

# **STUDIES IN JOHN'S LETTERS**

BY GLENN PEASE

## **CONTENTS**

### **I JOHN**

- 1. THE VOICE OF EXPERIENCE Based on I John 1:1-2**
- 2. FELLOWSHIP IS FUNDAMENTAL Based on I John 1:3**
- 3. GOD IS LIGHT Based on I John 1:5**
- 4. TRUTH IN ACTION Based on I John 1:6**
- 5. WALKING IN THE LIGHT Based on I John 1:7**
- 6. CHRISTIAN CONFESSION Based on I John 1:8-9**
- 7. PERFECTION Based on I John 2:1**
- 8. WE HAVE A LAWYER Based on I John 2:1b**
- 9. BLESSED ASSURANCE Based on I John 2:3**
- 10. HATRED HIT HARD Based on I John 2:7f**
- 11. LOVE'S LIMITATIONS Based on I John 2:15-17**
- 12. WORDS OF WARNING Based on I John 2:18f**
- 13. SATANIC SEPARATISM Based on I John 2:19f**
- 14. THE WINNING WIND Based on I John 2:20**
- 15. CHILDREN OF GOD Based on I John 3:1-2**
- 16. GOD IS LOVE Based on I John 4:7-12**
- 17. THE CONQUEST OF THE WORLD Based on I John 5:4**
- 18. PROFOUND SIMPLICITY Based on I John 5:7**

### **II JOHN**

- 1. THE MYSTERY WOMAN**
- 2. A LETTER TO A LADY**

### **III JOHN**

- 1. THE FEELING FINE Based on III John 1-8**

## **I JOHN**

### **1. THE VOICE OF EXPERIENCE Based on I John 1:1-2**

**James Thurber tells the fable of the bear that use to go on a spree of drunkenness, and come home at night and break up the furniture, and frightening the children and drive his wife to tears. One day he reformed and decided to never drink again, and from then on he would come home and demonstrate how fresh and vigorous his new way of life made him feel by doing gymnastic exercises in the living room. In so doing, however, he broke the furniture, frightened the children, and drove his wife to tears. Thurber is pointing out that one extreme is no better than another in its practical outcome in life. One has little to boast about who has escaped falling flat on his face by bending over so far backward he falls on his head. It is the man who keeps his balance, and falls neither way that represents the Christian ideal. Neither the rider who falls off the horse on the left or the right side is to be compared with the man who stays in the saddle.**

**Albert Schweitzer said, "No man ever gets a great idea without carrying it too far." He illustrates his statement as he makes it, for he certainly went too far when he said, "No man," for Jesus as a man showed perfect balance. What he said, however, is a valid judgment on most men and movements. The Apostle John in writing this first Epistle is combating a movement that has gone to an extreme and has become a dangerous heresy. The Gnostics, as they were called, were not trying to destroy Christianity, but were trying to make it an intellectually respectable philosophy that would appeal to the contemporary mind.**

**They were doing the same thing that we see being done in our**

day. There are men and movements within the framework of modern Christianity who are saying we need to cleanse the church of old ideas, and make its message relevant to the contemporary mind. Such things as the virgin birth, miracles, and the literal resurrection of Christ are not acceptable to many modern minds, and so they are saying we need to cut them off as branches that will bare no more fruit.

The Gnostics in John's day had the same idea, and there have always been men in movements to promote this way of thinking. That is why you notice this Epistle is not addressed to anyone in particular. It is called a Catholic Epistle, which means, it is a universal Epistle. It is God's perpetual answer to all believers in all generations who are being thrust into turmoil and confusion by the muddled thinking and speculation of men. God gave the church this teaching and guidance through the Apostle John, who was one of the first chosen by Christ; who was uniquely loved by Christ, and who lived longest in the service of Christ. When we listen to John we listen to the voice of experience, for no man who has ever lived has had, either in quantity or quality, a greater experience with Christ. John does not answer the heretics on the level of debate and theory, but on the level of experience.

