

Lessons on John and Jude

1st John, 2nd John, 3rd John and Jude

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Dedication

To our friends from the Becoming Closer class, for their constant encouragement and support.

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What We Have Seen - 1st John 1:1-4

Overview

We begin a new series in this lesson, concerning the first letter of John. We will get to the Scripture momentarily.

Authorship

In the early 1900s a scholar by the name of Paul W. Schmeidel brought forth the idea that the letters of John were written not by the apostle, but by another John whom he named "John the Elder." With a little sleight-of-hand concerning some ancient documents he put this forward as authoritative. At that time the "higher criticism" school of theology was in high form in Germany. The idea spread westward and was eventually adopted by a number of liberal scholars in English speaking countries. There is only one thing wrong with this theory: it's wrong. The ancient witnesses, including Irenaeus, are unanimous on the point that the letters were written by John the apostle. It stands as a lesson for us: whenever some scholar says, "it must have been", it means almost certainly that he has no evidence for it whatsoever.¹

It is generally agreed that the gospel of John was written after the other three Gospels. From the internal evidence, it appears that the letters of John were written well after the gospel of John. Most scholars hold that it must have been written after A.D. 70. The last of John's writings was Revelation. He had these visions in the salt mines of Patmos. It is likely enough that he was released from Patmos in A.D. 98. (This was caused by a change in Caesars.) So the general feeling is that his letters were written sometime in between.

One of the main reasons for attributing authorship to John the apostle is the fact that he takes up the same themes as the gospel does, and deals with problems in the same way. Watchman Nee once remarked that Peter was the prototype preacher, because Christ called him to be a fisher of men. Paul was a tentmaker, and therefore he was the builder of the church. John was called while he was mending his nets, and therefore he is the mender of things in the church. We shall see this rather clearly in this letter.

Purpose

John clearly has three purposes in mind for this letter:

- ✚ First, it is his intention that his disciples may experience joy to the full.
- ✚ Second, he writes so that we will not sin but rather will have eternal life.
- ✚ Finally, he warns of deception in the church. We shall see this clearly later.

Theme of the Work

John is quite consistent in the various themes that he weaves in his letters. This letter will concern itself with three primary themes:

¹ See Barbara Tuchman's classic *Guns of August*, in the forward for some very cogent comments on this.

- ✚ First, there is authentic Christianity. This concerns itself with three things: the authority and nature of Christ, the doctrine of the church, and the fellowship of all Christians.
- ✚ Next, he is concerned with fellowship. This means fellowship with God the father (a relationship of obedience), fellowship with Christ (a relationship based upon his teachings and example), and fellowship with each other.
- ✚ Finally, he is greatly concerned with the truth. He wants you to know it, but more than that he wants you to live it.

The Nature of Christ

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life-- and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us-- what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.

(1Jn 1:1-4 NASB)

The Heresies

One of the reasons for assuming a date late in the first century for this work is that it deals with some of the heresies which developed about that time. The assumption is that John knew of the heresies (there is plenty of extra-Biblical evidence for this) and was countering them. Here are the things which he was concerned with:

- ✚ The first was the Arian heresy. The Arians denied the divinity of Christ; they held he was a created being, lower than God the Father, who therefore could not be divine. The modern equivalent of the Arians is the Mormon church. They believe this because of the special revelation in the book of Mormon.²
- ✚ The alternative came from the Gnostics. They didn't believe in the humanity of Christ. At this time there were two versions of this:
 - ✚ The first was the Docetist heresy. It held that Christ only appeared to have a body — when he walked, for example, he left no footprints. You would think the apostles would have noticed this over the course of three years with a man, wouldn't you?
 - ✚ The second was the Cerinthian heresy. The man who propounded this, Cerinthus, distinguished between Jesus and Christ. He said that Christ entered into Jesus at his baptism, and left him just before the crucifixion. Like the other heresy, this one denies the resurrection.

Tradition tells the story of the fervor of John's opposition to Cerinthus when John discovered Cerinthus in the same public bath house as John causing John to run out of the bath house yelling, "Let us fly, that the thermae (steam) fall not on our heads, since Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is therein." It gives you some idea of just how intense the debate might have become.

² The evidence for Mormonism quickly falls apart. Consider the climactic battle between good and evil which supposedly happened on the North American continent before Columbus. It featured wheeled chariots and horses — neither of which is known anywhere else on the North or South American continents before the arrival of Columbus. The Mormons own the site on which this battle supposedly happened and do not allow archaeological research therein.

Divinity

Let us be perfectly clear: it is the assertion of every orthodox Christian that Jesus, the Christ, has always been, is, and will always be God. Jesus of Nazareth is in fact God in the flesh. It is also asserted that Jesus is not only God, but with God from the beginning. Before time began, the Son and the Father existed together. Sometimes you have to say it simply to understand the stunning effect that these assertions have had on humanity.

Some might ask, "isn't it possible that God divided, like an amoeba, to produce Jesus?" The answer is no. One specific reason for this is that we have the relationship between Jesus and God as an example for us. That relationship has three prime characteristics: the dependence of Christ upon God, the obedience of Jesus to the Father, and the love that each bears for the other. Dependence, obedience and love — a good model for all Christians.

Humanity

We might just be pedantic about it ask: "just what evidence is there for Christ's humanity?" There are three primary bits of evidence that I would give you from John's own right:

- ✚ First, there is the fact that John spent three years walking around, listening to and for all we know playing Frisbee with Jesus of Nazareth.³ John was Jesus' best friend; who would know better of his divinity and humanity?
- ✚ It is in John's gospel that we find the story of Doubting Thomas. If ever there is proof of the physical humanity of Christ, this is Exhibit 1.
- ✚ Exhibit 2 would come in that eerie scene at the lake. It's tacked onto the end of the gospel, as if it was so important it had to be added as that thundering footnote. Jesus, the Christ, cooks and eats fish with the disciples. He had a body, and evidently fish was one of his favorite foods. How human!

The Word

We now come to one of the most important doctrines in Christianity. It is necessary to understand that among all the apostles, John is the philosophical one. In today's language, he would be considered an intellectual Christian.⁴ He proclaims Christ as being the logos, which is a Greek philosophical term meaning "word ." The concept is unfamiliar to English speakers. It is somewhat related to the Platonic ideal form — the idea that every object has an ideal form, and the things we see are just poor imitations of that ideal form. It's not a common idea today, but it does express the thought that there could be an ultimate form of something. Christ is the ultimate form of communication from God. The author of Hebrews puts it this way:

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.

³ Though it is hard to see a game of Frisbee lasting very long when the Frisbee is made of pottery.

⁴ The casual reader will please recall that the phrase "intellectual Christian" is not identical with the word, "hypocrite".

(Heb 1:1-4 NASB)

Therefore, the actions and words of Christ are in fact the message of God. As God said to those about him at his baptism,

Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."

(Luk 3:21-22 NASB)

Testimony

We may now examine the concept of testimony and being a witness.

Witness

The word we use as "witness" is the one which is transliterated from the Greek as "martyr." In this sense of the word, it is the ultimate form of putting your money where your mouth is. It was expected in that time that if you testified something, in the formal manner which is referenced here, that you were willing to Back it up with your life. People took this stuff seriously in those days.

We maintain some of that sense today in the concept of a witness being "under oath." The threat of the penalties of perjury is supposed to keep the witness honest. John and the other apostles certainly had that test. Among the 12, he was the only apostle to die a natural death. The rest were executed — something which they could have avoided by merely testifying that this whole business of Christianity was false. None of the original witnesses of Christ ever did that.

What was the purpose of being a witness? Simply put, it is so that you will believe.

John's Testimony

We may bring forward three aspects of John's testimony which I hope will serve to make it sure in your mind:

- ✚ First, John is frequently referred to as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." John the apostle was the best friend Jesus ever had on Earth. He was his best buddy. Of all the human beings who have ever lived, John is most qualified to tell us about Jesus. His gospel shows us this, in that it includes many intimate details which were omitted from the first three Gospels.
- ✚ John tells us here that this testimony is based upon his senses: he saw, he touched, he heard. This is not something he witnessed from afar, or heard somebody tell him about. It's three years of his life with his eyes open, his ears alert and his hands ready.
- ✚ In a larger sense, John's own life witnesses to the truth of Christianity. For example, he was sentenced to work in the salt mines of Patmos — when he was already an old man. All he had to do was deny the truth of the faith, and the Roman Empire would've let him live out his life in peace. He probably dug salt for several years, during one of which he had the visions which are written down in the Book of Revelation.

Testimony Leads to Fellowship

Testimony is worthless unless it produces some change in people's lives. But once it does, it produces true fellowship. One of my students once taught me this: "The secret of true fellowship is

utter and complete devotion to Jesus Christ." It makes sense, for Christ is what we all have in common. It produces fellowship in three ways:

- ✚ It produces fellowship with the Father, by the Holy Spirit.
- ✚ It produces fellowship with Christ. If we suffer with him, we will reign with him.
- ✚ It produces fellowship with each other. There is a reason veterans go to reunions. If we suffer with each other, for his sake, how can we not love one another?

Walking in the Light - John 1:5-10

The apostle John is the most philosophical of the writers of the New Testament. But nowhere is his writing more philosophical than in this chapter, as we shall see.

This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

(1Jn 1:5-10 NASB)

God Is Light

The Bible gives many references for the light which is given by God. But verse five in this passage is the only instance in which we are told that God is light. This brings us to the subject of metaphor.

Metaphor: God Given Light

We begin with the nature of a metaphor. The definitions vary in the dictionaries, but the prominent idea of a metaphor is that by using something not really associated with what you're talking about, you might come up with a really good illustration. One of the most frequent is the use of light to represent the wisdom God gives. We say that someone is "in the dark." It means they don't have a clue. But it's very much parallel to being in the dark stumbling around. The metaphor used here is so powerful that it becomes a frequent description of God's wisdom as given to man.

The reason for this is in the nature of physical light. We say that darkness is the opposite of light; this is not true. Darkness is the absence of light. Metaphorically speaking, this is also true: those who do not have the light of God's word stumble around a lot. They do dumb things. And like its metaphorical parallel, evil is not the opposite of good or of wisdom. It is the twisting of wisdom. In other words, just as you cannot have physical darkness without the existence of light, you cannot have moral darkness if there was no moral light. It's a very easy metaphor, and the Bible uses it frequently.

Aquinas and John

To understand the statement, "God is light" we must delve into philosophy just a bit. Aquinas taught that all things can possibly have three different categories:

- ✚ The most prominent category is that of essence. This is what really defines a person; for example, deductive logic is the essence of Sherlock Holmes. So then, what is God's essence? His existence. He is the necessary being, and he is the only necessary being. He must exist, or all those things that derive existence from someplace else cannot.
- ✚ The next category is that of attributes. As God's essence is his existence, it is said that he is his attributes. He is truth, he is love, and as John informs us here he is light. This is undoubtedly the metaphorical version of light — not a large collection of photons.
- ✚ Then there are accidents — things that a person might have which really don't define him or her at all. God the father has no accidents; Jesus the son does. For example, Jesus had a shoe size.

Interestingly, this is yet another proof that Christ did claim to be God. When was that? When he said, "I am the light of the world."

God As Creator

The connection between "God is light" and God giving light stems from the fact that God is the creator God. In God there is no moral darkness, therefore God creates light that cannot be sullied by the darkness. The creation reflects the creator. This brings us to two questions:

- ✚ Is it good to have the light?
- ✚ If so, how do we get it?

Walking in the Dark

We might begin by exploring the opposite question: how does one go about walking in the dark? After all, most of us would say we are walking in the light — even if we think it's normal to bump into things.

Claiming Fellowship

It is a sad fact that in every reasonably sized church there are those who claim to be in fellowship with Christians who are plainly misled or lying. Often enough, there is a tacit conspiracy between those in the pulpit and those in the pew to allow this to happen. Here are some of the ways this might work:

- ✚ One way is to say nothing about sin. If the concept of sin is not preached from the pulpit then it is reasonable for the person in the pew to assume that it is unnecessary to know anything about it for salvation. If your doctrine is (explicitly or implicitly) that everyone goes to heaven, why would those walking in the dark see the light?
- ✚ In some churches, the assumption is that membership equals fellowship. If your name is on the rolls, and you are a good contributor, the church will speak up for you and tell God that you are a good Christian. The effectiveness of this method is somewhat in doubt — at least for those who believe what the Scriptures say.
- ✚ For some, it's a matter of social skills and smiles. Those who know how to get along and go along often can deceive people for quite some time — especially themselves.

Claiming to Be without Sin

At first glance this would seem to be somewhat absurd. But it really does make some sense — if what you have is the claim that you are forgiven. Indeed, most real Christians claim to be forgiven. There are two instances in which we might think this is not the case:

- ✚ First, what if there is no confession of sin? The Scripture is clear: forgiveness requires confession. If there is no confession, how can we expect forgiveness?
- ✚ In other instances, the individual thinks that if he waits long enough the offense of sin is eroded away by the waves of time. There is no evidence that this is the case. God is eternal.

Claiming We Have Not Sinned

This is a bit more difficult. It seems impossible that anyone who would call himself a Christian would ever say that he has not sinned. But consider these possibilities:

- ✚ Does sin even exist? In many variations of the emerging church, the concept of sin is held to be invalid. They say that sin just doesn't exist; or more commonly they fail to proclaim that it does exist. If sin does not exist, you can't have committed one.
- ✚ Does God count that sin? In some emerging church pews, God takes no account of sin. After all, that would imply that there is some absolute standard by which one can sin. The emerging church is a postmodern phenomenon, which holds that absolute truth cannot possibly exist. Therefore, by what possible standard would one say that I have sinned?
- ✚ What might be the most curious argument of all is this: sin is an obsolete concept. It is old-fashioned. We now call those things mistakes — and certainly we know that mistakes do not have any moral importance to them. Do understand the underlying fallacy in the argument: that truth can become obsolete.

Walk in the Light

We have evidently defined the ways of walking in the dark. Let's take a look at the other side.

As He Is in the Light

The first principle of walking in the light is simply this: the imitation of Christ. Thomas a Kempis put it this way:

“By these words of Christ we are advised to imitate His life and habits, if we wish to be truly enlightened and free from all blindness of heart. Let our chief effort, therefore, be to study the life of Jesus Christ.”

If you do this, you not only are blessed⁵ but your conduct also reflects the glory of his being⁶.

Confession

There is a solid, unfortunate fact of life:

Proverbs 28:13 NIV He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.

When your imitation of Christ fails, it is necessary to confess and renounce your sin. Every one of us fails in the imitation of Christ at one time or another. It is therefore wise to get used to the idea that confession is a normal part of the Christian life.

It's particularly important that you realize that confession is what releases the power of the blood of Christ. That blood which cleanses us from all sin is applied upon our confession of that sin.

Results

John points out three things that happened when you are walking in the light:

- ✚ The first is fellowship with one another. This makes a great deal of sense, really. If I sin against you, we are divided. If you forgive me, we are reunited. So the result of walking in the light is in fact fellowship with one another. If we all do it right, we are all on the same page.

⁵ Psalm 89:15

⁶ 1st Timothy 6:13-16

- ✚ The second result is that his word is in our lives. The simplest meaning of this is that the Scripture comes alive. When you are walking in the light, the study of the Scriptures is never a problem or pain. Sometimes there are difficulties in understanding (which was really knows what revelation truly means?) But there is always the light, and God will give you knowledge of that which is necessary for your Christian walk.
- ✚ Finally, you will live by the truth. If you do it God's way, it works. Nothing else does.

I Write You - 1st John 2:1 – 17

Walk As Jesus Did

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of* the whole world. By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard.

(1Jn 2:1-7 NASB)

Atonement

Central to our understanding of the gospel is the concept of the atonement of Jesus Christ. This idea involves the acceptance of our own sinful nature, the fact that we can't fix our own sinful nature nor provide our own atonement, but must accept the atonement that Christ made on the cross. For many Christians the problem comes when they sin after accepting Christ. Does the atonement cover this situation?

It does; but we need to be careful in accepting it. There is a temptation to decide that — since Christ is going to forgive us anyway — there is no sense avoiding sin. Indeed, some early heretics argued that the more we sin, the more the grace of Christ abounds. Thus, by sinning, we increase God's grace! You might get away with this in a theology class, but I wouldn't try it with your mother.

In fact, the real solution to sin after accepting Christ is the fact that we have an advocate who pleads our case before God the Father. My own father told me a story about this. He was living, bachelor style, on the island on which I was eventually to be born. He had two roommates; a Catholic and a Jew. (I know this sounds like a joke, but it's not.) The Jew once told them this: "you Christians are lucky; you have someone to argue your case before God. We Jews have to do our own arguing." There something to that. Our advocate, Christ, argues for our forgiveness on the basis of his sacrifice, not our merit. There's a simple reason for this: arguing based on our merit doesn't work.

This is somewhat of a side note, but an important one. Some interpreters argue that Christ's atonement — stated here to be for the sins of the whole world — implies that all will be forgiven, and no one will go to hell. This contradicts the plain sense of the Scripture in many other places. The meaning should be clear: anyone who accepts Christ can be forgiven; it is not reserved for the right kind of people.

Obedience

The test of whether or not Christian knows God is a simple one: does he obey Christ's commands? To understand this we must first examine the verb, "to know":

✚ It may mean, "To be acquainted with." We might use it in the sense that we know the way to Disneyland.

✚ Or it might mean, "To be deeply aware of." We speak of people who "know their business."

The sense in which we know God is implied to be the second of these two. So how does obedience bring to us the love of God? Think of it this way: if you want just a little bit of water, you turn on the tap just a little bit. If you want a lot of water, you open the tap all the way. Obedience is opening the tap of God's love. If you want to know God's love in the fullest, you must have obedience in the fullest. The question is simply whether or not you will obey God's commands.

This of course leads us down one of two trails: the first trail is that of legalism. The idea is that you can memorize a set of rules and regulations that will cover all possible circumstances. If you will recall, God tried this approach with the Jews for about 1500 years without a great deal of success. Rather than this, we need to know the principles by which we can obey God's commands. We need something that we can carry with us that in any given circumstance tells us what we should be doing.

That something is "the imitation of Christ." Christ is our example; we are to follow what he does. In these days we often hear it expressed as, "what would Jesus do?" The principle is the same; Jesus is our exemplar.

Love Your Neighbor

Of course, as soon as you try to imitate Christ you quickly discover that he has certain guiding principles too. One of these is "love your neighbor." This is hardly anything new; the Jews were given exactly such a command in the Old Testament law:

'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.

