

The
Epistles
of
John

Version 1.0

Dr. Brian J. Bailey

“The Epistles of John”

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Preface

It is universally accepted that the beloved Apostle John wrote the three epistles that bear his name. The place, time, and circumstances of the epistles are not known. John's contemporaries simply state that he wrote the three epistles of John, the Gospel of John, and the Book of Revelation. These writings suggest that the author was very old, since their tenor is one of a grandfather writing to his spiritual children who spanned many generations.

Therefore, it may be assumed with some degree of accuracy that John's epistles were written toward the end of his life when he was responsible for the seven churches in the Roman province of Asia (Rev. 2-3).

There are two main themes that flow through John's epistles. The first theme that John develops is love. John, the Apostle of love, portrays love as the essence of God's nature—God is love. The second theme that John develops is fellowship with the Father and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

John's epistles were written in a straightforward, even terse style. First, Second, and Third John have a Greek vocabulary of only 303 words. This is a very small vocabulary compared to the 5,437 words used in the New Testament. John's epistles provide a very easy primary Greek reader.

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The First Epistle of John is written in a very understandable manner. It presents the theology of the one (John) who received comprehensive revelation of both the beginning of all things and the end times. We find the foundation of John's doctrine in verses 5 and 6 of his second epistle, which restate the New Commandment given by Jesus to love one another (see Jn. 13:34; 15:12). This is the very heart of John's message.

One approach to studying the epistles of John is to begin with the second epistle, which encapsulates John's teachings, to follow with the third epistle, and then to conclude with the first epistle. However, we have chosen to study these epistles in the traditional manner in which they are found in the Bible, as it is an easier method of study.

*The
First Epistle
of
John*

OUTLINE

1. *Fellowship with the Father and Son (1:1-4)*
2. *Walking in the Light (1:5-10)*
3. *Our Advocate Before the Father (2:1-2)*
4. *Love One Another (2:3-11)*
5. *Levels of Spiritual Maturity (2:12-14)*
6. *Love Not the World (2:15-17)*
7. *Warning Against Antichrists (2:18-19)*
8. *The Abiding Anointing (2:20-27)*
9. *The Likeness of Christ (2:28-3:3)*
10. *The Sinless Nature of God (3:4-10)*
11. *Brotherly Love (3:11-24)*
12. *Try the Spirits (4:1-6)*
13. *Perfect Love (4:7-5:3)*
14. *Overcomers (5:4-6)*
15. *The Three Witnesses (5:7-13)*
16. *Confidence in Prayer (5:14-16)*
17. *Freedom From Sin and Idolatry (5:17-21)*

INTRODUCTION

This epistle, which may be termed *a general epistle*, was written to the churches for whom John had oversight. In this epistle, John speaks in forthright terms, making the responsibilities of the Christian life very clear. He uses the verb “know” 30 times to give believers the absolute assurance of knowing the way to eternal life.

One cannot help but be in awe of the tremendous intimacy that John enjoyed with the Lord, as portrayed by the first three verses. John speaks with authority, but also with the gentleness of a true father in Christ. The First Epistle of John was undoubtedly written to counter heresies and false doctrines that had crept into the Early Church, primarily Gnosticism, which denied that Jesus had come in the flesh.

CHAPTER ONE

Fellowship with the Father and Son (1:1-4)

1:1 – *“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life.”* First, John introduces Jesus as the One Who does all things by stating that Jesus has existed from the beginning of time.

While we all have different revelations of the matchless character and nature of Christ, one that impresses me most vividly is His boundless energy and sense of purpose. He is essentially the Man with a mission.

Christ’s eternal existence is revealed in His nature, as is clearly stated by the Apostle Paul in Colossians 1:15-17, where he says of Jesus: “Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.”

This is also confirmed by the classic verses in John 1:1-3 which speak of Jesus as the Word of God: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” In Revelation 1:8, Jesus is called, “the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending.” Then in Hebrews 1:1-3, Paul exalts Jesus as being the very image of

God: “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

It was by wisdom that the world was created (Eph. 3:9-10), and not in vain (Isa. 45:18). Thus, Christ, the Co-Creator of the universe is alluded to as the personification of wisdom in His creative role as King Solomon states in Proverbs 8:30. The Lord Jesus is the Worker, the Creator, and the Doer.

We must see God as the Eternal One who has always existed. Moses said in Psalm 90:2, “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.” It is hard for us at times to comprehend that God has always existed and will always exist. In our minds, everything has a beginning, yet Christ has always existed.

John’s Encounter with Christ

John describes four ways in which he encountered the Lord Jesus Christ:

1. That which we have heard
2. That which we have seen with our eyes
3. That which we have looked upon
4. That which we have handled

First of all, John says, “*That which we have heard.*” John heard the words and teachings of Jesus, the Word of God, and embraced them as coming directly from the throne of God. Jesus is the Preacher of all preachers. The only reason that the officers, sent by the religious leaders to take Jesus, could give for not bringing Jesus back to them was that they had never heard any man speak like Him before (Jn. 7:46).

The people made a distinction between the teachings of Jesus and the teachings of the scribes, because Jesus taught with authority (Mt. 7:29). For over three years, John and the other apostles were privileged to hear the Incarnate Word of God, Jesus Himself, speak and teach. Peter said in Acts 4:20, “For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”

We must expect to hear from God on a daily basis. We need to understand that our relationship with God is the relationship of a father with his sons and daughters. In a normal family, the children interact with their father every day. Every good father wants to speak with his children every day. It is the same with the Heavenly Father. He wants to speak to us each and every day.

Most parents have children because they fill a void in their lives. God created us because He had a void and a need in His heart for fellowship. God created us for His pleasure (Rev. 4:11). God is love and love has a need to be reciprocated. God loves us, but He also feels the need for us to love Him in return. One of the ways of expressing love is through verbal communication. How precious it is to hear, day by day, the Word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (Mt. 4:4). We should seek to develop an intimate relationship with the Lord and hear His

voice each and every day. Isaiah 50:4 says, “The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.” We want our spiritual ears opened to hear what God desires to say to us each and every morning as we spend time in His presence!

Secondly, John says, “*Which we have seen with our eyes.*” John was privileged to see Jesus with his very own eyes. He was an eyewitness of the ministry and person of Jesus. John saw with his very own eyes the “Word made flesh.” The Apostle Peter said, “For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Pet. 1:16).

One time on a tour of South Africa by the royal family of England, Prince Charles looked around and saw his son, Prince Harry, taking a photograph of him. The joy this brought to Prince Charles that his son would want to take a picture of him and look at him was evident to all who were present.

It brings such pleasure to the heart of a father when his son or daughter looks at him. It is the same with the Heavenly Father. Just as a bridegroom loves having his bride look at him, so the Lord Jesus, our Heavenly Bridegroom, loves it when His people, His Bride, gaze at Him in love and admiration.

Jesus said in John 14:21: “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself

to him.” The Lord desires to shower us with His love and openly manifest Himself to us. The Lord manifested Himself to Moses in an awesome way, as seen in Numbers 12:8: “With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?”

Being blind is very difficult. I had a very close minister friend in the state of Washington who was blind. He was a pastor and also a businessman. He told me that the greatest sorrow of his life was that he was never able to see his sons with his physical eyes. He did not know what they looked like. When he died, I was asked to perform his funeral ceremony. God gave me a vision of this dear pastor when he passed away. When he died, his spirit came out of his body and before he was taken to heaven, the Lord allowed him to see his sons. At last, he was able to see his sons and it brought him such great joy.

I have been so blessed when the Lord has given me visions of Himself and His earthly ministry and life. There is no experience like seeing Jesus. The cry of my heart is to see Jesus, even as the Greeks told Philip, “Sir, we would see Jesus” (Jn. 12:21). I have had several visions of heaven, and in every one, my one desire is to see Jesus. Beloved, if you will set all of your love upon the Lord Jesus, He will openly manifest Himself to you as well.

Thirdly, John says, “*Which we have looked upon.*” He is not repeating what he has just said about seeing the Lord Jesus with his eyes. Rather, John is referring to something more than looking upon Jesus’ physical appearance with his physical eyes — to see people as they really are is to know their character and nature. Christ wants us to

experience Him in this way so that we might see Him as He really is and know Him intimately.

Fourthly, John says, “*Our hands have handled.*” John physically touched Jesus while He was upon the earth. John had such an intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus that he even leaned upon Jesus’ bosom at the Last Supper (Jn. 13:23). Thomas touched Jesus and felt His wounds after His resurrection (Jn. 20:27-28). In Luke 24:39, Jesus appeared to the disciples and said, “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle [or touch] me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.”

There is an impartation with a physical touch. The Lord taught me this very important lesson when I was ministering in New Zealand many years ago. I was the pastor of a church of several thousand people. It was hard to personally get to know all of the people in the church because there were so many. The Lord spoke to me that I should stand at the entrance of the sanctuary at the end of every service and shake hands with every one as they walked out. The Lord told me that sheep need to feel the touch of their shepherd because there is an impartation of the shepherd’s love with a physical touch.

On several occasions, the Lord has appeared to me and said, “Touch Me.” One time He said to me, “Touch Me, for I am altogether goodness.” When I touched Him, there was an impartation of His goodness to my life. When the woman with the issue of blood touched the hem of Jesus’ garments, she was instantly healed (Mk. 5:25-34). Matthew 14:35-36 records that everyone who touched the hem of Jesus’ garment was healed. Reach out and touch Christ by faith, beloved, and you will receive healing, life, deliverance, and every

blessing from on high. John concludes verse 1 by speaking about Jesus as the “*Word of life*.” We read in John 1:14: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” Jesus is the Word of God made flesh—the Word of Life. God wants His Word to be made flesh in us—in other words, that His Word is rooted in our hearts and affects every aspect of our life. David said in Psalm 51:6, “Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.” God wants His truth to become a part of who we are.

President Jimmy Carter, an ex-president of the United States, has written several books from the cassettes of his Sunday school lessons. In one of his books, he said, “We are to be little Christs.” This statement is absolutely true. God wants us to resemble the Lord Jesus Christ and we should be a reflection of Christ in everything we do and say. Dear Ones, let us seek to be like the Word of Life in every area of our lives.

