section with "These things I wrote that you may *know*."

The Christian's knowledge of his personal salvation is attested to by his experience, and in this sense John may say, "Hereby we know," (*ginosko*). However, it is not *just* our experience upon which the certainty of our eternal life rests. We may know, (*oida*) with the knowledge which comes from study, reflection and mental deduction as we read what is written by inspired writers.

Peter confirms this when he says, ". . . no prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation. For no prophecy ever came by the will of man; but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit." (II Peter 1:20-21) We are not to reach conclusions concerning the will of God on the basis of our own preconceived notions. Man is not to form his own theological concepts entirely in light of his own "religious experiences." It is the Inspired Word which gives meaning to our experiences, and not *vice versa*.

Paul also supports John in this respect. "Every Scripture inspired of God is profitable . . . that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work." (II Tim. 3:16-17) The Inspired Record contains all that is needed to assure the person whose life conforms to it that he has indeed passed out of death into life.

2. Translation and Comments

a. Reason for the writing . . . v.13

(13) "These things I wrote to you in order that you may know that you are having eternal life, the ones believing into the name of the Son of God."

As in the Fourth Gospel, so here, John states his reason for writing. There, it is, "in order that you may go on believing that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and in order that believing you may go on having life in His name." (John 20:31) This verse is an echo of the same inspired motive. John is here concerned, in the face of the gnostic

controversy, that his readers not only have life eternal through faith in Jesus as the Christ. He desires also for them the certain knowledge that they do in fact possess this life.

The Gospel of John was written to present the evidence by which to strengthen the faith of believers, and thereby insure their continued life. The First Epistle of John was written to provide certain knowledge that this life does indeed continue in those who remain in Him.

A word needs to be said about "eternal life." It is far more than "forever existence." Because man is essentially in the nature of God, man can never cease to be.

This in and of itself is no blessing. In fact it can become the greatest possible curse. It is this same inspired writer who warns us of the danger of being "tormented day and night forever and ever." (Rev. 20:10)

Eternal life is the *kind* of life that finds its fullest expression in God Himself. It is His life, and men come to it through Jesus, and no other way. (John 14:6)

It is this to which Paul refers when he says we "were raised with Him to walk in a new kind of life." (Rom. 6:4)

That life which is limited by time and space and weakness, which is subject to the corrosion of the elements and the desires of the flesh is changed in Christ for something new and glorious. (I Cor. 15:42-ff) That which produces from within itself "fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, wraths, factions, divisions, parties, envyings, drunkenness, revellings and such like;" is changed in Him for that which results in "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control." (Cf. Gal. 5:20-ff)

Eternal life is the kind of life that vibrates in the very being of God and which, as Jesus demonstrated, cannot be held by death. In the believer it is a present reality and not merely a doctrine of the future.

John has written in this epistle, and now reminds his readers, that eternal life is characterized by certain qualities and that one who has those qualities may know with certainty that he has eternal life. Such a person will accept divinely revealed truth in preference to human philosophy. This is especially true as revealed truth is concerned with personal morality, human relationships, and the identity of the Son of God. Such a person will practice righteousness, will love God's children, and will have a great deal of personal confidence in Jesus Christ.

Believing into the name of the Son of God means personal surrender to Him that answers to total commitment, and a reliance upon Him which amounts to complete trust for life itself.

b. Assurance in and limitation of prayer . . . v.14-15

(14) "And this is the confidence which we are having toward Him, that if we should ask something according to His will He is hearing us.

(15) And if we have known that He is hearing us the thing we may ask, we have known that we are having the request which we have asked from Him."

The reality of eternal life in the individual is measured by the freedom with which he prays! If praying aloud in the privacy of ones own prayer closet sounds foolish, it is time to re-examine one's entire relationship to God. If praying aloud in public results in stage fright to the extent that it becomes impossible, the same need is apparent.

Perhaps the first thing that needs to be examined is our understanding of prayer itself. John, in the Fourth Gospel, and in this epistle, has given us five limitations which God has placed upon prayer. Perhaps we would have a great deal more inclination to pray if we understood these limitations:

First, all prayer is to be in accordance with God's will, the eternal grand design for which man was created and redeemed. This limitation was even evident in the praying of Jesus Himself. (John 17:25-26, compare with Matthew 26:42)

Probably the greatest mistake we make in prayer is the expectance, unvoiced but present, that earnest prayer can alter the will of God. This simply is not true. Prayer is not the means of getting God to do our own rather arbitrary desires. It is an earnest seeking after His will as a given circumstance may relate to the grand design. With this lesson learned, we will ask in prayer for those things which expedite the bringing of His will to earth, rather than for those things which can only result from getting our will done in Heaven!

Prayer can be no more profound than "Show me thy will in these circumstances, and provide what is needful for its accomplishment!"

Second, prayer is to be "in His name". That is, committed completely to Jesus alone, and fully dependant upon Him. It is true that we have access to God directly; that no man can intervene or intercede. But we cannot pray effectively until we realize also that our access to God was paid for by the Suffering Servant, Christ. Jesus Himself placed this limitation upon prayer. (John 14:14)

"In His name" is not a formula with which to close a prayer, nor an easy way to let the congregation know the prayer is ended. It is very possible to pray "in His name" and never pronounce the formula. It is equally possible to pronounce the formula and not really pray "in His name."

An intimate relationship to Him is necessary for prayer to be made in His name. There is no statement in the Bible that sinners ought not pray. Cornelius' experience may be taken as evidence that such praying ought to be encouraged. However, the *promise* of answered prayer is only to those whose personal commitment to Jesus Christ is such that they can pray "in His name."

Third, answered prayer is for those who are "remaining" in Christ; whose commitment is constant. (John 15:7) John has gone to great lengths in I John to present the tests by which we may know we are remaining in Him, and He in us. (Cf. I John 2:10, 27)

Just praying "in the name of Christ" because we were at one time baptized into Him, (Gal. 3:27), is not enough. Our remaining in Him is to be the constant continuing course of our lives.

To remain in Him so is to daily live in the awareness that we are part of His body. That which brought Him into the world, continued through His commission to us, must be our ever present and over-riding concern. All else fades into relative insignificance. The person who treats the church, Christ's body, as merely a place to go or an extra-curricular activity, has no right nor reason to expect God to hear, much less answer his prayers! Answered prayer is for those who are personally involved in the steadfast continuing of "the apostles teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of the Bread, and the prayers." (Cf. Acts 2:42)

Fourth, answered prayer is directly related to personal obedience. (See above on I John 3:22) Obedience is the outward expression of the attitude expressed in "Thy will be done".

Every sin that has ever been committed can be summed up in two words, "I want". This is the opposite of obedience. The person who *will* not obey, *can* not pray!

Fifth, we seldom think of awareness of God's hearing as a condition of prayer. John affirms, however, that we may ask; "if we have known that He is hearing". (I John 5:15[a])

Prayer is meaningless unless we are aware that we are talking to God; a transcendent, all-wise, all-powerful living God, Who by virtue of the gift of His own Son has become our Father.

Many have tried to reduce prayer to a mere psychological exercise, a sort of mental gymnastic in which we talk to our own best selves. John will not allow this. It is only when we are conscious that God is hearing us that what we say may properly be called prayer at all.

With these conditions met, we may go to God in prayer in the certain assurance that we have that for which we ask! John does not say that we may be sure we shall *get* what we ask for, but that we *already possess* it.

Perhaps this may be illustrated simply like this: If I have money in the bank, I have it, even though it is not yet in my pocket. To get it I must meet certain requirements. It is available to me on certain conditions. When the conditions are met, I will then have the money in my hand.

So it is with the assurance we have in prayer. On certain conditions I possess what I have asked from God, even though it may not yet actually be in my hand.

What I will then possess is not some bauble of my own choosing, but the will of God.

c. The exception . . . v. 16-17

(16) "If any man should see his brother sinning sin not toward death; he is to ask and He will give him life, the one sinning not toward death. There is sin toward death; Not concerning this am I saying that he should ask. (17) All unrighteousness is sin, but there is sin not toward death."

These verses create an insurmountable problem for those who say that a child of God is not able to sin at all. So far as John, and indeed the other New Testament writers, are concerned, there is a constant possibility and a danger that we will in fact sin.

Paul has something to say about the attitude of a Christian toward his brother who is found in sin. As we might expect, what Paul says, is in complete harmony with this statement by John. Paul writes, "Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye who are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness; looking to thyself, lest thou also be tempted." (Gal. 6:1)

John gives us, in prayer, the practical means of "restoring such a one." He also sets forth a limitation. We are not to expect an answer when we pray for the life of one who is sinning "unto death." Even in this extreme case, however, John does not say we should not pray.

The attitude of both Paul and John is a far cry from the common reaction of one church member toward another who has fallen. Those who fancy themselves to be spiritual, often seem much more apt to talk to God in the sinner's behalf.

Condemnation of one's brother is itself a sin, and the one committing it must be prayed for!

Before we decide to pray or not to pray for someone on the basis of our arbitrary judgment of what he has done, we will do well to keep these two verses strictly in their context. John is not primarily concerned here with the one who is "caught in the act" of sinning.

The total context of I John is concerned with the assurance of his own life by a child of God, and with the tests by which one may know certainly that he is himself a child of God. John is suggesting that the fact of answered prayer is evidence of such sonship. However, there is a condition in which one's prayer may not be answered. There is an exception to the certainty of prayer.

John now, in verses 16-17, identifies that exception. He does not do so in order to prevent us from praying for anyone. Rather he does so in order that we will not doubt our own divine sonship when this particular prayer is not answered. If we pray for one who is sinning toward death, (and John explicitly says he isn't telling us to do so), we are not to be surprised when "nothing happens."

The most frequent question asked in response to these verses is "what is the unpardonable sin?"

Asked against the backdrop of the whole gist of I John, and particularly in the context of this fifth chapter, the question is superfluous. It is so much so that John doesn't identify what he refers to as "sin toward death."

The first step toward possible clarification of the wide-spread confusion in this matter is the realization that the Bible nowhere uses the term "the unpardonable sin." John has something more in mind than a single unrighteous act.

Jesus did not use this phrase, "the unpardonable sin," although He is generally credited with it. A careful reading of the synoptic references usually cited in support of the doctrine of "the unpardonable sin" will prove enlightening. These references are Mark 3:29, Matthew 12:32, and Luke 12:10.

Mark 3:29 quotes Jesus as saying ". . . whosoever shall blaspheme

against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is guilty of eternal sin . . .”

Matthew's version of the same quotation is, “. . . but the blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven . . . whosoever shall speak against the Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in that which is to come.” (Matthew 12:31-32)

Luke has “. . . but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Spirit it shall not be forgiven.” (Luke 12:10)

On the surface, and in the context of Jesus' statement, the most obvious conclusion is that attributing to Satan the work of the Spirit is unforgiven. However, as we pursue the matter deeper into the New Testament, we discover there is a great deal more to it than merely stating that Satan has done some work which is in fact the work of the Holy Spirit.

That such blasphemy is not to expect pardon will no doubt prove true, but we ought not suppose that the making of the statement *per se*, pre-empts all possibility of subsequent salvation.

It has been suggested that denial of the deity of Jesus, since it, in effect, calls the Holy Spirit a liar, is the sin referred to here. If we are to identify sin toward death as one particular act, the denial of Christ probably comes closer to the truth than any other single sin.

John has just said that the testimony of the Holy Spirit supports the incarnation of the Word in the person of Jesus. (I John 5:7-11) To call Him a liar certainly comes under the heading of blasphemy. However, the absence of a definite article, “the”, with sin in I John 5:16-17, suggests the probability that John is not speaking of one single act of sin.

The denial of Jesus by those who have come to know Him, as opposed to the denial that is made by others who have never confessed Him, has been suggested as the sin unto death. Hebrews 6:4-6 would seem to support this conclusion. However, when read in the original language, even these verses do not close the door forever upon the one who has fallen away. It is true “it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance.” (Hebrews 6:6), but there is no indication that they cannot *themselves* repent.

The Hebrew writer comes back to this same vein in Hebrews 10:26. A literal translation of that verse would read “For we, going on sinning deliberately after we have received the knowledge of the truth, not concerning sins is there left a sacrifice.”

Such literal renderings in English are always awkward reading, but often very helpful. The key word here is the participle translated "*going on sinning*" modified by the adverb translated "*deliberately*."

"Going on sinning" describes a continuing *state*, rather than a single misdeed. "Deliberately" underscores that *state* as one of choice.

One can violate the will of God out of ignorance, compulsion, inability to resist some strong temptation, or he can violate the will of God as a matter of deliberate choice. In the case of the former he will probably hate the sin, both during and after its commission, and even hate himself for his weakness. He will shrink in horror at the thought of repeating the disobedience to God, and yet may yield again to the same temptation.

So long as he is honest in the revulsion, fundamentally sorry for the guilt, and faces his own responsibility for it as well as the reality of it, the blood of Christ is equal to cleansing it. (See on I John 1:8-22)

On the other hand, when one violates the will of God cold-bloodedly, aware of his transgression but determined to have his own way regardless of God's will and delighting in his sin, he has removed himself from the reach of the cross. *To continue in such a state is to "sin toward death."*

The overt act committed outwardly may be the same in both cases. Sin toward death is not necessarily measured by the deed done. It is the state of a man who has heard the call of sin and has decided to serve it rather than God. He has listened to falsehood and decided to accept it rather than truth. He will readily commit any and every act that has ever been identified with "the unpardonable sin," and do so without remorse.

Such a person cannot be said to walk in the light. The light reveals the nature of sin and the personal guilt involved in it, and he has preferred to live in sin; possibly even to deny guilt. The light has revealed the eternal nature of the things of God, but he has chosen the love of the things of the world; to be a materialist. The light has revealed Jesus to be God's Son and he has chosen to deny Him. He "has loved darkness rather than light, because his deeds are evil." (John 3:19) His life will not meet any of the tests presented in I John.