The Gnostics were very spiritual people. In fact they fit into the category of those who are so heavenly minded they are no earthly good. The Gnostics were so spiritual, so fanatically spiritual that they became anti-Christ, for Christianity is based on the fact that Jesus, the very Son of God, did not remain Spirit, but came in human flesh. The Gnostics were too spiritual to accept this. They said that God was spiritual, but they wrongly concluded that all that is not spirit is evil. They said flesh is evil, and all that is material is evil, and, therefore, the Son of God could never become a real man. He only appeared as a man. He was like a phantom. He seemed to be a man, but was really not. They denied the incarnation, and that

**is why John is so emphatic when he says, "Every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God."**

**The Gnostics had such a high view of the spirituality of Christ that they actually became anti-Christ. They refused to balance their high view with the belief in the incarnation, and so even though believing Jesus to be divine, they were not Christians, but enemies of the church. They illustrate that half the truth can be a whole lie. Half truths are even more dangerous than lies, for they are often so plausible. They deceive so many more people. Never be content to ask is it true of a teaching, but go on to ask is this the whole truth. Heresy is almost always based on half truths.**

**The Gnostics proved that even the best things of life, and God's greatest truths can become curses if not kept in balance. The reason the Bible is so full of paradoxes is to keep us ever mindful of the need for balance. Fishing nets are only of value when they have both lead and cork; the heavy and the light. If all the net had was cork, it would float on the surface and catch no fish. If all it had was lead, it would sink to the bottom and catch no fish. But with cork and lead to make it both sink and float, it accomplishes its purpose and catches fish. The Christian who is weighted down with the duties of the Christian life is too gloomy to be an effective fisher of men. The Christian who is super-spiritual, and floating on cloud nine, is also too irrelevant to attract the fish. The effective Christian life is the balance life.**

**The Apostle John is the great Apostle of balance. He was a profound theologian, and also a man of great personal piety. He was deeply profound and highly practical. Bernard Ramm wrote, "How to put together theology and spiritual life has been one of the main concerns of my life. Theology ought to lead to the depths of spiritual experience. It certainly did with Paul. Spiritual experiences ought to create a great hunger in the soul for the truth of God. But how**

**fractured we are! Theologians are frequently spiritually snobbish or over-sophisticated. And men who emphasize the spiritual life can be so theologically naive and Biblically illiterate. Great theology and great spiritual experiences ought to go hand in hand.**

**The Gnostics were spiritual, but very poor theologians. Those who stress the deity of Christ and deny His humanity fall on their face, and those who stress the humanity of Christ and deny His deity fall on their head. The Christian is committed to stand with John with his unwavering balance based on historical revelation and personal experience with the God-Man, Jesus Christ. Let us listen to his authentic and authoritative voice first of all concerning-**

## **I. THE HISTORICAL REVELATION verse 1.**

**John here, as in his Gospel, begins at the beginning. The source of the Christian faith goes back beyond history into the realm of eternity where Christ was eternally before the beginning. John only goes back to the beginning, for that is as far back as creatures of time can go. John is conveying to us the fact that Jesus was from the beginning. He did not begin then, but was then. All else and all others have entered the scene later, but he was the Alpha-the first to be on the stage for the drama of history.**

**It is as if I said, Henry Ford was from the beginning of the Ford Motor Company. This tells us nothing about what was before that except that Henry Ford was in existence before the beginning of the Ford Motor Company. He did not begin at the beginning of his company. He only began his role as founder and creator of the company at that point. Likewise, Jesus did not begin at the beginning, but already was, for He was eternally with the Father before the beginning. Jesus did begin at this point, however, as the founder and creator of the universe. The eternal Christ did have a beginning as Creator just as He had a beginning as a child, and as a**

**sacrifice for sin, and as a resurrected Lord and interceding high priest at the right hand of the Father. The eternal Christ has a variety of beginnings in various roles, because He left the realm of timelessness and entered the realm of history.**