1:2 – “*(For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father; and was manifested unto us;)*” John continues in verse 2 by saying that “the life was manifested.” John says that eternal life (Jesus) was with the Father. John 1:18 explains that Jesus is in “the bosom of the Father.” Jesus has been with the Father and a part of the Godhead since the very beginning.

Jesus is the Life, as He said in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” Jesus is the Bread of Life (Jn. 6:35) and the Resurrection and the Life (Jn. 11:25). Jesus is the only One who can give us

eternal life. We read in John 17:1-3: “These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” What is eternal life? It is that we might know God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1:3— *“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.”* Our fellowship is with the Father and the Son. God desires to have intimate communion and fellowship with His people. God wants you and needs you! Some people feel like they are not wanted by their parents or relatives, but we are all wanted by God. He created us to have fellowship with Him!

We must never forget that the desire of God the Father is to dwell with us—His sons and daughters. He expressed this desire to Moses in Exodus 25:8: “And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them.” God instructed Moses to build the Tabernacle because He wanted to dwell among His people.

When I left England and went to France as a missionary, my parents wanted me to write and tell them every little detail of my experiences in France. I wrote my parents often, but no matter how much I wrote it was never enough for them. So they came to France to see me because they wanted to know how I was doing. They wanted to be involved in my life. It is the same with God the Father. He desires to be involved in every little detail of our lives. He wants us to tell Him

everything we are feeling and pour out our hearts before Him. It is good to read the books of those who have had experiences of heavenly visions, because they give us insight into the nature of God and His purposes for our lives. I relish reading such books; they have been a great blessing to me. May I recommend a few, such as John Bunyan's *Pilgrims Progress*, *Visions of Heaven and Hell*, and *Return From Tomorrow* by George J. Ritchie.

The Heavenly Father desires, as any parent would, to have His children around Him. I once had a vision of God the Father in a heavenly garden, taking little children into His arms to bless them. The Heavenly Father wants to have that relationship with each one of us. This is exemplified in Psalm 103:13, which says, "Like as a father pitieth [or caresses] his children, so the LORD pitieth [or caresses] them that fear him."

1:4 – *"And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full."* John's whole purpose for writing this epistle was that our joy might be full. It is through fellowship with the Father and the Son that we enter into the joy of the Lord (Mt. 25:21).

Walking in the Light (1:5-10)

1:5 – *"This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."* John defines the message of Jesus by saying that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. There is a beautiful passage in John 1:4-9 that describes Jesus as the true Light: "In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God,

whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.”

Jesus said in John 8:12, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” In John 9:5, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” Jesus is the Light of the world, but now that He has ascended to heaven, as His representatives, we are the light of the world. John the Baptist was “a burning and shining light” (Jn. 5:35).

Jesus said in Matthew 5:14-16, “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” The light of Christ should shine brighter and brighter through our lives each and every day so that everyone around us will see His light in us and glorify the Father in heaven.

The Lord Jesus declared in Luke 8:17, “For nothing is secret that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad.” Paul emphasises this truth in 1 Corinthians 4:5, “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.” In His time, the Lord will uncover the hidden things of darkness. That is why it is so important that we allow the Lord to purge our hearts of all the works of darkness.

Jesus spoke of the importance of being full of light in Matthew 6:22-23, “The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” Let us seek to be full of the glorious light of Jesus Christ that will dispel all of the darkness in us.

1:6—*“If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.”* Our walk or conduct, therefore, determines our fellowship. “Can two walk together except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3). We cannot walk with God, Who is Light, if we walk according to the prince of this world (who is Satan, the prince of darkness) and commit the works of darkness (Gal. 5:19-21).

1:7—*“But if we walk in the Light as He is in the light then we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”* If we walk in the light, not only will we have fellowship with the God of Light, but we will have fellowship with other Christians as well.

I have noticed that ministers who stop walking in the truth become partakers with those who walk in unrighteousness. Those who are walking in the light can no longer fellowship with them. There is a veil of separation between those who are walking in the light and those who are walking in sin. However, as we walk in the light, *“the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin.”* As we need to constantly wash ourselves from the defilement of daily life in the natural, so too, in the spiritual we need constant cleansing from the defilement of this world.

Fellowship is based upon two things:

1. Walking in the light
2. Common experiences (common trials & triumphs)

In order to have fellowship with Christ and other believers, we must be walking in the light. In addition, having similar experiences as another person increases the level of fellowship and friendship you can have with that person. The more we experience what Christ went through on earth, the richer and deeper our fellowship will be with Him (Phil. 3:10).

1:8 – *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”* We must ever remember, as King David said in Psalm 51:5, “In sin did my mother conceive me.” We, being the sons of Adam, are born with the fallen nature.

When John Bunyan was privileged to have wondrous experiences of heaven, which he recorded in his book, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, he was told that even the holiest men on earth have battles with sin until they are released from these earthly bodies. Therefore, beware of the doctrine of sinless perfection.

1:9 – *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* First of all, we must confess our sin. This step may seem to be easy, but it is a stumbling block to many people. Jeremiah 3:13 says, “Only acknowledge thine iniquities.” King David did this when He said in Psalm 51:3, “For I acknowledge my transgressions and my sin is ever before me.” We read in Hosea 14:2, “Take with you words,

and turn to the Lord: say unto Him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously.”

It further says in Leviticus 26:40-42: “If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; And that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land.” God promises to remember His covenant with us if we will confess our sins and accept the consequences and punishment of our sins.

“He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.” This is the wonderful assurance we have in Christ. Confession brings forgiveness. As we confess our sins, God will not only forgive us, but also wash and purify our hearts of everything that is not pleasing to Him. He will *“cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* God will take away the root of our iniquity if we will allow Him to do so (Hos. 14:2).

We read in Hosea 14:8, “Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found.” The tribe of Ephraim will be purified of their root sin of idolatry so that they will no longer want anything to do with idols. God wants to do the same thing in our lives — to remove every root of bitterness

and iniquity so that we no longer do things that displease Him. After all, we were created to please Him (Rev. 4:11).

1:10 – *“If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”* None of us can say that we have not sinned because we were all born in sin. If we were not sinners, then God would not have sent Christ to die for our sins on the cross.

CHAPTER TWO

Our Advocate Before the Father (2:1-2)

The beloved Apostle gives his reason for writing on the subject of sin.

2:1 – *“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”* We should continually draw upon the grace of God so that we have the strength to resist sin and walk in righteousness. However, if we do fall, John assures us that we have someone to plead our cause before the Father. Our advocate is the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says in Hebrews 7:25, *“Seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.”*

2:2 – *“And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”* Christ is the offering that placates or covers our sins and the sins of all those who receive Him as their personal Saviour.

Love One Another (2:3-11)

2:3 – *“And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.”* This is essentially the response that Jesus gave the rich young ruler when he asked, *“Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”* *“Keep the commandments”* was Jesus’ reply (Mk. 10:17-22). The New Covenant does not do away with the Ten Commandments. It fulfils the real purpose of the Ten Commandments, which is for them to be written on the fleshly tables of our hearts instead of on tables of stone.

2:4— *“He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”* If we say that we know God, but we do not keep His commandments, we are liars and we have deceived ourselves into thinking that we really know God. When we stop keeping God’s commandments, His presence leaves us as it did Samson. He deceived himself into thinking that he could disobey God’s commandments and still keep God’s presence and anointing. Samson did not even realize it when God’s anointing and the spirit of might left him after he told Delilah that his hair was the secret to his strength (Judg. 16:20).

2:5— *“But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.”* Now John shows us some of the fruits of obedience. As Paul writes in 1 Timothy 1:5, love is “the end of the commandment.” This is confirmed in Galatians 5:14: “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” The bond of perfection is love (Col. 3:14). Thus, when we keep God’s commandments, love is developed in our hearts. Thereby *“we know that we are in Christ.”*

2:6— *“He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.”* As we study the Scriptures we realize that what applies to Jesus also applies to us, His disciples. Christ is the Light of the world and we are also the light of the world. Jesus is called the Christ (meaning “the anointed One”) and we are called Christians (anointed ones). Therefore, we should walk as Christ walked—in love, purity, and holiness.

2:7— *“Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old*

commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning.” Remember, New Testament believers only had the 39 books of the Old Testament, for the New Testament had not yet been assembled into its present form.

Jesus made the joining of the Old and New very clear when He said in Matthew 5:17, “Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the prophets, I am not come to destroy but to fulfil.”

2:8 – “*Again, 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.*” The darkness mentioned here was the fact that the Law was only a shadow of good things to come (Heb. 10:1), and not the very image of things now seen in the true light of Jesus.

2:9 – “*He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.*” Our relationship with others determines our relationship with God. How can we say we love God whom we have not seen if we do not love those whom we have seen? It is a contradiction of terms to say that we are walking in the light if we have hatred in our hearts for others, because hatred cannot abide in the light of Jesus Christ.

2:10 – “*He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.*” As was the custom of Jewish writers, John contrasts the negative and the positive to illustrate a particular truth. In verse 9, John talks about hatred, and in verse 10 he talks about love. If we love our brothers and sisters in Christ, we will not do or say anything that would cause them to turn away from the faith because of our conduct.

2:11 – “*But he that hateth his brother is in darkness and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.*” Seeing Christians, and especially ministers, hate each other and attack one another is one of the saddest things I have ever seen. Those who hate others become enshrouded in spiritual blindness and lose the illumination of the Holy Spirit. They begin to wander and lose all sense of spiritual direction.

Levels of Spiritual Maturity (2:12-14)

John now discusses the three levels of spiritual maturity:

1. Children
2. Young men
3. Fathers

These three levels of spiritual maturity correlate to other sets of threes in the Word of God:

1. **The three sections in the Tabernacle of Moses:** the Outer Court, the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies.
2. **The three levels of productivity (Mt. 13:8):** thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and hundredfold.
3. **The three levels of fruitfulness (Jn. 15:1-8):** fruit, more fruit, and much fruit.
4. **The three levels in heaven,** mentioned by the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:2: “*I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether*

out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.”