One who has made this final choice has forfeited all hope of divine forgiveness. Consequently, the child of God is not expected to pray for him, and if one does pray for such a person, he is not to take the absence of an answer as a slur against the reality of his own eternal life.

d. Three Christian certainties . . . v. 18-20

(18) "We are knowing that everyone having been begotten from God does not keep on sinning, but the One Who was begotten from Him is keeping him and the evil one is not touching him. (19) We are knowing that we are from God, and the whole world is living in the evil one. (20) And we are knowing that the Son of God has come, and has given us an understanding that we may know the True One and we are in the True One in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and life eternal."

Nothing is more needful to Christians in the face of pseudo-intellectual attacks on the faith than divine assurance. The need is not new, but it is probably more pronounced today than at any time since the first century. For his reason, I John needs to be read and re-read in today's churches.

It is very popular among modern liberal "scholars" to say, "nothing is absolute." Not only the present-day church, but twentieth century society in general has slipped the moorings of divine certainty. One cannot watch the televised congressional investigations of long-range government policy without sensing the bewildered lack of any certain base. Our world is teetering on the brink of total race suicide, and no one seems to know any more than any one else where the "handle" is by which it can be steadied.

Perhaps such befuddled uncertainty is to be expected in the world, which denies the existence of objective truth or error, but the worse tragedy of all is the evidence of similar confusion among Christians. The naive statement that "it doesn't really matter what one believes, as long as he is sincere," is a verbalizing of spiritual uncertainty and confusion.

John will have none of this irresolute wavering. No writer of scripture has earned the title, "Apostle of Love", as has this "disciple whom Jesus loved," but his statements regarding revealed truth are among the most dogmatic in the Bible.

There is no contradiction between love and insistence upon truth. Compromise with error at the expense of another's eternal life cannot be excused on the ground of high sounding "tolerance" or the teaching of a sacerine spiritual pablum.

"The Apostle of Love" closes his epistle with the reiteration of three distinct certainties upon which the child of God can literally stake his life. *Hereby we know!*

First, we know that righteousness is the normal course of life for the child of God. Nowhere does John, or any other Biblical author indicate that it is impossible for a Christian to commit a sin. In fact, the triple insistence of this epistle in respect to sin is that we are to recognize the reality of it and depend upon Christ Jesus for cleansing from it.

However, we may be assured that the constant attitude of God's children toward sin is to avoid it. The marked distinction between the Christian and the worldling in respect to righteousness is that the worldling accepts sin as the normal pattern of behavior, while the Christian is constantly on the alert to avoid sinning.

The reason a Christian instinctively avoids sin, even though he may on occasion commit sins, is that "the One Who was begotten from God is keeping him, and the evil one is not touching him." We are not alone in the battle for good. The hymn writer has captured the truth beautifully,

"Jesus keep me near the cross
There a precious fountain
Free to all a healing stream
Flows from Calvary's mountain."

A Christian is not a person who never sins; he is a person who does the very best he can to avoid sin, because of an inner revulsion against it, and who recognizes his efforts must be sustained by One Who is mightier than himself. He not only does his own best, he relies on Christ Jesus to make up the difference between what his behavior is and what it ought to be.

John's statement that "the evil one is not touching him" means literally that the evil one is not touching with harmful results. The Devil cannot snatch away from Christ one who remains trustfully aware that he is, in Christ, a son of God. (Cf. John 6:38-ff)

Second, "we are knowing that we are from God, and the whole world is lying in the evil one." This again is absolute knowledge. The cleavage between the sons of God and sons of Satan is sharp and sure.

It is presently very popular to preach tolerance, to say that all men are the sons of God. This is diametrically opposed to everything John has written! There are, no doubt, many "men of good will" outside of

Christ. It is true that the Christian Gospel for nearly twenty centuries has served as salt and leaven in western civilization. The moral and ethical standards that are the unwritten mores of our ethic as well as the foundation of our written legal code are essentially Christian. But the rapidity with which these standards are being abandoned in our time is evidence alone that there is still evil in the world. Satan is still very much alive and at work.

The child of God who makes a determined effort to meet the tests of life set down in I John is going to find himself part of a "peculiar people".

Third, "we are knowing that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding . . ." Of all the areas of conflict between the certain assurance of the Christian and befuddled bewilderment of the world, the most marked is in relationship to Jesus as the incarnate Christ.

The self-centered agnosticism which permeates modern Protestantism denies the inspiration of the Scriptures. This is followed, quite logically, by denial of the incarnation of the Word. Since the New Testament is the only source book by which we know of God's visit to earth as a man, the person who cannot accept the New Testament as reliable has no ground upon which to base a belief in Jesus as the Christ.

The practical result of modern agnosticism is identical to that of the gnosticism which called forth John's writings. John's claim is that he personally witnessed the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus. Anyone who denies the fact of the incarnation makes John a liar, just as he makes God a liar.

Once a person has succeeded in convincing himself that the Bible is unreliable, and the incarnation a myth, he cannot take the problem of sin seriously. He may get carried away in the broad torrent of civil demonstrations. He may spend his time and energy fighting social injustice and insisting upon the rights of minority groups, but he cannot be concerned seriously with the fact of *personal*, social and moral responsibility to God.

But God's children are not confused. We *know* that the Son of God *has* come. He has given us an understanding of life which the world cannot grasp. Just as He opened the minds of the twelve that "they might understand the scriptures," (Luke 24:44-ff) so he has given us the divine approach to reality.

The world tests reality in terms of materialism and human reason. To the world the only reality is that which can be explained in terms of three dimensional matter. The only sound conclusions are those which can be demonstrated within the closed system of cause and effect which is called science. The only recognizable criterion by which to form opinions and determine the course of our actions, says the world, is the deductive power of the human mind.

The Christian, on the other hand, judges reality in the light of the incarnation. God's visit to this planet in the person of Jesus Christ is seen as the single all-determining gauge of truth. It is the "fullness" of all preceding time (Gal. 4:4) and the meaning of all that has followed. (Col. 1:16-20) In Christ alone we reach the ultimate reality which is God Himself. (John 14:6)

In saying that Christ has given us understanding in order that we may *know* God, John again returns to *ginosko*, the knowledge of experience. The world wonders if there is a God, the philosophers have speculated as to what God is like, and the modern fool has decided "God is dead!" (Cf. Psalm 14:1) But the child of God has experienced the reality of God in his own life. One who daily walks and talks with Him can scarcely be persuaded God is dead!

God's child has seen demonstrated in the person of Jesus of Nazareth that God is. (John 14:9) He has come to know what God is like through the cross of Christ, and through the daily living of the eternal life bought for him there; especially in the practice of life-giving love. The Christian's life takes its source in his divine begetting and re-birth. He has been begotten of God.

The daily experience of facing his own guilt as well as the blessed cleansing from it, the practice of loving his brother in tangible demonstrable ways, and the personal confidence which he daily places in his atoning Friend . . . these are the certainties which come from experience. It is in these experiences that we know God is and that all else is "but refuse". (Phil. 3:1-11)

e. The final plea . . . v.21

(21) "Little children, guard yourselves from idolatry."

Ephesus, the cultural and religious center of influence in the area of Asia Minor, where John's readers lived, was the temple keeper of Diana. The whole tenor of the society was flavored by the presence of idols everywhere.

Since most of those John addresses as "dear children" had come out of such pagan background, there was the ever present danger of lapsing back into it. Gnosticism could easily form the catalyst that would make the lapsing even easier. It was, after all, a mixture of paganism with Christian philosophy.

The warning of verse 21 was more readily applicable to life in the first century than in our own time. That is not to say that it was any more needed then than now. Idolatry is a threat to the Gospel in any age. It happens that in our age of scientific sophistication the threat is more subtle than in past ages. However, this fact in itself makes the danger more deadly.

The word *eidolon* (idol) is from the root word *eid* meaning see. It is concerned with that which is seen, as opposed to that which is invisible. The making and worship of graven images is the most gross expression of life that is concerned primarily with the created rather than the Creator.

Romans 1:18-23 traces vividly the downward progression which results from refusal to have God in our knowledge or to glorify Him as Deity. The end result is the worship of "the likeness of an image".

We ought not think, however, that because our sciences have done away with the worship of stone gods that we are no longer subject to the fundamental threat of idolatry. The foot note on I John 5:21 in the *Oxford Annotated Bible*, (H. G. May and B. M. Metzger, Oxford Press, New York, New York, 1952) observes that idolatry is, "any rival of God".

I Cor. 10:14 seems to confirm this observation. The words of this Pauline passage are identical to those of our present text. Paul issues this warning immediately following the sweeping statement, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear, etc". This certainly includes "any rival of God".

From this it is easy to support the present preoccupation with rationalism, materialism, existentialism, scientism and humanism are, at their root, highly refined forms of idolatry. Just as did the worship of graven images, so have these modern philosophies "exchanged the truth (reality) of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator . . ." (Rom. 1:25)

Idolatry is essentially self-worship. It may take the form of some

animal associated symbolically with a particular lust. It may take the form of some good or evil in self. These are the gods of the Greeks and Romans.

Self-worship in modern times is more apt to be expressed in the worship of man's achievements and possessions. It is idolatry, nevertheless.

E. *Questions for Review*

1. In addition to our experience in Christian living, we also may rely upon _____ to confirm the certainty of eternal life.
2. What is John's reason for writing I John, as stated in his own words?
3. How does this reason for writing correspond with his reason for writing the fourth Gospel?
4. Because man is created in the image of God and so can never cease to be, eternal life is more than mere _____.
5. Eternal life is that *kind* of life that finds its fullest expression in _____.
6. While life identified with this present world produces _____, eternal life produces _____. (Cf. Gal. 3:20-ff)
7. Believing into the name of the Son of God means _____.
8. Name five limitations which John places upon prayer _____.
9. What is the single exception to the certainty of prayer which meets these limitations?
10. Why does John discuss the certainty of prayer in this letter which deals with the evidences of eternal life?
11. Condemnation of a brother taken in sin is itself _____.
12. What significance do you attach to the fact the Bible never uses the term "unpardonable sin?"
13. What does John mean by "sinning sin toward death?"
14. "Going on sinning" describes a _____ rather than a _____.
15. List three distinct certainties upon which the child of God can stake his eternal life.
16. What is meant by "understanding" in I John 5:20?
17. A Christian not only does his best to avoid sin, he relies upon _____ to make up the differences between what he does and what he ought to do.

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18. How is the danger of idolatry as present, and even more dangerous now than when John wrote?

PART V II and III John

CHAPTER XVII

LETTER TO "THE ELECT LADY AND HER CHILDREN"

II John

A. *Background*

1. Who wrote II John?

The majority of modern scholarship agrees that II John, as well as III John, is written by the author of the Fourth Gospel and I John. This is so obvious that many early scribes included second and third John as part of first John in their manuscripts. The term "the elder" with which the author addresses himself to his reader neither confirms nor denies this.

2. To whom is it written?

The destination of the letter, initially, is not so well agreed upon. Theissen lists five views concerning the original recipient of Second John.

Jerome held that the letter is addressed to the whole church. Lightfoot, Brooke and Zahn contend that it is addressed to some particular local congregation. Wordsworth believed it was intended primarily for the church in Babylon. Others have held that it was addressed to some notable lady.

Among those who hold this latter view, there is disagreement. Law says it is addressed to one Lady Electa. Bengel believes that the Greek *kuria* (usually rendered "lady" in II John) is the Hellenistic form of the Hebrew Martha.

It is possible that Second John is a personal letter addressed to a Christian woman of some influence who was a personal friend and co-

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worker of the author. However, this seems unlikely for reasons we shall mention shortly.

I find it very difficult to agree with A. T. Robertson's statement, "The obvious way of taking it is a woman of distinction in one of the churches . . ." It hardly seems plausible that any single individual could be said to be loved by everyone who knows the truth (verse 1). Further, throughout II John the *eklekte kuria* (elect lady) is sometimes addressed in the plural (vs. 6, 8, 10, 12) as well as the singular (vs. 1, 4, 5, 13). One may address a congregation with the singular when thinking of it collectively, or with the plural when thinking of the individual members. One would hardly address a particular lady of close intimate acquaintance with a plural.

It seems likely that the letter is, as are the other writings of John, a circular letter intended to be read in all the congregations in and about a certain area.

B. *The Text*

"The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth; and not I only, but also all they that know the truth; (2) for the truth's sake which abideth in us, and it shall be with us forever: (3) Grace, mercy, peace shall be with us, from God the Father, and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love. (4) I rejoice greatly that I have found certain of thy children walking in truth, even as we received commandment from the Father. (5) And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote to thee a commandment, but that which we had from the beginning that we love one another. (6) And this is love, that we should walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, even as you heard from the beginning, that ye should walk in it. (7) For many deceivers are gone forth into the world, even they that confess not that Jesus Christ cometh in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. (8) Look to yourselves, that ye lose not the things which we have wrought, but that ye receive a full reward. (9) Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son. (10) If anyone cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into your house, and give him no greeting: (11) for he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his evil works. (12) Having many things to write unto you I would not write them

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with paper and ink; but I hope to come unto you, and to speak face to face, that your joy may be made full. (13) The children of thine elect sister salute thee."

C. *Try to Discover*

1. Who is "the old one"?
2. Who is the "elect lady"?
3. Is there more to v.3 than the mere formality of greeting?
4. Who are the children of v.4?
5. What is the purpose of John's writing in II John?
6. Why is II John so short?

D. *Paraphrase*

"The Elder unto an elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth; and not I alone, but all those also who understand the truth, (2) for the sake of the truth that abideth in us and with us shall be until times age-abiding (3) Favour mercy peace shall be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Son of the Father, in truth and love. (4) I rejoiced exceedingly in that I had found from among thy children such as were walking in truth, even as a commandment we received from the Father. (5) And now I request thee lady, not as writing a new commandment unto thee but one which we were holding from the beginning That we should be loving one another. (6) And this is love, that we should be walking according to his commandments: This is the commandment, even as ye heard from the beginning that therein ye should be walking. (7) Because many deceivers have gone out into the world, they who do not confess Jesus Christ coming in flesh: This is the deceiver and the antichrist. (8) Be taking heed unto yourselves, lest ye lose what things we earned, but a full reward ye may duly receive. (9) Every one that taketh a lead and abideth not in the teaching of Christ hath not God: He that abideth in the teaching the same hath both the Father and Son. (10) If anyone cometh unto you and this teaching doth not bring be not receiving him home and Joy to thee! do not say; (11) for he that biddeth him rejoice hath fellowship with his wicked works. (12) Though I had many things to you to write I was not minded to say them with paper and ink; but I hope to come

unto you, and mouth to mouth to talk, that your joy may be made full.
 (13) The children of thy chosen sister salute thee."