(Lev 19:18 NASB)

So in one sense this is a very old commandment. But in a very real sense it is also a new commandment, for each Christian must learn it by experience. Consistently loving those around you is not something which comes naturally. If you don't think so, spend a day with some three-year-olds in a preschool. So even though the commandment goes back to the Old Testament, we still need to learn it as if it was issued just yesterday. A commandment is something which is posted on the wall – until it is carved in your heart.

Please note that God does not wish you to be confused about this. Just exactly how are you supposed to love your neighbor? The answer to this the John gives us is that we should "walk in the light." Put shortly, it means that God will give us that guidance to do his will if we will let him. He will show us the way. The second implication of this is that if you don't know the way, can't figure out what you're supposed to be doing, then you're probably walking in darkness and you need to give heed to your obedience.

I Write You

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you,

children, because you know the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.
(1Jn 2:12-14 NASB)

In the Name

The concept of the name of God being important has declined in the last few years. Older Christians will remember when obscene language was referred to as "taking the name of the Lord in vain." We can learn something from this. The original meaning does not include casual obscenity, which is so common today. It meant to misuse God's name. For example, if I give you advice that comes from my brain alone but I tell you it's God's command, I am misusing the name of the Lord. I am taking upon myself the power and authority which belong to God. That is the true obscenity.

If we look what David himself says about that, you will see that he pleads for forgiveness in the name of God.⁷ The argument is relatively simple; he is appealing to God's reputation. God is a loving God, known to be merciful — and that is what David is appealing to. It's not my merit, but his reputation.

We do something of the same kind every time we say "the boss wants you to..." We are invoking a name with a certain amount of power — and we should be aware of the risks in doing that falsely. John here tells us that we have been forgiven of our sins in Jesus' name. We are invoking the name with all authority and power when we tell others that we have been forgiven in Jesus name.

From the Beginning

Think about it: we know the God of the universe. We know the one who created all things that we can see feel and touch. Indeed, we have a deep relationship with him, often the most profound relationship human being can have. We should not forget, however, that we have this relationship solely because he permits it.

He is the eternal one. Eternal doesn't mean just "forever." It also includes being beyond the reach of time, but not beyond reaching time. The master of time and space, its creator, has come in human form to us so that we might have a relationship with him — forever. Sometimes, you just have to sit back and think about these things.

What is even more amazing is this: he wants us to call him "Father." Can you imagine such a relationship? It is beyond the human mind to comprehend the God who is so mighty and yet so loving and compassionate. That's what happens when things which are finite are used to measure things which are not.

You Have Overcome

John tells his hearers that they are strong. When I first read this, I thought how fortunate they must be — because I certainly didn't feel strong. The matter deserves a bit of explanation.

⁷ Psalm 25:11, for example

Many years ago I was staying in a hotel which had a rather limited selection of late-night television. In fact, the only thing remotely worth watching was a Russian weightlifting competition. Igor came out, looked at that massive barbell, and with appropriate noises lifted it up over his head. To clear the stage, the authorities sent out 10 Russian soldiers who struggled to take that barbell off the stage. Later on, Ivan came out to face an even bigger barbell. He lifted it. This time they sent out one Russian soldier to take the barbell away. One Russian soldier – but he had a forklift.

That's us. We have the impression that we are supposed to be some sort of spiritual weightlifters. We are not. We are to be those who are strong in Christ. We think it's our independence we must chase; it's actually our dependence.

How can we do this? This happens when the word of God lives in you. There are two possible meanings to this:

- ✚ First, it means that the spirit of Christ is in you — the Holy Spirit.
- ✚ Second, it means that the word of God, the Bible, is in you by your patient study of them.

John then tells us that we have overcome the evil one. If there is one thing I can convince young Christians of, it would be the reality of Satan. We have been hammered so long with the comic image of the fellow in the red tights with the pitchfork the tail that we have stopped believing in the real thing. Satan, on the other hand, still believes that he exists. And in this one instance, he may be right.

So how do we overcome the evil one?

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
(Rom 12:21 NASB)

Love of the World

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and *also* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.
(1Jn 2:15-17 NASB)

Not in Him

Topics in preaching come and go. One which is currently out of favor, apparently, is the thought that the question is not to love the world or anything in it. It's not that our doctrine has really changed; it just is an unpopular subject right now. This has the unfortunate result of leading the average Christian slip into the habit of doing exactly that: loving the world and the things that are in it. Let's take these one at a time.

What does it mean to love the world? The Greek word for world is the one we get our word cosmos from. We may take this to mean the entire world system. If you accept the idea that your success in this world is the most important thing in your life, it doesn't matter how you define success. You have failed. The world and the things in it are temporary; and that includes us. God tells us to focus on the things that are eternal, for we are designed to be eternal. So if your life is bound up in the things of this world — in the "rat race" — you are living your life the wrong way. The key point to get out of

this is that it doesn't matter just which aspects of the world you are chasing; the fact that you're chasing any of them is the problem.

The results of chasing the things of this world are rather consistent. The problem you have is not so much that you can't get them, but that you can. And what should you do get them, they lose their appeal. If you want to have to have a fishing boat capable of sailing around the world, you will work hard and long until you get it. There will be a brief period of euphoria when you say to yourself, "I finally accomplished it!" Then you will find that something else comes in to be chased, and the fishing boat sits at the dock. Satan approves of hard work — as long as it's working for something that has no eternal value.

The difficulty stems from the fact that the verb "to love" must have an object. It is really false to say that someone is a loving person, or that they are full of love. It is much more accurate to say that they love someone or something. The question is, just what is it that you love? If the love of God is not your first priority, all other loves do not fall in their correct position. Surprisingly, if all your loves are second to the love of God, you find it quite easy to express those other loves. Indeed, as Saint Augustine put it, you find that you can "love God — and do as you please."

How Does One Love the World?

John gives us three categories of method for loving the world:

- ✚ The first he describes as "lust of the flesh." It's a familiar series of temptations. In our time we strive to make women just as vulnerable to this temptation as men are. We strive to make sure our women dress so that such temptations are more common, and more intense. Sex sells; sex also is used for temptation. We go to great length to justify our attitude toward sex. If you haven't noticed, the church has ceased to preach against this.
- ✚ The next he describes as the lust of the eyes. It means you see something, and you have to have it. It doesn't matter too much what "it" might happen to be. For some it's expensive; for some it's rare; for others it is desirable solely for the fact that it gives offense to somebody else. Sometimes it's just the desire for the fashion of the moment; remember when we put up fiberglass sheep all over town? I see it, I want it, I must have it, and it doesn't matter what I have to do to get it. That's the problem.
- ✚ Of course, the last is always pride, the sin of Satan. Please understand that pride does not mean a sense of satisfaction in your work; it means that sense of "I'm better than you are." If you can't gloat over it, it's probably not pride.

Transient and Eternal

The world is passing away — what does that mean? It means that the stuff in this world gets old and goes away. Some of those other fashion; some of it wears out; some just rusts away. If your mind is fixed on this world, you are seeking continually for things that are new. Even if you're an antique collector, you need the new old stuff. It is this continual seeking of what is new, rather than what is right that defines the love of the world. Satan is pleased to give you one more thing to chase until you die.

If you set your sights on things above, you understand just how fleeting the world is — and how important are the eternal things, like other people. Remember that you and I are designed to live forever; the new sports car won't. All that is not eternal is eternally out of date.⁸

⁸ C. S. Lewis

Antichrists, Plural - First John 2:18-29

Distinction

In dealing with today's passage, it is necessary for us to distinguish between two uses of the same word, Antichrist.

- ✚ Most of the passages in the Bible referring to the Antichrist speak of one particular individual who is yet to come. We will examine the characteristics of this individual so that you will recognize him when he arrives.
- ✚ The apostle John, on the other hand, speaks not only of the Antichrist but of many antichrists. We will see that the antichrists also have certain characteristics which we can recognize.

With that, we may proceed to the Scripture.

Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not *really* of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but *they went out*, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also. As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life. These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him. Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.

[\(1Jn 2:18-29 NASB\)](#)

The Antichrist

There are a variety of views about the Antichrist. These typically relate to the major views of Revelation. We will consider the common points of these views, and in the individual distinctions.

Common Points

We begin with the points made in Daniel the 11th chapter⁹:

- ✚ He exalts himself above every God. We might take this to mean that he denies the existence of God, or any form of religious system. More likely, it holds that he is superior to such a system. A contemporary example of this would be those individuals who believe that science explains everything, and any form of religion must fit into their particular system of science and metaphysics.
- ✚ He says "unheard of things" about God. This could apply to any number of people today; after all, anyone with a "brilliant theory" about God can have a hearing today. Because we have rejected the

⁹ Daniel 11:36-45

concept of absolute truth, we hear all kinds of nonsense about God. So this aspect of the personality would also apply to a large number of people.

- ✚ He honors the "God of fortresses." Perhaps we might take this to mean that he believes military power is supreme; as Mao Tse-Tung would put it, "power grows out of the barrel of a cannon."

The next major section concerning the Antichrist is found in second Thessalonians chapter 2:

- ✚ We see him as "man of sin" also translated as "man of lawlessness." This is a man who ignores or defies the law; most probably it means one who defies what is described as the natural law. It is very common today to deny the existence of natural law; the absurdity of which is given in the fact that most of us do feel that murder is a crime. But this person would fit in very well today with the idea that each of us defines his own reality and his own morality.
- ✚ We are told that he takes his seat in the Temple of God. This would seem to imply that at least outwardly the person is associated with the church. If you believe this person is the Pope, this is fairly obvious. As we shall see from the sequence of events coming up next, it is highly likely that he is a person in authority over the church.
- ✚ Finally, we see that this man exalts himself to the point of being God. To the best of my knowledge, no one successfully maintains this status. A look at Revelation gives you more detail on this. The disturbing fact is this: many will trust this man as if he is God. We need to take warning about this.

Finally, we may take one point of the book of Revelation: the Antichrist comes from Rome.

Postmillennialism

The postmillennial view was very, starting in the Protestant Reformation up through the end of the 19th century and into the early 20th century. The view began in the Protestant Reformation, and because of that the Antichrist is identified with the Pope, or the papacy. The argument is about whether or not the Antichrist refers to one particular Pope, or the papacy in general. You can certainly see characteristics of the Antichrist in some of the medieval popes, continuing through the Renaissance, or you can imagine that one particularly wicked Pope will arise at the time of the end. This view is currently out of favor with most scholars, but is still held by a number of denominations.

Premillennialism

A great deal can be said about this particular theory and its view of the Antichrist, identified also with the beast of Revelation. One thing is certain, however: the Antichrist is not identified with the Pope. Premillennialism is very ecumenical (and evangelical), and such a view would naturally offend Roman Catholics. Since the rise of the Antichrist is supposed to happen after the rapture of the church, the point would seem to be one which is rather academic to most Christians.

Amillennialism

This view is the common view of most Christians of most times. Interestingly, the idea that the Holy Spirit is what holds back the Antichrist is relatively new and premillennial; the old view holds that what held back the Antichrist is nothing but the Roman Empire. Thus the prediction (by both Augustine and Chrysostom) that the Roman Empire had to fall before the Antichrist could come. The final fall of the Roman Empire occurred in 1453, with the fall of Constantinople. Other than that, nothing in particular is predicted other than what is in common with all theories.

Whoops! It is an unfortunate fact therefore that the number of candidates for the Antichrist is quite large. Here's a partial list of those who have been nominated:

Hitler
Kissinger
Gorbachev
Nero
John Paul II
Bill Clinton
Barack Obama
Bill Gates
Antiochus Epiphanes
Charlemagne
Napoleon
F D Roosevelt
Mussolini
Franco
J F Kennedy
King Juan Carlos
Ronald Reagan
Saddam Hussein
Rev. Moon
Yasser Arafat
Louis Farrakhan
Karl Hapsburg (a dentist in Austria)
Mickey Mouse
Barney the Dinosaur

The reader will no doubt think of other possibilities. Eventually, if we think of enough of them, one of us is bound to be right.

Lowercase antichrists

John the apostle is the only one who mentions these people. Please remember that John is the last of the apostles; much of his writing occurs after all the other apostles are dead — long enough in the history of the church for antichrists to arise. It is therefore not surprising that he is the only one.

How to Know Them

There are three primary characteristics of these people that you need to know:

- ✚ First, he tells us that they "went out from us." These are not people on the outside the church telling us that were wrong; these are people who have left the faith, having been part of us, and have now formed their own new version of Christianity (or whatever else they call it.)
- ✚ Second, he tells us that they "run ahead." This simply means that the true Christian knows where doctrine stops, as well as what it says. It's an important point. Lots of us know that the faith is inspired by God; we believe it; therefore everything we believe is inspired by God. I leave the logical fallacy to the reader; but if you push long enough you will eventually get the point where all that stuff you about Christianity is now false in light of your new, brilliant logic.
- ✚ Most important, they want to suck you into their falsehood. These are not people who are content with their own thought; somehow they validate themselves with the number of people they can convert from Christianity to their way of believing. It is therefore important that we know how their doctrine varies from the truth.

Doctrine

So what is it that they teach, then?

- ✚ First, they deny that Jesus is the Christ. That is to say, they deny that Jesus of Nazareth is the long promised Messiah of the Jews. That carries with it a number of implications. One of the most important is that he cannot be the atonement if he is not the Messiah. If there is no atonement, then why would one believe in the resurrection? I hope you can see how absolutely critical to the faith this concept is.
- ✚ Second, they deny the Son. This, John tells us, means that they deny the Father too. In short, by denying the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth they implicitly deny the divinity of God. By this definition, Mormons are antichrists.
- ✚ Third, they deny that Jesus has come in the flesh. That means they deny the humanity of Christ.

I hope you can see that these are three of the most important doctrines of the church. They go to the very core of the faith. So we are not talking about typical dispute at an elder's meeting over the importance and meaning of Second Hezekiah.

What Shall We Do?

All this may seem to be very interesting — and in fact it forms the basis for in great deal of Christian literature arguing about things — but we must come back to the practical question: what are we in supposed to do about all this? After all, this is of academic interest (particularly if you are a premillennialist), but not much more. Just what an individual Christian is supposed to do about the Antichrist doesn't seem to be specified. But the much more common problem of one of the antichrists is given some thought here.

Know the Truth

Before you can know what to do, you have to know when you really have the problem.

- ✚ First, you do know the truth. You have been taught what is true. So don't go back to the beginning and see if you really want to re-examine all of Christianity all over again, just because somebody on the outside is yelling that you got it wrong. If you want to argue about infant baptism, fine with me. But the doctrine that the antichrists deny is not up for negotiation.
- ✚ Second, distinguish between what is important and what is absolutely vital. It is perfectly acceptable to have a reasoned, polite debate over doctrine. Doctrine is important. The core of the faith is absolutely vital. So be polite, know what you're talking about, and know when your opponent is not one of the antichrists.

Just a word of advice on this: remember the submarine principle — if you get a ping on the right and ping on the left, you're probably going down the center of the shipping lane.

Obedience

The very best way to avoid the antichrists is by obedience. If you are walking in the light, the path is plain. So how do we do this?

- ✚ May I give you Saint Augustine's dictum? "Love God, and do as you please." Those who know the teacher will know well how much he loves his wife. If you have that kind of love, it is a pleasure and a joy to do the kinds of things that she wants to do. It works the same way with God. If you love him, you will do what he wants to do. Following his will is obedience.

- ✚ It should not be necessary to point this out, but obedience is a practice — not a theory. If you are not doing obedience, you are not obedient.
- ✚ Remember that there is a cycle of sin, confession, repentance and restoration. Use those steps to continue to walk in the light.

Intolerance

John tells us not to associate with these people.¹⁰ That's intolerant, right? Right.

- ✚ Remember that these people will pose as true (but “enlightened”) Christians trying to correct your ignorant, primitive beliefs. They will look good – and they will be lying.
- ✚ If you welcome them socially, John says, you share in their wickedness. How is this? You lend your good name to their deception in the name of being hospitable.
Know your enemy!

¹⁰ Second John 1:10-11

Through a Mirror Darkly - 1st John 3:1-3

We now come to one of the most closely packed sections of Scripture:

See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and *such* we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.
(1Jn 3:1-3 NASB)

Children of God

It is profitable to take this one verse of the time, for it covers some extremely important concepts.

How Great the Love of the Father

One of the effects of the "me and Jesus in the telephone booth" theology of the 20th century is that we seldom hear of the greatness of God compared to the smallness of man. The book of Job is a difficult study in any circumstances; it's made more difficult by the central fact of the book: God doesn't explain anything. He is so much greater than we are that explanations cannot be demanded of the Almighty. This doesn't mean we don't seek them; it just means he's not obligated to tell us. This thought in particular comes from the Old Testament. Some thinkers hold the Old Testament is obsolete, and that only the New Testament really defines our relationship. It is not so; the New Testament is set in the context of the Old Testament. The God of the Old Testament is indeed God the Father; he is still the holy, awesome sovereign God.

In fact, we can see in the Scriptures a progression in the relationship between God and man.

- ✚ Throughout most of the Old Testament, the people with whom God dealt (at least favorably) were usually referred to as his servants. You will recall Elijah on Mount Carmel; how he prayed that the people would know that God is God, and "I am thy servant." Elijah is the consummate prophet; but still only a servant of God.
- ✚ The only exception to this is Abraham. Abraham is known as the "friend of God." In the Old Testament, the title is unique. Only the man to whom the world would be blessed was accorded this title.
- ✚ But on the night of the Last Supper, Jesus told his disciples that he no longer called the servants, but friends. Please note that this is just before the resurrection; after the resurrection Christ refers to "my father and your father." The letters of the New Testament frequently speak of the children of God.

You see the point. We are all servants of God; only the best of us could be a friend of God — until the resurrection. The change is enormous. Such a change in relationship could only be made possible by the atonement at the cross; but you knew that. Is it too much to say that the essence of being a child is not how you were born but how you are loved?

Western Civilization

The core idea of Western civilization is simply this: the fatherhood of God over the brotherhood of man. In the last 60 to 70 years we have attempted to maintain Western civilization without this idea, and it's not working. Permit me two points:

- ✚ The fatherhood of God implies the existence of a natural law — a natural law of right and wrong. This would have been sufficiently obvious to our ancestors as to be beyond question; however, today only one justice of the United States Supreme Court holds to this view (Clarence Thomas). If you abandon this concept, then there is no common code of conduct in your civilization. Unless, of course, you consider "get what you can while you can as fast as you can" to be a moral code. Having abandoned this, the closest thing we have left is the idea that "if it's legal, it's moral." I leave it to the reader to determine whether or not this is true progress.
- ✚ The brotherhood of man¹¹ also carries its implications. In words particularly dear to Americans, it means this: it is self evident that "all men are created equal, and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights." It is not a surprise that the abolitionist movement in America came out of the churches. It is not a surprise that the civil rights movement in America came out of the churches (skeptics will please recall that it was the "Reverend Martin Luther King" who was so prominent in this.) If this idea falls, our politics quickly degenerate into a rush for the public feeding trough to see who can get the biggest share for his people.