**John is making clear that the foundation of the Christian faith is indeed the foundation. It is not secondary in any sense, but goes right back to the very beginning of time and history. Whatever is really new is not really true, for He who is the truth was from the beginning. How could we trust our eternal future to anyone that did not have an eternal past? There is no end to the newness of the experiences we have in Christ, and new are His mercies each morning, but all that is new is our personal experience of the eternal grace of Christ. In other words, all we experience in time has its origin in eternity. The Gnostics would not object to this, but John then leaps immediately from the beginning right into the present historical setting of his day and says that we have heard and seen and even handled with our hands this one who was from the beginning. He not only made the stage of history, but He came on the stage to play a role Himself-the role of redeemer.**

**Now if John would have kept it more general he still would not have been offensive to the Gnostics, but when he talks about actually handling Christ with his hands he has gone too far for them. John is saying that the eternal Christ actually entered history and was manifested in human flesh. Westcott said, "A religion that is to move the world must be historical." The world has had more than enough philosophic speculation about God and religion. If speculation could save the world, we would have been in paradise long ago, but only a real, literal, actual historical Savior can really, literally, actually, historically save us, and this we find only in Jesus Christ. The God of eternity and the God-Man of history.**

**Often as Christians we speak of God being seen in His handiwork**

of nature, but let us never forget that the Bible stresses far above this the fact that God is a God of history. All the great acts of God and revelations of God have been historical, and His final, fairest, and fullest revelation was in the Incarnation when God became man. This is so basic that to doubt it or deny it is to reject the Christian revelation as a whole. John goes even further than emphasizing that Jesus became man; he also stresses-

## **II. PERSONAL EXPERIENCE.**

Jung once said, "The best of truths is of no use...unless it has become the individuals most personal inner experience." Even truth is not an end in itself. Even the Bible is not an end in itself. John in all of his writing makes it plain that the eternal Christ not only became the historical Christ, but that he must become the experienced Christ to fulfill his purpose and our salvation. It is not enough to know Jesus as eternal and historical if one does not know Him as personal.

John says we have personal contact with Christ. We knew Him through the avenue of our senses, and we bear witness of Him. John is an eyewitness conveying his experience to those who were not. Almost everything we know about any of the great personalities of the past is known on the same basis as this: Personal testimony by contemporaries. He who would doubt the historicity of Christ would on the same grounds have to doubt all that is written about Plato, Socrates, and all the Ceasars, as well as all the kings and queens, philosophers and statesmen, and poets of the past. The very knowledge of their existence is based on the same evidence that we have concerning Christ.

John is no arm chair speculator, for he is an eye witness contemporary of Christ. He was writing this 50 to 60 years after the cross, but he makes it clear that Christ was still his contemporary.

**In verse 3 he talks about present fellowship with the Father and the Son that he and all that believe can have. His experience with Christ is not a mere matter of memory, but a matter of continuous day by day fellowship. This is the goal for every believer. This is the ultimate in Christian happiness, for when we have come to this experience, John says then our joy will be complete.**

**The evidence of the past is effective in getting one on the road to belief, but the personal encounter with the present Christ is essential to get us to the destination of certainty and commitment. John knew the dangers that Christians faced in his day because of confused thinking in theology. He knew that the anti-christs were already come, and that believers would be in danger of being tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. That is why he gives this strong testimony as to the historical revelation and personal experience of the eternal Christ. He knows a Christian needs to have a solid and sure anchor when the storm hits. He knows a believer who is not in a state of fellowship with Christ and fellow believers day by day is in dangerous waters.**

**The same holds true for our day. It appears that there are rough waters ahead for faithful believers. Doctrines unchallenged for centuries are being rejected by leaders of the church. Men are reviving the Gnostic plan to update Christianity so it fits the thinking of our day. Subtle error is going to touch everyone of us, but if we take advantage of the light we have and walk in it, we need not fear the darkness.**