2:12 – *“I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake.”* What a blessing it is to be assured of God’s forgiveness! This is the first of three stages in the Christian life. In addition to knowing the blessedness of their sins being forgiven, these Christians experience the other elementary principles of the doctrine of Christ found in Hebrews 6:1:

1. Foundation of repentance from dead work
2. Faith toward God
3. Doctrine of baptism (water and Holy Spirit)
4. Laying on of hands and the spiritual gifts
5. Resurrection of the dead
6. Eternal judgment

2:13-14 – *“I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that 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 wicked one.”* Now John continues by speaking of the other two levels of Christian maturity: young men and fathers. The qualifications of the three groups of Christians are as follows:

1. Little Children

- a. They know their sins are forgiven.

- b. They know God is their Heavenly Father, having the witness of the Spirit in their spirit that they are children of God (Rom. 8:16); for they have received the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, “Abba, Father.”

2. Young Men

- a. They are strong.
- b. The Word of God abides in them.
- c. They have overcome the wicked one.

3. Fathers

- a. They know the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit in a very intimate way.
- b. They know the Father’s heart, the greatness of His goodness, and the beauty of His character (Zech. 9:17).

When we accept the Lord Jesus Christ into our hearts, we are born again by the Spirit of God. Our sins are washed away by the blood of Christ, and we are adopted into the family of God (Rom. 8:15-16). We are “babes in Christ” (1 Cor. 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:2). At this stage in our Christian lives, we are spiritually immature and need to grow in the knowledge and nature of Christ.

Paul clearly defines the goal of Christianity in Ephesians 4:13-14, which is for each one of us to grow in the knowledge of Christ and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. “Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every

wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming” (NIV). Unless we mature and grow spiritually, we will remain as spiritual infants that are easily tossed back and forth by every wind of doctrine.

There is a maturation process in our natural life as we grow from being infants to being young men and women to being adults. In the same way, we should mature as Christians from infants in Christ to mature spiritual fathers and mothers. In other words, our goal is to reach spiritual fatherhood whereby we are able to produce spiritual offspring and nurture them in the ways of God.

When we are spiritual infants, we drink the “milk of the Word”—the elementary truths of God’s Word (Heb. 5:13; 1 Pet. 2:2). In order to grow and become strong, we eventually need to be weaned from milk and begin to eat the “meat of God’s Word”—the deeper truths of God’s Word (Heb. 5:12,14).

The key to spiritual growth is to feed upon God’s Word every day. Meditate day and night in God’s Word and you will grow spiritually. Psalm 1:2 says, “But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.” God’s Word will make you strong, as John says in 1 John 2:14, “Because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you.”

The other aspect of spiritual young men that John mentions is that they have overcome the wicked one. We want to be overcomers and more than conquerors in Christ (Rom. 8:37). How do we overcome the devil? Remember, Scripture is its own best interpreter. The answer is found in Revelation 12:11: “And they overcame [the devil] by the

blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.” There are three keys to overcoming the devil mentioned in Revelation 12:11. We overcome Satan:

1. By the blood of the Lamb
2. By the word of our testimony
3. By not loving our lives unto death

First, we must continually walk under the canopy of the blood of Jesus. There is tremendous power in the blood of Christ. Satan cannot overcome His blood. That is why we must constantly appropriate His blood.

Whenever Satan attacks you, remind him that he has been defeated by the blood of Jesus on Calvary’s cross. A pastor I knew once said to a demon that was inside of a person, “Do you know the blood of Jesus?” The demon replied, “Yes, we hate the blood because there is power in the blood.”

Second, we overcome Satan by our testimony and confession. We must continually praise the Lord with our mouths. The children of Israel complained in the wilderness and had a negative confession. As a result, they died in the wilderness. Only Joshua and Caleb inherited the Promised Land because they declared that God was well able to give them the land of Canaan (Num. 13:30; 14:8-9).

Third, we overcome Satan by not loving our lives. The Lord Jesus said in John 12:25, “He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.” It is said of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15:26 that they risked their lives for the

sake of the Gospel. This attitude is beautifully exemplified by Queen Esther when she risked her life to save her people, saying, “If I perish, I perish” (Esth. 4:16). As we continue to feed on the Word of God and overcome the devil, we will mature into spiritual fathers and mothers in Christ. Thus the goal of the Christian life is two-fold: spiritual maturity and spiritual reproduction. The Lord wants us to mature and become spiritual fathers and mothers who bring many into the kingdom of God and nurture them in the ways of God.

God told Abraham that he would be “a father of many nations” (Gen. 17:4). The Lord said to Abraham in Genesis 17:6, “And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.” God also told him that He would multiply his seed as the stars of the heaven and the sand upon the seashore (Gen. 22:17).

Abraham has an abundance of children, both natural and spiritual. He is the father of the Jewish people through Isaac and the father of many of the Arab nations through Ishmael. Paul tells us that Abraham is the “father of all them that believe” (Rom. 4:11). Like Abraham, we want to be very fruitful and bring many into the kingdom of God.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4:15, “For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.” There are many Christian pastors, teachers, and ministers in the world today, but there are few true spiritual fathers and mothers who intimately know the Heavenly Father and are a true reflection of the image of Christ. More than ever before,

there is a tremendous need today for spiritual fathers and mothers. In the last day revival that is soon approaching, millions will be brought into the kingdom of God. They will need spiritual fathers and mothers to nurture them in the ways of God and lead them on to dwell in spiritual Zion - the mountain of His holy presence.

Moses, who was a spiritual father to the Israelites, said to God in Numbers 11:12, "Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers?" The Lord is looking for men and women today who will be "nursing fathers and mothers" (Isa. 49:23) to those who are being birthed into the kingdom of God. Who will answer this call to be a spiritual father and mother in Christ?

Love Not the World (2:15-17)

2:15 – *"Love not the world, neither the things in the world, if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."* Jesus said in Matthew 6:24, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." We cannot love the world and love God at the same time. If we love God, but allow the love of this world to creep into our hearts, it will gradually suffocate the love of God until eventually we no longer love God.

We should learn that we cannot love God and this world from the tragic story of Demas, who was one of Paul's travelling companions (Phlm. 1:24; Col. 4:14). Demas saw revival and the glory of God

and ministered with Paul, but the love of this world consumed him and took him away from God. Paul said in 2 Timothy 4:10, “For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica.”

2:16 – *“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life is not of the Father, but is of this world.”*

Three root sins of mankind are mentioned here:

1. The lust of the flesh
2. The lust of the eyes
3. The pride of life

1. The lust of the flesh signifies carnal desires and appetites that are not controlled by the Holy Spirit. Gluttony, drunkenness, and inordinate sexual desires are all examples of the lust of the flesh.

2. The lust of the eyes signifies the incorrect use of the things we see. This may be illustrated by the words of Solomon in Ecclesiastes 2:10: “And whatsoever my eyes saw I kept not from them.”

3. The pride of life signifies the desire for position, wealth, power, honor, titles, and the acclaim of this world.

There are many warnings in Scripture against ungodly desires and lust:

Mark 4:19 - *“And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.”*

Romans 1:24 - *“Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:”*

Romans 6:12 - *“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.”*

Romans 13:14 - *“But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.”*

Galatians 5:24 - *“And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.”*

Ephesians 2:3 - *“Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.”*

1 Timothy 6:9 - *“But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.”*

2 Timothy 2:22 - *“Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”*

Titus 2:12 - *“Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.”*

Titus 3:3 - *“For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.”*

James 4:1 - *“From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?”*

1 Peter 2:11 - *“Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.”*

1 Peter 4:2 - *“That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.”*

2 Peter 2:18 - *“For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error.”*

Jude 1:18 - *“How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.”*

2:17 - *“And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”* Peter reminds us, “But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (2 Pet. 3:7). Let us heed the admonition of the Apostle Paul in Colossians 3:2, “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.” In Colossians 3:4, Paul continues, “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.” If we want to appear with Christ in His glory, we must set our affections on things above instead of on the things

of this world. Let us also put into practice Paul's exhortation in Colossians 3:5, 8: "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry... But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth."

"But he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." John adds that those who do the will of God remain forever. An example of such a person is found in Psalm 1:2-3: "But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."

Warning Against Antichrists (2:18-19)

2:18—*"Little children, it is the last time and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time."* We must be quite clear that there is only one Antichrist, even as there is one Christ. John speaks of him in Revelation 13:1, 18. He is the beast who shall rise up from the sea and whose number is the number of man, which is 666. He is the "man of sin" that Paul spoke of in 2 Thessalonians 2:3.

However, even as the followers and disciples of Christ are called Christians, so those who manifest the evil tendencies of the Antichrist—who oppose truth, goodness, and the Lord Himself—are called "antichrists." Jesus said in Matthew 24:24, "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and

wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.” The spirit of antichrist is increasing in the world today to prepare the way for the Antichrist to come in the last days.

2:19 – *“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: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.”* There are many antichrists in the Church of Jesus Christ. They are like wolves in sheep’s clothing (Mt. 7:15). They will eventually be exposed and leave the Church, but they try to do as much damage as they can before leaving.

The Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:19 that one of the primary purposes of heresies and false doctrines in the Church is to reveal who is real and who is false: “For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.”

One of the most difficult aspects of being a pastor of a church or a leader of a fellowship is to have people whom you have loved and cared for leave your church or fellowship. It can be very painful at times but it is necessary for the true state of their hearts is not revealed to everyone until they leave. The reality is that they did not share the God-given vision for your church nor did they truly support you. Christ had Judas and in the same way, you will have people who will betray and forsake you, simply remember that it is part of God’s plan.

Several years ago, in our fellowship of churches, Zion Fellowship (located in Waverly, New York), we went through a time of division when several pastors left our organization. It was a very

painful time. It grieved my heart to see pastors that had been my Bible school students 30 years before make wrong decisions and harden their hearts.

However, the Lord spoke to us that this separation was a part of His plan. The Lord gave one of our pastors a vision of a mighty chasm between those who left and those who remained in the fellowship. Although they had been among us for many years, they forsook us because they were never “of us.” They did not have the same spirit and vision.

In my 50 years of ministry, I have often seen that after a church experiences a division and many people leave, those who are left experience unity. Beloved, if you are experiencing this in your church or ministry, keep your eyes on Jesus and rejoice in Him because it is part of His plan to bring your church into unity and glory.

The Abiding Anointing (2:20-27)

2:20 – “*But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.*” The unction or anointing of the Holy Spirit graciously reveals the truth to us. The anointing of the Holy Spirit gives us understanding and God’s perspective in every situation.