If there are any questions in your mind as to the causes of the collapse of Western civilization I suggest you ponder these two points.

Misunderstood

The life of the children of God is frequently misunderstood by those outside the church. How is it, one asks, that these questions can lead such dull lives and still be happy about it? Permit me an analogy. It is my opinion that the game of soccer is exceedingly boring. From a spectator's point of view it consists of a number of men in little shorts running up and down the field chasing a ball. Most of the games are decided on penalty kicks, as most of the games end in a tie before that. Games with no score are not unknown; games with low scores are frequent. As far as I can tell, if you wanted to create a game for the specific purpose of being boring, soccer would be that game.

My oldest son would disagree. He would watch soccer games in Spanish on TV, and thought them quite exciting. The difference in our views can be attributed to the fact that he played soccer for several years and I never played it. He sees what I do not see, and finds it very interesting.

The same thing is true of the Christian life. Paul calls it the "hidden life."¹² The secret to living the hidden life is to "set your mind on things above." When the rest of the world is chasing the prettier girl, the faster speed boat, the bigger bank account and the oldest bourbon, it's hard for them to understand that you are chasing something else. Those things cease to be important when the truly important things in our lives come forward. The secret is in knowing where your objective is: something on earth, or something in heaven.

¹¹ In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female — which I assume makes man in this passage to apply to both men and women.

¹² Colossae and 3:1-3

It's also why we see Western civilization collapsing, and they don't. Without a moral code, without the brotherhood of man, greed becomes a necessity. Several other sins become not just necessities but moral principles. Arrogant pride is now a virtue; adultery is expected (otherwise you will never be fulfilled); acquisitiveness is now called entrepreneurial spirit. We have thrown away much and got little in return.

The Body to Be

The most prominent example of the difference concerns death. The world's motto is "grab for all the gusto you can, for you only go around once." Death is the ultimate final end, which (using hope without reason) somehow will turn out all right. The Christian is taught that there will be a resurrection of the body, and then the judgment.

Through a Mirror Darkly

It's a tough thing to recognize, but essential: sometimes the answer "I don't know" is the right one. There is, of course, a difference when you get that answer is the result of a diligent search as opposed to a simple confession of ignorance. We should therefore begin this section by saying that none of us knows nearly all the facts. God has concealed them from us, perhaps because he knows we can't handle them. It is something completely beyond our experience. Military veterans might also remember the thought that such secrets are told only to those with a "need to know."

Be like Him

We are told that we will be like him. The word in the Greek implies something like being molded into a particular shape. We see a lot of that in our world today. If you've ever purchased one of these cheap little plastic drink containers shaped like (for example) Ronald McDonald, you've seen something that was molded to that particular shape. The image to which we are molded (the Greek word is the one from which we get our word icon) is that of Christ. In short, we will be like Christ in his post-resurrection appearances. What we know from this?

- ✚ In some sense, we will be superior to time and space. Our Lord seemed to be able to go from one place to the next without anything in between.
- ✚ We will be able to recognize one another, at least if the other participates and allows it. Whatever it is, it will be a body of power.

See Him Face to Face

It is a common fact that both the Old and New Testaments that no one can see God. But we are told that after the bodily resurrection we shall gaze at him wide eyed. Somehow or other, we will be able to see him.

What's strange about this is that the resurrection is a physical one. From the book of Job onward the resurrection is spoken of as a bodily resurrection; people coming up out of the grave. There is no evidence whatsoever for a "spiritual only" resurrection, however convenient that might be for those who just can't understand why God would do such a thing. We will be there in the flesh, so to speak, and we will see him with our own eyes.

That's then; what about now? Seeing God in this life is simply a matter of using the right instruments. If you want to see stars, you use a telescope. If you want to see bacteria, you use a microscope. If you want to see God, you have a pure heart.¹³

What to Do about It

All this is very interesting, I hope, but at this point I have given you know practical guidance as to what you should be doing about it. If there is a difference between the orthodox view and the common view of today, there should be some difference in your actions which is required. We must pass the test of Thomas a Kempis: what would you do differently if you knew the real answer? If the answer to that question is nothing, then you have a distinction without a difference. It's cocktail party conversation material only.

Hope-the Theological Virtue

In the 13th chapter of First Corinthians, Paul tells us that three things abide: faith, hope and love. Most of us understand faith. Most of us want to understand love. Most of us have no clue about hope. So let's be specific. Our hope is for eternal life. If you're going to have eternal life, you're going to do things differently here on this earth. Hope is not some dreamy thought for tomorrow, but it is a commitment to that hope. Christ tells you there are certain things you need to do to obtain eternal life; if you think eternal life as a fraud, there's no sense listening to him. But if you think eternal life is possible, and his words give you the path to get it, then you have some action to take.

Do not underestimate the importance of hope in the Christian life. Paul singled out along with faith and love; therefore it must be important. Consider his statement to the Hebrews:

Hebrews 6:17-19 NIV Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. **(18)** God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, **we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. (19) We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.** It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain,

(Bold emphasis is mine, not the original). Hope is the anchor for the soul. Never is this more apparent than at the funeral of a Christian. The secular man dies, and his funeral ambles about, full of platitudes and praise. The Christian funeral talks directly of going to heaven, and being raised from the dead when Christ returns. What a difference!

Purification

Paul tells us simply that if we have this hope, we will purify ourselves. That makes sense; it is the pure heart that sees God. So how do we do this?

First, we need to know what purity is. We have exactly one example of the truly pure human being: Jesus Christ himself. The imitation of Christ is ever and always the first principle of Christian conduct. Peter is a little bit more expensive about it:

¹³ Matthew 5:8

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless,
(2Pe 3:10-14 NASB)

Note that last verse. Spotless and blameless are other ways to put the word pure; if you are pure, and your sins are forgiven, you will be at peace with him. You cannot argue your way into heaven — but you can live your life so that you will be welcomed there. In other words, prepare yourself to go to heaven. Not just a little bit, but as Peter says, "make every effort."

Indeed, our Lord himself with the criteria most strictly:

Matthew 5:48 NIV Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

The Nature of Sin - First John 3:4-9

Unlike Paul, in his letter to the Romans, John actually has little to say about the nature of sin. He is much more concerned with the spirit which *overcomes* sin.

Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

(1Jn 3:4-9 NASB)

Nature of Sin

Some writers just naturally seem to have the gift of being both eloquent and terse. John is one of those writers. He touches here on the nature of sin, assuming that you understand it already and that he is just reminding you of the truth. Unfortunately, in our day, the very existence of sin is challenged by our society (and sometimes by our own church).

Does Sin Still Exist?

Up until the 20th century, the question would have seemed absurd to most Christians. Sin is the necessary precursor to salvation by grace. Matters have changed; the church now views things somewhat differently.

- ✚ Some — including the pastor of this author's church — simply ignore it. Even when quoting from the Scripture which mentions the word sin, it is simply ignored. We just don't talk about it. The subject is unpleasant to any number of hearers, so we just don't bring it up. This makes it somewhat difficult to determine exactly what theological position we hold; it has the corresponding advantage that the listener is never "turned off" by the mention of the subject. I leave to the reader the very difficult task of determining whether or not this particular strategy is the most fruitful possible.
- ✚ Many equate sin with the feeling of guilt. In doing this, the problem changes from what to do about the fact of guilt by sin to what to do about one's emotions. Enter modern psychology; consider the techniques used to deal with irrational guilt; apply liberally.
- ✚ A more recent development is to declare that sin is "cultural." There is an aspect of truth in this; modest clothing for an Eskimo Christian probably doesn't resemble the same thing for an African jungle Christian. The development is that all sin is now cultural. It can therefore be explained away. This is usually accompanied by statements like, "you need to think outside the box."
- ✚ In a combination of some of the above, you will also hear that sin is a "church word." Church words are now as forbidden as obscenity used to be. The use of the church word is equivalent to fire and brimstone preaching; a more polite euphemism must be found. The most common euphemism is the word "mistake." The difficulty with this technique is that mistake carries with it no sense of moral error or guilt; mistakes are things that happen on your arithmetic test. It's not good performance in arithmetic; but it's not morally evil either.

For the purposes of this lesson, we shall assume that sin still exists; that it still has its original, scriptural definition; and more important that it still has its original effect.

Frauds

Besides the techniques listed above, we have a number of time tested frauds which diverted the Christian from the true meaning of sin. These are not new developments; a fraudulent misunderstanding of sin dates back to the Garden of Eden.

- ✚ You will sometimes hear that it is sin "only when someone else gets hurt." This has a number of problems. The first is that it opens up the very real possibility that you get hurt. Second, we usually mean that no one gets hurt immediately. Long-term damage is exempt. Third, we have a very flexible definition of the word "hurt." Fourth, it distinctly opens up the possibility that, to use a specific example, "she wouldn't have been hurt if she didn't find out."
- ✚ An alternate technique is to insist that every possible sin must have a specific chapter and verse in the Scripture which carefully defines it and gives an example. This is legalism being used as an excuse. Neither the legalism nor the excuse work.
- ✚ Today, of course, we are infected with the doctrine that "if it's legal, it's moral." The ultimate authority in right and wrong is now the state, not the church. This neglects the fact that the state is limited in what kind of moral conduct it can enforce (think about adultery.) God suffers no such limitation.
- ✚ Somewhat fading today, but still popular, is situational ethics. This is the idea that you can't understand whether something is right or wrong without taking into account the situation. This provides a great deal of opportunity for human cleverness.

True Definition

So just what is sin? The word in the original Greek means to "miss the target." In other words, by some moral law you know that this or that action is morally wrong. If you do it anyway, you sin. This reduces the problem then to defining that moral law. There are three common definitions; they overlap somewhat but at least one is applicable in any circumstance.

- ✚ The classic example is the Old Testament law. Most Christians do not recognize the Old Testament law in its entirety as being valid; we're fond of ham sandwiches, for example. But the great, abiding moral principles laid out in that law still pertain to the Christian.
- ✚ That law is tempered by the New Testament law, which is the law of love. This love leaves us of the more legalistic aspects of the Old Testament, but also imposes upon us more clearly the duty to love the Lord your God, and love the neighbor as yourself.
- ✚ For those unaffected by the Scriptures (either willfully or by ignorance) there exists what is referred to as "natural law." To put it in modern shorthand, "what goes around comes around." The universe is a moral place; there are recognized moral laws common to all cultures; to violate them is sin.

Sin is commonly separated into two categories. There are the sins of omission; those things you knew you should have done and you didn't. There are also sins of commission; things you knew you should not have done but still did.

Work of Christ

It is fruitful to examine the work of Christ with respect to sin.

Review: Atonement

It should not be necessary to review the atonement. But, just in case, we stated as fact that Jesus of Nazareth was, is, and always will be God in the flesh. But he walked on this earth just like the

rest of us humans; was tried, crucified, died, buried and rose again. In the sacrifice of his life, we have remission of sin.

If there is one point which might be emphasized in this, it is that the crucifixion is the solution to the dilemma between righteousness and love in God the Father. His righteousness demands a sinless sacrifice to pay the price of sin. His love wants to forgive. The resolution is in sending his own Son to the planet to die for us. This carries some very serious implications.

Sinlessness of Christ

The part about Christ being sinless seems to bother some people. How, they ask, can anyone human being be the sinless? Either there is no such thing as sin, or it doesn't really affect this, or we are all sinners. So how is it that Jesus of Nazareth is proclaimed to be sinless?

The answer is in his very nature. He is perfectly human; that is, he shares with the rest of us are human flesh and blood and a general nature. As the ancients would say, he possessed a reasonable soul in a reasonable body (in the old-fashioned sense of reasonable). To be the sacrifice, he had to be human. But the sinless, he had to be God. He was perfectly man, perfectly God — and that is core to the Christian faith. Over and over again this has been hammered at; over and over again the heretics who deny it fade away.

What's really exciting about this is that, since he partakes of our nature, we can partake of his. He is the perfect bridge between man and God.

Cannot Keep Sinning

Perhaps most don't realize this, but the atonement does not just take care of our sins at the moment we become a Christian by baptism. It continues to correct for our sins all of our Christian life. Of necessity then, we must have some mechanism for the correction of sin and its prevention in the future.

There are two such mechanisms identified in Scripture:

- ✚ The first is human in nature: the church. God knows that we take our examples and advice much more readily from other human beings. The thought of having the heavens open up and the voice of God descending upon a saying, "thou art a sinner!" just doesn't appeal to us. We like to get good advice from our fellow sinners. That way, we don't feel that someone is lording over us, but coming beside us to help.
- ✚ The second is divine in nature: the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is specifically identified to us as "the helper." It's as if God quite well understands that no collection of human beings can possibly be enough. Therefore, there is divine assistance as well.

The result of all of this is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. In short, if you are in Christ and attempting to live the Christian life, results will soon show.

Self Test

This lesson may seem dry and dull and theological and boring. My apologies for that, but even the most boring lesson has to end with some statement of just exactly what you should be doing about it.

Satan and His Children

Let's begin with an examination of the enemy of your soul: Satan. It is fashionable today to omit his existence, but I must ask you: consider all the atrocities of the human race in the last hundred years. Are we really so bad that we had no help in doing these things? Let's take a look at his character:

- ✚ John begins by telling us that he is a murderer. This takes a little understanding. Let's suppose that you have decided to bump off your husband to obtain the proceeds of his life insurance policy. It seems tacky do you to pull the trigger yourself; so you arrange for some down and out soul to pretend to rob and kill him. Despite the fact that you yourself did not pull the trigger, the law considers you a murderer. Rightly so; and so it is with Satan. If God is love, Satan is the chief agent of hate. And hate is the chief cause of murder.
- ✚ As Christ tells us, he is the father of lies. When he lies, he speaking his native language. Have you ever worked for someone who lied when the truth would go better? You wonder how such a person can continually lie so often, and it's embarrassing to have to deal with them. They have a certain brazenness which challenges you; "are you going to call me on this lie? Can you really prove it?" Polite people don't want that challenge, and they let the lie continue. Satan depends on this.¹⁴
- ✚ The reason Satan gets away with this is that he is defiant and completely lawless. Most of us have the feeling that the person couldn't really be lying because they might get caught at it. Satan doesn't care. He's going to continue to lie, knowing full well that he repeats the lie often enough you will believe it. Have you seen this technique at work?

Diagnosis

The practical question is this: have I been sucked into Satan's scheme? The answer is always just as simple as it can be: by their fruits you will know them.

- ✚ Are you living the life of defiant lawlessness and constant lies? If you are, you are a child of Satan.
- ✚ If you are living the Christian life, you are filled with the Holy Spirit — and the fruit in your life shows it.

Prevention

Of course, most of us don't particularly resemble great Saints or great sinners. So we're going to have to do a little more work to prevent becoming great sinners. Just how does one become a true saint and prevent being a great sinner?

- ✚ First, there is the process of self examination. Please, when the time comes for communion, despite all interference, distractions and annoyances, examine yourself. Take the time to take stock of your life. That which you find sinful, ask forgiveness for — and strength to prevent it from happening again. Do not miss this opportunity.
- ✚ You are commanded to pray; you are commanded to "think on these things." That's called meditation. In your inner spiritual life, the life of prayer and meditation, start with your repentance but focused mainly upon the things that Christ would have you to do. Overcome evil with good.
- ✚ Stay with the church. Many Christians gone astray because they felt that the church was not doing what they wanted to do, so they could leave and be by themselves. Teddy Roosevelt had a great

¹⁴ One is reminded of Mark Twain's comment that "Satan is the spiritual head of 4/5 of the human race, and the political head of all of it."

answer for this. Someone once told him that he could worship God just as well out among the trees, lakes and forests. Teddy replied, "yes — but you won't."

✚ Once you get it right, keep it right. As the Scripture tells us, "walk in the light as He is in the light."

How Do I Know? - First John 3:10-24

The Fraud of "Heart " Christianity

In the middle of the 19th century, Christian preachers discovered that the new invention of the railroad could bring together large crowds which previously would have required much more effort. As a result of this change preaching methods changed with it. Out of this change of method there came a change of theology.

Heart Christianity — What Is It?

The major change which occurred was the shift from attempting to logically reason with the audience to an appeal to the emotions. As this developed, we find attitude well expressed by one preacher's phrase, "Check your brain at the door, because God wants your heart." The appeal of Christianity became that it made you feel good. Since this became its primary virtue, the study of the Scriptures has declined in importance. The reason is very simple: study of the Scriptures is an effort of the mind, not of the heart. The matter has gone so far that there are many preachers today who actively discourage the study of the Bible because it gets in the way of the emotional experience which they think Christianity really is. For example, in our own church we have a policy that no new Bible fellowships will be established; the existing ones will be allowed to age and wither.¹⁵

This is not just a preference in preaching methods. One of the most common effects comes when one asks the question, "How do I know I am saved?" We will get to the biblical answer later in the lesson; the usual answer today given is that you "feel it in your heart." Emotion now provides the authenticity test of Christianity. There is, of course, an obvious problem with this. Some of us are quite capable of generating what ever emotions we need; others find themselves rather unemotional in most circumstances. The former therefore are easily saved; we may assume that the latter are predestined to Hell.

It's important to point out that this is not a new phenomenon. This is not something which has just come out of the emerging church movement. It has often been used as a cover for heresy. Indeed, it makes a pretty good cover for fraud, too. If you'd like an example, tune into any "name it and claim it" evangelists on television. You'll find the appeal is an emotional one — even though the basic logical appeal is one of greed.

The Appeal

It would seem that it would be relatively easy to point out this error. There's a very simple reason why most preachers don't want to hear it: the method works. Practically every preacher wants the magic formula to make his attendance grow, his offerings increase, and baptisms to grow. If you meet these three criteria, it's obvious to the average preacher that you must be doing it the way God wants. There is an obvious logical fallacy to this; for example, if we pass the offering plates by using

¹⁵ The author has a mail note from a staff member to that effect.

naked strip club dancers, it's likely that the offering will increase. Therefore, we need someone to go out and recruit strippers, right?¹⁶

The reason the emotional method works is that it is the way of the world. We sell our goods and services on an emotional basis. Have you ever seen a car commercial without a pretty girl? Emotional appeal works because it's the way of the world. This gives rise to another reason that it is used. The tools for mass media Christianity, an appeal to thousands on the basis of emotion, are cheap and readily available. The emotional method is a shortcut, the quickest way to making your church into a mega-church. The difficulty comes with those who are not easily persuaded by emotion. They promptly conclude that Christianity is either fraud or delusion — since obviously there are no facts connected with it.