**Those men who became living torches in the garden of Nero, and those women flung to wild beasts in the amphitheater were not dying for any theory, or system, or vague hope. They were dying because they had encountered the eternal Christ in their own personal experience. James Stewart wrote, "Our religion is going to make absolutely no impact whatever on the world....is going to leave**



**not the faintest impression on the paganism around, unless it is our own assured possession." We know Jesus is eternal by revelation, and we know He is historical by the witness of others, but we can only know Him as personal and contemporary by experience. It is time that we begin to take seriously our need for greater fellowship with the living Christ, and for one another in Christ.**

**The American Commentary says on these first two verses, "In the verses before us, we see a deep and vivid experience attempting to put itself in sentences. The life in Christ has become life in John, and he wants to make such a declaration, such a testimony of it as will lift up all his readers to the same plane of divine experience." Personal experience is vital both for enjoying the Christian life, and for sharing it with others. One woman said, "You can no more tell what you don't know than you can come back from where you ain't been."**

**What you have experienced is a reality that no one can deny. The Pharisees said to the man who had been made to see by Jesus, "We know that this man is a sinner." He answered in John 9:25, "Whether he is a sinner, I do not know: one thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see." The experience did not prove Jesus was the Son of God, nor did it prove He was not a sinner, but the experience convinced the man that he had encountered the supernatural, and no one could refute that, or deny the reality of his experience.**

**There's no way to escape the paradox of experience. It is both essential and inadequate. Josiah Royce wrote in The Source Of Religious Insight, "Without intense and intimate personal feelings, you never learn any valuable truths whatever about life, about its ideals, or about its problems; but, on the other hand, what you know only through your feelings is, like the foam of the sea, unstable-like the passing hour, doomed to pass away." We need the objective**

**theology as a source of our authority, and the subjective experience as the source of our motivation.**

**Ruth Paxson in her classic *Life On The Highest Plane* writes, "The grave danger of fixing one's eyes upon an experience, however exalted and blessed, instead upon Him who bestowed it was expressed very tellingly by Spurgeon when he said,**

**I looked at Christ  
And the dove of peace flew into my heart;  
I looked at the dove of peace-  
And it flew away.**

**Take your eyes off Jesus and you can have much religious experience, but it is not related to any objective revelation and thus it is unstable, and its value uncertain."**

**The craving for experience is both wise and foolish. During war time young men fear they will die and miss out on much of life's experience, and so they rush headlong into all sorts of immoral behavior in order to experience all of life before they die. This war mentality is becoming a standard philosophy for our world. You only go around once so get all you can out of it, and live with gusto. This is the modern version of, let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.**

**An old sea captain told of how an inexperienced youth went to a hiring hall to get a job as a seaman. The hiring agent asked, "Have you ever gone around the Horn?" Well aware that the shipping companies preferred seasoned sailors who had made a trip or two around Cape Horn, the young man admitted that he had not made the trip. The agent said, "Follow me," and then led him into the next room. A horn of a steer was in the middle of the floor. The agent said, "Now just walk slowly around that horn." The startled would be sailor did as he was ordered. "You have now gone around the horn and I can get you a job on a ship going to India." The**

youth had been made a sailor in name only. He had the name, but not the experience.

There is a great deal of difference between calling yourself a Christian and being a Christian by the experience of yielding your life to Jesus Christ, and trusting Him as your Savior. Many take the name, but do not have the experience. It is the experience that saves and not the label. John had personal experience with Jesus, and his whole letter is urging all of us to enter into personal experiences with the Living Christ that we might like Him be able to speak with the voice of experience.

## **2. FELLOWSHIP IS FUNDAMENTAL Based on I John 1:3**

No one can doubt that this is an age of ecumenicity. Everybody is talking about getting together with someone else for dialogue or merger. Even those who are opposed to the ecumenical movement are merging and uniting. In other words, wherever you are today you are involved in a complex world where everybody is trying to make it more simple. The Apostle John gives us some guidance by teaching about fellowship. This will help us to know what to do in all relationships of life. If we know what Christian fellowship really is, we will be able to determine which relationships in life are consistent with fellowship with the Father and Son. Verse 3 supplies us with these three things: 1. The essence of fellowship; 2. The essential of Christian fellowship; 3. The extent of Christian fellowship. We will consider them in that order.