E. *Translation and Comments*

1. Salutation . . . v.1-3

(1) "The old one to an elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all the ones having come to know the truth, (2) on account of the truth which is remaining in us, and which with us shall be into eternity. (3) Grace shall be with us, mercy and peace from God as Father, and according to Jesus Christ the Son of the Father, in truth and love."

"Old one" translates *presbuteros*. The term is often used elsewhere in the New Testament to designate the elders of the church. Here John uses it merely to call attention to his age and experience.

The key word here is *alethia*, truth. John loves the elect lady in truth. So also do those who have come to know the truth. The reason for their love is the truth which is remaining in us, and which will be with us into eternity.

II John, as I John, contains a warning against the danger of gnosticism inherent in associating with gnostics. The warning is issued in love. It is because of his personal love for the church, which is shared by all those who have come to know the truth, that he must warn her of the error that stalks her path. For a discussion of the word *agape* (love) see above on I John 2:15-17.

This is not the love of sentiment, nor of selfish gain. John loves the church because for some sixty years and more he has deliberately chosen to give himself to Christ. No one can love Christ and not love the church. (See I John 3:14-ff) So in a real sense John had given himself to the church as well.

Sentimental love, or selfish ambition might prevent such a warning. It is much more popular to be tolerant of error than to try to correct it. Sentiment might dictate a less stern stand against falsehood.

A French proverb says, "There are times when to be only kind is to be not even kind." John demonstrates, in his firmness motivated by love, that the sort of kindness which in our day answers to tolerance is not a manifestation of real Christian love in the presence of error.

This warning of love against error grows out of John's firm persuasion that there is such a thing as objective truth, and that that truth has been

revealed in Jesus as the eternal Word become flesh. All else is false. It is within the sphere of this reality that John proclaims his love. His love is shared by all those who have come to know and who still hold fast to the truth revealed by God in Christ.

Such dogmatic convictions concerning truth and falsehood are, in our day, to say the least unpopular. It is very typical of the sophistry of today's pseudo-intellectual to say nothing is black or white. Everything, we are told, is to be found in the gray area between black and white. Truth is relative; nothing is absolute.

No one would willingly return to the prejudicial pronouncements of anathema against all those who disagree with some sectarian doctrine, which were so typical of past ages. However, there is a real need to remind ourselves that unless there were real black and real white there could be no gray. Unless there be objective truth and falsehood there can be no in-between.

The idea that there is an in-between gray area between the truth of Christ and the error of gnosticism would indeed be repugnant to John. The idea that compromise between revealed truth and human philosophy represents the true Christian position in the twentieth century ought to be a repugnant to us.

The truth concerning the nature of sin, the fundamental necessity of love and the deity of Christ Jesus is transcendent reality. Such reality is "from everlasting to everlasting." Man's pragmatic understanding of himself may shift from one base to another as psychology and its related fields of learning become more and more sophisticated. Man's knowledge of his environment swings from one theory to another as science probes deeper into the microcosm and the macrocosm of the universe.

The fundamental nature of the transcendent God does not change. The identity of His Son does not change. The soul made in His image does not change. The key role of love in both divine and human relationships does not change. The nature of sin and guilt do not change.

These truths are eternal! remaining in us and with us into eternity.

Within the scope of revealed reality, the grace of God is poured out in mercy and its effect is peace.

Perhaps a word should be said about grace. The word *charis* (grace) means: (1) objectively, that which causes favorable regard and (2) subjectively, unearned and unmerited favor, universally and freely given. The grace of God is that within God which causes those who know Him

to cry out "hallowed be Thy Name!" Grace in this sense is seen in the claim, "God is light," and again in the claim, "God is love".

As the grace of God expresses itself toward us it takes the form of mercy. God is absolute perfection. There is no darkness in Him at all. (I John 1:5) The very best man can hope to accomplish is a relative goodness which falls far short of the glory of God. Thus the problem of sin is universal. (Cf. Romans 3:23) The supreme message of divine revelation is the grace of God expressed in mercy and love to lost humanity.

Sin, in its deepest sense, is not merely the breaking of God's commandments, it is the breaking of His heart. It is a crime against love more than law.

A crime against law can be paid for by the exacting of the penalty of law. Not so a crime against love. The only thing that can ever atone for a crime against love is that the one offended take the initiative and forgive. This requires that mercy supercede justice.

So it is that God, whose heart has been broken by man's sin, has in mercy taken the initiative in man's redemption. (Cf. Romans 9:15-ff) God's grace provided salvation while we were dead in trespasses and sins. (Cf. Eph. 2:1-10) Justice was tempered by the mercy of Calvary.

This divine, unmerited favor, poured out on those who will receive it, finds its intended end in peace. This is not peace as the world knows peace. It is contentment which comes from bringing our lives into the light of God's truth and allowing Him to order them according to it. (Cf. Phil. 4:11) It is the peace which comes from the ever-present awareness that the Lord is at hand. (Phil. 4:4-7) It rests in the assurance that "No water can swallow the ship where lies the master of ocean and earth and skies!"

Far from being "the opiate of the people" to lull Christians into the grasp of those who would enslave and exploit, Christian peace is the calm assurance which allows the Christian to overcome in any earthly circumstance because he has learned from Christ that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 8:31-39)

Mercy, which issues from the grace of God finds its end in "the peace that passeth all understanding." It not only originates in God as Father, but is according to Jesus Christ the Son of the Father. Justice and mercy are reconciled in the cross.

It is small wonder that a world which has for a generation tried to

disprove the deity of Jesus by undermining the inspiration of the divine record of the incarnation and which now has decided that "God is dead," finds itself in the shadow of universal vaporization by nuclear war, its mental institutions overflowing, and its society in turmoil.

2. The path of loving obedience . . . v.4-6

(4) "I was greatly pleased because I have found (certain) of your children walking in truth, just as we received commandment according to the Father. (5) And now I entreat you, Lady, not as writing you a new commandment, but (the one) which we were having from the beginning, that we should be loving one another. (6) And this is the love, that we should keep on walking according to His commandments."

So many false teachers were abroad that John rejoiced to find certain "children" of the "elect lady" walking according to truth. If we are correct in the conclusion that the elect lady is a local congregation or the church at large in a particular area, the children are members of the church or churches to which John wrote. It is worthy of note that, where we often refer to Christians as "church members," John repeatedly refers to them as children. The New Testament church was not, fundamentally, an organization but a family. Each member was a child of the Father, and, rather esthetically, of the church.

To John the admissible evidence that we have come to know the truth is that we obey the commandments of God. (Cf. I John 2:3) He had learned well the lesson expressed by Jesus in the question ". . . why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?"

Again, as in I John, we are reminded that the fundamental commandment is that we shall love one another. This is particularly urgent in the midst of such serious controversy as that occasioned by the gnostic error. There can be no healing of the breach caused by error unless those who hold fast to truth do so in love.

But love will not allow compromise! "This is the love, that we keep on walking according to His commandments." While we endeavor, in love, to turn the heretic from the error of his ways, we are to continue obeying all the commands of God.

Love is the fundamental command to Christians, but it is not the only command. The commission of Jesus to the apostles is that they teach us to "observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matt. 28:20(a)) "From the beginning" we have had this commandment also.

3. Warning of waywardness . . . v.7-11

(7) "Because many wanderers have gone out into the world, the ones not confessing Jesus as Christ coming in flesh; this is the deceiver and the antichrist. (8) Look to yourselves, in order that you may not lose what we have wrought but that you may receive full wages. (9) Everyone going ahead and not remaining in the teaching of Christ is not having God. (10) If anyone is coming to you and is not bringing this teaching, do not receive him into (your) house, and speak him no greeting; (11) for the one speaking greeting to him is fellowshiping in his evil works."

The pleasure of John at meeting the lady's faithful children is occasioned by the fact that many wandering proponents of gnosticism, having left the fellowship of their home congregations, were going about teaching the heresy in whatever congregations would give them an audience.

It would be difficult to identify the antichrist any more specifically than John does here. The antichrist is any teacher who does not confess that the man Jesus is indeed the eternal Christ coming in flesh.

Here is also the most succinct statement in the New Testament of the incarnation. Together with John 1:14, this statement leaves no room for doubt concerning John's conviction about Jesus. And it is not John's alone; Jesus' identity is the foundation of the Christian faith and fellowship. (Cf. Matt. 16:17-18)

To turn from this conviction is to lose the entire result of apostolic labor. John and the others had but one message (Cf. Gal. 1:6-9). The Galilean carpenter was the Christ, the only begotten God, the eternal Word dwelling as man among men. It was the preaching of this message which formed the authority by which they offered salvation to individual men and women. (Cf. I Cor. 1:21) It was upon the basis of individual salvation that the obedient were added to the church. (Acts 2:47)

To deny the essential truth of the incarnation was to bring both individual salvation and the family of God to naught. John is so vehement in his denunciation of those who deny this truth; without it the whole Christian Gospel is destroyed. The crown of life, the reward of the Christian, is only to those who remain faithful unto death.

John is so certain of the validity of the claim of deity for Jesus, that he goes one step farther. To deny it is to not have God at all!

The deity of Jesus is either the most profound truth known to man, or it is the most calloused lie ever uttered. Since it is true, the denial of it becomes the most heinous blasphemy. There is no middle ground. Jesus is either the Christ coming as flesh or He is not. Since He is, anyone denying that He is, is antichrist and does not have God at all.

It may be possible, at least theoretically, to *know* something of God while denying the deity of Jesus, but it is impossible to *have* God without remaining true to the teaching in the incarnation.

The doctrine, or teaching, of Christ does not mean that which Christ taught. Nor does it refer to teaching about Him. It certainly doesn't refer to the teachings of faith, repentance, baptism, etc. (Cf. Heb. 6:1-ff)

The doctrine of Christ, as Robertson so aptly puts it, is "that of Christ which is the standard of Christian teaching . . ." It is the teaching of Jesus as the Incarnate Christ which is the *sin qua non* of everything Christian.

A great deal of false teaching has been done in the name of progress. There is a universal desire to move forward. Against this, John warns that, "everyone going ahead (or progressing) and not remaining in the teaching of Christ . . ." has gone too far. He has "progressed" until he no longer has God.

This truth has been demonstrated in the twentieth century. At first it was considered "progressive" to follow the higher critics through a labyrinth of alleged proofs that not all of the Bible is authentic. Certain learned men "progressed" still farther to the conclusion that, if the Bible were unreliable, its claim concerning Jesus must be myth rather than historic truth. "Progress" wavered slightly with the advent of Neo-orthodoxy, the crises theology of the mid-twentieth century. From this, "progress" led to existentialism. The ultimate was finally reached when it was acclaimed that "God is dead!"

This latest theological fad is but an admission on the part of its proponents that what John said is true; each individual who does not remain in the doctrine of Christ does not have God!

It has ever been the hallmark of false teachers to claim to be progressive; to possess advanced knowledge; to have a monopoly on scholarship. That which denies Jesus as Christ, and so has no God, is no knowledge at all. As Barclay has it, "Christianity is not a nebulous, undefined, uncontrolled theosophy; it is anchored forever to the historical figure of Jesus Christ."

There comes a time when even love must draw the line. Indeed one might say there is a line already drawn, beyond which Christian love dare not go. That line is drawn at the doctrine that Jesus is the Christ Incarnate.

It may seem inhospitable, but John instructs us not to invite into our houses, or even to greet one who is known to deny the deity of Jesus! John himself is said to have left the public baths when Cerinthus, the champion of gnosticism, came in! Today, it is more popular to enter into scholarly "dialogue" with such men!

To do otherwise than turn false teachers away is to partake of the evil of heresy. Here is a lesson desperately needed among many well-intentioned Christians today; particularly in certain academic circles. In times such as ours, as well as John's, when the church is fighting for its very life against the forces of "progressive" philosophical theology, it is time to "let the redeemed of the Lord say so . . ." (Psalm 107:2)

4. A projected visit and a salutation . . . v.12-13

(12) "Having many things to write to you I would not do so through paper and ink, but I hope to come to you and to speak mouth to mouth, in order that our joy may be having been made full. (13) Children of your elect sister greet you."

Nothing is more difficult than the attempt to bring about the reconciliation of a profound disagreement through written correspondence. John brings his correspondence with the elect lady to a close with much left unsead, but with the hope that he will soon be able to speak "mouth to mouth." The give and take of dialogue frequently accomplishes more than the one-sided presentation of truth, especially in writing.

The church (either the local congregation or the brotherhood in the area surrounding Ephesus) is included in his closing salutation. This is typical of such correspondence in that day. Paul frequently resorts to this form of closing.

F. *Questions for Review*

1. Why did some early scribes include II John as part of the manuscript with I John?
2. What are some of the different views of the identity of "the elect lady?"
3. Which of these views is probably correct? Support your answer.
4. What is the probable meaning of the term "elder" as used here by John?

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5. Against what does II John constitute a warning?
6. How does John's position against gnosticism answer the present day philosophy that "all truth is relative?"
7. The grace of God is that in God which brings about our _____ of Him.
8. The grace of God is expressed toward us in _____ which reaches its intended end in _____.
9. Sin, in its deepest sense, is a crime against _____ more than _____.
10. A crime against law can be punished by _____.
11. A crime against love can only be atoned for by _____.
Hence, if we are to be forgiven, God must take the initiative.
12. How would you answer the claim that the peace of God in the heart of Christians is "the opiate of the people" to lull them into the grasp of those who would enslave and exploit?
13. Why is John pleasantly surprised to find the wandering children of the elect lady walking according to truth?
14. The only admissable evidence that we know truth is that we _____.
15. The fundamental commandment of God to His children is that we _____.
16. How does love express itself? (Verse 6)
17. Love will not allow _____ with falsehood.
18. Who does John identify as the antichrist in II John? How does this compare with what John says about the antichrist in I John, chapter 2?
19. The essential truth upon which both the personal salvation of Christians and the fellowship of the church rests is _____.
20. What is meant by "the doctrine of Christ" in II John, chapter 9?
21. What is the danger of "progress" as set forth in II John, chapter 9?
22. Why are we forbidden to be hospitable to false teachers?