We need the anointing of the Holy Spirit upon our lives. John 3:34 tells us that Jesus received the Spirit of God without measure. Jesus said in Luke 4:18, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and

recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.” It was the Holy Spirit Who anointed and empowered Jesus to preach and heal the sick. We read in Acts 10:38, “... God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.” It is the anointing that breaks yokes and bondages (Isa. 10:27).

We want to receive a new and fresh anointing each day, and be able to declare as King David did in Psalm 92:10, “...I shall be anointed with fresh oil.” The anointing increases upon our lives as we walk in righteousness and spend time with the Lord in prayer.

2:21 – *“I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.”* The precious anointing enables us to discern between truth and error. When we lose the anointing like King Saul did (1 Sam. 16:14), we lose our spiritual discernment. Saul could no longer hear from God and resorted to seeking the counsel of a witch. This is why it is so important that we cherish the anointing and walk in righteousness so that we do not lose it.

2:22 – *“Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.”* John now becomes forthright in his denunciation of liars who deny that Jesus is the Christ. The insidious error of Gnosticism, which denied that Christ was God in the flesh, crept into the New Testament Church. Gnosticism means “knowledge.” As Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:7, some people are “ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

John defines antichrists as those who deny the Father and Son, which is exactly what the Antichrist will do, according to Daniel 11:37: “Neither shall he regard the God of his fathers, nor the desire of women, nor regard any god: for he shall magnify himself above all.” Paul said of the Antichrist in 2 Thessalonians 2:4, “Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”

2:23 – *“Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.”* It is impossible to deny the Son and expect to be received by the Father. No earthly father would ever receive someone who rejects his own son.

2:24 – *“Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.”*

John exhorts us to abide and continue in God’s Word. This was the cry of the Spirit through the prophet Jeremiah to those who had lost the path of truth. Jeremiah 6:16 says, “Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.”

If the precious truths of the Gospel—the elementary principles of Christ which we have already listed in 1 John 2:12-14—remain in us, and we obey the teachings of Christ, we will be likened to the man who built his house upon the rock. But if the foundation is

destroyed, what can the righteous do? (Ps. 11:3). If we build upon these truths, we will continue in the Son and the Father. Jesus said in John 8:31, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.” We are not Christ’s disciples unless we continue in His Word.

2:25 – “*And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.*” To my profound sorrow, I have witnessed many people who, after leaving the path of truth, have lost the assurance of their salvation. If we forsake the Lord, we can lose our salvation. Revelation 22:19 says that God will remove our names from the Lamb’s book of life if we remove any words from His Word (see also Exodus 32:33).

The doctrine of eternal security is an absolute lie from the pit of hell. It teaches that once we are saved, we are always saved and there is nothing we can do, including breaking God’s commandments, to lose our salvation. The truth is that we are only assured of eternal life as we continue in God’s ways (Jn. 8:31).

2:26 – “*These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.*” John does not mince words concerning the aim and desire of these wicked men. Those who leave the path of truth and follow error seek to draw the righteous into their dens of iniquity. They seek to spoil the congregations of the righteous. John rightly calls them seducers.

2:27 – “*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.*” Again John returns to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the blessed Comforter. He is the

Parakletos (the Greek word for “Comforter”)—the One who walks along side of us and is inside of us. The anointing of the Holy Spirit is our personal teacher.

The phrase, “*Ye need not that any man teach you,*” should not be misconstrued to suggest that we do not need to sit at the feet of godly teachers whom God has placed in the Church. In reality, what John is saying is that because of the anointing, we do not need to heed the words of seducers, for the anointing will show us the truth. Philip asked the Ethiopian eunuch if he understood the passage in Isaiah that he was reading, and he replied, “How can I, except some man should guide me?” (Acts 8:31). Paul says in Romans 10:14, “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?”

Paul told the Hebrew believers, “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat” (Heb. 5:12). Therefore, do not neglect the teachings of godly teachers and preachers.

The Likeness of Christ (2:28-3:3)

2:28 – “*And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.*” The Apostle John instructs us to abide in Christ. This is the message that Jesus preached in John 15. Jesus said in John 15:1, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman,” and continued in John 15:4, “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear

fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.” The Lord wants us to “abide in Him,” for we cannot bear fruit unless we are joined to Him, just as a branch cannot bear fruit unless it is attached to the vine. Without Christ, we can do nothing.

What does it mean to “abide in Christ”? Jesus gives us the answer in John 15:7,10: “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. ... If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love.” Abiding in Christ means that we keep His commandments and His Word abides in our hearts.

In verse 28, John attaches a promise to the mandate to abide in Christ: “*When he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.*” If we abide in Christ, we will not be ashamed at His Second Coming.

2:29 – “*If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.*” Because Christ is righteous, those who are truly born of Him will walk in righteousness as well. The psalmist says of Christ in Psalm 45:7, “Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness.” We read in Psalm 11:7, “For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright.” The Lord loves to see righteousness in His people; it delights His heart. Therefore, as John says, it is obvious that those who walk in righteousness are born of God.

CHAPTER THREE

This chapter opens in a tone of amazement concerning the love of God. It is as though the beloved apostle lets out a shout of ecstasy as he contemplates God's love for us.

3:1 – *“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.”* The meaning of the Greek word for “bestowed” is a gesture on the part of a sovereign who desires to show his gratitude or appreciation to a subject who has rendered a valuable service to the monarch.

However, God has bestowed on us a far higher honour than dukedoms, earldoms, or knighthood. He has literally given us the privilege of being the sons of God.

We read concerning Christ in John 1:12, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” There is really only one earthly example of a king bestowing such honor upon a subject. This took place when the Roman Emperor proclaimed his heir (and, therefore, legitimate son) to succeed him. Scripturally, we could liken it to Pharaoh making Joseph the second ruler of the land of Egypt after himself.

“Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.” In several passages in the Gospels, Jesus intimates that identification with Him means that we will be rejected by this world. Jesus said in John 15:18: “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.”

He also declared concerning His disciples in John 17:14, “I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” The world loves its own and we are not of this world. Therefore, the world will not acknowledge us.

3:2 – “*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.*” Being the sons of God is not only a future status, but also a present glorious reality. Paul says in Ephesians 2:6 that God has “made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” When John says, “*It doth not yet appear what we shall be,*” he is echoing the words of Paul in Ephesians 2:7, where Paul said, “That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.”

Through the eyes of faith John exclaims, “*When He shall appear we shall be like Him.*” In the fullest sense, this indicates His Second Coming, since He will be admired in all His saints at that glorious event (2 Th. 1:10). As King David declares in Psalm 17:15, “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.”

Why will we be like Christ? *Because we will see Him as He is.* Thus, to the degree our eyes see the King in His beauty (Isa. 33:17), to that same degree will we become like Him. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:18, “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” The principle of

believers being transformed into the image of Jesus is substantiated by the Song of Solomon. There we see the Shulamite who, in her ever-unfolding revelation of Christ, becomes more and more like her beloved Bridegroom. Certain aspects of His character are revealed in a series of cameos. After the Shulamite receives this revelation, her beauty is described in similar terms. Please compare Song of Solomon chapters 5:10-16 (which describes Christ) with 7:1-9 (which speaks of His Bride).

As the Holy Spirit reveals Jesus to us, there is an impartation of that particular aspect of His glory and goodness to our own life. Thus, to the degree that we have an unfolding revelation of Jesus, to that same degree we will be transformed into His likeness and image.

3:3 – *“And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”* How do we purify ourselves? King David gives us the keys to purification in Psalm 51:

1. We must acknowledge our transgression (v. 3)
2. We must acknowledge that we were born in sin (v. 5)
3. We must acknowledge that we need to be washed (v. 7)
4. We must acknowledge that we need to be purged (v. 7)
5. We must ask God to create a clean heart in us (v. 10)

Purity and the unfolding revelation of Christ to the believer flow together since Jesus stated, “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God” (Mt. 5:8). Let us pray, “Wash me, Lord, purge me, and create a clean heart in me so that You, dear Jesus, can dwell in me and have Your throne in my heart.” Jeremiah 17:9 states, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can

know it?” Therefore, we need Him to take away the heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh that He promises in Ezekiel 36:26. However, we also need to enquire of Him in order for this work to be accomplished (Ezek. 36:37). In other words, we must diligently seek the Lord to perform this work of grace in our lives.

The Sinless Nature of God (3:4-10)

This portion of the epistle is often misunderstood. Consequently, it has led many dear believers into condemnation and bondage. Therefore, we need to carefully examine exactly what the beloved apostle is saying in this passage.

3:4 – *“Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.”* John gives us a simple definition of sin—it is the breaking or transgression of the law. Sin breaks the law, which is holy (Rom. 7:12). We must never forget that Jesus came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it and write it upon the fleshly tables of our hearts.

3:5 – *“And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.”* John the Baptist introduced Jesus in John 1:29 by saying, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” Here John adds “in Him is no sin.” Jesus is the spotless Lamb of God.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” The key to obtaining victory over sin is to abide in Christ because in Him there is no sin (Heb. 4:15).

3:6 – “*Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.*” Abiding in Christ means to keep His commandments (Jn. 15:10), and as we abide in Christ, we will not sin.

On the other hand, “*whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.*” This refers to those who habitually sin, not to those who are overcome by a fault or fall against their will. This view is held by many British commentators who have written on the subject of holiness, and on this passage in particular. (See pg. 180 #1, *Epistles of John* by Dr. Howard Marshall.)

This is not said to excuse sin, but rather to compassionately view the lives of Christians with understanding and reality. For as we have said, even the holiest of saints here on earth have to fight valiantly against sins that war against their souls.

The Apostle Paul develops this ongoing struggle within us between good and evil in Romans 7:15-23 (NIV): “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind

and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.” Proverbs 24:16 says, “For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again.” Beloved, if you sin and displease God, do not become discouraged and give up. Repent, make it right with God, and continue on the pathway of righteousness that shines brighter and brighter each and every day.

3:7 – “*Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.*” In the days of John there were people who were declaring that it did not matter what a person did in the flesh. They advocated sinning and doing whatever made a person feel good, without regard for the consequences. Let us not be likewise deceived. Let us walk in the Spirit, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us (Rom. 8:4).