Postmodernism

When the scourge of postmodernism arrived it greatly amplified the effectiveness of the technique. The postmodernist believes that there is no absolute reality; you create your own. The postmodernist believes that there is no such thing as absolute truth, only your own personal truth. The postmodernist also believes that all ethical systems are simply a cover for "the will to power."

How does this play with Christianity? How often have you heard lately, "I'm glad that's true for you." Evangelism is no longer the hard road of convincing someone else of the truth; it's now the simple process of stating what you believe with no possibility of offending your hearer. They just assume you have a separate reality, and Christianity is true in your reality. They can take it or leave it; no offense intended, none in the world.

The same reaction governs our mention of the word "sin." To tell someone that they are a sinner, in need of repentance and salvation, is "judgmental." But if it's not an absolute reality, just one that is specific to me, then my words can't be judgmental. So this is a good way to avoid criticism of being puritanical. It's also a good explanation of the current trend to replace evangelism with "random acts of kindness."

It is more difficult to recruit people to go to church if you have to convince them of the existence of absolute truth, a single reality, and the validity of a system of ethics. That's "doing it the hard way." We all know how unpopular that is.

Key Question: How Do I Know I Am Saved?

All the discussion about brings up the question, "Just how do I know that I really am saved?" It's a question that has been asked why believers since the earliest times.

Answers

Throughout history there have been several answers to this. We will consider very briefly the three most important ones:

¹⁶ The author's wife feels that I may have oversimplified this, and that further thought for my health is required.

- ✦ First, there is the formal approach. You enlist in a church — which of course proclaims that they are the one and only true church, all the others being frauds — and your name is formally entered onto the rolls of the church. This is a common understanding among Catholics, for example. If you're on the list you go to heaven — no matter what you've done.
- ✦ Second, there is the "feel it in my heart" approach, as discussed above. This is really much more effective when the heavens open up and the finger of God appears pointing at you, saying "thou art saved."¹⁷
- ✦ Then there is the biblical approach, as outlined by the apostle John in today's passage.

By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; not as Cain, *who* was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous. Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.
(1Jn 3:10-14 NASB)

What Does the Bible Say?

John's approach is quite different. It primarily depends upon the principle that is usually associated with the sciences. If you want to know what's going on within a person, you must look at the effects shown in the person's life. John gives us four basic tests.

Love One Another

The Scriptures tell us that the world will know Christ's disciples by their love. In particular, we are encouraged to share with each other our worldly goods. This is a great sign of difference between us and the world. The world looks at "things" as being highly important; we see them as they are — temporary. A true Christian is willing to share his worldly goods with others who need them.¹⁸

There is an interesting corollary to this. It is possible to deceive oneself in this matter. It is possible to actually hate your brother but profess to love him. This is extremely dangerous; it means that you tell yourself (as well as others) that you genuinely love — but you don't have any actions to prove it. It is well to examine yourself in this matter.

This is of course nothing less than an example of the imitation of Christ, who gave his life for us on the cross.

The World Hates You

One of the great puzzles in life to most Christians is this: why is it I get so much flack for being such a nice guy? Your Lord told you about this; he said that if you love him the world will hate you.¹⁹ You are promised words for the occasions when they arise. That is something that usually doesn't happen to most of us. Most of us just want to know what we should do about it.

¹⁷ Which is not to say that feeling that you are saved means that you're not.

¹⁸ James 2:14-17

¹⁹ Matthew 10:16-26

The answer is to consider this hatred of blessing.²⁰ The rationale is simple: the reason the world hates you is because you resemble Christ. Resembling Christ — dare I say the imitation of Christ? — is the way Christians grow. So if the world hates you, and you've given them no reason for it, then the blessing of God rests upon you — and that's a good thing.

Of course, I haven't answered your curiosity, have I? You want to know *why* the world hates you. The reason is very simple; they don't know God.²¹ if they did, they would love him and see the resemblance to him in you.

Answered Prayer

The paradigm is relatively simple: if you love God, he's gonna love you back. In fact, he loved you first. That being the case, when you pray he will be inclined to answer your requests.²² He will do so in his own fashion; those familiar with the King James will remember that he gives you "every good and perfect gift." In other words, he's not a magic blessing machine; he's God.

He also expects you to ask, seek and knock. If you're serious about your prayers, you can be persistent, can't you? If you are persistent, and you're not getting answers, may I suggest one other little point? If the answers your prayers, do you give him the honor and glory as you should²³? Your mother was right; you should always say please and thank you.

Keep His Commandment

John is quite specific here:

- ✚ The first commandment he mentions is to "believe in his name." Put your confidence in him; do not trust the ways of the world, nor lean on your own understanding. The key point here is trust; you may say you trust him, but to your actions show it? For example, do you hoard your money when there are those in need?
- ✚ The second is as stated above: love one another.

Summary

So then, here are the four test points:

- ✚ Do you love one another in truth and in deed?
- ✚ Does the world hate you?
- ✚ Does God answer your prayers?
- ✚ Do you keep his Commandments?

If the answer to these questions is yes, then please be assured, on the word of an apostle, that you are saved.

²⁰ Luke 6:22-23

²¹ John 15:16-24

²² John 15:7

²³ Psalm 50:15

Testing - First John 4:1-6

Testing the Spirits

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

(1Jn 4:1 NASB)

The Teachers Object

We have heard in the news recently that the teachers employed by the Los Angeles Unified School District are up in arms over the proposal to use the results of standardized testing to evaluate their performance. It is difficult to object to the idea that a teacher's performance appraisal should be based upon the results shown in the students. The teachers themselves raise the following objections:

- ✚ The caliber of the students varies across the district. Interestingly, the teachers in poor sections of town are convinced that this will drag their scores down while the teachers in richer sections are certain that their students will improve less because they are already doing so well. The method seems to be permanently unfair to all teachers.
- ✚ They also object to the competitive nature of the evaluation. A test can be used to compare one group of students to another; or it can be used to determine just what the students know. The teachers object to the comparison; they seem to have no objection to the absolute evaluation of the students.
- ✚ Indeed, the purpose of the evaluation is to determine what impact any given teacher has on the students. The comparison is to other teachers, thus leading teachers to "teach to the test".
- ✚ Finally, this is a standardized test. Some students just don't do well on standardized tests, and teachers fear that having a few of those students in your classroom will destroy your reputation.

There are answers to each of these objections. It's not my purpose in this lesson to discuss how to evaluate public school teachers. Rather, I point out to you the difficulty of using test information at all. It seems that the teachers object to this process mostly because of the fact that it's based on this testing. So how does one perform proper testing?

Sign of a Good Test

So, what are the signs of a good test?

- ✚ First, the test must tell the truth. No matter how convenient the test may be to administer, no matter how prestigious the organization that delivers it, no matter how the public views it, the test must tell the truth.
- ✚ Second, the test must be understandable. One of the objections the teachers have raised the standard test is that the statistical use of the results is not easy to comprehend. A test which requires a genius to interpret is inherently faulty.
- ✚ Third, the test must be consistent with other tests. If you have seven measures of a teacher and six of them are highly positive, one of them very negative then the first place to look is at the test, not the teacher.

Why Test the Spirits?

Indeed, the teachers argue that such testing is unnecessary. There is already a system of classroom evaluation which provides information on how teachers perform. So it would seem that if we implement a test, we should be clear about the need for the test and the purpose of the test.

John, in this verse, tells us to test the spirits. He also tells us why. The reason is simple: there are a whole bunch of frauds out there. How do we know who are the real Christian teachers, and which are the frauds? It's very important that we do this for two reasons:

- ✚ First, we know the character of Satan. He will take the true tests, the ones we should be applying, and twist them so as to deceive us. We cannot presume innocence.
- ✚ Most important, if you're not testing the spirits, you're the one who runs the risk of hell.

From God?

By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. (1Jn 4:2-3 NASB)

Acknowledge

The matter is rather straightforward. The first test is that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. You will recall John's trouble with Cerinthus, who denied that Jesus had a real body. The idea that Jesus came in the flesh is necessary for any real understanding of the Christian faith.

- ✚ Jesus must be fully man to be acceptable as the reconciling sacrifice of the atonement.
- ✚ But he must also be fully God, otherwise he does not speak with authority. He never claimed to be just a prophet, as the Moslems say. He claimed to be God in the flesh. No flesh, no God.

The Christ

Implicit in this test is the idea that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ. Messiah is the Hebrew word; Christ is the Greek word. They both mean that he is the Holy One of Israel. He is the long promised one, the one who was written about in the prophets of the Old Testament. This has two extremely important implications:

- ✚ If you accept the Old Testament prophecy as being fulfilled in Christ, at least in part, then you accept the idea of prophecy in general. This implies that you believe certain things will happen in the future. If you are certain of those things, you should prepare for them. So prophecy does not mean something that has no effect on our lives, but has an ultimate effect.
- ✚ It also implies that the God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament. If Jesus comes out of nowhere (like Mohammed) he can proclaim a new truth. Jesus did not do this. Instead, he fulfilled an old, eternal truth. There is still one God. His laws do not change.

If Not

The result of this test is binary: either the spirit delivering a message to you is under the control of the spirit of God, or is inspired by Satan. If inspired by Satan, it is an antichrist. Remember, that spirit could be speaking to someone by prophecy, or be the guiding spirit of the individual speaking to you by mouth. If that spirit is an antichrist, that person is going to hell.

I hope that makes the matter quite serious for you. Often enough, Christians who do not participate in Pentecostal worship skip over this section as not applying to them. It applies to all Christians; you are to discern whether or not the preacher or the teacher or the speaker is an antichrist. Which brings us to the second point: are you better equipped to do this with a great deal of Bible study

or very little Bible study? The modern trend is to eliminate Bible study. In the history of the church there have been several periods where the study of the Bible by anyone but an expert has been all but forbidden. The people in those ages were often very pious. But it is possible to be pious and misled.

Church and World

You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak *as* from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

(1Jn 4:4-6 NASB)

Here John makes it clear: the spirit which comes from God, the spirit of truth is tested by its conformance to what the apostles taught.

Worldview and Church View

One of the recurring myths found inside the church is the Christian should be just like other people, only forgiven. Do you remember that bumper sticker? In fact however, Christians are different and they have a different world view.

- ✚ Most important, those were Christians have overcome the world. The rest of the planet is mired in the passions of mankind – the things that you must leave behind when you die. The Christian overcomes that because he knows where he will be 5 min. after he's dead.
- ✚ How did this come about? The Christian knows it is not because anything that he personally has done; it is by the power of God. So if there's a big difference between Christian life and non-Christian life, it stems from the fact that the power of God is in the Christian life.
- ✚ What keeps this effective in changing lives is that the children of God listen. They listen to God; the world does not. The world listens to the voices that cry out for younger women, older whiskey, faster cars and more money.

If those things don't make you different, what on Earth or heaven above would?

Obviously, the world has a different view. The essence of that view is that you only go around once, and you should grab what you can grasp all the time. The world's view is the sins of the flesh, sins of the world and the sin of pride are good things. You should therefore use your main strength to chase after them. By their fruits you will know them.

Application

So it comes down to this: who are you listening to? Are you listening to the spirit of God, or the spirit of the antichrist?

There are many people who hold the church doctrine is dull, boring and most of all — useless for any practical purpose. It's just an opinion you hold. That's the world's view; nothing could be further from the truth. If you hold to the mysteries of the faith your life in this world will be greatly changed. I will not promise you that your life will be one of smooth sailing and no problems; Christ never even hinted that that would be so. I will tell you that he will give you the strength and the wisdom to overcome the world – if you will follow him.

Let Us Love One Another - First John 4:7-13

Four Loves

It is useful for the Christian to understand that the Greek has four different words that can be translated "love." This is particularly important in passages which is more than one Greek word, such as in John 21. One can hardly fault the Greeks for this; as of late, the word love in the English language has changed meaning quite a bit. So here are the four loves.

Phileo

Believe it or not, you are actually familiar with this word. It is the root word in Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love. (Adelphia means brothers.) And that describes this type of love quite well: it is the kind of love that grows between brothers. There are no sexual overtones to this; this is not about gay rights. Those who have served in the military might know the phrase, "band of brothers." It is that tight knit feeling that comes of having served together. The word itself almost carries a flavor to it: the flavor is warm and friendly. It is not a solemn word; rather, it's the word you would use when you and your buddies went out to have a beer.

Its most prominent use is in John 21. Christ challenges Peter with the question, "Do you love me?" The first two times he does this he uses the more familiar agape; the last time, he descends to the warm and friendly word phileo.

Storge

This word is used of family affection. This is the love that normally grows up in a functional family. It's interesting to note that in our time the dysfunctional family seems to have become the norm — at least on television. We seem to have a shortage of family love.

The only use in the New Testament of this word is in Romans:

Romans 12:10 NASB *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;*

It is no accident that Christians refer to each other as brother and sister. Family love gives us a model for how the people of God should behave toward one another. It should be noted that families are not guaranteed a lack of conflict, but in a functional family the conflict must be resolved. After all, you have to go on living with these people. The same is true in the church. Conflict should be resolved because were going to be in the church together forever. You can now see why Satan loves a good church fight.

Eros

Please draw a preliminary distinction here. This is the root word from which we get "erotic." That word has been corrupted as of late to include the word "pornographic." In the original Greek this sense is not there. Rather, this word refers to the passionate love between man and woman. It is generally considered to be fully emotional. Interestingly, the Greeks would hold the man in the grip of erotic love was not in his right mind. Our method of falling in love and then getting married would have been roundly condemned by the ancients. They would view infatuation as a form of insanity; if you fell into it, your friends would do their very best to prevent you from making the mistake of marrying under the influence of this insanity. Since most marriages were arranged by your parents anyway, it was

considered proper for women to be sequestered until marriage. That way her first passionate infatuation would be with her husband.

The concept has taken quite a beating in our time because of its mixture with pornography. But erotic love is not condemned by the Scripture; for example, Song of Solomon in the Old Testament is an example of this type of love.

Agape

This word, which is used in this passage, is the kind of love God has for us. You can see that the first three words are not suitable for God loving us. But what is the difference? I submit to you that the other three words have one thing in common: they are conditional. You have to have brothers, family or lover to use the first three. There is a relationship which is exclusive as well as inclusive. A condition of each type of love is that you belong to the right group or be the right individual.

God's love for us is unconditional. That is the great distinction. And as we shall see, it is this love which God commands us to have toward all mankind. The apostle John will spend quite some time on the subject.

God Is...

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.
(1Jn 4:7-8 NASB)

Concepts

Let's take this from the top. It is really useful to understand God in the philosophical sense. Aquinas broken down this way:

- ✚ The essence of God is his existence. He is the great "I am." He must exist so that anything else can exist.
- ✚ Thus God is his attributes: love, mercy, truth, righteousness, justice and so on.
- ✚ Of accidents (a technical term) God the Father has none. But Jesus had a shoe size.

Take a look at that second bullet. It defines the very fundamental conflict God has after the fall of man. God unconditionally loves his creation; meaning that he loves us no matter what we've done. But that's not the same thing as approving what we have done. But because God is also righteousness man deserves his punishment. That punishment is death. Sounds pretty grim, doesn't it?

That's what the cross is about. At the cross, God in the person of Jesus Christ paid the penalty for our sins and reconciled us back to the love of God. That's how much God loves us. The question for us that is, what are we going to do about it? Are we simply to say, "Gee thanks God, that was great!" Or do we do something about it?

Disciples

God intends us to do something about it; namely, he wants us to become his disciples. A disciple has two major characteristics:

- ✚ The disciple learns what the master teaches. Being a disciple is tied up with being a learner, following a teacher. Note that this is the old-fashioned kind of learning; it's personal, not a lecture session in the Grand Canyon.
- ✚ The disciple also follows what his master teaches. In other words, this is not a purely academic course of study but a transformation of the disciple. The objective is not just a learned disciple, but an active one.

So, the Christian disciple learns from and follows Christ. It therefore follows logically that the Christian disciple will imitate his Lord and love unconditionally.

That's our part of the business. But being a disciple of Christ is not like being a follower of a coach a football. If you follow Christ and imitate him in love, that he promises you two things of supreme important:

- ✚ The first is that you will be "born of God." You become a child of God; and that implies a lot. Just as our children imitate us while they're growing up, so we will imitate God as we grow up. It just takes a little longer for us.
- ✚ The second is that you will "know God." Think about that for a minute. You know the creator of the universe, the Almighty. By his command you approach boldly the throne of grace. One of the reasons you are commanded to pray for those in authority over you is that you will thus intercede on behalf of those who are weaker than you. Have you ever thought of it that way?

Of course, the definitive test of whether or not you are born of God and know him is whether or not you love as he loves.

And If You Don't

So, if you're a real Christian, you will show the same kind of love for your fellow Christians and for those outside the church that God shows for you. But if you don't, you show that you do not know God. You might understand all the complexities of the Bible, every bit of theology, give money right and left but still be someone who doesn't know God. The test is whether or not you love same way he does.

On a side note, there is the question of how that love is expressed. Let me take an example to show you how good Christians can differ on method while loving all the same. Let's take the question of feeding those among us who are homeless and hungry.

- ✚ Many, particularly in the Catholic Church, hold this is the function of the church as a whole. The individual is not necessarily required to feed the hungry, but the church collectively is.
- ✚ Others, particularly in mainstream Protestant denominations, hold that the state should do this; the Christian's duty is to politically campaign for the state to take charge of this.
- ✚ Still others hold that it is the function of the individual Christian to do this, usually considering that the church as a whole takes part in as well.

As you can see, the method varies quite a bit. There are pitfalls in each approach; for example, if you believe the state must do this it's possible to ignore the hungry man standing by the roadside. So the question of how to love (in the sense of in what practical manner we wish to do this) seems to be left to the disciple. That you must love is a commandment.

Paradigm of Love

By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

(1Jn 4:9-13 NASB)

God Shows His Love

There is a point in this passage which is often missed by Christians. We are well aware of God's love as it is shown at the cross. But have you considered this: how great was his love at the Incarnation? Consider what it must mean to the creator to become part of the creation. It would be like you becoming an amoeba in your campaign to save the amoebas. In this way, Christ submits to many of the restrictions we take as normal. For example, Christ is not bound by time except in the incarnation. The limitations of space to the human body are also his. It is probably beyond our comprehension, but at least we can pay it the respect it deserves.