THIRD JOHN

CHAPTER XVIII

A LETTER TO THE BELOVED GAIUS CONCERNING AN IMPENDING VISIT BY TEACHERS OF TRUTH

III John

A. *Background*

1. Who wrote III John?

III John is so obviously from the pen of the author of the other Johanine letters that no comment is required as to its authorship. What has been said for first and second John will suffice for third John also. The purpose of III John is a practical situation in which the previous teaching must be applied.

2. To whom is it written?

There is no question that III John is written to an individual rather than to a congregation or a group of congregations.

There is some question concerning the identification of the individual, Gaius, to whom it is addressed. Three men of this name are mentioned in the New Testament: Gaius of Macedonia (Acts 19:29), Gaius of Derbe (Acts 20:4), and Gaius of Corinth (I Corinthians 1:14).

There is no conclusive evidence that the Gaius to whom John wrote is to be identified with any of the three. Some early writers chose to identify him with Gaius of Derbe.

We can be fairly certain that John wrote to a Gaius who was an elder in whatever congregation he served, for the matter of which he wrote was serious and would require overt action. In the New Testament church, such matters were settled by the elders.

3. Construction of the book

Three individuals are mentioned by name in III John. For this reason, I have chosen, rather arbitrarily, to divide the outline into three major headings, beginning at the mention of Gaius, Diotrephes, and Demetrius respectively.

THIRD JOHN

B. *The Text*

"The elder unto Gaius the beloved, whom I love in truth. (2) Beloved, I pray that in all things thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. (3) For I rejoiced greatly, when brethren came and bare witness unto thy truth, even as thou walkest in truth. (4) Greater joy have I none than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth. (5) Beloved, thou doest a faithful work in whatsoever thou doest toward them that are brethren and strangers withal; (6) who bare witness to thy love before the church: whom thou wilt do well to set forward on their journey worthily of God: (7) because that for the sake of the Name they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. (8) We therefore ought to welcome such, that we may be fellow-workers for the truth. (9) I wrote somewhat unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. (10) Therefore, if I come, I will bring to remembrance his works which he doeth, prating against us with wicked words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and them that would he forbiddeth and casteth them out of the church. (11) Beloved, imitate not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: he that doeth evil hath not seen God. (12) Demetrius hath the witness of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, we also bear witness; and thou knowest that our witness is true. (13) I had many things to write unto thee, but I am unwilling to write them to thee with ink and pen: (14) but I hope shortly to see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be unto thee. The friends salute thee. Salute the friends by name."

C. *Try to Discover*

1. What is the problem about which John writes to Gaius?
2. Is there any gnostic influence here as in I and II John?
3. What part does Diotrephes play in the problem?
4. Why is Demetrius mentioned?

D. *Paraphrase*

"The elder to Gaius the beloved, whom I love in truth. (2) Beloved! concerning all things I pray thou mayest be prospering and be in

health, even as thy soul is prospering. (3) For I rejoiced exceedingly at brethren coming and bearing witness unto thy truth, even as thou in truth art walking. (4) I have no greater favour than these things, that I should be hearing that my own children in the truth are walking. (5) Beloved! a faithful thing art thou doing, whatsoever thou shalt accomplish for them that are brethren and with all strangers, (6) who have borne witness to thy love before the assembly: whom thou wilt do nobly to set forward worthily of God. (7) For in behalf of The Name have they gone forth, taking nothing from them of the nations. (8) We therefore ought to be sustaining such as these, that we may become fellowworkers with the truth. (9) I wrote something unto the assembly: but who is fond of taking the first place among them—Diotrephes doth not make us welcome. (10) For this cause if I come I will bring to remembrance his works which he is doing, with wicked words prating against us: and not content with these he neither himself maketh the brethren welcome, but them who are minded to do it he forbideth, and out of the assembly doth cast them. (11) Beloved! be not thou imitating what is bad but what is good. He that doeth good is of God: he that doeth what is bad hath not seen God. (12) Unto Demetrius hath witness been borne by all and by the truth itself; howbeit we also bear witness, and thou knowest that our witness is true. (13) Many things had I to write unto thee, but I am unwilling with ink and pen to be writing; I hope straightway to see thee, and mouth to mouth will we talk. Peace be unto thee. The friends salute thee. Salute the friends by name.”

E. *Translation and Comments*

1. Gaius The Beloved . . . v.1-8

(1) “The old one to Gaius the beloved, whom I love in truth. (2) Beloved, concerning everything I pray (for) you to prosper and to be in good health, just as also your soul is prospering. (3) I rejoiced greatly when brethren came to me testifying to your truth just as you are walking in the truth. (4) Greater joy than this I do not have, that I may be hearing of my children walking in truth. (5) Beloved, you are doing faithful works in whatever you may do for the brothers, and strangers at that, (6) the ones bearing witness of your love before the assembly; you will be doing well sending them forward worthily of God. (7) For they went out for the sake of the Name, taking

nothing from the Gentiles (8) Therefore we ought to welcome such (men), in order that we may keep on becoming fellow workers with truth."

There is ample reason to believe that Gaius was a dear and intimate friend of John. He is four times referred to as "beloved." In addition, John expresses concern for his health as well as his stand for the truth.

Concerning Gaius' stand for truth, John has heard from mutual friends, and he rejoices. We know from both the Fourth Gospel and from John's first two letters that the chief concern of the Apostle's life is for truth as it is revealed in Christ. The gnostic influence in III John is indirect, but it is present. It is the spread of this false teaching which causes John to so greatly rejoice when he hears of those who are remaining faithful.

It is not unreasonable to suppose that Gaius was an elder in the congregation in which He served. The matter which John places before him is the matter of hospitality.

Hospitality is a matter nearly forgotten in our day of easy creature comfort, but it ought not so to be. When a Christian brother who, as in III John, is also a stranger, hospitality is the obligation of the church, and especially of the elders. They are to extend him the courtesy which is due one who labors in the truth. The Hebrew writer informs us that in this many have "entertained angels unawares." (Hebrews 13:2)

In verse five, John comes to the real purpose of his letter. Just as there were certain false teachers going about teaching error, there were also dedicated men going out in the name of Christ. Just as he would not have believers greet nor invite false teachers into their houses (II John 1:10), he is equally concerned that no opportunity to extend hospitality to faithful men be missed.

Not only is the apostle anxious that those who went out in Christ's name be treated with hospitality, but he would also have Gaius "send them forth worthily of God." "Sending forth" is frequently used in the New Testament to include financial support; the furnishing of the means of continuing the journey of service.

Visiting missionaries, since they are going out "for the sake of the Name," are to be treated as one would treat Christ Himself. It is in His name, for the sake of His purpose that they are leaving the security of established homes to teach the truth. There is nothing less worthy of

God than the niggardly treatment extended to such laborers by shortsighted church members, and even by those who share the eldership with Gaius.

The policy followed by Gaius' visitors (as well as by Paul—II Cor. 12:16-f) of not taking money from those among whom they did missionary work, increases the necessity of hospitality and support. This policy is equally important on the mission field today. There is ever present danger that the missionary will be accused of doing what he does for the sake of monetary return. Therefore, it is required that Christians in established congregations furnish the missionary with his livelihood.

The responsibility of the church in the adequate direct support of those who give their full time to the preaching and teaching of the Word is a subject feared by too many modern preachers as well as their congregations. Paul, as John, makes no uncertain demands in this direction. (I Cor. 9:14)

The reward of financial support to Gospel preachers by those who render the support is that they thus become fellow workers with truth. Again Paul supports John's statement. In thanking the Philippians for their gift to himself, Paul expresses gratitude not only for the benefit their gift would bring him in his need, but that through their giving, they were permitted to share in his suffering for Christ's sake. (Phil. 4:10-20)

2. Diotrophes who loves pre-eminence . . . v.9-11

(9) "I wrote something to the congregation, but Diotrophes the one loving pre-eminence among them is not receiving us. (10) On account of this if I should come I will bring about his remembering the work which he is doing, unjustly accusing us with wicked words, and not satisfied with this neither is he receiving the brethren but is hindering those who want to, and casts them out of the congregation. (11) Beloved, do not mimic that which is evil but that which is good. The one doing good is from God; the one doing evil has not seen God."

Divine wrath is the reaction of divine love in the presence of sin. Here is a superb demonstration of this truth as the "Apostle of Love" severely castigates a self-assuming status seeker by the name of Diotrophes. Most scholarship is agreed that Diotrophes is, like Gaius, an elder in the same congregation. The situation which exists is not an unfamiliar one.

Diotrephes, the self-seeking, assertive overlord, dominates the congregation. He refuses to receive what the apostle has written, probably concerning the gnostic controversy, or to receive the travelling missionaries with the hospitality his eldership demands of him. Instead, for his own reasons, he has opposed those who would extend such hospitality and has even cast them out of the congregation.

Gaius, as is so often true of loving, sincere, Christian men, has given no apparent resistance to Diotrephes' self-assertion. John implores him not to mimic that which is evil by passively tolerating Diotrephes' un-Christian behavior. It is time for someone to stand up against the dictatorial demagogery of Diotrephes and to see to it that proper treatment is afforded the ministers of the Word!

All that is needed to make this letter one of the most relevant of the New Testament is to change the names of these two elders! Where is the congregation that has not been plagued by its own Diotrephes? There is an abundance of egoists holding office in local congregations. They will espouse whatever doctrine, false or otherwise, that will gain for them the most personal status. They will mistreat any member of the congregation who, though not outwardly opposing their grab for power, attempts to receive the truth in love and treats the ministers of the Word with Christian gentility.

To the honest, "beloved," service-seeking elders who serve with the modern kin of Diotrephes, John's plea is needful today. Such men gain power only when others, through failure to oppose, follow after their evil behavior. The dictators of history have all climbed to power on the backs of good people who simply did nothing to oppose them. To "go along" with such a man is, in effect, to mimic his conduct.

Self-agrandizement has no place in the kingdom. Jesus taught that he who would be great among us must be servant of all. Anytime a cousin of Diotrephes rises in any congregation, it is the duty of the kin of Gaius, the beloved, to actively oppose and put down such enemies of the faith.

The example here is John himself, the "Apostle of Love," who warns of stern action should it become necessary to visit the congregation in person to set the situation right. His warning is reminiscent of Paul's to the Corinthian congregation. (Cf. I Cor. 4:21, II Cor. 10:11, 13:1-3)

3. Demetrius, who has the witness of truth . . . v.12

(12) "It has been witnessed to Demetrius by all and by the truth itself and we also are bearing witness, and you know that our witness is true."

It has been suggested that Demetrius was the leader of the visiting delegation to whom John would have the congregation extend hospitality. Perhaps he was himself the bearer of the letter to Gaius.

It is not possible to identify him positively. Some have thought he might be Demetrius of Ephesus, the silversmith of Acts 19:21-ff. If this be true, the three-fold witness to his genuineness is necessary as was Barnabus' intercession on behalf of Saul of Tarsus just after his conversion.

Others have thought that Demetrius is Demas mentioned by Paul in Colossians 4:14, Philemon 24 and II Timothy 4:10. Demas is a shortened form of Demetrius. Again, if this be true, the witness would certainly be necessary after what Paul had written about him.

There is no conclusive evidence that John's Demetrius is either of these.

Whoever Demetrius may have been, John is apprehensive lest the lack of aggressiveness in Gaius cause him to succumb to Diotrophes' forcefulness and turn Demetrius and his party away. Pursuant to this end, John lists three witnesses in behalf of Demetrius.

First, Demetrius had the witness of all who know him. If he was indeed either Demetrius of Ephesus or the second Demetrius, this is significant testimony. In the case of Demetrius of Ephesus, the whole church knew by this time that he had been the leader of the opposition to the Gospel in the very area to which he now came as a missionary! If he was, on the other hand, the Demas accused by Paul of having turned away from the faith because he loved the things of the world, the church also knew of him. Testimony to his repentance was needed.

In either case, or indeed if Demetrius is neither of these, John presents as evidence of his present genuineness the witness of those who know him *now*.

From the Christian view point it is a man's present genuineness that is to determine his relationship to the church, not his past behavior as either a heathen or a backslider!

The second witness to the genuineness of Demetrius is the truth. A. T. Robertson suggests that "the truth" here refers to the Holy Spirit Himself as in I John 5:6. It seems more likely that the term is meant rather to refer to the truth of the Gospel as opposed to the error of gnosticism. Demetrius' stand for the truth in the face of his falsehood would indeed mark him as a genuine Christian.

John is the third witness on Demetrius' behalf. The apostle expects the elder Gaius to take his word for Demetrius' character. It is to be hoped that now as well as then, the word of an inspired apostle is enough for any elder!

4. Final salutation . . . v.13-15

(13) "I had much to write you, but I do not wish to write through paper and ink; (14) I hope, rather, to see you and we shall speak mouth to mouth. (15) Peace to you. The friends are greeting you. Greet the friends by name."

The final salutation is much like that of II John. In controversy, John prefers to speak face to face rather than attempt to settle a personal matter through correspondence.

John's choice of the common greeting "peace to you" may be more than coincidental in light of the controversial atmosphere to which he wrote. In the midst of doctrinal as well as personal controversy, the Christian will be victorious who has within himself the peace that passeth all understanding.

F. *Questions for Review*

1. What significance do you attach to John's repeated referral to Gaius as "beloved?"
2. What position did Gaius probably hold in his home congregation?
3. What is the problem about which John writes Gaius?
4. Contrast the personality of Gaius and that of Diotrephes.
5. What treatment does John ask of Gaius for the visiting ministers?
6. What is the significance of the term "set forward on their journey?"
7. Why is the policy of not taking money from those to whom the Gospel is preached on a mission field a wise policy?
8. What is the reward promised by John to those who support the preachers of the Gospel?
9. What wrong had Diotrephes done?
10. What damage is possible to the church when an elder accuses a minister "with wicked words?"
11. How do genuine Christians often imitate evil men such as Diotrephes?
12. What two possible identifications have been suggested for Demetrius?
13. What three witnesses does John set forth as to the genuineness of Demetrius?