3:8 – “*He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.*” There are essentially two fathers according to Holy Scripture: the Heavenly Father and Satan.

The Heavenly Father is called the *Father of Lights*—“with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (Jas. 1:17). The devil is called the *father of lies* (Jn. 8:44). To which father do we belong? The answer to this question is determined by our way of life. If we walk after the lusts of the flesh, then our father is the devil—even if we profess faith in Christ. If we walk in the light of God’s Word as He is in the light, then our father is God. The Son of God was manifested to destroy the works of the devil. Jesus reigns in glory at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

having spoiled Satan and stripped him of his power by His death on the cross (Col. 2:15). In His perfect timing, the Lord will descend from the clouds to utterly and totally destroy and crush His enemies under His feet (Ps. 8:5-6, Heb. 2:7-8).

3:9 – *“Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.”* This verse has troubled the tender conscience of the saints throughout all ages. In reality, as we understand the doctrine of our two natures, this verse then yields its very blessed fruits of a holy life for the believer.

All of us are born with the Adamic nature, the nature of sin. When we receive Christ into our hearts, we receive a new nature in us—the nature of God that cannot sin because God cannot sin. However, the old nature that we inherited when we were born into this world can do nothing but sin and that nature is still in us.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:45-49: “And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.”

We must compare Scripture with Scripture. King Solomon, with respect to this subject, states in Proverbs 24:16, “For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again: but the wicked shall fall into

mischief.” Thus it is clear that the righteous can fall, but by the grace of God rise again, while the wicked, however, perish. Therefore, Scripture does not teach that we are infallible or incapable of sinning, but simply that the new nature of Christ within us cannot sin. Any one of us can sin at any time if we yield to temptation, which is why Jesus told us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Mt. 6:13).

3:10 – *“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.”* John is saying that the new nature of Christ within us will bring forth its fruit. The goal of the Christian life is to see the old nature become weaker while the new nature becomes so strong that it controls our thoughts, words, and actions. This new nature is manifested through us as we perform the righteous acts of God and as we love others.

Brotherly Love (3:11-24)

3:11 – *“For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.”* John again repeats the theme of love. For this reason, John is known as the Apostle of Love. It is the message of his beloved Master, who said in John 13:34, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.”

3:12 – *“Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous.”* John reemphasises his message in the negative sense. Cain is used in Scripture to serve as a warning

to those who harbor hatred in their hearts for others. Cain is also spoken of in Hebrews 11:4 and Jude 1:11.

Those who lose their position like Queen Vashti or their inheritance like Esau tend to hate those who replace them or take what they lost. Revelation 3:11 warns us, “Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.”

3:13 – *“Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.”* Then John links the hatred of Cain against his brother to the hatred the world has against Christians. All that we stand for—righteousness, holiness, and love—is in direct contrast to the world, which is at enmity with Christ (Jas. 4:4). Do not be surprised if the world hates you, because if it does, it means that you are doing what is right in God’s eyes.

3:14 – *“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.”* This is the blessed assurance of the believer. Because we love our fellow Christians, we know that we have eternal life. However, those who hate others will abide in hell forever.

3:15 – *“Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.”* The root cause of murder is hatred. Paul reminds us in Galatians 5:19-21: “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do

such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” Thus, if we have hatred in our hearts there will be no inheritance for us in heaven. Let us be wise and ask our beloved Lord Jesus to cleanse us from all forms of the works of the flesh.

3:16—*“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.”*

Now we have the greatest demonstration of love. The Lord Jesus stated very clearly in John 15:13: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” The Apostle Paul adds in Romans 5:8, “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Therefore, the Lovely One of God laid down His life for us while we were still in all the filth of our sinful ways. The Lord set an example for us to follow. We, too, should be prepared to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

This is a normal procedure in the armed forces. When I was in basic training, we were taken by our instructor into a very small room. We were told that if a grenade was tossed into the room by the enemy, the one nearest the grenade should throw himself upon it. By covering the grenade with his stomach, the shrapnel would be absorbed by the soft layers of the abdomen and save those around him. In the same way, we need to have the love of God in our hearts for others. A daily laying down of our will and desires for others prepares us to one day naturally and literally lay down our lives to die for another, should the Lord ever require that of us.

3:17—*“But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him,*

how dwelleth the love of God in him?” Now John develops the practical aspect of love. We must never forget that although the kingdom of heaven is within us, it is manifested in our lives in the tangible expressions of giving food and shelter to those in need. If we see someone in need and we have the means to help them, but we choose not to, we do not have the love of God in our hearts, because God’s love compels us to help those in need.

3:18 – *“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.”* James 2:14-17 says: “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.” Let us ensure, beloved, that we personally seek for every occasion to help those who are in need. If we are in leadership, we should ensure that our churches have programs whereby the poor and those in need are helped in a very practical way through food, clothing, and, if need be, shelter.

3:19 – *“And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.”* John now reverts to the inward witness of our hearts toward the Lord. We must keep the assurance of our salvation as we walk in the light. Regretfully, so many people lose this assurance because they permit sin to reign in their lives.

3:20 – *“For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.”* This refers to those who are having battles concerning sin in their lives over which they have not yet

obtained the victory. It is that besetting sin that they do not want to commit, but it overcomes them from time to time, making them miserable. However, God, who knows all things, is greater than our heart that condemns us. The Lord forgives us and encourages us until we have the final victory over that wretched sinful desire.

3:21 – *“Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.”* With a heart set free from guilt and sin, we can have intimate communion and fellowship with our lovely Lord Jesus.

3:22 – *“And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.”* Here we have one of the most beautiful assurances concerning prayer. It would be beneficial at this time to examine what we might call the theology of John with respect to prayer.

Here John clearly lays the foundation for prayer—relationship with the Lord. First, we must keep His commandments—not only the Ten Commandments, but all of God’s commandments in His precious Word. Second, we should do the things that please Him.

David said in Psalm 50:23, “Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God.” Hebrews 13:15 says, “By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.”

Friendship with Jesus is the key to answered prayer. Jesus said in John 15:14, “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command

you.” A man will do anything for his friend, and so will our lovely Jesus. We are His friends as we do those things that please Him. He gives us this wonderful assurance in John 14:13-14: “And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.”

3:23 – “*And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.*” Now we have the dual commandments to believe upon the name of Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, and love our neighbours as ourselves. Faith and love flow together.

3:24 – “*And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.*” The wonderful relationship that obedience enables us to have with Christ is that we dwell in Him and He dwells in us. The Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are indeed the sons of God as we abide in Jesus. What heavenly bliss!

CHAPTER FOUR

Try the Spirits (4:1-6)

4:1 – *“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”* John now turns to a subject of great importance—the discerning of spirits. We need to understand that there are two forms of spirits in the unseen world around us. First, there are the angels of God, described by Paul as ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those who are the heirs of salvation (Heb. 1:14).

Jesus speaks of the angels who watch over children in Matthew 18:10: “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.” Angels ministered to Jesus after His temptation, as recorded in Matthew 4:11: “Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.” The Apostle Paul testified of angelic ministration in Acts 27:23: “For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve.” The Apostle Peter experienced the ministration of angels on several occasions.

At an early age, an angel spoke to me and showed me God’s purpose for my life. At other times, I have been acutely aware of their presence with me in times of difficulty. The ministry of angels is varied. Some angels are responsible for imparting truth to us, as we see in Daniel 9:22, “And (Gabriel) informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding.” There are angels who rule over nations, cities, and villages, and there are angels

who are responsible for looking after children. Every believer has his own personal angel who cares for him.

The second order of angels is fallen angels who have given their allegiance to Satan. The Apostle Paul speaks of these angels in Ephesians 6:11-12: "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

Paul warns in 1 Timothy 4:1, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." Therefore, there are spirits whose mission is to perpetrate false doctrines and errors, turning unstable souls away from the ways of righteousness. They do so through the agency of false prophets and false teachers. It is for this reason that the beloved Apostle John issues this warning to us to try the spirits.

How do we try the spirits? A Biblical example of testing the spirits is found in Joshua 5:13: "And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?"

Joshua challenged the appearance of this man whom, as we read on, was none other than the Lord Himself, as seen in Joshua 5:14: "And he said, Nay; but as Captain of the host of the LORD am I now

come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant?" Joshua did not trust his natural senses, but forthrightly asked the man who he was. The man declared that he was the Captain of the Lord's host.

Similarly, in the ministry of Jesus, our Lord Himself demanded to know the name of the spirits when confronted with a man possessed of devils. This is recorded in Mark 5:9: "And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many."

The Apostle Paul cast out a spirit of divination from a girl, as recorded in Acts 16:16-18: "And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour." Here it was clear to Paul that the spirit was not of God; therefore, there was no need to challenge it.

4:2 – "*Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.*" Now John gives guidance concerning the spirits. This is substantiated by the teaching of Paul, who stated in 1 Corinthians 12:3, "Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." This became a reality to me in the days when the former Yugoslavia was under the rule of Marshal Tito. I visited

Belgrade, the capital city, which was under tight communist rule. No meetings of more than four persons were allowed without a government permit. This permit was not issued to churches that did not have their own buildings.

Greeted by the pastor of the church I was visiting, who had just been released from prison, I was told that members of the congregation thought that the assistant pastor had betrayed the pastor to the authorities. They asked me what they should do. I responded by saying that we should wait and see how the Spirit of God moved in the church services.

Our meetings were held in a basement, and at one such meeting many people asked for prayer after the service. As there were too many people for me to pray for alone, I asked the senior pastor and assistant pastor to help me pray for the people. After I finished praying, I went to where the assistant pastor was still praying for some people. He was praying in German, which did not surprise me since many in the congregation and in the country at that time spoke German, as well as their native language, Serbian.

The assistant pastor's prayer was beautiful. He exalted the Lord Jesus and His blood. When he finished praying for the people, I spoke to him in German, but to my amazement he did not understand me. Then someone standing by said to me: "He does not speak German. The German that you heard him speaking was the Holy Spirit speaking through him in other tongues."

I instantly knew by the Spirit of God that the assistant pastor was not guilty of betraying the pastor to the authorities. When he was told

what I had said, he broke down crying. The real culprit was later revealed. Thus, I had a very practical illustration of the Holy Spirit glorifying Jesus in prayer.