Note, please, that God did this so that we might live through him. It is a curious phrasing. Perhaps we'd best think of it like a pioneer. The pioneer goes before us, cutting the trail. Without the trail we cannot go. Christ did that for us so that we might have eternal life. This is a high and mystic thing — but no less real for it.

Of course, the ultimate show God's love is at the cross. We have to remember that this is not just a display of God's love, but a display also God's justice. The atonement is not some meaningless ritual in which Christ dies; it is the payment for our sins. This is the most important fact in human thought. It is no secret why we take communion; we do it to commemorate this sacrifice. It's that important.

Do Likewise

It may sound perverse to you (it does to me) but a common problem in Christianity is simply this: we say thank you to God for the sacrifice, and go about our merry way. It is the common commandment and expectation in the Scripture, however, that we will in fact act like God and spread that exact same kind of love. Why should we do this?

- ✚ Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery — and also the surest sign of the disciple. The imitation of Christ has been for 2000 years the path of the true Christian. Indeed, it can be said that the imitation of Christ defines the Christian, for "Christian" means "little Christ."
- ✚ Justice demands that same love. Think of it this way: he treated you with unconditional love to the point of the cross. You will never be able to repay him, or even duplicate what he has done. Is it not just, then, that you should act as he acted? Fair is fair.
- ✚ Perhaps most interesting of all is this: love is the weapon of God. Hate is the weapon of Satan. You can tell which side the soldier is on by the weapons he uses.

That last item is particularly important. But please to remember that nothing in the Scripture guarantees you an easy time of being a Christian. He never promised you a rose garden; but He is well acquainted with thorns.

No One Has Seen God

It's true that no one can physically see God. But they can see us. If the love of God abounds in your heart they will know what God is like by watching you. Consider: your children often act as mirrors of your own personality. Have you ever had someone say that you recognize your kid because he looks just like you? Or more to the point, acts just like you? The children of God act like God.

Some may object that this is quite impossible. How can I love like God loves? Take a look at the passage again: "His love is perfected in us." There is the secret to the problem. It's not that one day one of being a Christian you act exactly like God does. It is that your being slowly perfected, tuned for a purpose, and as you grow his love will show from you more and more.

How do you do this? This is one of the functions of the Holy Spirit and that's why John tells us here to listen to the Holy Spirit. Why do we do this?

- ✚ First, the Holy Spirit is our guarantee of eternal life. We have a connection with God the Father through the Holy Spirit.
- ✚ The Holy Spirit has a function within us of convicting us of sin and correcting our faults. This takes time. But please understand the process is under God's control, as much as you will allow the Holy Spirit to lead you.

So it is that we are to "abide in Him." Note the verb in that sentence: abide. It carries with it a sense of calm and peace; it means that we are at home with the Holy Spirit. This only happens when the Holy Spirit is at home with you.

Character Development - First John 4:13-21

Indwelling

By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son *to be* the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

(1Jn 4:13-15 NASB)

Live in Him

The relationship between God and the Christian is designed to be so tight that we live in him, and he lives in us. You have, as it were, a lifetime houseguest in the Holy Spirit. Consider for a moment how you treat a welcome houseguest:

- ✚ You sacrifice the *present* to favor your houseguest. A houseguest makes demands upon your time; you wind up rearranging your schedule to accommodate that person. So it might well be asked to you do the same for the Holy Spirit?
- ✚ You sacrifice the *pleasant* to favor your houseguest. Your home is designed to be comfortable; sometimes your guest winds up in your own favorite easy chair. We could then ask whether or not you do the same for the Holy Spirit? Do you give up pleasant things because you have the Holy Spirit?
- ✚ You sacrifice the *private* to favor your houseguest. If you don't think so, just whose bathroom do they use? One look in your medicine cabinet will tell someone an awful lot about you. Are there things you trying to hide from the Holy Spirit?

It's tough to give a really good analogy for this, but you could say that the Christian is immersed in the Holy Spirit. It's a day-to-day relationship like no other; in fact, the marriage relationship is often used to describe it. And the relationship between Christ and his church is used to describe the marriage relationship. It's that close.

Indeed, we are told that the body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit. This perhaps makes more sense to people in John's time than it does to us. We don't see a temple as being necessary. But do consider that this is in fact the relationship we have — and for that reason the human body carries with it a certain amount of sacredness. It is a major point of dispute with the postmodern movement; are we nothing but animals, or are we indeed home to the Holy Spirit? How is the average man to tell?

Living Evidence

If the average Christian doesn't give off evidence of the Holy Spirit, the average observer is not going to see any such thing. So how do we display the fact that the Holy Spirit lives within?

- ✚ The most obvious way is from our confession and our testimony. If you never mentioned Jesus Christ, how are they to know?
- ✚ Another obvious way is from the fruit of the Spirit. If the Spirit lives within you, the results should be evident.

- ✦ Perhaps the most telling is also the most where: merciful forgiveness. As Christ is merciful and forgiving towards us, so we should be merciful and forgiving towards others.²⁴

Confession

Technically speaking, there is a difference between confession and testimony. A "confession of faith" usually is a proclamation to the world, based on a particular formula, which tells the world what you believe. We may now examine the elements of such a confession:

- ✦ We believe that Jesus is the Christ — that is to say, the Messiah promised to the Jewish people in over 1500 years of prophecy.
- ✦ We believe in the incarnation — that is to say, that Jesus of Nazareth was and is fully human.
- ✦ We believe that Jesus is the son of God — that is to say, that he is fully divine.

Please note something: to say that he is fully divine implies that you are obedient to his commands — even if those commands conflict with the law of the day. Permit me a current example. There are several Catholic universities in the United States. They are being told that under Obama care they will be required to provide (via healthcare coverage) abortions, abortion pills, contraceptives of all types and the encouragement to use them. The postmodern view is that religion is something you do in your silence — and we'll see to it that there is no silence. Your tax dollars at work.

Love

We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.

(1Jn 4:16-18 NASB)

God Is Love

Please remember that John is the philosopher of the apostles. When he speaks this way, he is speaking within the philosophical framework of his time. The implication is that love is so much within God as to require that the existence of God implies the existence of love. Aquinas would tell us that God is his attributes, and one of his attributes his love. The supreme example of that love of course is given at the Cross.

So it is no great logical leap to say that to live in God is to live in love. We can turn that around; if you are living in love — that's your lifestyle — then you are living in God. It's a little more complicated than that, but you get the idea. Love is so much in his nature that you cannot be a child of God and fail to love at the same time. It is logically contradictory.

Love Perfected

There is a logical problem for most of us. God is eternal and unchanging; his love never varies. We are mortal human beings; we change and our love therefore varies. To understand how this works

²⁴ It is interesting to note that our church campaign "unleashing compassion" seems to ignore this aspect. Compassion, in the modern view, is a corporate activity only. Why this should be so is left as an exercise for the reader.

we must understand how to make something perfect. The word "perfect" does not mean (in this context) flawless; it means perfectly fit for a given purpose. The perfect screwdriver isn't much use as a jackhammer. So we need to understand the purpose of this perfection. That purpose is simple: it is to make us confident on the day of judgment. The idea is that we will have lived so long as a part of God's love, reflecting him in our everyday lives, that we will know for a fact that the judgment will not do anything other than reward us.

The key verb here is "abide." It means not just to live someplace, but to continue, to endure, to stand. You see the point; love is something that you continue to do and continue to be. An act of love once is not what we were talking about. The lifetime of love is what God is driving for here – because he wants you to be like him for eternity.

No Fear in Love

When you first read that statement, "there is no fear in love," it seems rather ridiculous. First, we are taught to fear God. Then, we all know that no matter how much we love, this life still gives us fear. So what is John talking about?

To begin with, you cannot cause love to arise out of fear. No one has ever been scared into loving someone. So just because you fear God doesn't imply you love him. As James says, the demons believe — and shudder. Fear of God is a recognition of who he is; love of God is the correct response to it. As Paul once said,

Philippians 2:12-13 NASB (12) So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; **(13)** for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.

Take a good look at that passage. It starts out implying that our salvation is something we need to work on — and then explains that it is God doing the work. Love operates in a similar manner; we imitate God, God strengthens us. Love overrides fear — and thus we rise in the faith.

Of course, if you are a real Christian you will be tested in this. The day will come when your spiritual mind says you need to love, and the world says you need to hate. The greater that your love is, the more it will cast out the fear of ridicule and ostracism and thus allow you to love as God does.

Practical Aspects

We love, because He first loved us. If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

(1Jn 4:19-21 NASB)

Cause and Effect

Despite the thinking of the emerging church, it is not normal for human beings to love unconditionally as God does. God understands that about us; we work by cause and effect. God, therefore, must initiate the process by which we grow in love. The cause of unconditional love in human beings is the love of God acting on our behalf – at the Cross.

Human beings look at this with somewhat difficult thoughts. The problem from the human perspective is that we want to repay God for that love; that's the way all human love works. Human love is not unconditional, but comes with strings attached. We are so accustomed to this paradigm when God loves us unconditionally, we still want to pay him back. But we can't. So what do we do then?

Let me share with you something that was written for my mother's funeral, and distributed as a bookmark there.

As the wife of an Army Finance Officer, John, the couple was often stationed in remote locations. During his 20 years of service they helped friends and acquaintances in time of trouble and in turn they were helped by others. They knew they could never repay those who helped them so they did the next best thing: they helped others. This became known to the family as "Pass It On". They remained true to this tradition all of their lives.

Hypocrisy

Love, in the Christian sense, is a beautiful virtue. It graces those who have it to the point of beauty. It therefore is a prime target for hypocrisy. Curiously enough, the usual motive for hypocrisy — wanting to appear to be something you aren't — isn't really the case here. There are other motives. Two of them — greed and stinginess — relate to money. We want to be known as loving, without taking out our wallets. The temptation is to cluck sympathetically, pat the victim on the shoulder and say, "better luck next time," and move on, feeling good about ourselves.

Another such cause is hatred. The real test of this comes when the person you so dislike stumbles and falls. The temptation is to crow, to point out all your warnings, and to let everyone know how justified and vindicated you think you are. But your Heavenly Father, who causes his rain to fall on the just and the unjust, would have you do differently. Such an event is a divine appointment; do not let it slip by.

Of course, this sense of doing what you should be doing, loving those who are not like you is exactly what various charities are depending upon when they send you junk mail solicitations. At some point good stewardship must take hold. But make those decisions in compassion not in anger.

Commandment

We have not put too much stress on this, but the requirement on the Christian to love as God loves is just that — a requirement. It is something that at the very least you do in obedience to God. You should also do it in imitation of Christ, but sometimes we know obedience and we don't know imitation. Therefore, the least you can do is obey — and you should do that.

A strange thing happens, though. As you grow in Christ, your God like love becomes less and less dependent on obedience and more and more joyful as you learn to be like Christ. You grow into love. A lot of human activity works this way. Remember learning to ride a bicycle? You started with training wheels, so the bike could not fall over. Then came the day that the training wheels came off — and at first it seemed that bicycle was out to get you. But with a little practice you got to stay upright. Later, you didn't even think about it — it just worked that way. So it is with love.

You have to remember this: you are a work in progress. God is not yet finished perfecting you. That implies two things: one, don't be so hard on yourself when you fail. Two, always be open to his path for your growth. Learn from your mistakes, and grow in grace.

Burden of Love - First John 5:1-5

Loving the Children

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the *child* born of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments.

(1Jn 5:1-2 NASB)

Love God, Love His Children

It is a truism among families: "love me, love my kids." God apparently follows the same rule of thumb. So the first question is, "just who is a child of God?" John gives us the answer here; whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ. Think that one through for a minute; it means someone who accepts that Jesus is who he claims he is. In particular, it is his claim to be the Messiah (the Christ) which is most important. The reason for that is simple: it implies all the other claims of Christ. If you accept this one, the rest come more or less as a package with it.

John uses the phrasing, "whoever believes." Please note that in John's time the idea that you could believe something and not act upon it was considered a sign of mental defect. In short, you had to be nuts to believe something and take no action upon it. So we may not conclude from this that an academic believe *only* is sufficient. But we can conclude from the first word, whoever, that membership in this family is open to anybody who wants to take it up. It often comes as a surprise to the new Christian that he does not have to be "good enough" to become a Christian. The only known qualification for being a Christian is that you have to be a sinner first. Some of us are exceedingly well qualified. (Blows on fingernails, polishes them on shirt.)

The transformation of becoming a Christian is so immense that it is described as being "born again." The technical term is regeneration. There are certain lizards whose tails can be completely removed and then grow back. This is the spiritual equivalent. The process is so effective that we are said to be "born of God"; we become something entirely new. Of course, this process only begins when you become a Christian and continues for the rest of your life — and as far as I know, may go on beyond that.

Love God

So how do I love God? Just asking the question is a good start. It's not something that necessarily comes completely naturally — ask any successful husband and he will tell you that love is hard work. If it's that difficult with a wife, how much more difficult is it to love God? Let's take a look at some of the common techniques:

- ✚ Scripture reading. If you love God, you love to hear from him. So open his writings and hear from him.
- ✚ Prayer. If you love someone, isn't that just natural to want to talk with them?
- ✚ Meditation. We are to "think on these things." It's how you get 20 years of experience rather than one year of experience 20 times.

Those are the techniques which might be described as *interior* — meaning that they belong to the inner person. The outer person has methods too:

- ✚ Most prominent is public worship. A significant part of public worship is the adoration of God.
- ✚ Perhaps as important is this: do you praise God in front of other people for what he has done for you?

These things may seem rather ordinary to you; but did you really expect that loving God to be intellectually complicated?

Observe His Commandments

It's when we get observing his Commandments that most people think that loving God is difficult. The impression persists that Christianity is a large collection of rules, mostly negative, violation of any of which causes you to go to hell immediately, do not pass go, do not collect \$200. Actually, Christ condensed the entire matter to two Commandments. The first is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength; the second is to love your neighbor as yourself. Let's take the first one first. If you put your entire heart, soul, mind and strength in the loving God you give him the key to correcting any misimpressions or false starts that you might have made. Remember, you are host to the Holy Spirit who will guide you into all truth. That guidance comes in a number of forms, including Scripture reading and perhaps listening to this lesson, but the principle is simple. Give it all you've got.

When Jesus was asked about this business of loving your neighbor, he didn't reply with a nice dictionary definition of who a neighbor might happen to be. He told the parable of the good Samaritan. This tells us two things: first, neighbor includes a lot of people we didn't think it would. Second, this is not something subject to rules and regulations but rather wholeheartedness.

One aspect of love your neighbor which has been greatly neglected in the emerging church is this: if you love your neighbor, would you share who Jesus Christ is with that neighbor?

Not Burdensome

For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.

(1Jn 5:3 NASB)

What Is Burdensome?

Noah Webster in his original dictionary defines the word as having these characteristics:

- ✚ Grievous to be borne.
- ✚ Causing uneasiness or fatigue.
- ✚ Oppressive.

If you need a contemporary example, may I refer you to the Internal Revenue Service? Federal regulation has become indeed burdensome to the typical American. It need not be federal regulation; we have police departments busting six-year-old girls for holding forth with a lemonade stand. This is what were trying to avoid.

It should be pointed out that this also describes a common straw man argument for Christianity. The opponents of Christianity are fond of portraying it as a massive, burdensome collection of regulations. It's easy to show that this makes it a lousy religion. What's difficult is to maintain and claim

that that's really what Christianity is about. Then again, our opponents are not too picky about the facts. After all, the postmodernist knows that this must be true — at least for him.

Keep His Commandments

Have you ever thought about that word keep? It really means to hold onto something, doesn't it? That's what he wants us to do with his commandments — hold on to them. The fact is that from the earliest days it has been easy to summarize what God wants him to simple things. Let me give you three examples:

✚ First, from the Old Testament:

Micah 6:8 MKJV He has shown you, O man, what *is* good. And what does Jehovah require of you but to do justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God?

(The Modern King James is perhaps the most eloquent here.) Three simple points and Micah has summarized everything you need to do to keep his commandments.

✚ Saint Augustine comes next: "Love God — and do as you please." If you love God, what you please to do will please him.

✚ Third, we have the obvious one from Jesus Christ:

Luke 10:25-27 MKJV And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tempted Him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? (26) He said to him, What is written in the Law? How do you read it? (27) And answering, he said, You shall love *the* Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.

(The following verses lead into the story of the Good Samaritan.)

If you are still puzzled about this, consider a commonplace example. Most of us know how a car works — that is to say, we know where to put the key, we know where the gas pedal is, and we know how to steer the car. An automotive engineer would consider this completely inadequate to describe "know how a car works." The engineer would probably get into gas expansion laws, the laws of thermodynamics, and any number of things having to do with materials. All this knowledge is good; we certainly hope the automotive engineers have it. But the simple level of how a car works, works.

Not Burdensome

Let's go back and look at those three criteria for burdensome again:

✚ Grievous? There is no grief in being forgiven.

✚ Uneasiness? The Christian should be able to reply to his questioners with confidence. We are to present the ready defense; if you are prepared, the uneasiness disappears.

✚ Oppressive? It is Christ who gives true freedom and relieves all oppression.

Burdens are heavy when you can't lift them. If you have help lifting them, they aren't heavy.

Overcome the World

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

(1Jn 5:4-5 NASB)

Whatever

Note that word "whatever." The word in the Greek is rather inclusive: it can mean whatever, whoever and several other words ending with the word ever. It's not just people; it's something that is characteristic of anything that is born of God. Whatever it is, it overcomes. This is something that comes out of the attributes of God; his character so to speak. As God is victorious, so are the things born of God. The things of God love God; they do not love the world. The people of God love God; they do not love the world. In particular,

- ✚ They do not obey its dictates. The world commands us to acquire more, to fight on all occasions, to hate. The question is, do you give into this?
- ✚ It follows therefore that the child of God is not someone who "goes along, gets along." We are not here to blend in to the scenery. We are to be a light upon a hill which cannot be hidden.
- ✚ In particular, we are citizens of the heavenly kingdom — and therefore do not submit ourselves to the laws of Satan.

Victorious

The word "victory" in the original Greek is also the root word of "overcomes." You know that root word; it's "Nike." The word form used as "overcomes" is in a continuous tense; it means to continually overcome, not just overcome once.