### **I. THE ESSENCE OF FELLOWSHIP.**

What does the word fellowship mean apart from any Christian content? This word did not just fall out of the sky into the Bible, nor

**did John make it up, nor did God give it to him as a new word. It was a Greek word in wide usage long before it became a part of the Bible. Koinonia is the Greek word. It was used to refer to many relationships by the Greeks in which people shared a common bond. Business partners, trade guilds, and burial societies were all called fellowships in the first century. Those who had a common social relationship had fellowship, and those who shared a belief in a common god had religious fellowship.**

**The basic idea is a relationship persons have because of what they hold in common. This meaning is clearly seen in the New Testament. This verse, for example, has that meaning for John. He is saying, we are declaring what we have seen and heard to you, because once you also know it, then we will have a common knowledge and belief. This is the very essence of fellowship. Without something held in common between two persons there is no possibility for fellowship.**

**In all four cases of the use of the word communion in the KJV it is a translation of koinonia-the same word translated 15 times as fellowship. There is no distinction between the two at all in the New Testament. Sometimes we hear, "May the fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all," as if they were two different words, but they are not, for they are identical. Paul says in II Cor. 6:14, "What communion has light with darkness?" In other words, what koinonia, or fellowship, can there be, for what do they have in common? On the other hand, the Lord's Supper is called communion. The meaning is clear, for when we partake of the elements symbolizing the body and blood of Christ, we remember together the common basis of our salvation. What do believer's have in common? They have salvation through the shed blood of Christ on the cross, and, therefore, this most basic and common factor in our lives is called communion, or fellowship.**

## **II. THE ESSENTIAL OF CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP.**

**John says, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you." This is what distinguishes Christian fellowship from all other forms of fellowship. It has one foundation and that is the historical Christ. Nothing else can constitute a basis for Christian fellowship. If we did not have an objective record of what the Apostles saw and heard, we could have no common basis for fellowship. The very reason the Bible is in print is not just to satisfy our curiosity about the past; it is the only way that the revelation of God can be a common factor in the lives of all believers. The Word of God in print makes it available to all men, and thereby increases the basis for fellowship.**

**The Gnostics, whom John was opposing, had just an opposite attitude. They said, keep the truth in the hands of the elite. Do not make it common knowledge, or it will be contaminated. The truth is only for the intellectuals. The vulgar masses are unworthy of it. But John says, I am putting down in writing what we have seen and heard so that anyone can read and believe, and then enter into a common union with us and God. The basis of Christian fellowship is not locked up in a temple vault. It is not confined to any priestly class or body of intellectuals. It is not composed of mystical or magical incantations learned only by the elite. It is found in the form of paper and ink-the most common means of communication in the world. Christian fellowship is based on fact, and not fantasy, fiction, fallacies, or force. That which was seen and heard is recorded, and this objective factual record is the foundation of true Christian fellowship. By this alone the Christian determines what is, and what is not, Christian fellowship.**

**Many other things are held in common and provide a basis for fellowship, but only when this essential factor is involved can it be called Christian fellowship. If Jews and Christians have fellowship**

**around the ten commandments, which they hold in common as the Word of God, it would be true fellowship, but it would not be Christian fellowship, for the essential for that is not in the ten commandments. This means there is two levels of fellowship. There is a level based on anything in common, and then there is the Christian level based on the revelation we have in Christ. This means a Christian and a non-Christian can have fellowship based on common interests, but it is not Christian fellowship. It is not even Christian fellowship when two or more Christians get together to watch a game or share in some common secular interests. It is fellowship, but it is not Christian fellowship.**