4:3—*“And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.”* John now makes the same point in the negative sense. We can challenge spiritual manifestations by asking the spirit the very simple question mentioned in this verse. If the spirit denies that Jesus came in the flesh, we may be assured that it is not of God.

The Antichrist who is to come, called “the man of sin,” will vehemently deny Christ and His atoning work on Calvary. He will, in fact, speak great things against God, as seen in Daniel 7:25, “And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time.” The spirit of antichrist (though not the Antichrist himself) is definitely in operation in the world today.

4:4—*“Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.”* With triumphant assurance, John declares that we have overcome the wicked one, even as the young men mentioned in chapter 2:13. The reason that we can overcome Satan is that Christ in us is greater than Satan and all his hordes of evil spirits. Colossians 2:15 triumphantly declares of Christ, “*And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.*” This is an experience that all believers should walk in. We should allow

Christ within us to rule and reign in our lives, giving us the victory again and again.

4:5—“*They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.*” False prophets are loved by those who do not walk uprightly, even as Jeremiah declared in Jeremiah 5:31: “The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?” It is a true saying that “one loves one’s own.” Therefore, Christians love Christians and those of the world love their own. The ungodly receive their own and hear the words of the unjust.

The terrible standard that pervades the world today is illustrated in an article from *Readers Digest*, dated February 1998, page 75, featuring Professor Simon of Hamilton College. He states that 10 to 20 percent of his students are reluctant to make moral judgments—in some cases even about the Holocaust. One student’s comment was, “Of course, I dislike the Nazis, but who is to say that they are morally wrong?” Another teacher, Professor Sommers at Clark University, says that many students come to college “committed to moral relativism that offers no grounds to think about cheating, stealing, and other moral issues.”

4:6—“*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.*” By being born again and baptized in the Holy Spirit we know that we are of God. Those with like precious faith will flow with us, while those who do not know God will oppose us. By this we can also discern between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Perfect Love (4:7 - 5:3)

4:7—*“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.”* John now reverts to his favourite theme—the everlasting love of God for His people. Love is the very integral nature of God.

The whole of salvation is rooted and grounded in His love, since Christ told us in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

4:8—*“He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.”* Those who are born again have that love in their hearts and, therefore, know God Who is *Love*. The contrary is also true. Therefore, love is the “litmus test” of Christianity, even as our Lord said in John 13:35, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”

4:9—*“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.”* God’s love was manifested in His sending of His Son into the world to die for our sins. Jesus purchased eternal life for us by His death upon the cross that we might have abundant life.

It is a continuous walking with Christ that constitutes the true Christian life. Paul said in Galatians 2:20, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

4:10 – “*Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*” The true manifestation of love is from God who is love. He is the origin, source, and very essence of love. Our love comes from His abiding love within our hearts. We can love Him only to the degree that His love is in our hearts.

God’s love is manifested and openly declared to all in that He sent His Son to die for us. The greatest battle that a parent faces is relinquishing his child and seeing his child suffer. Yet God deliberately sent His Son to the cross to be marred for all eternity for our sins. Jesus voluntarily gave His life for our sins. No greater love can be shown than this.

4:11 – “*Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.*” God has set an example for us in giving His all for us. Therefore, as we are born of God we should also give ourselves for others. A beautiful story from the life of Sadhu Sundar Singh helps illustrate this truth. When he and another Christian were travelling in the mountainous area of northern India, they came to a pit and heard cries for help coming out of the pit.

Both of the men were very tired and suffering from a lack of food, and the man who accompanied Sundar Singh said that he was too weak to help the man in the pit because he needed all his energy to survive himself, and he continued on his journey. Sundar Singh pulled the unfortunate man out of the pit by himself and carried him up on through the mountainous path. It was not long before he came upon his fellow traveller, who was dead, lying by the wayside. The one who had sought to save his life had lost it, and the one who had sought to give his life

for another saved his. Jesus said in Matthew 16:25, “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.” May God grant that we learn this lesson.

4:12 – “*No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.*” The key to having the indwelling presence of God is to fulfil the two greatest commandments found in Matthew 22:37-39: “Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

The proof that we obey the first commandment is that we manifest the love of God toward others. Love and perfection flow together, since we are told in Colossians 3:14 that love is the bond of perfection.

4:13 – “*Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.*” Further proof that we know we are in God and He is in us is that we have received His Holy Spirit into our lives.

4:14-15 - “*And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.*” Now John adds his personal testimony to the sonship of Jesus.

Paul states in Romans 10:9, “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” Thus, our salvation is based upon heart belief and confession with our mouth that Jesus is Lord.

4:16 – “*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.*” Now John emphasises again that the whole motivating force for all that God has done in and for His creation is *love*. In his letter to the Ephesians the Apostle Paul develops this theme as well. We should examine very carefully what he says about the indwelling of God in our hearts through His love.

We read in Ephesians 3:17-19: “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.”

It is the glorious experience of having Christ ruling and reigning in our hearts that enables us to know the love of God. The Lord’s desire is that everything we do and say is motivated by love. To the degree that we know the love of God, to that same degree we are filled with His fullness.

4:17 – “*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.*” The standards of the New Testament are far higher than the standards that the Old Testament saints were expected to attain. This was made very clear by the Lord Himself frequently in the Sermon on the Mount.

This is illustrated in Matthew 5:21-22: “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That

whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.”

John now gives perhaps the highest standard by which man should live—*“as he is, so are we in this world.”* We should walk even as our blessed Lord walked upon this earth. The Lord Himself said in Matthew 5:48, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” Then the Apostle Peter takes up the refrain in 1 Peter 1:15-16: “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.”

4:18 – *“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.”* Many Christians are under the bondage of fear, which essentially is manifested in the following areas:

1. The fear of man, which is a snare. Proverbs 29:25 says, “The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.” Many people are governed by fear and do not do what is right because they are afraid of what others will say about them or do to them.

David proclaimed triumphantly in Psalm 56:3-4: “What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.” He said in Psalm 118:6, “The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?” We obtain victory over fear by trusting in the Lord.

2. The fear of evil, in the sense that some evil will befall us. In particular, there are two evils that people fear:

(1) *The Fear of War* - King David made this triumphant statement in Psalm 27:3: “Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.” David’s confidence came from having singleness of mind, as he says in verse 4, “One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.”

David knew that in a time of trouble, God would hide him and lift up his head above his enemies. David would not fear; instead, he would sing praise and offer up sacrifices of joy to the Lord. Let us follow David’s example and not be afraid in time of war.

(2) *The Fear of Death* - The Lord came to deliver us from the fear of death, which afflicted many Old Testament saints, as we read in Hebrews 2:15: “And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”

King David overcame the fear of death, writing in Psalm 23:4, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.” David triumphed over the fear of death, and we can, too, by the grace of God as His love is perfected in us. When there is perfect love between two people, neither fears the other. So it is between us and God. Perfect love dispels all fear. I am reminded of a testimony of a certain doctor. He gave his life to Christ because

he was amazed by the attitudes of Christians who received the news of imminent death with great joy and expectancy. The unsaved will receive the same news with gloom, despair, and cursing. Therefore, let us be secure in the love of Jesus and not be bound by fear.

4:19 – “*We love him, because he first loved us.*” Is it not true in the natural that when one loves us we return that love? With God this is even truer, because His love is so pure.

4:20-21 – “*If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.*” Now John again examines our love for God to ensure that it is authentic, as he has done virtually throughout the whole epistle.

This is very necessarily repeated so we may thoroughly understand that for us to think we can love God while having ought against others is an absolute delusion. This chapter closes with the reminder that the two great commandments are veritably linked together.

CHAPTER FIVE

This chapter commences with a statement of faith that enables us to know that we are the children of God. It perhaps would not be too strong to say that this epistle is written primarily to little children in Christ. Its purpose was to provide assurance of salvation and protect them from the insidious errors of John's time.

5:1 – *“Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.”* As John has said on previous occasions, inherent to our salvation is the belief that Jesus is the Son of God. Therefore, if we love the Heavenly Father, we will also love His only begotten Son.

5:2 – *“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.”* John repeats his theme that love is the key to knowing whether or not we are the children of God. If we are God's children, we will love God's people.

5:3 – *“For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.”* John continues by defining in very precise terms the nature of love—to love God is to obey Him.

A child's love for a parent is exemplified in his obedience to his father or mother. Similarly, our love for God is manifested to the degree that we obey Him.

Overcomers (5:4-6)

5:4 – *“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”* While we have stated that this epistle is primarily for little children in Christ, nonetheless there is also spiritual meat in it for young men and fathers. Here the text addresses those who are overcomers, who are termed young men by John in 1 John 2:12-14.

In Revelation 12:11, John shows us the three keys to overcoming Satan: “They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.” The people of God in the last days will use these three keys to win the battle against Satan.

5:5 – *“Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?”* Thus, strength comes through declaring our faith. To emphasise this, John asks a rhetorical question. Our faith in Christ is our most precious possession. We must ensure that it burns brightly within us through fervently witnessing for Christ and receiving fresh truths from Him every day.

5:6 – *“This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.”* Jesus came by water and blood. By water, John means Christ’s natural birth, and by blood, he means that Jesus did in fact come in the flesh and die in the flesh. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, even as the Lord Jesus Christ declared in John 16:13-14: “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself;

but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you.”

The Three Witnesses (5:7-13)

5:7—“*For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.*” The doctrine of the Trinity sets Christianity apart from all other religions in that it clearly defines the Godhead as Three in One.

The Father

When we consider the Godhead, we must realize that although They are equal, the Father is supreme. He is the One who originates all things. The phrase, “It pleased the Father” (Col. 1:19), summarizes the teachings of the Gospels and epistles. The Father is not only supreme, but He does all things after His own will.

The Word (or the Son)

Jesus, the Son of God, is introduced by John as “the Word made flesh.” John 1:1 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” We read in John 1:14, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” Jesus is the Word of God, and He manifested the Word through His life. In the same way, God wants us to have His Word in our hearts so that we are living epistles known and read of all men (2 Cor. 3:2).

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the third member of the Holy Trinity and, as any younger member of a family would be, is protected by the others. He is the Comforter. Jesus said in John 16:13-14: “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you.”