The phrasing used in "this is the victory" implies that we have found the source of that victory, not the result. What John is telling us here is that faith is in fact the source of the Christian's victory. In other words, if your faith is strong your victory is more certain. So the practical question for us is, how do I have a strong faith?

This author has had the privilege of watching Tino Wallenda (of the Flying Wallendas) perform in prison ministry. If you ever get the chance to see, take a look at where he keeps his eyes. You will see that his eyes are always fixed upon the other end of the tight rope — his final destination. That's the secret to faith as well: keep your eyes fixed on your final destination, Jesus Christ. Don't get distracted; faith is not about "what" but about "whom."

Who

When John asks, "who is the one" the original words of the Greek are not those of one who is seeking an answer which he does not already know. Rather, they are an appeal to the hearer to apply the facts he knows and the experience he has to come to the same solution. In essence he is saying, "Look around you." Look at the successful Christians you see; they are victorious. Look around at the rest of the world too; you will quickly find that it is only the believer who overcomes the world. Remember, overcoming the world is not the same thing as being successful in the world.

Why is this so? It is because overcoming the world rests entirely upon Jesus Christ. Nobody else has risen from the grave by his own power. No one else has eternal life in his hands. Faith in him yields victory now and the "well done" when our Lord returns.

If this seems rather obvious to you, that's because it is.

Testimony - First John 5:6 – 12

A Side Note

The reader who is following these lessons in the King James Bible will notice a substantial disagreement in the text. In particular, between verses seven and eight there seems to be a lot more material in the King James. The reason for it is this: when Erasmus, the scholar who put together the first comprehensive Greek text for the New Testament, was doing his work he came across this passage as being disputed. Only two manuscripts supported the inclusion of the extra words; one of those was highly suspected as a fraud. Erasmus, trying to err on the side of caution, included the text for the simple reason that it seemed to him to provide a better argument for the existence of the Trinity. Scholars since that time have been almost unanimous in labeling this a late insertion, largely motivated by the fact that the Vulgate has a similar insertion. This insertion, or its lack, does not really affect the doctrine of the Trinity. It does affect the meaning of the passage, however; it is also a great example of how textual modifications can be identified and corrected.

Testimony

This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for the testimony of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son.

(1Jn 5:6-9 NASB)

The Nature of Testimony

If you've ever had to serve on the jury, the nature of testimony is probably very clear to you. Someone comes up, purporting to know something about the matter, takes the oath that he will tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth — and proceeds to tell you his story. The key to this is that word, "someone." Testimony is something which is delivered from a person. That testimony — outside the courtroom — might be entirely symbolic. That's particularly true when the one doing the testifying is God. Most of us don't get the "open up the sky and deep bass voice tells you" kind of testimony. But that doesn't mean God has left you without such things.

Testimony is distinguished from evidence by the fact that evidence is something which does not come from a person. The fact that Joe's fingerprint is on the jar is evidence; testimony is when I tell you that I saw him run out of the house with a smoking gun. The distinction is important because most people, quite logically, accept evidence as being fact. How Joe's fingerprint on the jar might be a matter for testimony; the fingerprint is evidence. Evidence pretty much forces itself upon you. Testimony you must decide on: accept it or reject it.

Ark of the Testimony

One of the places where God gives his testimony is in the Ark of the Covenant, which is also known as the Ark of the Testimony. Take a look at this diagram:



It's basically a box, and the box has a lid. The Angels are sitting on top of the lid, the cover is down between them. Inside that box is the testimony of God against the Israelites:

- ✚ Aaron's rod — the testimony that God selects the leaders of Israel, not men. He reminds them of their rebellion by including this.
- ✚ Manna — he reminds them of their lack of faith, and his consistent Providence.
- ✚ The 10 Commandments — the reminder that God makes the rules.

Inside the ark are items which God uses to testify against Israelites. But please notice: they are covered up by the lid on the box. That lid is called the Atonement Cover. You have to look at this from God's point of view; which is to say from above. As he looks down on the ark he sees the atonement cover, but not the testimony below it. So it is a picture of God's mercy that he does not see their sins but recognizes their atonement.

Coherence of Truth

So for those on the jury the question quickly arises: how do we evaluate testimony? A number of methods arise for this, but they all base themselves on one central assumption: truth has only one value. In the court, the idea that something is "true for you but not for me" is considered absurd. So we evaluate witnesses on the basis of their coherence with the truth. For example, do they agree with the other witnesses? Does their testimony correspond well with the physical evidence? I submit to you there are three relatively simple tests we can apply to the testimony in any case:

- ✚ Truth is unitary; it has only one value. This is why the ancients wanted to hear three witnesses for any event. If all three told the same story, the chances were good that they were telling the truth. It isn't 100% certain²⁵, but it's a good start.
- ✚ Truth is objective. It doesn't depend on someone's feelings; it's a matter of fact which exists beyond the witness.
- ✚ Truth is somewhat discernible. By that I mean that very often we can find the truth, but sometimes we have to admit we don't know what the truth is. In those instances we are left evaluate the testimony based on the one doing the testifying.

²⁵ Especially if your witnesses are named Larry, Curly and Moe.

Triple Testimony

John, in this passage, brings forward three witnesses to Christ. In doing this he is following along with both Roman law and Jewish law. It's not like he's trying to legally prove this in a court of law, but he is trying to prove it in the court of your mind.

Water

John's first witness is "water." Remember, he is trying to convince people who are already Christians that their salvation is secure. So he is bringing to mind the experiences that they have so that they might properly evaluate their security. Let's look at water:

- ✚ The first thing that comes to mind is baptism. One of the aspects of this is cleansing. In effect, John is asking the Christian to look back to his own baptism and ask himself whether or not by that baptism he was cleansed of his sins. The question, then, did you get a new start?
- ✚ Baptism is also the experience by which we are "born again." He's asking you this: after your new start, did you continue to grow in this new personhood of yours?
- ✚ One test of that comes from another expression used of water, "living water." He's asking you the question, does your life now overflow with the fruits of the Spirit? In the world see that you are a source of living water, one who knows the way to the master.

Blood

It always strikes the modern Christian as being rather strange that blood plays the part of does in the symbolic nature of worship. We think of blood is something which gets the floor dirty; if you work in a medical office it can be downright dangerous as a carrier of HIV. But the view in the first century was quite different:

- ✚ The first use of blood is in purification. The blood from the sacrifice was used to purify any number of things in the Old Testament — Temple, Ark, tabernacle. So the question John might be asking here is, don't you know that his blood has made you holy?
- ✚ The second use is in atonement. There is no remission of sin without the shedding of blood, the Scripture assures us. So John here reminds the Christian that Christ's blood was shed on the cross to provide atonement for the sins of the church.
- ✚ The third use might be somewhat strange to you: it comes from the fact that the high priest never entered the sanctuary without blood. Blood is a way of access to the Father. John might be asking is here do you have access to God the Father? Are your prayers heard?

Spirit

The effects of water and blood are fairly visible in the Christian life. But when you mention the Spirit you must (obviously) be dealing with something which is internal to you. So this witness may not be too helpful in dealing with others — but it should be quite convincing do you. Let's take a look:

- ✚ The Spirit is first and foremost counselor, pointing us to the truth. So we might ask you, are you having difficulty finding the truth? Or do you have the Spirit within to guide you into truth?
- ✚ The Spirit "testifies with our spirit" that we are children of God. If you are confident that you are a child of God, this is the work of the Spirit — testimony if you will.
- ✚ Finally, the presence of the Spirit is a deposit guaranteeing your resurrection. If you know you have the Spirit, you know you have Christ.

Our Reaction

The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

(1Jn 5:10-12 NASB)

Choice

If you go back to the beginning of the lesson, you'll see that evidence leaves you no option about what you believe. Testimony, on the other hand, leaves you with a choice: believe it, or reject it. It's fairly obvious that if you believe the testimony and accept it, then you have the evidence necessary for Christian faith. That much is pretty obvious.

If you don't accept the testimony, however, it's not just like accepting someone's opinion about who's going to win the football game this afternoon. Not accepting the testimony has consequences. In particular, you are calling God a liar. That is a most serious step. Most of those who do this would like to tell you that they just didn't believe the Christian. I submit to you that this is not really the case. John is not talking to the unbeliever here; he is talking to the one who believes — but has doubts. What he's telling you here is this: if you have doubts, and therefore refuse to commit yourself to the Christian life, you are telling God he lied to you.

What makes us really dangerous is the usual reason for not accepting this testimony is that some human being told you something to the contrary. So you not only calling God a liar you are telling him that his word is worth as much as that human being over there. Think this one through folks; this just might be what Ray Stevens called "a great example of a bad idea."

What Is the Testimony?

So that we may be clear on this, let's review just what this test he is about: eternal life. Please remember that eternal life is an attribute of God, for God is eternal. What were saying by this is that God has given us a chance to partake of that same eternal existence.

This testimony is given also to convince us that the life in question is given through his Son, Jesus Christ. So we now have an attribute, we have a method. And that leads us to a result: eternal life. I now point out to you that this is a binary result: you either have eternal life or you don't. The fence on which you wish to sit is razor-sharp. For those of us who have eternal life, it is the best possible news.

Hell

What may strike you as strange is that John, the apostle of love, is pointing this out. You might expect that Peter, the fiery member of the disciples, would bring the subject up. The impression is that John is just too nice to do that. But let me ask you a question: is it loving to ignore heaven and hell? If you know the right answer, shouldn't you share it with those in danger of hell? That's the punch line. John is convincing you of the security of your salvation so that you may spread it to others.

Finale - First John 5:13-21

Know Eternal Life

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us *in* whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

(1Jn 5:13-15 NASB)

Review

A few lessons prior in this series, we discussed how it is the Christian may know that he is saved. It is useful at this point to review them:

- ✚ We know because we love each other. This is the test of Christ's disciples.
- ✚ We know because the world hates us — without cause.
- ✚ We know because we keep his commandments.
- ✚ We know because our prayers are answered.

That last item is important to this passage. Let's take a look at how one gets one's prayers answered.

Confidence

We are told that we are to approach the throne of grace boldly. There are two ways that the word "boldly" can be taken. The first is to adopt an air of braggadocio. You know the sort; the kind of person's always willing to pray for you. You, on the other hand, are afraid of the results. Is it possible that a person could be so confident of God as to brag about it? In my experience, the answer is no. Those who have the confidence necessary to bring it about have the humility to shut up about it.

Here's the secret: confidence is not based on your attitude but upon the facts. If you have confidence, it's because God answers your prayers. It's something that is very much a part of the universe; God listens to his children. It's a little tougher us to believe that, so let me give you an example from a different field.

College physics students will be familiar with this demonstration. A hapless lab assistant is placed on the board at the top of the lecture room. Just below his chin is a bowling ball with a rope attached to form a pendulum. Letting go of the ball amuses the students; watching come back and come within an inch of the lab assistant's chin usually produces a gasp. The physics major knows that the bowling ball will not rise any higher than it started. The demonstration's one of conservation of energy, to use the technical term. The lab assistant is probably the only person in the room with no worries; he's done this before. There are the two elements of confident prayer: knowledge of God and prayer success.

Heard and Obeyed

If you want your prayers to be heard, you need to be in obedience to God. There is no sense in approaching Almighty God to ask him for a favor when you are hiding sin in your life. John tells us here that we can get anything we ask for, provided it is "according to his will." In fact, if you'll notice verse 15, you will see that John uses a present tense, "we have the requests" not "we will have the requests." The

nature of God is unchanging. If we rely upon his unchanging nature, living in his will, we are confident of success in our prayers.

Sin to Death

If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not *leading* to death, he shall ask and *God* will for him give life to those who commit sin not *leading* to death. There is a sin *leading* to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not *leading* to death.

(1Jn 5:16-17 NASB)

Unforgivable Sin

When you first read through this passage, there seems to be an insurmountable difficulty. John distinguishes a sin which does not lead to death from a sin which does. The problem is, he forgot to tell us just what sin that is. There have been three primary suggestions:

- ✚ The Roman Catholic Church has long held that there are seven such deadly sins: lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy and pride, the worst of all. Since John does not specify a number for these sins, we can only take this list as being traditional.
- ✚ Saint Augustine held that this was the sin of leaving the church brotherhood; in effect, rejecting the body of Christ.
- ✚ Others hold that this is the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit which Jesus described.

That last deserves a bit of description. Many people have been told that they have committed the unforgivable sin and are doomed to hell. One of the things that are almost certain is that someone telling you that you have committed the unforgivable sin means that you haven't. Here's how that works: first, the function of the Holy Spirit is to convict the world of sin and judgment. If that conviction succeeds, the next step is repentance. But suppose it doesn't. Then you have sinned against the Holy Spirit by rejecting the idea that you are a sinner – and therefore are in need of a Savior. You must allow yourself to be convicted of sin, or else you will not repent. And if you will not repent, you will not be forgiven. If not forgive, not saved.

Steps

The practical question for most of us is not how to avoid the unforgivable sin. It's how do we pray for our brother or sister's. A casual reading this passage might suggest that if a Christian is suffering from a sin that is not unto death, we should pray for his forgiveness. I submit this leaves out step. In fact, our prayers for someone else's sin could well be made in three steps, one:

- ✚ First, we should pray for that person's repentance. Forgiveness will not happen unless there is repentance.
- ✚ When repentance occurs, we should give thanks. Isn't it amazing how many of us forget to do that? But surely, we can take the time to say thank you to God for bringing one of our brothers or sisters back into the fold.
- ✚ *Then* we can pray for forgiveness. Sometimes we think it's automatic; there is nothing automatic about the creator. At the very least this teaches us just how serious sin is.

The Defiant Sinner

This, of course, raises the question: what do we do about the defiant sinner, the one who proudly refuses to repent? We are speaking, of course, of one who is in the church. For those who are outside the church, the prayer should always be the same: that they will come to know the Lord Jesus Christ, repent and be baptized. But for the one in the church we have the steps of church discipline:

- ✦ First, the person who first spots this should go to that sinner and attempt to reason with them. If successful, no other interventions are necessary.
 - ✦ Following that, the matter needs to be brought to two or three witnesses.
 - ✦ If that doesn't work, the individual should be brought before the entire congregation.
- If you'd like to see just how serious this can get, as Paul talking to the Corinthians about it:

It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst. For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, *I have decided* to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

(1Co 5:1-5 NASB)

Look at that: Paul is willing to turn the man over to Satan, so that he might suffer the consequences of sin in this world and be saved at the Lord's return.

We Know

We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in *the power of* the evil one. And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. Little children, guard yourselves from idols.

(1Jn 5:18-21 NASB)

Does Not Continue

There is a bit of a problem with the translation. Unlike English, but like many other languages, Greek has a continuous tense. In the 18th verse here John uses one of those continuous tense verbs. So the question is not somebody who sins occasionally, but someone who continually sins. Such a person is one who cannot be a child of God.

Why not? Because the one born of God keeps him. That phrasing gives rise to the question; just who is he talking about? The phrasing could mean that the Christian himself keeps himself the continually sinning. It could also mean that Christ keeps him from sinning. It is just possible that John meant both answers at the same time.

Perhaps more important, there is protection from Satan, the evil one. You may think that's a light thing; after all, why would Satan concern himself with me? But if you will look back into the Old Testament to the book of Job you will see that sometimes the righteous are attacked by Satan — and it is no small assault.

We Are the Children of God

To understand that, we need to review a little bit about Satan. Put simply, the average Christian in America today does not believe that Satan exists. He's a fable, a fairytale. We find the Scripture that Satan is very real; interestingly, missionaries to the Third World find that he is quite real as well. His message to the modern world is that he doesn't exist, and therefore God doesn't exist either. His message to the Third World is that the demon is stronger than this God of the Christian missionaries. The father of lies is in his natural habitat.

Satan, if you will recall, was originally a very high-ranking Angel. He became what he is today through pride. He decided that he would be like God – but there is only one God. Somewhere in time, Satan was given power and authority over this planet. Mark Twain said it rather humorously: "Satan is the spiritual head of 4/5 of the human race, and the political head of all of it." This may seem to be rather subtle, so let me give you an example. We have a friend who is greatly devoted to the cause of countering Islam in America. She has only the facts and justice on her side; she is therefore called "Islamophobic" frequently. She is viewed very often as a nut case. It is very frustrating to have the facts and be unable to convince the world at large.

So you think that this would be frustration enough. But if you are to examine her life on a daily basis, you would see that she is under assault by Satan. Things just seem to happen to her which are highly frustrating, or even intimidating. She could tell you tales.

The Son of God Has Come

If there was nothing else for us to learn, this would be the most important thing. We know that the son of God has come to earth. One might picture it this way: Jesus is the bridge between man and God. Part of being that bridge concerns our understanding of God. Without having had the opportunity to see God in the flesh, what would we really know about God? Here we are told of the specific part of Christ's ministry was to make sure that we did know. We know these two things:

- ✚ We know God himself. His Holy Spirit is in communion with our spirit. There are things we can know about him because of this that no one else could know.
- ✚ We know God is true; there is no falsehood in him. He is not a capricious God who changes his mind, but he is the eternal God who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

The true God is the one who *is* truth. We have the privilege of bringing our prayers and our communion to the God of the universe, who is truth. More than that, we know his son told us, "I am the way, the truth and the life."

Without the way there is no going.

Without the truth there is no knowing.

Without the life there is no living.

Grace, Mercy, Peace - 2 John 1:1-3

One of the neglected books of the Bible, 2 John is, like much of John's writing, capable of bringing out great things in few words.

The elder to the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in truth; and not only I, but also all who know the truth, for the sake of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever: Grace, mercy *and* peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.
(2Jn 1:1-3 NASB)

Background

There has recently (the last two centuries) been some controversy about this book. The arrogance of modern scholarship rejects any historical evidence from the early church, but depends instead upon word frequencies and other techniques. The testimony of the ancient church is unanimous: this book was written by the Apostle John. It is stated to be so by those who were his students and his students' students; we shall assume they were neither blind nor deceived. John wrote it.

To whom it was addressed, however, has provoked a little more controversy. The Greek word, *kyria*, is the feminine form of *kurios*, meaning "Lord." Various suggestions have been advanced:

- ✚ It may simply be a lady of John's acquaintance.
- ✚ It may be a lady named Kyria; the word is used as a personal name, and would correspond most closely to the Hebrew we now translate as Martha.
- ✚ It may also mean the church, either as a whole or, more likely, at a particular place (see verse 13).

"Her children," therefore, would vary with the above suggestions. What complicates matters is the word "chosen" – "elect" in the King James. From some other passages, some scholars have concluded that this is a veiled reference to the church at Rome. We know that John went on various journeys after his exile in Patmos (again, church history). It is possible that he visited Rome.