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SPECIAL STUDIES

W. CARL KETCHERSIDE

- Walking in the Light
- Receive Him Not

WALKING IN THE LIGHT

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:7).

No discussion of fellowship can ignore this statement. It is apparent that the fellowship mentioned is conditioned upon "walking in the light" and doing so to the extent that God is in the light. But what is the light? What is darkness? What is it to "walk in the light?" An objective analysis of this passage and a proper answer to these questions produces a real surprise to partisan defenders who have merely accepted a traditional explanation without study or investigation.

It is not our present intention to outline at length the background of this epistle. That belongs more appropriately to our forthcoming discussion of 2 John 10, 11. It will suffice now to say that, at the time of this writing, the last survivor of the apostles was living in Ephesus. Here he came into direct contact with the sect of the Gnostics who had infiltrated and disturbed every congregation in the Greek world. These factionalists pretended to special insights and claimed to have knowledge of the mystical and elemental structure of the universe. They took their title from *gnosis*, knowledge. They were the "knowing ones," those on the inside, as opposed to the uninitiated.

Although there were various schools of gnostic thought, all were basically agreed upon the idea underlying their synthetic philosophy, that all matter is essentially evil. On this basis they concluded that God could not have personally created the world because he could have no contact with or relationship to evil. By the same token they concluded that Jesus was either a phantom, or that he was born of Joseph and Mary and elevated to Sonship with God at his baptism by John. Under the leadership of Cerinthus and other advocates of that day, this philosophy wormed its way into every congregation in Asia Minor. Wherever it went it destroyed the faith of many in the fact that Jesus had come in the flesh.

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Prevalent in the theory was the idea that there could be no possible union between the human and the divine. The former was material and, therefore, evil; and the possibility of fellowship between them was regarded as absurd and ridiculous. God was so far above the universe which had been created by a demi-urge, one of a series of emanations which had gone out from the divine essence, that he was wholly unconcerned about anything on earth and completely without interest in mankind. There could be no bridging of the chasm between deity and humanity, and from this stemmed two conclusions. Jesus was not deity manifested in a body of flesh and there was no such thing as a stage of fellowship between God and man.

John counters this theory with his gospel record. This will account for the difference between it and the "synoptics." This term is applied to Matthew, Mark and Luke, because their contents can be charted in parallel columns and synchronized. A synopsis can be made which will be true of all three. The gospel according to John does not lend itself to such treatment. It was written for a distinctive purpose and to meet a wholly different need. The first two epistles of John were written for a distinctive purpose and to meet a wholly different need. The first two epistles of John were written for the same purpose. Both specifically deal with the treatment to be accorded those who "deny that Jesus is the Christ" (1 John 2:22), that is, "that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh" (2 John 7).

An analysis of 1 John in the light of its background and the circumstances which called it forth, is one of the most rewarding experiences which can come to the dedicated Bible student. John begins by affirming that eternal life, which was with God from the beginning, was manifested and made visible unto men, and that he was one of the selected witnesses who beheld that life embodied in a person, and could testify to it. "We have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life." Since eternal life was with the Father from the beginning, and was not merely extension of time, but possessed the quality of personality, the pre-existence of the "Word of life" was thus asserted.

Nature of the Testimony

The fact that prior to the manifestation, the Word was in a different state, does not argue against existence. It serves only to demonstrate that the incarnation revealed to human eyes what previously had been hidden from them. Once accepted, this would deal a death blow to

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elemental gnosticism. But there was a group of gnostics called the Docetics, from *dokeo*, to appear, to seem. These alleged that Jesus possessed no reality, that he was immaterial, and a phantom (or phantasy). For their benefit the apostle shows that the Word not only became flesh, but was actually subject to examination by the senses.

He argues against the possibility of the witnesses being deceived or deluded upon the basis of their intimate personal association with the embodied Word. From the standpoint of time, proximity and conscious interest, they had ample opportunity to examine the validity of his claims. They were with him long enough and were associated with him closely enough that they could not be misled. Their own careers and very lives were staked upon his veracity. They had left all and followed after him.

Their examination was audible, visual and manual. "We have heard, we have seen with our eyes, we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life." The best proof is visual, and this is stressed. Not only did they see Jesus with their eyes, but they "looked upon" him. This has to do with studied investigation or prolonged scrutiny. Theirs was no mere passing glance. They did not simply *look at* Jesus as he passed by, but they *looked upon* him. The apostles were qualified witnesses. Their testimony met all of the requirements essential to proving a point of fact.

Their experience with the manifested Word made possible a fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. Eternal life became incarnate with them. "This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life" (1 John 5:11, 12). When the Word of life became embodied, that Word was designated the Son of God. When eternal life dwells in us we are also called sons of God. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (3:1).

The declaration of what the apostolic witnesses had seen and heard was to make possible the extension of the divine-human fellowship unto their hearers, and thus provide for them fulness of joy. The essence of the message which had been conveyed unto them by God and which they, in turn, conveyed to others, was summed up in the words, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." Since the declaration was to assure fellowship of the human with the divine, and since it consisted of the statement that God is light in the absolute, it is obvious that

nothing can be of greater importance than identification of the light. Fellowship is conditioned upon walking in that light.

Fellowship is not by word but by walk. It is not the testimony of the lips but of the life. The word "walk" means more than merely making progress in a given direction, or placing each foot alternately before the other. It involves experience and sharing of thought and life. "And Enoch walked with God, and he was not (found); for God took him" (Gen. 5:24). "Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God" (Gen. 6:9). Inasmuch as God is light, to say that one is in fellowship with God, while walking in darkness, is to lie and do not the truth. Darkness is the opposite to light.

Identifying the Light

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

What is the light? In this context the light is what God is, for God is light. The word "light" is used as a symbol for various qualities or things in the inspired scriptures. Sometimes it is used for divine revelation, and the unrevealed is darkness. Sometimes it is used for reverence of the living God, and idolatry is darkness. More frequently it is used for knowledge and ignorance is darkness. Only by studying the frame of reference in which the term is employed can one be certain of its meaning.

In this connection, we can eliminate from consideration anything which it is not possible for man to possess in the same degree as God, that is, in an absolute or perfect degree. "God is light and in him is no darkness at all . . . If we walk in the light *as he is in the light.*" This immediately excludes knowledge of God's will from consideration. It is obvious that none of us can have the same degree of mental perception as God. The finite mind cannot embrace the scope of the infinite. To walk in the light cannot mean either to perfectly understand God's will or to perfectly do it. This would require something we do not have in the flesh.

Fortunately, we can determine from this brief epistle what light is, as John uses the word. *Light is love.* It is not, however, affection, sentiment or passion. This love of which John speaks is *agape*, the love which God had for us which prompted him to send Jesus to die for us. It is that active and energetic good will which stops at nothing to achieve

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passive. It is apprehended in its demonstration which is always out-reaching and outgoing. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because the good of the beloved object. It must be expressed. It can never be he laid down his life for us" (3:16). It is this in which we must walk.

Light is love and since the opposite of light is darkness, the darkness must be hate. Once this is grasped every sentence in the epistle falls into place like the pieces of a jig-saw puzzle and a beautiful picture results. Let us proceed with the proof of our assertion. To abide in the light is to love the brethren. "He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him" (2:10). If this is correct, hatred for the brethren will be darkness. "He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother is in darkness even until now" (2:9). This last is the equivalent of saying, "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie" (1:6). "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar" (4:20).

It may be urged that the completing phrase of verse 6 is "do not the truth." This is correct for if we walk in darkness "we lie and do not the truth." But it is by brotherly love that we know we are of the truth. "And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him" (3:19). To the Greeks, truth was the reality which was at the basis of all appearance. It was the ideal which was behind every semblance. It was the genuine. John is saying that those who are "in the truth" are obligated to walk according to it, and the reality behind God's whole purpose is love. If we say that we share in the diivne nature (have fellowship with God), and walk in darkness (hate our brethren), we lie and do not the truth (miss the reality underlying the whole Christian structure).

Personification of Love

On what premise can we conclude that John introduces the theme of love in conjunction with his affirmation that the Word of life was personalized? The answer is simply that it was the love of God which made eternal life manifest unto us. Because he loved us thus, we ought also to love one another. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him" (4:9). "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (3: 16). "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (4: 11).

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The Son of God was "God manifest in the flesh, reconciling the world unto himself." But that which was manifested was the Word of life which was with God in the beginning, and which was also God. But that light which was manifested was eternal life (1:2). It was this Word of life personalized which constituted the basis of the apostolic message. "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you." Eternal life is not extension of time but expression of love! Read the following carefully. "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light" (1:5). "For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another" (3:11). "This is the message . . . God is light." "This is the message . . . that we should love." There are not two messages. There is simply *the message*. It defines the nature of God and outlines the expression of that nature in those who are his sons.

And if it be true that light is love, it must follow that, if God is light, God is love. On this the record is positive. "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (4:16). "He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love" (4:8). To the serious student nothing else should be necessary to identify the light. When a writer says, "God is light," and in the very same connection twice explains what he means by saying, "God is love," it should require little intellectual ability to determine that in the context of that writer, *light is love!*

Perfection of Love

We come now to the chief intellectual hurdle and the greatest challenge to the scholarly mind. If light is love, does this not imply that we must possess love in the absolute, that is, in perfection? Whatever light is we must experience it, that is, walk in it to the same degree as it is manifested in God. "If we walk in the light as he is in the light." That this is absolute is proven by the statement that "God is light and in him is no darkness at all." If we walk in the light as he is in the light there can be none of the opposite effect in us.

We have already eliminated knowledge from consideration because all of us are ignorant in some degree, of the will of God. No one knows as much as God. To assume that light is knowledge of God's will and darkness is ignorance of it, is simply to make us liars. We would then have to read, "if we say that we have fellowship with him and are ignor-

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ant of any part of the divine will, we lie and do not the truth. But if our knowledge is absolute and perfect, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." No sane reasoner would want to hinge his hope of being cleansed from sin upon knowing as much as God does.

But do we not face the same problem if we regard light as being love? Can we love as God? Can we walk in *this* light as God is in the light? I unhesitatingly affirm that we can. This was the very purpose of John's epistle. It was written to tell us why and how we must do so. The thing that disturbs many is that they regard love as something to be achieved rather than something to be experienced. But no one achieves light. It is a creation of God, a blessing to be bestowed and enjoyed. And that love which is equivalent to light is not something to be attained by human striving. It is a gift of God. It is a commitment unto us of the divine nature. "Love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God" (4: 7).

When the love of God was personalized in Jesus, God revealed the possibility of incarnating the divine nature. That nature had always existed but was never expressed before as it was in Christ. "In him the whole fulness of diety dwells bodily" (Col. 2:9). In him the world could see love manifested. The nature possessed by God could now be incorporate in man, for true love was now available. "A new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth" (2:8): The true love was now reality in flesh.

The love that God requires he supplies. It is a fruit of the Spirit. It is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us of God (Romans 5:5). It did not originate with man but with God. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us" (I John 4:10). "We love because he first loved us" (4:19). When God dwells in us his love is perfected in us (4:12). "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love: and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world" (4:16, 17). As he is, so are we—and in this world!

This does not minimize our responsibility. It does not mean the human factor is eliminated. The provision of love is God's part; the expression of it is ours. God never forces us to act contrary to our will. It is his will

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to make love ours, it is ours to will love to others, and to be like him. This is proven by the fact that sometimes love is regarded as light which man cannot create, while at the same time man is commanded to walk in that light, that is, to exercise it in his own life. A man can love his brother or he can hate him. The manifestation of love is contingent upon the will of the individual, but one who is completely surrendered and committed to God will spontaneously and naturally walk in love. The secret is the surrender of the will absolutely to God so that the divine nature is incarnated in us as it was in Jesus. The Word must become flesh in us!

Loving Our Brothers

God is light. God is love. One who walks in love walks in light. One who dwells in God dwells in light. One who dwells in love dwells in God. God dwells in such a person, so he is in the light and the light is in him. "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (4:16). It is as we love our brothers that we walk in light and move out of darkness—the darkness of hate and animosity. Let us note the things affirmed of such love.

1. To love the brethren is to abide in the light (2:10). The word "abide" is not the word for a temporary dwelling. It is not used of transients who merely stay overnight. The light is the fixed residence of those who love the brethren. They do not merely pass through the light enroute from one area of darkness to another.

2. Love for the brethren is one of the two distinctive marks of sonship with God. Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (3:1). "In this the children of God are manifest and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother" (3:10).

3. Love for the brethren is a waymark to identify the area into which we have come as that of life. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (3:14). The expression used here has to do with crossing a frontier. It was used of those returning from an alien country to their native land. When one is able to love the brethren unreservedly, because they are brethren, and not upon other conditions, he can know that he has left the territory where death reigns. He no longer breathes the noxious fumes of hate, he is in a purer

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atmosphere. He does not wade through the murky swamps of animosity. His feet are on solid ground.

4. Love for the brethren is a criterion by which we can determine we are of the truth. It is useless to contend we are of the truth when we do not love our brethren. We can memorize the scriptures and be able to quote whole chapters but this does not demonstrate we are of the truth. "And hereby we know we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him" (3:19).

5. Love manifested toward brethren enables God to dwell in us, that is to be in fellowship with us. As we love, the divine love is perfected in us. We must love as God loved. His love was not conditioned upon our sinlessness, our perfection in knowledge, or our freedom from error. The love of God is different from all other forms of love. Love which is composed of sentiment, affection or emotion, is extended to those who are deemed worthy. The love of God creates the worth in itself. The first loves those who are precious; the others are precious because they are loved.

When we tolerate or endure those who disagree with us and love those who do not, we are no better than the despised and outcast publicans (Matt. 5:46). They loved those who reciprocated in kind. Theirs was the mutual sharing of misery. Our love is to be creative and outgoing. It expends itself because only in so doing can it live. In loving we see God in our own hearts. "No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another God dwells in us, and his love is perfected in us" (4:12).