In Mark 3:28-29, Jesus shows the importance of the Holy Spirit: “All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation.” (The subject of the person, life, and ministry of the Holy Spirit is treated in more detail in our book entitled *The Comforter*.)

5:8—“*And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.*” Now John writes of three witnesses who testify to the truth. The Holy Spirit is placed first since He is the One who verifies the other two members of the Godhead. In searching for the interpretation, we cannot digress from the interpretation of verse six, for in so doing we would transgress the laws of hermeneutics. Meanings of types are not changed in the same context. Therefore, water speaks of the natural birth of Jesus and the blood speaks of His life as the Son of Man.

5:9—“*If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son.*” This

verse confirms the interpretation of the previous one. John is indeed speaking of the Holy Spirit witnessing of the Lord Jesus. God Himself has testified of His beloved Son in that He has spoken to us through His Son (Heb. 1:2).

5:10 – *“He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.”* When we believe in Jesus, the Holy Spirit bears witness to our spirits that we are indeed the sons of God.

However, the terrible indictment for unbelievers is that by not accepting the irrefutable testimony of God, they are declaring, in effect, that He is a liar. One can but imagine their terrible shame at the judgment seat when they are confronted with their sin. They will see the blessed Son of God, whom they denied, seated in all His glory at the right hand of God.

The reason for John’s constant reiteration of the fact that Jesus is the Son is because false doctrines stating Jesus was not the Son of God had crept into the Early Church. It is inconsistent to profess belief in God and then deny the testimony of God the Father to His Son, as John’s opponents were doing. This is true today of many false religions. They profess a belief in God, but deny the Son. Consequently, they cannot receive eternal life.

5:11 – *“And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.”* We may think that this repetition is needless. However, I have travelled extensively in other lands and have heard Christian leaders say that those who worship idols and hold other

beliefs are going to heaven. This suggests that they have not been sufficiently rooted and grounded in the faith. Jesus Himself clearly stated that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and that no man comes to the Father but by Him (Jn. 14:6).

5:12 – *“He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.”* All life is in the Son and without Jesus no one can be saved. No other religion has the message of salvation.

5:13 – *“These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”* In this verse, John states the basic reason for writing this epistle. This is the message that we should relay to the world. There is only one way to receive eternal life and that is through Christ. We read in Acts 4:12 concerning Jesus, *“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”*

Confidence in Prayer (5:14-16)

5:14 – *“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us.”* Relationship is stressed in prayer, since confidence and assurance flow together when we pray. Two aspects that we have to consider: Firstly, we must know of a certainty that He hears us. Secondly, we must know that we are asking according to His will. This indeed is only possible if we know the Lord intimately.

5:15 – *“And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.”* As the Lord

said, “Every one that asketh receiveth” (Lk. 11:10). This refers to those who are His true disciples, walking in the light of His Word. King David could say with great confidence in Psalm 38:15, “For in thee, O LORD, do I hope: thou wilt hear, O Lord my God.” However, King David also said in Psalm 66:18, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” Confidence in prayer comes from walking uprightly and having an intimate relationship with the Lord.

5:16—*“If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.”* Sin leads to death. When we know that a fellow believer has sinned, we should pray for him that God in His infinite mercy will grant him life. However, that which has perplexed theologians is that we are forbidden to pray for those who have sinned unto death. This is perhaps partially cleared up for us in the next verse.

Freedom From Sin and Idolatry (5:17-21)

5:17—*“All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.”* We are the frail descendants of Adam and are often prone to fall short of God’s standards for our lives. The definition of sin from the original Greek is “to fall short of the mark.” Often we sin because we are weak, not because we want to sin.

This is the type of sin that is not “unto death.” Sin that is unto death is deliberate and habitual. Some clear examples of this type of sin are mentioned in Galatians 5:19-21 by the Apostle Paul, and they clearly prohibit a person from entering the Kingdom of heaven. “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery,

fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” Paul does not give room for doubt concerning those who commit such iniquities. Unless we repent of these sins and do not commit them any more, we will lose eternal life.

5:18—*“We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.”* Certainly, God’s own people should not participate in the above, but walk in such a way that these sins are not part of their lives. Therefore, sin has no dominion over them and the wicked one has no part in them, even as our Lord Himself said, “The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me” (Jn. 14:30).

5:19—*“And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.”* This verse helps make a clear-cut differentiation between those who are of God and those who are in the world. The world loves its own. Worldly people approve of the actions of the wicked as long as they themselves are unharmed. The world will not bring its own to judgment. As Christians, we should not expect justice from this world and its judicial system. In fact, this age will culminate with the Antichrist warring openly against Christians.

5:20—*“And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may 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.”* We are indeed blessed that Jesus has come to give

us an understanding of the way to eternal life, but this understanding also helps us to understand the present world system and its end. Current events should not cause us to worry; nor should we become depressed when the wicked escape judgment because we know their end.

5:21 – *“Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.”* This epistle fittingly ends with a warning to keep ourselves from idols. Many Christians in the Western world do not think this applies to them, because they do not worship idols like many in Eastern cultures do. However, idols can take on many forms. The definition of idols is anything that we worship or love more than God or that comes before God. Idols do not simply refer to images or statues made with wood, stone, or precious metals. Anything can become an idol in our life if we allow it to come before God, including people, our family, our ministry, our occupation, hobbies, and money.

We read in Ezekiel 14:3-5 concerning idols of the heart: “Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face: should I be inquired of at all by them? Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet; I the LORD will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols; That I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols.” Let us never allow anything to come before the Lord in our lives. May we continually ask Him to purify our hearts of anything that comes before Him.

*The
Second
Epistle
of
John*

OUTLINE

1. *Salutation (1:1-3)*
2. *Walk in the Truth and in Love (1:4-6)*
3. *False Teachers and False Doctrines (1:7-11)*
4. *Benediction (1:12-14)*

INTRODUCTION

In this letter John introduces himself simply as the elder. The reason for this is that the recipient of the letter evidently knew that John was the letter's author.

The title "elder" was reserved in the Early Church era not just for the aged, but for leaders of congregations, and in this instance for one of great stature. The Apostle Peter uses this title when writing of himself in 1 Peter 5:1, "Whom am also an elder."

CHAPTER ONE

Salutation (1:1-3)

1:1 – *“The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth.”* The lady whom John wrote to is unnamed. Some scholars have suggested that he was writing to a church, yet this seems to be an unnecessary spiritualization in view of the fact that John sends greetings from that lady’s sister and her children. Furthermore, consistency would support the reasoning of this letter being written to a particular individual in that John’s third epistle is clearly addressed to a person.

This lady, in whose house the church met, may have been a widow. In the New Testament, there are several instances of pious women being used of God. Mary and Martha, who owned a house in which Jesus was a guest, are examples, as well as Priscilla (Rom. 16:3) and Lydia (Acts 16:14). In many countries, ladies have opened their houses to congregations who have availed themselves of their hospitality.

The title “the elect lady” simply means one whom God has graciously chosen, or more simply, one who is saved. Obviously, this lady was greatly loved and appreciated by the Apostle and her fellow Christians. One other saint whom this brings to mind is Philemon in whose house the church at Colosse met. He, too, was well beloved by the Apostle Paul and other believers. These wonderful Christians in Holy Scriptures are patterns of Christian hospitality and generosity for us to follow.

1:2 – “*For the truth’s sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever.*” We must remember that truth is not abstract; it resides in the person of Christ. Jesus said in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” The Lord Jesus Christ is the very embodiment of truth, and we are complete in Him (Col. 2:10). Now John follows the traditional Early Church greeting.

1:3 – “*Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.*” In saying, “grace be with you,” we are saying to those we greet that we desire God’s enabling strength to be their portion so that they may be able to accomplish His task for their lives that day. In His mercy, God will show them kindness when, in fact, they deserve none. This is the idea of lifting someone out of a pit that he has fallen into by his own fault, despite repeated warnings.

“Peace” is another traditional Jewish greeting that has been preserved in Israel until this very day in their greeting of “Shalom.” It has more significance than simply wishing someone a peaceful day. It incorporates the thought of prosperity in the realm of body, soul, and spirit, as well as financial blessing.

John adds that his desire for this godly lady to receive a blessing came from the Father and the Son, cradled in love and truth. How important it is for us to live our lives filled with love and truth so that from our inward being the blessing of the Three in One flows forth. In other words, may we enjoy the covenant blessings of Abraham, of whom God said in Genesis 12:2, “Thou shalt be a blessing.”

Walk in the Truth and in Love (1:4-6)

1:4—*“I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.”* One of the great joys of both a natural father and a spiritual father is to know that his children are walking in the truth. It brings such joy to a father’s heart.

1:5—*“And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another.”* John reverts to the theme of love. The commandment to love one another in one sense is a new commandment, for Jesus said in John 13:34: “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.” Yet in another sense, it is not a new commandment because what God has always desired, from the very beginning of time, is for us to love Him and one another.

The first commandment, which is to love God with all our heart, was given by God in the Old Testament in Deuteronomy 30:6: “And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.” And the commandment to love our neighbours as ourselves can be found in Leviticus 19:18: “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” It is for this reason that John says that loving our neighbor as ourselves is not a new commandment.

1:6—*“And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.”* Thus, true love means to keep God’s

commandments. However, at this time we would like to consider briefly the nature of love as defined by Holy Scriptures. We are told in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 that love is sweet and kind to all. The fruit of the Spirit expresses the nature of love. Love is joyful, producing a rejoicing spirit. It is likewise peaceful and serene. It suffers long and bears all things.

It is gentle as a nurse tending a sick child. It is filled with the goodness of God, incapable of thinking or doing evil to anyone. It is steadfast in the faith, believing all things, and hoping all things. It is meek, not desiring its own, and has a holy acceptance of all things as being permitted by a loving Heavenly Father. Love is temperate in all things, never unseemly, and has no occasion of stumbling. From the above list we can well understand why Paul calls love the bond of perfection.

False Teachers and False Doctrines (1:7-11)

1:7 – *“For 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.”* Now John leaves his favourite subject to give a timely warning. If the truth sets us free, as Jesus said in John 8:32, then the converse of this statement must be true as well—error and false doctrine bind us and cause us to leave the path of righteousness. Paul, speaking of those who worshipped angels and lost sight of Christ, the Head of the Church, warned in Colossians 2:18, “Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.” Thus, error can indeed diminish or even cause us to lose our heavenly inheritance, and in severe cases, lead us into the very pit of hell itself.