The impact of the book, however, is undiminished by these controversies. It has always been accepted as Scripture by the church, and it reads just like John – the Apostle of Love.

Love of "the Lady"

We begin with two observations about this word:

- ✚ First, it is the Greek word, *agape*. It is therefore not the romantic love nor family affection, but the unselfish love of Christ at the Cross.
- ✚ In John's writings, love is always coupled with action. To love "in the truth" is to love in deed as well as word.

"In the truth"

It is unfortunate – or perhaps very fortunate – that the original would have been written in uncials – all capital letters. Therefore, we don't know if John was writing about "the truth" or "the Truth" –or if he was writing about both.

- ✚ Is it possible to love without truth? I do not think so. Love is the deepest of personal relationships, and personal relationships are just that – personal. If you love a person, you must know them. Indeed, in love you want to know more about that person – to explore them, so to speak. It is so with all loves – they must have truth, or the relationship will eventually fall apart. If that relationship is designed to be eternal, then it must be founded upon truth.
- ✚ This relationship in particular is impossible without The Truth – Jesus Christ. No matter how good our intentions, we are still sinners. Sinners unaided by The Truth, Jesus Christ, cannot persist eternally in love. Sin eventually will break the bond, sooner or later. Later, if we are strong in our good intentions; but eternity is still a longer time.

So we conclude that love is impossible without truth. We know this from our everyday relationships as well. Is it possible to have a successful marriage without trust? What is trust, but the sure knowledge of the truth about your partner, knowing that he or she loves you in truth?

“Not I only”

Indeed, the communion of saints itself – the church – has the same basis.

- ✚ We are bound together in love because we have the truth. We know the facts. Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Christ, the Son of God the Father, and He is risen from the grave. Those who know – and trust – those facts are those in communion with me (and all other saints). We are united – by the fact of the resurrection of Jesus. We are united by the truth.
- ✚ But we are also united by The Truth – as in, “the way, the truth and the life.” The source of our union is Jesus Christ himself, who prayed that we might be one. If you and I are brothers to the same person, we are obviously brothers. Christ is my brother; therefore you and I are family. This family is united by the love of God – the Truth itself.

Religions come “thick” and “clear”, said C. S. Lewis. Clear religions are analytic and factual; thick religions are mystical and impenetrable. Christianity is both.

Why I Love

Never ask your wife why she loves you. You might get the truth for an answer; it’s very disappointing to discover that you’re a cure for insomnia.

John, however, has a series of reasons for his love, and we should have the same view:

“Because of the truth”

This can have two meanings – again because of the capitalization:

- ✚ It can mean causality. I know certain facts; I reason on them; I perform certain actions. I know that my Lord commands my love for my fellow Christians, for example – which is therefore a command to love the church.
- ✚ It can also be imitation. I have met The Truth. He is overwhelmingly lovable and admirable; I want to be like him. I want to be as truthful as he is Truth; as loving as he is Love.

“Which lives in us”

This can mean nothing other than the Holy Spirit, for we are the temple of the Holy Spirit. What is the relationship of the Spirit to truth?

- ✚ The Spirit is to *reveal* all truth to us. This begins with the inspiration of the Scripture, but also includes those times of learning in which we see a truth displayed.

- ✚ The Spirit is to *guide* us into all truth. Sometimes it is not sufficient to show someone the truth; they have to be led through it. (If you don't think so, ask your wife to explain labor pain to you.)
- ✚ The Spirit is also there to *correct* us, to bring us back into the truth.

If something is alive, it moves and grows. The Spirit in us grows as we mature as Christians, and moves us ever closer to the Truth.

Forever

We are handling eternal things when we speak of love in the Christian sense.

- ✚ If we handle eternal things, we must expect eternal consequences – for us and for those around us. If we refuse to spread the Gospel, what does that mean for someone near to us?
- ✚ It also means that we are to expect eternal blessings – for those who act in love in time, will be blessed in love eternally.
- ✚ In all things, therefore, we must think “like God” – we must think eternally.

Thomas à Kempis spelled out three steps to knowing the truth by knowing the Truth:

 - ✚ First, we must know ourselves. We must realize what sinners we truly are.
 - ✚ Then we must know Him – the Truth itself, in person.
 - ✚ Once we know where we are, and where we should be going, we must go on the journey, seeking one-ness with the Truth itself. We must journey to become like Him.

Grace, Mercy and Peace

(Translation note: the phrase “the Lord” is found only in the King James, and is based upon a manuscript addition of a late date. Newer translations delete that phrase.)

Progression

The order in which John places these three blessings is significant, for they must come in that order:

- ✚ First must come grace, which is the forgiveness of God. Without his unmerited favor, nothing else would come from him, for we are sinners worthy of his condemnation. If he did not choose to pay the price of Calvary, nothing but wrath would come our way.
- ✚ But once received, his forgiveness is just the beginning. We know that it is possible to forgive – and yet have the offender receive just punishment. Often, forgiveness clears the heart of the forgiver, but (as in our justice system) does not affect the punishment of the forgiven. Mercy does that; it is tangible sign that says the lesson has been learned and that the punishment that justice would demand has been remitted.
- ✚ Then – and only then – comes the peace of God. Grace breaks down the wall of hostility; mercy removes the consequences and peace is the result. Not just the cessation of hostilities; God desires no armistice. He desires true peace, when the cause of war is taken completely away.

The realm

Some plants only grow in a hothouse environment; others need a harsh environment. Grace, mercy and peace need the right environment if they are to grow as well. What is that environment? Truth and love:

- ✚ Truth – for without a sure knowledge of the truth, we begin to take God for granted. We tend to feel it's his job to forgive, and would he please get on with it. But in knowing the truth – who we are, who He is – we are kept from this. Grace and mercy depend upon this.
- ✚ Love – for if there is resentment, how can there be peace? If there is anger, how can there be peace? Only if there is love can we see true peace.

Summary

Picture in your mind the balance scales of justice. On one side place love; on the other place truth. We need both.

- ✚ Without truth, what is love? It is nothing but starry-eyed dreaming. Love does not consist of denying the truth for the sake of happiness. Love is not an anesthetic; it is a cure for the pain of truth.
- ✚ Without love, what is truth? If there is no love, then truth requires condemnation of all that is not perfect – of all that is not God. But God, who is perfect and is therefore perfect love, overcame this at the Cross.

The truth of the Cross is the love of God.

The Forgotten Aspects of Love - 2 John 1:4-7

Love, to some, is a compound of saccharine and molasses, hearts and flowers with an occasional pepperoni pizza heartburn thrown in. If your experience of love is like this, consider yourself fortunate. There is a melancholy side to love. Many older Christians know this, for they see their adult children walking in the wrong way; this causes great pain. We will examine this pain – and the forgotten aspects of love which it highlights.

I was very glad to find *some* of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment *to do* from the Father. Now I ask you, lady, not as though *I were* writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it. For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ *as* coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist.

(2Jn 1:4-7 NASB)

Some of your children

There is a sad note in this passage; it is implied in the word “some.” The Apostle clearly understands that not all of this lady’s children are walking in the faith. This may be personal to one lady, or it may represent the faithless in the church – but whichever, we can learn from it.

Why do children of “good parents” go astray?

It’s a question parents of adult children often get to ask themselves. Some have the privilege of knowing this is not their problem, but most Christian parents understand this question all too well. It’s the answer that seems to be the problem.

- ✚ *Naturalism* – some of us subscribe to the theory that a child grows up as the product of nothing more than heredity and environment. If only we had raised the kid somewhat better, all would be well. The theory is common in sociology; it’s the “poverty causes crime” theory, for example. The poor child had no choice but to become a thief and drug addict, considering his environment. But what about the kid in the “good” environment?
- ✚ *Secret sin* – most of us are good at laying guilt on ourselves, and often good at laying it on others. Sometimes we see our children’s ways as the revelation of our own sins. God is showing the world that we didn’t do everything the way he told us to. Because of our sins, our children have rejected our faith and gone their way, holding us to be hypocrites. We’re not really “good” after all.
- ✚ *Choices* – the simplest (and I think most correct) answer is this: like us, they have the freedom to choose. We chose to follow Christ. They have that freedom as well; having that freedom means that some will choose not to follow Christ. When I was growing up, I wanted to make my own decisions. So do my children.

Our attitude –what it is

When our children make these wrong choices we have a tendency to look at the failures and ignore the successes. We’re like the older brother in the story of the Prodigal Son; we know what’s right and we’re going to stick with it. Often this means that we overlook the good in our other children – we are so focused on our problems. This is a serious thing, for it means that we *have failed to rejoice in the truth*. Did you ever wonder what that phrase meant? Surely it includes giving thanks for our

children who follow the Lord, and rejoicing that we have them. If for no other reason than for the example it sets to the lost, we should do this.

Sometimes we have the tendency to “get offended.” When your children were little, you probably heard “I hate you!” screamed at the top of their little lungs. You may have replied, “Well, I love you.” (Usually followed by “and that’s why you’re going to bed *right now!*”) We need to carry over that attitude into adulthood. We need to remember that we still love them.

Worse, there is the tendency to simply give up. The frustration of years of trying becomes so painful that we simply stop. It is a sad thing when the pain of abandoning your child is less than the pain of trying. Perhaps we should look for help with the pain.

Our attitude – what it should be

The Apostle gives us our clue: we should rejoice about the “some” who are following the truth. Often we take our adult children in the faith for granted. We assume that this is how things should be – so we don’t give thanks for them, we do not rejoice over them. This – rather than fretting about the others – should be our main point.

But what about the ones who have gone astray? We are to walk in love; we forget the character of love:

- ✚ It hopes all things – so let us not despair of our children.
- ✚ It endures all things – so let us not be so offended that we perpetuate childish argument.
- ✚ It perseveres – and so should we.
- ✚ It rejoices in the truth – which, please God, shall come.

Balance: Love and Obedience

If you read this passage again, you will see John’s difficulty in expressing a basic truth. First he tells us to love; to love is to obey his commands; his command is to love. Has John lost track of his notes? I think not.

- ✚ It is a difficult concept to express in any language. Love and obedience in the faith feed each other, they grow together. The closest analogy of which I know is a “feedback loop” – love provokes obedience, which provokes love, which provokes obedience, which...
- ✚ There is also the value of repetition – the Apostle is telling us not only what to do, but that this is the most important part – for he repeats it so much.

Obedience as a result of love

Obedience is the natural result of love in a child. Why?

- ✚ *Imitation.* When you were a small child, you imitated your parents. Why? Because you loved and admired them – you wanted to grow up to be just like them. The same is true for us as adults; if we love and admire our Lord, we will want to grow up just like him. So we will imitate him.
- ✚ *Illumination.* Sometimes we obey simply because we understand. If we know that someone cares for us, we do not reject their suggestions out of hand, but consider them carefully. That often results in our following them. How much more should this be true of our Lord!

- ✦ *Anticipation.* We know that someone who loves us will do good things for us. As children, we didn't want to do anything to "spoil" that. It's a pretty good principle for adults, too.

Love as the result of obedience

We don't often think of love being the result of obedience, but it certainly is. Why?

- ✦ Spiritual matters are cleared up by obedience. Sin no longer stands between you and the Father; when that happens, his Word gets through to you. Sin is sometimes the static on the phone line between you and God.
- ✦ Obedience is the natural relationship of a child to its Father. We know that in raising and being raised; is it not also the case spiritually? Do things the right way the first time – it works.
- ✦ To obey means "to follow a pattern." That pattern can be a person, or a set of laws, or a picture, or any number of things. One thing is certain: the better the pattern, the better the result. Our pattern is perfect. The results therefore should be great ; we should imitate Him – and He is Love.

Connections

If you go back and read that passage again, you might wonder why verse 7 is included. Most commentators group it with the following verses. But read the passage again in the New American Standard, which is a little more accurate – and see the first word in verse 7:

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ *as* coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist.
(2Jn 1:7 NASB)

See that first word? "For" – it implies a cause and effect relationship. What John is saying is that all his words about love and obedience are caused by this problem of "deceivers" – those who deny Christ came in the flesh. We need to examine this to understand the connection. Suppose the deceivers were right – that Jesus was not really human like us, he did not come in the flesh. What difference would it make?

No atonement

The Old Testament makes it very clear: without the shedding of blood, there is no atonement for sin. That means that you and I would be unforgiven – and thus our relationship with God would be totally imaginary, for he can have nothing to do with sin. Remember that spiritual things are cleared by obedience? Obedience prevents sin. Sin is the static on the line, remember – and this would make that static a permanent condition. We could not communicate with God. And we would be lost forever.

Greater love

We know what the greatest example of love is:

"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.
(Joh 15:13 NASB)

If Jesus did not come in the flesh, then he did not lay down his life for us. He is therefore not the greatest example of love; the pattern is not perfect – and the results can't be either.

God is the perfection of his attributes

It is worse than that, however. God is the sum of all perfections – the perfection of all good things. So it is that the Apostle can say, "God is love." But if Christ did not come in the flesh, he did not

show us the greatest possible love – to lay down his life. And therefore he would not be God; he would not be divine.

Turn it around

But Jesus **did** come in the flesh – and therefore he did atone for our sins; he did show us the greatest example of love; he is divine, the Son of God.

Reprise

So then, what about those adult children – the ones who are not among the “some” over whom we rejoice?

- ✚ We must hope, persevere and endure – for our Lord did that for us. Do not give up!
- ✚ We must continue, ourselves, to walk in love. If for no other reason than that they might see the example, we should do that. If for no other reason than that our prayers be heard, we should do that.
- ✚ We should continue in prayer, trusting that the ultimate example of love will bring them home.
- ✚ We should continue in hope – hope in the power of God, who is the ultimate expression and meaning of love.

The Virtue of Intolerance - 2 John 1:7-13

It is a cherished American notion that everyone is entitled to his opinion. From that we have somehow derived the idea that all such opinions are equally true and valuable. How it is that we have regressed from the right of free speech to the equality of idiots, I do not know. But in the church we are required, on specific occasions, to be intolerant. John describes such a situation here:

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ *as* coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into *your* house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds. Though I have many things to write to you, I do not want to *do so* with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, so that your joy may be made full. The children of your chosen sister greet you.
(2Jn 1:7-13 NASB)

Deception

Let us make one thing clear: John is not talking about someone whose opinion varies from ours in some minor detail. He is clearly laying out – as our Lord did – the idea that we will encounter those who will attempt to deceive us with regard to our Lord. We need, therefore, to examine this in some detail.

The Deceivers

What kind of people are these? We have a few clues from the Scripture:

- ✚ First, these are often *greedy* people. With greed there comes a certain unscrupulousness – anything for money. It leads the greedy down the trail of lies for profit.
- ✚ Next, these are those who will lie to make their point. John is very specific here. He is talking about those who add to the Scripture in one way or another. How often have we seen those who have a “special revelation” from God!
- ✚ Finally, as our Lord said, by their fruits you will know them. They will eventually be shown as those who bring the church into disrepute.

The Deception

It’s important for us to realize that John is not talking about every little point of doctrine here. The Scripture is sufficiently deep and wide that honest, learned scholars will disagree as to its particular meaning at particular points. At the best, this reflects the fact that God is infinite and eternal, and we are not. So what, then, are the specific items that are cause for such a charge?

- ✚ As identified here, the first is that Jesus did not come in the flesh. (The previous lesson details some of the consequences of this).
- ✚ Next, there is also the denial that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah promised to the Jews. This specifically relates to the Atonement.
- ✚ Finally, there is the heresy that Jesus is not the Son of God – that is, that he is not God in the flesh.

Search as you might, you will not find anything else which causes this charge of being a deceiver and Antichrist. Here are the lines in the sand, drawn with the sword of God.

Deceit versus disagreement

It must be stressed: reasonable Christians can (and do) disagree about a large number of things. This is unfortunate, but no reason for incivility. Our reaction to disagreement is very different:

- ✚ John is quite clear that those who are deceivers are to be completely shunned by the church.
- ✚ But all others with whom we disagree we are to reason with, in love.
- ✚ It may be useful to note that some people are not to be persuaded. We need to recognize when our disagreements need to be left alone, so that our relationship may be continued in Christian love.

Consequences

It's a logical question: "so what?" What happens if we just let things be? After all, we wouldn't shun a Hindu that way. (We should be sharing the Gospel with that Hindu, of course). So what difference does it make here? Why is it, for example, that Christians have no fellowship with Mormons?

It's because Mormons claim to have an additional ("secret") revelation that tells us that Jesus is not divine – but an equal with Satan. It's an old heresy; in this case the inventor of the tale was Joseph Smith. But why would this have an effect on us?

Judgment

We must remember that the Day of Judgment is coming, when our Lord will return to judge the living and the dead. One aspect of the judgment that is sometimes neglected is that of *reward*.

- ✚ Judgment is both positive and negative. Think of it in terms of a civil, not a criminal, court case. The Last Judgment is the time when God rights the wrongs, but also rewards the righteous.
- ✚ For example, we are told that when we give a banquet, we should invite those who can't issue a return invitation – so that we will be rewarded at our Lord's return.
- ✚ Who could be fair in such a judgment? Only one who was both divine, having the wisdom of God, and human, knowing the weakness of mankind. Only Jesus, the Christ, could be this judge.

If you were going into a civil court, expecting such a reward, it would not be wise to treat the judge flippantly. On the contrary, you would address him as, "Your honor." After all, he's the man that's going to make the decision! How much more, then, should you honor the judge of the living and the dead! Note, then, that the points of deceit all have to do with the person and character of Jesus. It's as if you were saying to the judge, "I really don't think you have the power and authority to do anything about this, nor the wisdom." Not a very bright remark to make to a judge.

Loss of reward

So it is that John warns us in verse 8: watch out!

- ✚ He's talking about the reward that we have worked for – that which we have earned. That means he's not talking about salvation.
- ✚ It also means that this loss of reward can happen – if we are careless.
- ✚ Careless? Careless about the essentials of the faith – who do you say that Jesus is?
If you're going skydiving, it's annoying to forget your watch. But I'd be really careful to pack both parachutes.

Practical Warning

Iraeneus repeats a story he had from Polycarp about John: It seems that John knew such a heretic, one Cerinthus. It happened that John was about to enter a public bath house (no central plumbing in those days) when he was told that Cerinthus was inside. John refused to go in – allowing that he didn't want to be there when the roof caved in. How, then, should we deal with such a situation?

Watch out!