6. When we are partners in Brotherly Love, Unlimited, we are freed from all torment or fear. This is not true of those who are restrained and restricted by a legalistic concept of the Way. All who seek to live by law, or love by law, will spend their time on earth "bound in shallows and in miseries." Who knows if he has learned all he could learn, done all he could do, or climbed as high as he could by exertion of his own power or ability? There will always be doubt and suspicion, fear and distrust, under such a system. God changed the world by turning love loose. When we do the same we lose all fear of men on earth and judgment after death. The secret to the carefree life is love unbounded. "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment . . . There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear; because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love" (4:17, 18). Notice that it is only perfect love that can cast out fear. Imperfect love is always frightened and fearful.

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Hating Our Brothers

In the context love is a positive, active, energetic and energizing force. It is creative. But hate is negative. Because of its nature love must express itself in positive fashion, but hate need not necessarily do so. It can be simply lack of love. Man was made with the ability to love and thus to be like God, who is love. When he fails in this respect he does not cross the frontier. One must do something to leave where he is but he need not do anything to stay where he is. Not to love is to hate! This thesis would be incomplete if we showed the nature of love without studying the nature and results of hate.

1. Hatred for the brethren (that is, lack of love) leaves one in darkness. Regardless of how one may assert he is in the light, if he does not love, he lies. "He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now" (2:9). Darkness is simply absence of light. God did not create darkness. He created light.

2. Hatred of our brethren blinds us and makes true perception impossible. No man can ever grasp the import of God's revelation until he loves his brethren as God loves them. To assert that one sees the truth while hating his brothers is like a blind man claiming to view the beauties of nature. "But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because the darkness hath blinded his eyes" (2:11).

3. Lack of love for the brethren is proof of the fatherhood of Satan in our lives. The realm of hatred is presided over by "the prince of the power of the air." Those who operate in the area of hatred and animosity are on the devil's territory. It is useless to affirm we are sons of God if we do not love God's other sons. "In this the children of God are manifested and the children of the devil" (3:10).

4. Those who do not love the brethren are still in the domain of death. They dwell like lepers in putrid sepulchers, and like the evil spirits of old "abide in the tombs." It is by love that we cross the frontier from death unto life. He who has not learned to love has not learned to live (3:14).

5. One who hates his brother is a murderer. Under the regime of Christ, thought and intent may be taken for the act. Jesus pointed out that those in olden times said, "Thou shalt not kill" but now to be angry against a brother without cause, or to slander or falsely accuse him, might result in losing one's soul. One who hates lacks only the opportunity to do violence to a brother who is the object of his wrath and spite.

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6. One who does not love does not know God. He may know about God and be able to catalogue the attributes of deity. But there is a difference in the ability to identify a person and in being identified with him. It is one thing to describe another; a wholly different thing to abide in Him. "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (I John 4:8).

The Fallacy of Orthodoxy

It cannot be denied that the average preacher of "The Church of Christ" regards the light of which John speaks as his own credal interpretation of the new covenant scriptures! To "walk in the light" is to live up to the traditional factional explanation of the party of which he is a member. To "walk in darkness" is to deviate in some particular, especially that of the special party emphasis, from the unwritten creed. There are some two dozen factions in the non-instrument segment of the disciple brotherhood. Each one thinks that it alone is in the light and all of the others are in darkness. Since "fellowship one with another" is conditioned upon "walking in the light," and since the light is the legalistic code of the faction, fellowship is regarded as ordained of God to be limited to fellow-partisans.

It would be a matter of compassion if only the ignorant and unlearned were victims of such philosophy, but it becomes tragic when it is realized that this type of exposition is advocated by editors and journalists who have a reputation in their parties. It is even advanced by college professors responsible for teaching the young. The situation would be regrettable if such teaching was given without intent to unduly influence others; it is even more so when it is done with the deliberate design of maintaining division in the family of God, and keeping apart those who should recognize each other as brethren. When the humbler saints indicate a desire to exhibit love for those on the other side of a partisan wall they are discouraged by misapplication of the statement, "If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another." Actually the revised factional version should read, "*If they* will walk in our light as we are in that light, we will have fellowship with them."

The apostle John wrote in a time of crisis to stimulate believers in the Word of life and to encourage fellowship in love. His letter is a majestic treatise on brotherly love, unsurpassed in the whole realm of literature. In spite of that, men under the guise of loyalty to Jesus single out a

passage and interpret it in such a manner as to make fellowship impossible and to render every claim of the epistle upon our better selves null and void.

I deny that the light in this instance is a written code. God is light but he is not a written code. Not a letter that John wrote was either life or light. If the third epistle was either one, the apostle deliberately withheld life or light from Gaius, for he declared, "I had many things to write, but I will not with pen and ink write to thee." If the second epistle was to be life or light, it was imperfect, for John wrote, "Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink." That the first letter was not intended to convey life is evident. "These things have I written unto you that believe on the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life" (5:13). Eternal life is not having a copy of the Bible, but having the Son of God. "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (5:12).

Where is the congregation of believers which will brazenly affirm that it is composed only of those who know as much about God's will and purpose as God himself? If the light in which we must walk to have fellowship, is knowledge of God's revelation, we must either be as perfect as God or we cannot be in fellowship. "If we walk in the light *as he is in the light*, we have fellowship one with another." "God is light and in him is no darkness at all." If darkness is ignorance we cannot be ignorant at all. We must know all there is to know, and be as wise as God, or else we walk in darkness. If we say we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness—if we are ignorant about anything—we lie and do not the truth.

The absurdity of this lies in the fact that we will have to immerse people in the morning and exclude them from our fellowship in the afternoon, for if they do not come to a perfect knowledge as soon as they are immersed they are walking in darkness. If the champions of orthodoxy say that we must allow them time to learn, then we ask how long can they walk in darkness and be accepted? How much of the Bible must one be able to grasp perfectly before he is walking in darkness? How much of it can he misunderstand and still walk in the light?

It is time to quit playing around with such puerile proponents of partisan positions. Where is the preacher who quotes this passage to debar saints and discourage fellowship among brethren, who will dare affirm that he is as wise as God and as good as God? If he dare not say that

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he is, by his own admission he is not in the fellowship. Like Haman, he is hanged on the fatal gallows which he constructed to destroy others. I consider the traditional orthodox interpretation placed upon I John 1:7 as one of the most dangerous ever palmed off on unsuspecting men and women. It is subversive of the Spirit and a scandal to the church of God. It dooms the body to disintegration and can only damn us all to destruction.

Let us recapture the valid meaning of this warped and wrested passage and use it to promote fellowship, not pervert it. God is light. God is love. If we walk in the light we walk in God. If we walk in love we abide in God. If we love our brothers we abide in the light. You cannot separate light and love. Neither can you separate those who love one another. We quit living together when we quit loving each other. The road to togetherness is the path of love. "And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also" (I John 4:21). When we heed this command, and only then, can it be said, "As he is, so are we," and it can be added—"in this world."

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If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed:

For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 10, 11).

This is one of the "twisted scriptures." It has become the handle for every factional tool used to pry apart the living stones in the temple of God. It is the murderous knife employed to dismember the body of the Lord. It was written by the apostle of love to protect the flock of God from prowling wolves who sought to seduce them through denial of the foundational fact that Jesus has come in the flesh. It is now used to convert the sheep into snarling dogs, snapping at each other over every stray scrap of doctrine. It has substituted the law of the pack for the love of the flock.

No other passage so well illustrates the danger inherent in ignoring the context. That the leaders of thought in the "Church of Christ" should have been betrayed into adopting an interpretation which makes unity impossible and renders ridiculous their vaunted claim to respect for the authority of the word of God, is one of the amazing developments in the restoration movement of which we are heirs. Any use of the written word

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which make impossible the fulfillment of the prayer and purpose of the Living Word is abuse and misuse. We can never regain our integrity as scholars until we repudiate the current partisan explanation which makes every vagary of thought and dissent an occasion to destroy fraternal relationship and stab love dead at our feet.

What is "the doctrine" which is so transcendent that one who does not attest to it, must not be allowed to enter the house, nor be given a greeting on the street or in the marketplace? Or, looking at it from the opposite position, what is it that, when advocated is so heinous and so poison to the fellowship, that to merely salute its proponent is to make one a participant in his vicious works? The use of individual cups in the Lord's Supper, says one. Bible classes on the Lord's Day, says another. Chartered homes to care for orphans, says still another. Advocacy of the pre-millennial coming of the Lord, or of instrumental music, or of missionary societies—all of these are added to the motley list by partisan voices raised to high pitch in the clamor for debate.

The depth of one's love for the family of God can be determined by the relative value of those things for which he is willing to sacrifice or break it up. The triviality of those views elevated to a higher station than the family ties created by the blood of the cross is indicative of the shallowness and superficiality of thought eating like a pernicious cancer at the heart of a great restoration movement in our day. Who can really believe that the apostle who wrote more about brotherly love than any other man, would recommend that we refuse entrance to our homes to those saints who disagree with us about cups, classes, colleges, or collectives for the care of orphans? What sane reasoner can actually conclude that to greet a brother who differs with us about the millenium or instrumental music is to become a participant in some "evil deed"? The very absurdity of such a conclusion renders obnoxious the common usage of the passage by "Church of Christ" expositors.

I do not hesitate to say that so long as these men maintain such an unrealistic attitude toward the sacred scriptures they can never make any impact upon the thinking world. They will only be purveyors of prejudice, agents of animosity, and disseminators of distrust. Such explanations are exercises in eisegetics, not exegetics. They inject a meaning into the holy oracles rather than extracting one from them. And while there was a time when dogmatism held men and women in line because the masses could neither read nor write, that day is over. We face another "Great Awakening" in the religious realm. Enlightened people are

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growing less satisfied with the dry husks thrown out to them by factional debaters.

To what did John refer by "this doctrine"? Who were the wandering teachers who were to be refused entrance when they applied for hospitality? What condition existed at the time which made it imperative that the "elect lady and her children" refrain from giving a greeting to certain teachers? Who were those who "went beyond" and did not remain in the doctrine of Christ? Surely what they denied must be related to the very fundamental and essential facts upon which Christianity was predicated to require such drastic measures to preserve it inviolate.

General Observations

Every reputable scholar known to us believes that John was writing to counteract the pernicious effects of Gnosticism. Upon no other ground can we account for the approach of his gospel record and first two epistles. Who were the Gnostics? What did they teach? Why were they so dangerous to the Christian concept? How did John become involved in the controversy? It is not our purpose here to analyze this synthetic philosophy, interesting though it might be. We shall be content with supplying our readers with sufficient background material to enable them to see the purpose and intent of John and to recognize how modern "interpreters" among us have warped and wrested what the apostle wrote. For your own convenience and to aid the reviewers of what we write, we will number the various observations.

1. The word "gnostic" is from *gnosis*, knowledge. The Gnostics were "the knowing ones". It was believed by the Gnostics that all matter is inherently evil and only spirit is good. Since the spirit was imprisoned in the body, and the body is composed of matter, the chief aim was to free or liberate the spirit. Taking their cue from the Greek mystery religions they taught that only by probing the depths and ascending the heights of knowledge, could that which was real be delivered from the material. This required an elaborate secret ritual coupled with painful, arduous and disciplined investigation and research into the mystical infinite wisdom of God. All men were not equipped to do this, either from lack of time, inclination or ability, and the majority of these would continue on a mere animal plane. The Gnostics were in a class by themselves in that they could "go beyond."

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2. This idea of a spiritual aristocracy made up of specially endowed thinkers who were on "the inside" would wreak havoc upon the idea of fellowship. For this reason John emphasizes over and over that all of the saints have access to, and possess, knowledge. The word "know" appears in its various forms eleven times in chapter two. "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and *ye know* all things" (2:20). "I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth but because *ye know it*" (2:21). The one who doesn't know where he is going is the one who hates his brother (2:11). In chapter three "know" is found 8 times, in chapter four 7 times, and in chapter five 7 times. In every instance the disciples are comforted with the thought that knowledge is not the special privilege of the few. Note the recurrence of "we know" and "ye know."

3. The Gnostics held that matter was evil. On this basis they speculated that God could not have created the earth because it is material. By the same token the idea of the incarnation was unthinkable. One group held that Jesus was simply an ethereal person, a mere phantom. They insisted that he never had a real flesh and blood body, that he was pure spirit. These were called Docetics, from *dokeo*, to appear. John attacked this speculation by affirming that the apostles had heard, seen, scrutinized and handled Jesus with their hands.

4. Cerinthus was the first Gnostic leader whose name has come down to us. He lived in Ephesus where John apparently wrote his epistles. According to Eusebius, the father of church historians, John knew Cerinthus for what he really was. Cerinthus made a distinction between Jesus and the Christ, or Logos. He taught that Jesus was human, the son of Joseph and Mary. But Jesus increased in wisdom and in favor with God, which he could not have done if he had been God, according to Cerinthus. (See Luke 2:52). When Jesus was thirty years of age, he had lived in such a state of purity that God adopted him, publicly announcing that Jesus was his Son in whom he was well pleased. Upon this occasion the Christ (anointing) descended upon him in the shape of a dove. Cerinthus reasoned that Jesus could not have been God prior to this as he did not have the Spirit of God until it descended upon him. The Christ came upon him at John's baptism.

He further contended that the Christ (Spirit) could not be killed or made to suffer pain. The human Jesus was nailed to the cross and en-

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dured agony but the Christ had withdrawn as he came, and was beyond the reach of men. It is for this reason John insists that, "This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ: not by water only, but by water and blood" (I John 5:6). It was not just Jesus who came to be baptized but Jesus Christ; it was not just Jesus who was crucified but Jesus Christ. He did not come by water (baptism) only, but by water and blood (crucifixion).

5. The crux of the whole matter as it affected Christian faith lay simply in the fact that a Gnostic could not believe in the incarnation. It was impossible for such a person to admit that the pre-existent Logos was made flesh. This provided a real test. If one, upon being asked, "Do you believe that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh?" answered in the affirmative, you could be sure he was motivated by the Spirit of God. If he denied or hedged, as the record says, "Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist" (I John 4:1-3).

Specific Observations

Having given this meager outline of Gnostic philosophy we turn to consideration of the group of Gnostics against whom John sought to protect the saints. Let us list some of the things about them which we can learn from his writings.