1:8 – *“Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.”* We need to realize that following the wrong teachers or preachers can do us eternal harm. Ask God for discernment to attend a church that teaches the truth and the whole counsel of God.

John exhorts us to take heed so that we receive a full reward. Boaz said to Ruth, “The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust” (Ruth 2:12). We do not want to receive a portion of our heavenly reward and inheritance; we want our “full reward.”

The children of Israel did not receive their full reward. The entire first generation of Israelites who left Egypt died in the wilderness and thus, never entered the Promised Land, except for Joshua and Caleb.

Moreover, the succeeding generation who entered the land still did not possess the full inheritance that God had intended for them for we read in Joshua 13:1, “Now Joshua was old and stricken in years; and the LORD said unto him, Thou art old and stricken in years, and there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed.” Let us possess the full inheritance and full reward that God has promised to us.

1:9 – *“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.”* False doctrines can deprive us of fellowship with Christ and the Father. Do you see the importance of right doctrine and the part it plays in our lives, now and for all eternity? Truth enables us to enjoy fellowship with both the Father and Son.

1:10 – *“If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed.”* Pastors must not allow those who propagate false doctrine to preach in their churches. It is like permitting someone to sow weeds in the gardens of our hearts. Weeds take a long time to pluck out and destroy.

Pastors, guard your pulpits with all diligence, and above all, do not bless purveyors of unrighteousness and doctrines of devils.

1:11 – *“For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.”* Paul says in 1 Timothy 5:22, “Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men’s sins: keep thyself pure.” This applies to doctrinal purity as well as to morality.

Benediction (1:12-14)

1:12 – *“Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full.”* I must say that I well understand what the Apostle says here in ending this letter. Writing is not as satisfying as talking to someone face to face. When we talk in person, we can feel one another’s spirit and clearly explain our point of view. Even in these days of telephones, fax machines, and e-mail, there is still no substitute for talking to someone in person.

1:13 – *“The children of thy elect sister greet thee. Amen.”* How wonderful it is to have a family atmosphere in our churches so that we can send greetings from relatives and other brothers and sisters in Christ to one another. It creates a little piece of heaven here upon earth.

*The
Third Epistle
of
John*

OUTLINE

1. *The Commendation of Gaius (1:1-4)*
2. *The Virtue of Hospitality (1:5-8)*
3. *The Condemnation of Diotrephes (1:9-11)*
4. *Demetrius—The Man of Good Report (1:12)*
5. *Conclusion (1:13-14)*

INTRODUCTION

This letter is addressed to Gaius. It is one of the few epistles addressed to an individual by name. Although the name Gaius is mentioned four other times in Scripture, we must remember that it was as common as the names James and John are today. Therefore, the Gaius in Third John cannot be associated with others in Scripture who bear the same name. For the purpose of study we will quote the references to the other Gaius' in Scripture:

Acts 19:29: *“And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul’s companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre.”*

Acts 20:4: *“And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus.”*

Romans 16:23: *“Gaius mine host, and of the whole church, saluteth you. Erastus the chamberlain of the city saluteth you, and Quartus a brother.”*

1 Corinthians 1:14: *“I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius...”*

We see from these references that Paul definitely was the father in Christ of the Gaius that he refers to, while it appears that the Gaius mentioned in Third John was the spiritual son of the Apostle John. Thus they cannot be the same person.

CHAPTER ONE

The Commendation of Gaius (1:1-4)

1:1 – *“The elder unto the wellbeloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth.”* Gaius was greatly loved by the Apostle John. What a beautiful commendation from John, who himself was so perfected in love. Therefore, Gaius could serve as an example of love for us.

1:2 – *“Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.”* True Christian prosperity may be understood as wholeness of body, soul, and spirit for the believer. It is a state in which all our needs are met and we enjoy the blessing of the Lord. Some people, however, have construed this to mean that “gain is godliness” (1 Tim. 6:5), but Paul warns us to withdraw ourselves from such people.

1:3 – *“For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth.”* A good report “gives health to the bones” (NIV), as Solomon wrote in Proverbs 15:30. We can well understand why the Apostle’s heart was made glad by the testimony of those who visited Gaius.

When we think of this commendation we should realize that this testimony is required of all church officers, as we read in 1 Timothy 3:7, “Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”

1:4 – *“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.”* Here again we see the heart of a father in John. What delights

a father the most? Surely, it is to know that his children are walking in the ways of the Lord.

The Virtue of Hospitality (1:5-8)

1:5-8 – *“Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well: Because that for his name’s sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth.”*

In this passage the Apostle is lauding Gaius for his hospitality in caring not only for believers from his church, but also for other believers. We see in these comments of the Apostle the way of life of the Early Church’s travelling ministers. They depended upon the kindness of the believers to care for their needs. Apparently, they refused to accept help from non-believers. For this reason, John urges support for these itinerant preachers.

We should pray that God gives us a benevolent heart and a bountiful eye so that we can apply ourselves to this blessed ministry of hospitality. It certainly was prevalent in the New Testament Church, since we read of another Gaius who lived in Corinth and showed great kindness in lodging the Apostle Paul and his companions (Rom. 16:23).

In those days, the inns were so notoriously ill kept that Plato likened the innkeepers to pirates who preyed upon their guests. Therefore, even in the world there was the tendency to practice the virtue of

hospitality to strangers, to receive them into their houses and then to send them forward on their way. It is no small wonder that the New Testament abounds with many exhortations for Christians to manifest kindness and hospitality. We will now quote a few of them:

Romans 12:13 - *“Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.”*

1 Timothy 3:2 - *“A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach.”*

1 Timothy 5:10 - *“Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints’ feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work.”*

Titus 1:8 - *“But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate.”*

Hebrews 13:2 - *“Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”*

1 Peter 4:9 - *“Use hospitality one to another without grudging.”*

The Condemnation of Diotrephes (1:9-11)

1:9-11 - *“I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us*

with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church. Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.” In these few verses, we are introduced to Diotrephes, who is the very opposite of Gaius. He stands as a warning to all generations of a church elder or pastor whose character belies his calling. A true shepherd should portray the virtues of Christ, who is the Good Shepherd. Diotrephes manifested the traits of those shepherds of Israel who were condemned by the Lord in Ezekiel 34:2-6 because they were devouring the flock. God made it clear that He would require of them a reckoning of their conduct and cause them to cease from their calling.

Beloved, let us remember the warning of the Apostle James, who said in James 3:1, “My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.” Let us who have been given some form of oversight in the church do as the Lord would. The law of kindness must flow from our lips, and our heart must be filled with love and concern for the flock.

The nature of Diotrephes is characteristic of many shepherds who have left the pathway of righteousness and have fallen into some form of sin, whether it be sexual immorality, envy, jealousy, hatred, or pride. They lord over the heritage of God (1 Pet. 5:3). They assume almost dictatorial powers so that they are a law unto themselves, causing all those who do not flow with them to be cast out of the congregation or fellowship. They literally become tyrants and control those who are under them. Generally speaking, they are then smitten with some form of false doctrine by the Lord, so that their labours

are null and void, bringing forth no fruit to perfection. Oh, that we would heed this warning and not be like Diotrephes, but rather bring forth the fruits of the Spirit like Gaius. We want to become well beloved by God, as was Daniel (Dan. 10:11).

The Apostle John made it clear that he would set the situation in order when he had occasion to visit the congregation. It seems as though Gaius either did not have the oversight at that time or the strength of character to do so himself, although he later became the Bishop of Pergamum, according to tradition. Those who do have apostolic authority must ensure that the flocks under their care are protected against those who are wolves in sheep's clothing.

Demetrius—The Man of Good Report (1:12)

1:12 – *“Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is true.”* Demetrius was a very choice vessel of God who was well spoken of by all who knew him. It is a very rare commendation and it speaks of a man who was kind and sweet to all. Not only so, but because of his testimony others acknowledged the truth of God. This is confirmed likewise by the Apostle himself. Certainly, Demetrius had also a good report of those who watched over his soul (Heb. 13:17).

Conclusion (1:13-14)

1:13-14 – *“I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee: But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to thee. Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name.”* As we close, we should not miss this very

important truth—we cannot, even in our days of telephone, fax machines, and e-mail, convey our deepest thoughts on any given church problem from a distance. There is still the need to wait until we are able to sit down and talk things over face to face.

The Apostle John had to undertake an arduous journey on this occasion. In fact, while writing this book, I find myself in a similar situation. I have to fly a very long distance over several countries in order to try to resolve a problem between two ministers.

The epistle concludes by presenting us with an understanding of the atmosphere that surrounded those who were the intimate friends of this great Apostle of the Lamb—it was one of loving friendship. It was indeed very similar to the relationship that existed between our Lord and His disciples. Jesus said, “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you” (Jn. 15:15).

Oh, what blessed sweet communion we have with the Lord and other believers as we walk in loving fellowship with Him. This is like heaven upon earth and very pleasing to our blessed Lord Jesus as He dwells in our midst.

EPILOGUE

By meditating on these three little epistles of John, we can gain insight into life in the Early Church. It was not always harmonious. There were false doctrines that would have destroyed the pure faith of the believers that needed to be exposed. Therefore, the Apostle John had to reveal their errors and reaffirm the true Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Certain elders (or pastors) had left the path of love and they needed to be disciplined in a way that all would fear. Furthermore, it was evident that some matters could only be dealt with by the Apostle John, since others did not have the power or authority needed.

These letters give us an insight into problems which existed not only then, but also throughout the Church Age until now in one form or another. They will undoubtedly increase in these last days as sin abounds and gross darkness covers the earth.

We should, however, take courage and remember that when problems enter our churches, 1 Corinthians 10:13 tells us, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

Truly, there is nothing new under the sun. There were problems in the Early Church, and the Last Day Church certainly will not be spared from problems. Therefore, let us face these obstacles with courage, addressing what needs to be addressed and re-emphasizing

that which is right. If we are called to be pastors, let us teach the truth in love, being good under-shepherds and protecting the flock. May the Lord give us grace to be true as John was unto the very end!

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