The first essential is vigilance. How do we stay centered in the will of God? The steps are well known, but worth repeating:

- ✚ First, take no one's word for it – study the Scripture yourself. There will be some parts you don't understand. There will be some in which you will draw the wrong conclusion. But those are bare spots in the paint of a solidly built house.
- ✚ Listen to sound teaching – and not just from one teacher. Read those who have been called home; read those who write now; listen to those who teach now. Do not listen in blind acceptance, but compare it to your own understanding of the Scripture. I have often been challenged on my statements in class, and on occasion have changed my opinion because of it. You do your teacher no favors by sponging; scrubbing is what makes things clean.
- ✚ Listen to the Holy Spirit – which means an active life of daily prayer. He will keep you from error, and show you the way.

Taken together, these three will be the compass you need in the course of life.

Do not support the deceivers

"Sometimes," remarked Calvin Coolidge, "being open minded is just being too lazy to make up your mind." Why should you shun the deceivers?

- ✚ If you don't, you give public approval to their deceptions – and this tends to help them deceive others.
- ✚ Let's understand who these people are: Antichrists. They may appear pious enough, but they are those who are actively opposed to Christ. Why would you want to help Satan?
- ✚ If you will not shun them, what motivation do they have to repent? You do them no favors that way.

"Not mine to argue"

Note that you are not called to argue with these people. In fact, if you shun them, you won't have the chance. There are many reasons for shunning rather than arguing; here are two:

- ✚ First, you might not be capable of arguing with them. Why risk it?
- ✚ Next, suppose you are mistaken. If they are true Christians, they will seek to resolve the problem in love, to preserve the unity of the church. If they are "the only real Christians," you'll soon find out. Either way, you will avoid petty dissension and save this technique for its important use.

One last reminder: this is a particular case. You will see it. Conduct your disagreements in love; shun only those who are the deceivers and Antichrists.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern - 3 John

William Shakespeare has left a rich heritage to those who speak the English language. It has only been in my lifetime that this 17th century playwright has been downgraded to “Dead White European Male.” So rich is this legacy that a playwright of the 20th century could seize upon two of the most obscure characters in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and make them the title character of his play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. Their very obscurity was the chief literary device.

We meet in this small letter two such characters as well: Gaius and Diotrophes. Nothing is known of them outside this letter. But we can see enough of their character in fourteen verses to gain some insight.

The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth. Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers. For I was very glad when brethren came and testified to your truth, *that is*, how you are walking in truth. I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth. Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially *when they are* strangers; and they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth. I wrote something to the church; but Diotrophes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire *to do so* and puts *them* out of the church. Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God. Demetrius has received a *good* testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself; and we add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true. I had many things to write to you, but I am not willing to write *them* to you with pen and ink; but I hope to see you shortly, and we will speak face to face. (1:15) Peace *be* to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.

(3Jn 1:1-14 NASB)

A Leader’s Prayer

There is a myth in modern Christianity. It goes like this: those who are leaders in the church – the “real” Christians – have some magic formula for their prayers that makes them much more effective. I doubt this. Perhaps the formula is found in their lives, not in their words. Why? Look at John’s prayer for his friend Gaius:

- ✚ First, he asks for his physical well-being (“enjoy good health.”) God often uses our physical suffering for our spiritual good – but I will thank all of you to pray (as John does here) for exactly the opposite.
- ✚ Next, he asks for his worldly well being (“things may go well.”) Sometimes we think it “unspiritual” to pray for success in business. (Try it; it works).
- ✚ Finally, there is the spiritual side. So it is that John prays for the entire person: body, worldly works and spirit.

No greater joy

John tells Gaius that he has “no greater joy” than seeing his students succeed in the faith. In so saying, he gives us the truth about real teachers.

- ✦ First, the teacher is measured by the success of his students. (I don't want to repeat the point too often – one of mine is Don, at the state mental hospital).
- ✦ Next, because this teaching is for spiritual life (as opposed, say, to calculus), the teacher's joy is increased in that he sees his students imitating him – as he imitates Christ.
- ✦ But please note: It's "walking" in the truth, not just repeating it. No matter how brilliantly phrased the lesson might be, if you're not walking it, the teacher was wasting his breath.

One Approved

John commends Gaius for being "faithful" in what he is doing for the brothers. In this we learn two lessons:

- ✦ First, we learn that what we do for "the brothers" (probably itinerant preachers) is not credited based on who they are – but on the one for whom you do it. If for Christ, then great is your reward. (Even the least of the brothers).
- ✦ Next, we can see that the good works of Gaius are spreading and reproducing in the usual manner of the kingdom – the brothers cannot repay him, so they pass the blessing on to others. Who knows where this can lead?

The sake of the name

Modern Christians – perhaps most Christians – have a little problem with this.

In the city of Los Angeles, the Roman Catholic church has recently erected a new cathedral to be the seat of Cardinal Mahoney. It is, by all accounts, a magnificent building, built with the finest materials to a striking design. Such a cathedral is by no means rare; tourists to Europe flock to them (seen Notre Dame?) Also common is the criticism; it is known as "Taj Mahoney." The argument is made that the money could have been better spent on the poor – of whom we have no shortage.

It is an old argument – dating back to the Apostles, in fact. Remember the woman who poured the perfume on Jesus' feet?²⁶ The worldly do not understand an act of devotion – it is extravagance to them, with no practical use. In fact, its only use is to bring glory to God. It is solely to honor and glorify the name of Christ. Consider too that what Gaius did had no practical benefit to his local church. It went entirely for the glory of the Name.

Is this wrong? I submit not. Indeed, I would argue that we do this far too little. If we as Christians devoted ourselves to the glory of the name of Christ, how many more would come to know him as Lord and Savior? If your friends know that you hold the name of Christ in the highest esteem, and build your life around it – even to the point of extravagance – what would that tell them? What would that do for Christian evangelism?

Consider a poor man's parallel. I occasionally bring flowers to my wife. Sometimes for a particular occasion; often for no such thing, other than the fact that I love her. What do you conclude from that behavior? Is it not something like, "John must really love that woman." (Indeed, it is so – he really does.)

²⁶ John 12:1-8

Work together for the truth

It is the name of Christ that unites us. Indeed, we all proclaim ourselves to be “Christians” – including some who really aren’t (e.g., Mormons). I have far more in common (in the eternal point of view) with a devout Catholic than I do with a lukewarm member of my own church.

Often we see others doing evangelistic work, we praise it – and then say that we have no ability to do it. We may not be able to do it – but we can share in it. I share in the evangelism of the Morse family in Southeast Asia – even though I’ve never been there. How? Because they and I are united in the Name, and I contribute to their upkeep. (Put your money where your mouth is).

In the first century, this was expressed in hospitality. What Gaius did here was not uncommon; indeed, it was the common way to travel. No doubt he sent the brothers on their way with such additional items as they might need. In such simple things we can share in the work of the great names of the faith.

One disapproved

It is sad that Diotrophes is mentioned only here. For a man who wanted to be a big shot, he comes pictured to us as an instance of the old saying: “Nothing is ever a total loss. It can always be used as a bad example.”

What’s the problem?

Diotrophes and his like are still with us. See if you can recognize any of the following behaviors in the church:

- ✚ *Rejecting the truth.* Some of us are so enamored with our own abilities that we give God a little help in rewriting the Bible. God certainly didn’t mean what he said, so I’ll interpret it for him. Here Diotrophes thought his version much better than that of the Apostle.
- ✚ *Gossip.* Undoubtedly given in the form of a stern (and very public) warning to the congregation. Evidently Diotrophes was a prominent man in the church, and everyone got the benefit of his opinions. Frequently.
- ✚ *Rejecting the unity of the church.* By refusing hospitality to itinerant brothers – an act which the world of that time would have considered very insulting – Diotrophes makes it clear that he defines who is in, or out, of the church. (May I suggest that you let Christ decide this?)
- ✚ *Misuse of authority.* To be able to do these things, Diotrophes must have had some authority. Perhaps it was his wealth; perhaps he was an elder – we do not know. But the misuse of authority tends to divide the church. It’s one of the signs of misuse.

Why?

We sometimes wonder why people would do such a thing. After all, the motto of the church today is “get along, go along.” We avoid church arguments by not insisting too much on sound doctrine. Why would anyone want to abuse his authority in this way?

- ✦ *Envy.* Sometimes we recognize a real Christian, and we know we just can't measure up. So we try to pull him down.²⁷
- ✦ *The Big Frog.* Sometimes we enjoy being the big frog in the small puddle. One way to keep that enjoyment is to see to it that the puddle remains small. This is not what God wants.
- ✦ *Blossoms, not fruit.* The Scripture tells us that "by their fruit you will know them." Sometimes we see blossoms and mistake them for fruit – a brilliant sermon, a moving concert – but no real spiritual life behind them.
- ✦ *More complete power.* Diotrophes may have been motivated by the love of power. Many of us make the mistake of saying that someone wants more power. Most don't. Most want more complete power. There is something in the ego that rises when we can completely dominate those around us.

John's reaction

John does not react as we might expect. He is, after all, the last living Apostle. You might think he would come down and "straighten that guy out." But that's not what he proposes to do:

- ✦ *Call attention to.* In order that all may learn, he will simply point out the error. The weapons of God are so designed that there is no defense for them in Satan's arsenal.
- ✦ *Gentle restoration.* Should this be successful, John will gently restore him. How do we know he would be so gentle? See how his Master corrected him (Mark 10:35-40).
- ✦ *Imitate what is good.* "Do not overcome evil with evil, but overcome evil with good." It is the basic rule of Christian combat.
- ✦ *By their fruits you will know them.* John now counters the argument, "how can we tell which of you is right?" Look at the fruit in their lives; it is a sure sign.

Our actions

To end this little letter, we need to consider just what this might mean to us. I will submit to you two simple points:

- ✦ The root of the problem is found in pride. It is the sin of Satan; it is the most troublesome sin in the church. Against this we must be ever on our guard. But how do we defeat it?
- ✦ Pride is putting ourselves first. To defeat this, we must put someone else first. But who is so pure that we could safely do that? Only Jesus Christ.

A sincere personal devotion to Jesus Christ drives out pride and secures you in the Rock of Ages. Lord, secure me even more.

²⁷ I cannot resist a story here. Most of you know that we always put the name of another class on our prayer list for the week. The reason is simple: your teacher was convicted of envy. This reminds him each week of just whose church this is.

Warning Shots - Jude

The book of Jude is seldom read these days. Most Christians have never studied it – which is a shame, for it is a warning which we need most urgently today.

Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, To those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ: May mercy and peace and love be multiplied to you. Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe. And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day, just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire. Yet in the same way these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties. But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed. Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. These are the men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam; wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever. *It was* also about these men *that* Enoch, *in* the seventh *generation* from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him." These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their *own* lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of *gaining an* advantage. But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they were saying to you, "In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts." These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. And have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh. Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, *be* glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

(Jud 1:1-25 NASB)

About this book

It's rather short – 25 verses in all, quite easy to read in a few minutes. Scholars have noted a great similarity (almost word for word in some instances) with 2nd Peter. It is generally thought that Peter wrote first, and Jude is emphasizing the same message.

Who was Jude? We know that he is the brother of James (this is the James who wrote the book by that name). From that, we know that he is also the brother of Jesus. He is generally identified as one of the Apostles; in some parts of the Gospel he is identified as “Judas (not Iscariot).” Other than this we know very little of the man.

The mystery continues if we ask to whom he was writing. It's clear that he's writing to a Hebrew church – but which one? We don't know, as the salutation provides no clue. Because of this mystery, the canonicity of this book has been questioned at various times. This is particularly so since Jude quotes things which come from very non-canonical sources. But with the exception of the Protestant Reformation, when it was challenged for a while, it has been accepted since the earliest days until now.

The real question today is this: why does your teacher pick this book to produce a one week study? The answer is simple: Jude and I have the same purpose in writing: to contend for the faith. That faith, “once for all entrusted to the saints,” is now being attacked by men who bear a remarkable resemblance to those described here.

Recognition

During the Second World War, civilians who were charged with spotting enemy air raids were furnished with a deck of cards. The cards had the silhouettes of various enemy aircraft, along with other information useful for identification. This way, the spotters did not need to get a clear view of the aircraft to know what it was – the clues were enough.

Jude starts by giving us the same help here:

- ✚ These are Godless men. Isn't that a little surprising, since they're in the church? Not really. If my ego is stroked enough by being a big shot in the church, fraud is easy to commit.
- ✚ They change grace into license. One key error that is a clue to such men is that they presume upon the grace of God. They sin with the attitude that God will forgive them; after all, it's his hobby.
- ✚ Most important: they deny Jesus Christ as Sovereign and Lord. Sovereign refers to Christ's position; Lord to his power over their lives. So we would be looking for those who do not honor Christ as head of the church – nor obey his commands in their daily lives.

What will God do about it

Jude stops with those three points and gives us some examples of exactly what God has in store for such people. He cites the history the Hebrews would know to show just how severely God will deal with such people. This, therefore, is a reminder – but what a reminder:

- ✚ Remember the people coming out of Egypt by God's might? They saw miracle after miracle – and exactly two of them made it to the promised land. The rest died in the desert. God has always been willing to pare down his people to a remnant who are faithful.

- ✚ Angels – Jude (quoting non-canonical books) reminds them that even angels have been imprisoned by God for their rebellion. No power in heaven or on earth can stop God’s wrath.
- ✚ Finally – a very relevant example today – he reminds us of Sodom and Gomorrah. Let us be quite explicit: they were the homosexual heavens of their day, as San Francisco is ours. They were utterly destroyed.

Further identification

Now that Jude has thoroughly alarmed us (we’re not used to hellfire and brimstone anymore, are we?) he continues to define our opponents:

- ✚ They will be those who will pollute their own bodies. Jude knows, as we should, that sex is reserved for marriage. Anything else assaults your own body. How? If you have a prostitute, she becomes one flesh with you. In our own time we have seen the spread of diseases like AIDS. Isn’t it interesting that no one suggests that chastity would be of any assistance? Does the church really stand up for Christian marriage? If you think it does, tell me what it does about divorce?
- ✚ These men reject authority. If this is not familiar to you, please – open your eyes. I live next to a high school. It is a “magnet school” attracting the best and brightest from all of Orange County. It’s also a school whose student have mastered the art of giving obscene gestures to anyone who gets in their way.
- ✚ Interestingly, they “slander celestial beings.” The closest equivalent I could make to that today would be those who think that Jesus Christ is simply an obscenity.

Comparison to Old Testament characters

Jude knows that it’s difficult for us to remember a laundry list of faults, so he sticks in a list of similar people, familiar to us from the Old Testament. We need to do a bit of digging to discover what he means.

- ✚ Cain, we remember, murdered his brother Abel – and justified himself with the question, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Here’s something to look out for. Cain’s problem was that his own evil was not acceptable to God – while his brother’s offering was accepted. Do you see envy and jealousy here? Look further and you will see this: God warned Cain. He had but to turn from his wickedness and he would have been accepted.
- ✚ Balaam – scattered across Numbers – is a fine example. He is a prophet of God – but he also dabbles in other gods and goddesses, and he likes divination and sorcery. More to the point – he does this for money. He led the Israelites to sexual orgies at some temples. He was a “prophet for hire” – telling you what you wanted to hear. Joshua eventually had him executed for sorcery. But here you see the example of the “shepherds who feed themselves” – church leaders serving themselves.
- ✚ Korah is another example. Korah and his followers decided to help God out. They knew they were as good as Aaron, so they went to offer incense and prayer to God at the Tabernacle. They placed their reason over God’s command. God had Moses separate them out – and then had the earth swallow them. Do we know anyone today who places human reason above God’s word?

Whose problem is this?

It comes to mind – after all, most of us are not church leaders. So Jude makes it personal:

- ✚ These men are “blemishes” on our potluck church dinners. As a teenage girl works so hard to rid herself of pimples, so we should work to rid ourselves of these men.

- ✚ The best test of such men is still the same: much sound, much fury – but no fruit for the Lord.
- ✚ They make a great show of being righteous, but we still must look at their fruits.

To make this urgent for us, Jude reminds us that there is the 2nd Coming of our Lord. We seldom hear much of this these days. We need to remember that our Lord is coming to judge the living and the dead. For the sake of our own salvation, we need to be watching out for these people. In the context of the 2nd Coming, Jude gives us warning to watch out for these people:

- ✚ *Grumblers.* Every church seems to have them, but we should take particular care that we don't join them.
- ✚ *Faultfinders.* Of course, we only do that to point out someone else's sin, right?
- ✚ *Following their own evil desires.* Have you ever known a Christian who put their desires above their love for Christ?
- ✚ *Boasting.* Some of us are so proud of just how humble we truly are.
- ✚ *Flattery.* This one interests me. It is as if they assume that all others in the church are like they are, frauds. When fraud meets fraud in public, flattery is the result.
Do such things affect us in our church? I would think so.

What to do about it

This is all well and good as warning – but then what? What's the average Christian to do?

First, remember that you were warned that such men would appear. It was prophesied. So you should expect it. This is one reason you should stay in the church congregation where God has placed you – all the other congregations have this problem too. Don't be surprised when you find it. What kind of people were prophesied?

- ✚ Scoffers, particularly those who doubt the return of the Lord.
- ✚ Those who follow only their natural instinct. Have you ever heard, "Something so wonderful and beautiful as sex just can't be wrong, I know God would approve?"
- ✚ Most importantly, such people do not have the Holy Spirit. Remember the fruit of the Spirit? If it's not there, you know you've found one.

Next, we need to take that we do not slip into the same things. We need to be building ourselves up. Jude gives us these specifics:

- ✚ Faith – if we must stand one against the world, this is essential.
- ✚ Prayer – those who are self centered have no time for this. If you are a true Christian, you make time for it.
- ✚ Keep in God's love. Do you see the love of God flowing out from your hands?
- ✚ Surprisingly, you do all this while you *wait* – for his return.

Finally, having been forewarned, having built ourselves up in the faith, we must exercise church discipline when we can, in the love of God.

- ✚ First, we are to be merciful to those who doubt. For those who are new in the faith, nothing really helps like having wise counsel. This is an act of mercy.
- ✚ Next, we are to exercise church discipline. Remember what we are doing here: we are to "snatch others from the fire and save them." Does this mean that we should consider those lost in sin as headed for hell? Yes. Even in a church that never mentions that word and uses the euphemism "Christ-less eternity." (The Bible mentions hell fire; we mention home sickness.)

✚ Finally, we are to show mercy mixed with fear. We must always remember that hell is real – so we should do everything we can to keep ourselves and our brothers and sisters from it.