1. We know that these men pretended to have access to a source of knowledge which made them superior in wisdom to the average member of the body. It was their aim to make the Way intellectually acceptable to the philosophic schools by expressing their concepts of Christ in the language of Oriental mysticism. They belonged to an arrogant cult of philosophic aristocrats who claimed to have the ability to *go beyond* and penetrate the veil of true learning. The idea that Jesus had come in the flesh was spiritual pap for infantile mentalities but could not be countenanced by the advanced reasoner. John declared that the true *gnosis* was the apostolic testimony and the test of *knowledge* of God was willingness to receive that testimony. "We are of God; he that *knoweth* God heareth us: he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby *know* we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (I John 4:6).

2. We know the Gnostics were respected and received by many and that they were numerous. They were regarded as possessing visionary

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insight and revelatory power because they were accepted as prophets. For this reason the apostle cautioned the saints to test the spirits "because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (I John 4:1). John labels them antichrists and says, "Even now there are many antichrists."

3. We know these men were traveling from place to place as did many of the philosophers and teachers in the Greek world and they no doubt depended upon the homes they contacted in each community to extend them hospitality. Any such home would then be used as a base for their efforts. It is significant that John says, "Many false prophets are *gone out into the world.*" The false prophets were doing what Jesus commissioned the apostles to do.

4. We know that the Gnostics were separatists and schismatics and that they abandoned the body of saints to create a sect of their own. The unity of the body is based upon acknowledgment of the great fact that Jesus is the Christ. When men no longer are willing to accept this foundation upon which the community of heaven was planted they become antichrists. "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us" (I John 2:19). It is interesting that, in this context, John shows the one creed which can bind us together, repudiation of which will fragment us. "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist that denieth the Father and the Son" (2:22). So long as one accepts fully the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, he remains upon the foundation upon which Jesus said he would construct his community. When he forsakes that foundation he forsakes all that is Christian.

5. We know that even though the Gnostics withdrew they still sought to influence those who allowed that which they had heard from the beginning to remain in them, and who continued in the Son and in the Father (2:24). These false apostles were proselytizers. Under the guise of teaching advanced truth they wormed themselves into any home which would receive them, and led those who dwelt there to deny that Jesus was the Christ. It was to warn against such teachers that John wrote, "These things have I written you concerning them that seduce you" (2:26).

The reply of those who were solicited by these "advanced thinkers" was to be simply that they did not need any man to teach them, but hav-

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ing been anointed by the Holy Spirit they had access to all truth, and that truth was always consistent. The additional truth must be measured by what they had formerly been taught by the apostles. "But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him" (3:27). Those who were taught by the Spirit would abide in Christ, that is, in what they had been taught by the anointing. The Gnostics "went beyond and abode not in the doctrine of Christ" (2 John 9).

All history bears out the truth that during the lifetime of John, and in the very area where he resided and wrote, this synthetic philosophy was presented with ruthless disregard for the unity of the congregations. False prophets insinuated themselves into every company of the saints and promulgated their unhallowed speculations. It became necessary to issue blunt warnings to the saints against extending a welcome to such teachers, or allowing their homes to be used as bases from which to launch war on truth. This brings us to an analysis of the short epistle known as Second John. It contains the passage with which we are concerned in this article.

The Second Epistle

We shall not enter into the controversy as to identity of the addressee of this letter. It is my personal opinion that it was written to a Christian sister and her family. It is altogether possible that the congregation of saints met in her home. It will be observed how John speaks of truth and love in the same connection. He does not regard truth as being composed merely of facts which have been verified. Truth is a relationship which transcends human relationships. John loves the elect lady and her children in the truth (verse 1). All others who have known the truth exhibit the same love (1). The truth dwells in God's children and is age-lasting (2). The trinity of divine blessings—grace, mercy and peace—these are shared in truth and love (3). We walk in truth as required by God (4).

John approaches the primary purpose of his letter of admonition and warning with familiar language. Certain phrases are at once associated with certain writers. One of these phrases used by John is "a new commandment." Every such phrase should be considered in the light of its other appearances. That which John wrote to the elect lady will be

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correctly understood only in conjunction with what he wrote elsewhere upon the same topic. We must never forget that the gospel record and first epistle of John are *general*. They were written to meet a condition faced by the community of saints at large. The second epistle is *specific*. It deals with the same condition on a local basis and provides a specific approach to it. But the specific must be understood in the light of the general. One is not qualified to diagnose and treat a specific cancer until he knows the nature of cancer in general.

1. John filled his gospel record and first two epistles with a dissertation on love (*agape*) but these were not written primarily to be treatises on love at all. They were produced to offset a dangerous philosophy which threatened dissolution of the community by destroying the foundation upon which it was built. Love is the antidote to such a condition because it cements and holds the hearts of the saints together in times of greatest stress. One who reads the writings of John about love will derive much pleasure from the observations of the apostle but he will never understand why John injected the teaching as he did until he remembers that love was a prescription for the body at a time when certain errors were becoming epidemic.

2. John besought the elect lady to remember that he wrote no new commandment. He simply reminded her of the commandment heard from the beginning. He identifies that commandment—*that we love one another* (5). Only if we recall constantly the nature of this commandment which was had from the beginning can we ever understand John properly. In I John 2:7, the brethren are told that John will write no new commandment unto them, but an old commandment which they had from the beginning. They are told that the old commandment is *the word* which they heard from the beginning.

The word is not the new covenant scriptures. They did not have this from the beginning. The new covenant scriptures grew out of needs created by later circumstances. Philemon was a letter of commendation for a runaway slave, Onesimus, who was returning to his master. Philipians was a letter of thanks for assistance to Paul when he was in prison. First Corinthians was written to deal with a demoralizing state of affairs disclosed by the visiting family of Chloe, and to answer queries in a letter brought by Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus. All of this came later.

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The word which was heard from the beginning was "Love one another."

From the beginning Jesus said, "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12). Again, "These things I command you, that ye love one another" (15:17). John wrote to the elect lady, "This is love, that we walk after his commandments" (2 John 6). Those who regard the Way as being a legalistic system lay great stress upon this, but they fail to grasp the significance of the following sentence, "This is his commandment, that, as ye have heard from the beginning ye should walk in it." The previous verse tells us that we heard from the beginning was to love one another. This is the commandment of Christ. What John is here saying is, "This is love, that we walk after his commandments, and his commandment is that we love one another and walk in that love." But why does John use "commandments" (plural) and "commandment" (singular) in the same sense? The answer is found in Romans 13:9, where we are told that all the commandments are summed up in one word, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." This lifts the commandments of Christ above the level of law to the plane of love. This is the word we had from the beginning.

3. The reason for the admonition to the lady and her children to continue to walk in love is that, "Many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist" (7). Here John pointedly identifies the kind of traveling false teachers against whom he warns the recipients of this epistle. This letter was written to counter the efforts of the Gnostics. "The many deceivers who have entered into the world" are "the many false prophets who are gone out into the world" (I John 4:1). The deceivers of whom he now writes are the seducers of whom he has written. "These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you" (I John 2:26). The things written identify the personages as antichrists (I John 2:18).

The Fundamental Doctrine

4. The elect lady and her children are cautioned, "Look to yourselves, that you may not lose what you (or we) have worked for, but may win a full reward" (8). The purpose of the apostolic message was to build men in love on the Christhood of Jesus, so that the eternal life they possessed by having the Son might eventually terminate in fulness of joy in his presence. Those who face up to the fact of his divine Sonship in the flesh will be rewarded with fellowship face to face in the future.

If we abide in him here we may abide in his presence over there. But if antichrists seduce us to forfeit our faith in the greatest fact in the universe we will lose all. So fundamental is this fact of faith that rejection of it is the fundamental falsehood of this age. "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?" (I John 2:22). There is one foundation of salvation and one foundation of damnation. Both are directly concerned with the same fact. "He that believeth . . . shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned." (I trust that no carping critic will conclude that I have intentionally devaluated baptism in making this point).

5. "Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son."

To whom does the apostle relate the expression, "Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ?" What is "the doctrine of Christ"? Let us notice some of the other translations.

"Anyone who goes ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God" (Revised Standard Version).

"No one has God who goes too far and fails to stay by the teaching of Christ" (Charles B. Williams).

"Whoever goes beyond, and does not remain within Christ's teaching, will not possess God" (Authentic Version).

"Anyone who runs ahead too far, and does not stand by the doctrine of the Christ, is without God" (New English Version).

"Anyone who is 'advanced' and will not remain by the doctrine of Christ, does not possess God" (James Moffatt).

"The man who is so 'advanced' that he is not content with what Christ taught, has in fact no God" (J. B. Phillips).

It will be noted that these substitute for "transgresseth" (King James Version) such expressions as: goes ahead, goes too far, goes beyond, runs ahead too far, and advanced. Both Moffat and Phillips indicate by usage of quotation marks that the term "advanced" is used in a special sense. Those who are under consideration are not really advanced thinkers; they just flatter themselves that they are. These later versions are more nearly correct than the King James Version. The word "transgress" is a translation of *parabaino*, and it is true this is found in a few manuscripts. But all of the best copies have *proagon*, to go ahead, to advance beyond.

This was the very claim of the Gnostics. They looked with disdain and contempt upon "the common herd" who thought of Jesus as being the Word (Logos) made flesh. In their intellectual arrogance they had

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advanced to the place where they could see that Jesus was not the Christ. Jesus was human. The Christ was spirit. These two were not the same. They did not deny that Jesus existed nor did they deny that the Christ existed. They did not even deny that for a period the two had been invested in the same person. But they did deny that Jesus was the Christ or that the Christ was Jesus. Jesus was not the word (Logos) and had no existence prior to the incarnation, as they viewed it. Therefore there was no incarnation. Jesus did not *come in* the flesh.

The apostolic declaration was that Jesus had come in the flesh. This was basic, elemental and fundamental. The spirit which confessed this was of God; the spirit that did not confess it was not of God, but was antichrist. This was the test proposed by which to "try the spirits whether they are of God" (I John 4:1-3). This was the foundation. One who was on that foundation might be mistaken about many things and all of them were, but they dare not be mistaken about the foundation. It is noteworthy that one was built upon this foundation by a positive action—confession that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh (I John 4:2). The opposite is not denial, which is also a positive action, but simply "not confessing." "Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus is come in the flesh is not of God." This eliminates not only positive denial, but also neutrality. One cannot occupy a neutral position as to the identity of Christ and be built upon the foundation. The foundational fact must be confessed—*as a fact!* One cannot be either a gnostic or an agnostic.

6. We can determine what "the doctrine of Christ" is in this sense by the effect of "going beyond" or "abiding in it." One who *advances* has not God; one who "abides in it" has both the Father and Son. The doctrine of Christ, in this case, does not consist of *the things* Jesus taught, but of *the thing* taught about Jesus. The ethical and moral values of Jesus are very important. Nothing we say here must be understood as minimizing their value. One must "keep the commandments of Jesus" (John 15:10), and if he loves Jesus, he will keep them, naturally, automatically and spontaneously, for this is the only possible reaction of love. Only one who does not love Jesus will not keep his sayings (John 14:24). Yet we must all, without exception, place some qualification upon living up to the requirements of Jesus. "As far as we are able," "to the extent we understand them," "as we learn what he wishes,"—these are all our own qualifications to explain how we can have God, and how He can have us, while we fail to live up to His perfect example. We often transgress, and often disobey. If we did not the Father would not

need to administer chastisement. Yet we are told that all of us are partakers of such chastisement, and without this we would but demonstrate that we are bastards, and not sons.

But "the doctrine of Christ" about which John wrote cannot be qualified. It cannot be governed by mitigating circumstances. One who does not abide in it has not God. It is just that plain. It is just that positive. What is "the doctrine" one must have in order to have God? Whatever it is, it was possessed by all who have God while the apostles were still alive. It was possessed by "the lady and her children" and by "all others who are in the truth." It could not have been a copy of the new covenant scriptures, for no person on earth possessed that, not even the apostle John. It could not have included the Second Epistle of John for those to whom it was written were already "walking in truth" before John wrote it. This epistle could not have been part of "the doctrine of Christ" for there were those who had already gone beyond that doctrine when this epistle was written.

Fortunately John identifies the doctrine essential to having the Father and the Son. "Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ. . . . No one who denies the Son has the Father. He who confesses the Son has the Father also" (1 John 2:23). *Jesus is the Christ!* This is the foundation of the community of saints, the colony of heaven on earth. *Jesus is the Christ!* This is the only confession we may scripturally require of any penitent seeking admission to the fellowship of the redeemed. *Jesus is the Christ!* Every spirit which confesses this is of God. *Jesus is the Christ!* This is the only creed essential to overcoming the world. *Jesus is the Christ!* The one who believes this has the witness in himself.

But what of the "advanced thinker" who denies this great fact? How was the Gnostic teacher to be treated? How was one who did not abide in this doctrine to be regarded by those who did abide in it?

"Receive Him Not"

7. "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed; for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (10, 11).

"Do not receive him into the house or give him any greeting, for he who greets him shares his wicked work" (Revised Standard Version).

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"If any one who comes to you does not bring this teaching, do not receive him under your roof nor greet him; for he who greets him is a sharer of his evil deeds" (Weymouth).

"If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not admit him to the house—do not even greet him, for he who greets him shares in his wicked work" (Moffatt).

"If anyone comes to you who does not bring this doctrine, do not welcome him into your house or give him a greeting; for anyone who gives him a greeting is an accomplice in his wicked deeds" (New English Version).

"If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your homes, do not even bid him welcome; for he who bids him welcome shares in his evil deeds" (Authentic Version).

In the face of what has gone before, I would not presume upon the intelligence of my readers to further identify "the doctrine." Only those who ignore background, setting, contemporary issues and context, could ever mistake it. The application to other matters could only be made by those with a party axe to grind—those who would fasten upon the phrase "receive him not," to deny their relationship with the very brethren whom Jesus taught us to love. The warping and wrestling of this scripture by factional defenders should serve as a warning to us of what happens to those whose hearts are filled with the party spirit and who search the scriptures for a means to separate and segregate themselves from other brethren in the Lord.

Inconsistency of Orthodoxy

I have heard the expression "this doctrine" applied to every item of controversy among the various factions calling themselves "The Church of Christ." Depending upon the particular party whose champion quoted it, the expression has been related to individual cups, Bible classes, colleges, orphan homes, the pastor system, fermented wine in the Lord's Supper, a method of breaking the bread, the pre-millennial viewpoint, instrumental music, missionary societies, and a diversified host of motley issues which have made "the restoration robe of righteousness" a Joseph's coat that puts the rainbow spectrum to shame.

In every instance these partisan exponents have shown themselves to be utterly inconsistent. They have slashed themselves with one side of the knife which they have sharpened in eager anticipation of stabbing others. But their very inconsistency proves that each is better than his

unwritten creed. These brethren dare not apply practically what they claim to believe. Take for example the preacher who quotes 2 John 10, 11 in condemnation of one who cannot see that instrumental music as an aid in corporate worship is a sin. Does not the one who deplors the use of the instrument receive the other into his house—either the public meetinghouse or his private dwelling?

The fact is that all of the non-instrumental groups I know, not only receive into their houses those who disagree with them, but go to great lengths to try to get them into their houses. When they hold a meeting they spend money on radio and television programs, as well as newspaper advertising, all beamed at the very ones whom they condemn as "bringing not this doctrine." They go from door to door, greeting and saluting all and sundry, and when they find someone who does not agree with their position they *urge* him to come. They meet him at the door, welcome him warmly, and give him a "chief seat in the synagogue." Of course, after the meeting is over at night and the "faithful ones" remain behind to congratulate themselves upon the success of the personal work and the fact that "the Christian Church preacher attended," if one asks if it would have been a sin to call upon the visitor to lead prayer, the evangelist will quote, "If any man come and bring not this doctrine receive him not into your house nor give him any greeting."

If 2 John 10, 11, applies to "a Christian Church preacher" as my factional brethren so childishly designate those who use instrumental music, I charge that to even allow him to enter the house (much less invite him to come), makes them "accomplices in his evil deeds." It is such absurd, ridiculous and puerile reasoning which will keep thinking people from seeing the real force and beauty of a plea which began as "a project to unite the Christians in all of the sects." The very essence of sectarianism is exclusiveness, and if anyone is more exclusive than those who twist this scripture to justify their sectarian prejudices I have yet to meet him. Our brethren should be ashamed to live and afraid to die!

Every party among us, even the most reactionary, will greet any person who attends their meetings—after they get over their surprise. Of course they would not call upon him to pray to the Father but they will run halfway across the house to provide him with a songbook already turned to the right page, so he can praise the Father. He cannot pray out loud by himself, but he can pray as loud as he wants with others, if the prayer is set to a tune. I am thankful that literally hundreds of our

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brethren are becoming embarrassed by the imbecility and senselessness of the preposterous position in which they find themselves. The party spirit has driven them so far down a blind alley that at last some are trying to scale the fence at the other end and get back on Main Street again. This is good and I intend to give them a hand when I can.

My Position

I propose to regard all of God's children as my brothers. I intend to treat them as brothers. I have resolved to make nothing a test of fellowship which God has not made a condition of salvation. I shall accuse no one of being an antichrist who is built upon the one foundation simply because he differs with me in understanding of such things as cups, classes, colleges, the millennium, or instrumental music. I shall not allow our divergent views upon these things to keep me from associating with any of my brothers, or helping all of them.

I shall go visit any group to share what I have learned, and to share in what they have learned. I shall go with none of them in partisan alliance, for my allegiance is to Jesus Christ. I am joined to Him and through Him to all others who are joined unto Him. Never again will I be a champion of any party, faction or clique. I refuse to be affiliated with any clan in which my love for *these* precludes my love for *those*. I belong to nobody and no body but the body of Christ!

Under no circumstances will I apply to those who believe that Jesus is the Christ, those passages written to condemn those who do not confess this fact. My brethren are not Gnostics. They have not gone out from us even though we differ about many issues which have disturbed our tranquillity. When brethren come where I am speaking, I shall not seek to determine how they stand on instrumental music, the millennium, or Herald of Truth, before I call upon them to pray. These are matters between them and our Lord. If they can explain their position to his satisfaction, they need not try to satisfy me with their explanation. I am not so much interested in where they stand as I am in the direction they are facing. I shall recognize their right to pray because they are in Him and not because they are in some party. I have no party and no party has me! This last is even more important than the other. I know a lot of brethren who claim to have no faction, but a faction has a claim upon them. They stand in jeopardy every hour!

Upon the one foundation living stones are builded together. These stones are not all the same size, shape, texture or variety. A stone house

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must be built with the stones available in the area. Since stones vary from one area to another, a house in one location may not look like that in another. The house of God is not made of stones that are uniform in knowledge, perception, ability or aptitude. It is composed of those who are joined together by mutual faith in Jesus and cemented by love. The foundation for all is the eternal abiding principle in confessional form, that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." "If any man come and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, and give him no greeting."

RELIGIOUS HATRED

BY FREDERIC W. FARRAR, D.D., F.R.S.

(Editor's Note: After preparing the foregoing article I decided that our readers should hear from one capable of a more scholarly approach. I append this chapter from "The Early Days of Christianity" by Dr. Farrar, who was at the time Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge; Archdeacon and Canon of Westminster; and Chaplain in Ordinary to the Queen. He deals with 2 John 10, 11. We ask that you read it carefully.)

It will be seen, then, at a glance, that Truth and Love are keynotes of the Epistle, and that the conceptions which prevail throughout it are those with which we have been made familiar by the previous Epistle. And yet one passage of the Epistle has again and again been belauded, and is again and again adduced as a stronghold of intolerance, an excuse

for pitiless hostility against all who differ from ourselves. There is something distressing in the swift instinct with which an unchristian egotism has first assumed its own infallibility on subjects which are often no part of Christian faith, and then has spread as on vulture's wings to this passage as a consecration of the feelings with which the *odium theologicum* disgraces and ruins the Divinest interests of the cause of Christ. It must be said—though I say it with deepest sorrow—that the cold exclusiveness of the Pharisee, the bitter ignorance of the self-styled theologian, the usurped infallibility of the half-educated religionist, have ever been the curse of Christianity.

They have imposed "the senses of men upon the words of God, the special senses of men on the general words of God," and have tried to

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enforce them on men's consciences with all kinds of burnings and anathemas, under equal threats of death and damnation. And thus they have incurred the terrible responsibility of presenting religion to mankind in a false and repellent guise. Is theological hatred still to be a proverb for the world's just contempt? Is such hatred—hatred in its bitterest and most ruthless form—to be regarded as the legitimate and normal outcome of the religion of love? Is the spirit of peace never to be brought to bear on religious opinions? Are such questions always to excite the most intense animosities and the most terrible divisions?

Is the Diotrephes of each little religious clique to be the ideal of a Christian character? Is it in religious discussions alone that impartiality is to be set down as weakness, and courtesy as treason? Is it among those only who pride themselves on being "orthodox" that there is to be the completest absence of humility and justice? Is the world to be for ever confirmed in its opinion that theological partisans are less truthful, less candid, less high-minded, less honorable even than the partisans of political and social causes who make no profession as to the duty of love? Are the so-called "religious" champions to be for ever, as they now are, in many instances, the most unscrupulously bitter and the most conspicuously unfair? Alas! they might be with far less danger to the cause of religion if they would forego the luxury of "quoting Scripture for their purpose."

If this passage of St. John had indeed authorized such errors and excesses—if it had indeed been a proof, as has been said, of "the deplorable growth of dogmatic intolerance"—it would have been hard to separate it from the old spirit of rigorism and passion which led the Apostle, in his most undeveloped days, to incur his Lord's rebuke, by proclaiming his jealousy of those who worked on different lines from his own, and by wishing to call down fire to consume the rude villagers of Samaria. It would have required some ingenuity not to see in it the same sort of impatient and unworthy intolerance which once marked his impetuous outbursts, but which is (I trust falsely) attributed to him in the silly story of Cerinthus and the bath. In that case also the spirit of his advice would have been widely different from the spirit which actuated the merciful tolerance of the Lord to Heathens, the Samaritans, to Sadducees, and even to Pharisees. It would have been in direct antagonism to our Lord's command to the Twelve to salute with their blessing every house to which they came, because if it were not worthy their peace would return to them again. It would have been alien from many of the

noblest lessons of the New Testament. It would practically have excluded from the bosom of Christianity, and of Christianity alone, the highest workings of the universal law of love. It would have been in glaring disaccord with the gentleness and moderation which is now shown, even towards absolute believers, by the wisest, gentlest, and most Christlike of God's saints. If it really bore the sense which has been assigned to it, it would be a grave reason for sharing the ancient doubts respecting the genuineness of the little letter in which it occurs, and for coming to the conclusion that, while its general sentiments were borrowed from the authentic works of St. John, they had only been thrown together for the purpose of introducing under the sanction of his name, a precept of unchristian harshness and religious intolerance.

But there is too much reason to fear that to the end of time the conceit of orthodoxism will claim inspired authority for its own conclusions, even when they are most antichristian, and will build up systems of exclusive hatred out of inferences purely unwarrantable. It is certain, too, that each sect is always tempted to be proudest of its most sectarian peculiarities; that each form of dissent, whether in or out of the body of the Established Churches, most idolizes its own dissidence. The aim of religious opinionativeness always has been, and always will be, to regard its narrowest conclusions as matters of faith, and to exclude or excommunicate all those who reject or modify them. The sort of syllogisms used by these enemies of the love of Christ are much as follows—

"My opinions are founded on interpretations of Scripture. Scripture is infallible. My views of its meaning are infallible too. Your opinions and inferences differ from mine, therefore you *must* be in the wrong. All wrong opinions are capable of so many ramifications that any one who differs from me in minor points must be unsound in vital matters also. Therefore all who differ from me and my clique are 'heretics.' All heresy is wicked. All heretics are necessarily wicked men. It is my religious duty to hate, calumniate and abuse you."

Those who have gone thus far in elevating hatred into a Christian virtue ought logically to go a little farther. They generally do so when they have the power. They do not openly say, "Let us venerate the examples of Arnold of Citeaux, and of Torquemada. Let us glorify the Crusaders at Beziers. Let us revive the racks and thumbscrews of the Inquisition. Let us, with the Pope, strike medals in honor of the massacre of St. Bartholomew. Let us re-establish the Star Chamber and entrust those ecclesiastics who hold our opinions with powers of torture." But

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since they are robbed of these means of securing unanimity—since they can no longer even imprison “dissenting tinkers” like Bunyan, and “regicide Arians” like Milton—they are too apt to indulge in the party spirit which can employ slander though it is robbed of the thumbscrew, and revel in depreciation though it may no longer avail itself of the fagot and the rack.

The tender mercies of contending religionists are exceptionally cruel. The men who, in the Corinthian party-sense, boast “I am of Christ,” do not often, in these days, formulate the defence of their lack of charity so clearly as this. But they continually act and write in this spirit. Long experience has made mankind familiar with the base ingenuity which frames charges of constructive heresy out of the most innocent opinions; which insinuates that variations from the vulgar exegesis furnish a sufficient excuse for banding anathemas, under the plea that they are an implicit denial of Christ! Had there been in Scripture any sanction for this execrable spirit of heresy-hunting Pharisaism, Christian theology would only become another name for the collisions of wrangling sects, all cordially hating each other, and only kept together by common repulsion against external enmity. But, to me at least, it seems that the world has never developed a more unchristian and antichrist phenomenon than the conduct of those who encourage the bitterest excesses of hatred under the profession of Christian love. I know nothing so profoundly irreligious as the narrow intolerance of an ignorant dogmatism. Had there been anything in this passage which sanctioned so odious a spirit, I could not have believed that it emanated from St. John. A good tree does not bring forth corrupt fruit. The sweet fountain of Christianity cannot send forth the salt and bitter water of fierceness and hate. The Apostle of love would have belied all that is best in his own teaching if he had consciously given an absolution, nay, an incentive, to furious intolerance. The last words of Christian revelation could never have meant what these words have been interpreted to mean—namely, “Hate, exclude, anathematize, persecute, treat as enemies and opponents to be crushed and insulted, those who differ from you in religious opinions.” Those who have pretended a Scriptural sanction for such Cain-like religionism have generally put their theories into practice against men who have been infinitely more in the right, and transcendently nearer God, than those who, in killing or injuring them, ignorantly thought they were doing God service.

Meanwhile this incidental expression of St. John’s brief letter will not

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lend itself to these gross perversions. What St. John *really says*, and *really means*, is something wholly different. False teachers were rife, who, professing to be Christians, robbed the nature of Christ of all which gave its efficacy to the Atonement, and its significance to the Incarnation. These teachers, like other Christian missionaries, travelled from city to city, and, in the absence of public inns, were received into the houses of Christian converts. The Christian lady to whom John writes is warned that, if she offers her hospitality to these dangerous emissaries who were subverting the central truth of Christianity, she is expressing a public sanction of them; and, by doing this and offering them her best wishes she is taking a direct share in the harm they do. This is common sense; nor is there any thing uncharitable about it.

No one is bound to help forward the dissemination of teaching what he regards as erroneous respecting the most essential doctrines of his own faith. Still less would it have been right to do this in the days when Christian communities were so small and weak. But to interpret this as it has in all ages been practically interpreted—to pervert it into a sort of command to exaggerate the minor variations between religious opinions, and to persecute those whose views differ from our own—to make our own opinions the exclusive test of heresy, and to say with Cornelius á Lapide, that this verse reprobates “all conversation, all intercourse, all dealings with heretics”—is to interpret Scripture by the glare of partisanship and self-satisfaction, not to read it under the light of holy love.

Alas! churchmen and theologians have found it a far more easy and agreeable matter to obey their distortion of this supposed command, and even to push its stringency to the very farthest *limits*, than to obey the command that we should love one another! From the Tree of delusive knowledge they pluck the poisonous and inflating fruits of pride and hatred, while they suffer the fruits of love and meekness to fall neglected from the Tree of Life. The popularity which these verses still enjoy and the exaggerated misinterpretation still attached to them, are due to the fact that they are so acceptable to the arrogance and selfishness, the dishonesty and tyranny, the sloth and obstinacy, of that bitter spirit of religious discord which has been the disgrace of the Church and the scandal of the world.