**Christians have fellowship with non-Christians in many areas of life. It might be in sports, or music, or culture of all kinds, or hobbies, or clubs, or of a professional nature. Jesus had a great deal of fellowship with unbelievers of all kinds from Publicans to Pharisees. In His manhood He had things in common with each, and He used that common bond to make contacts with all people. This enabled Him to have the opportunity to lead them into a higher fellowship with Himself as Savior and Lord, and not merely as a man and friend.**

**To criticize someone for having Christian fellowship with an unbeliever is folly, for it is impossible to have Christian fellowship with one who does not have Jesus as their Savior as a common bond. To criticize them for having natural fellowship with them is also folly, for any Christian who does not have natural fellowship with unbelievers is not doing God's will as a child of light. There is no way you can be the light of the world and the salt of the earth without some form of fellowship with unbelievers. This does not mean a Christian can participate in anything sinful with unbelievers, but it does mean they can share in common many interests which are legitimate. Jesus sets the example, for He could fellowship with sinners and yet never be defiled by sin.**

**A little boy who was lonely said to his mother, "I wish I was two little puppies so I could play together." That was a natural expression of the desire for fellowship. We have a need to have something in common with someone else. The Christian is to take advantage of this natural desire, and use it for the glory of God by finding a common basis for fellowship with an unbeliever, and then introduce him to what you have in fellowship with Christ.**

**We have seen that the essence of fellowship is the relationship of persons who have something in common. We have seen that the essential of Christian fellowship is the reality of the historical Christ, and one's acceptance of Him as Savior. Now let's consider-**

### **III. THE EXTENT OF CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP.**

**You cannot be a Christian alone. When you enter the kingdom of God you can only do so alone, in the sense that only you can make that decision, but after you enter you become a part of the body of Christ, and are from then on you are not your own, for you belong to Christ. After a person is saved he is in a family where he has many brothers and sisters who share in common with him the same heavenly Father and Savior. John desired to share his experience with Christ that others might enter into this fellowship with him and the other Apostles.**

**Every picture of the church in the New Testament illustrates the concept of fellowship. It is a body with all cells in the body having a common interest in the life and health of that body. It is a building, and all the stones form a common structure. Jesus said I am the Vine and you are the branches. A branch not connected with the Vine will wither and die. Christian fellowship is not a luxury, it is a necessity, for you cannot be a Christian alone. Jesus says the shepherd leaves the 99 to go after the one lost sheep. The 99 can survive temporarily, but if the one is not found and brought back to**

the fold, it will parish.

**William Morris once said, "The lack of fellowship is hell." This is literally so, for those who do not enter the body; the building; the vine or the fold-that is the church of Christ, will not have fellowship with God but be separated in outer darkness forever alone. A Latin proverb says, "One man is no man at all." You cannot have anything in common without someone to have it in common with. As soon as a person trusts in Christ as Saviour they become a part of a vast fellowship of believers from all races where all are equal in Christ. The Gnostics were extremely prejudiced. They felt Christians were contemptible and absurd in treating the riff raff and lower classes as equals, but Christian fellowship is extended to all in Christ. God loves all for whom Christ died and this means all, and so our fellowship goes all the way to what we have in common with God and Christ. We have a common bond with God Himself and so our fellowship extends to the highest heaven and to the ends of the world and to all peoples. Only Christian fellowship leads us to be partners with God, for Jesus, the God-Man, is the common bond between God and man.**

### **3. GOD IS LIGHT Based on I John 1:5**

**Tolstoy wrote a story called "Where Love Is, God Is." It is about an old cobbler named Martin who lived alone. One night as he read the story of Jesus visiting the Pharisee, and the poor welcome he received, he prayed that the Lord would visit him. In his sleep he heard a voice saying, "Tomorrow I shall come."**

**The next day Martin waited all day for his visitor. He saw a poor old man sweeping snow, and he called him in from the cold and gave him some hot tea. He kept looking out the window and the old man**



**asked, "Are you expecting someone?" Martin told him of the voice. Sometime later he saw a shivering mother with her crying baby, and he brought them in and gave them some warm soup and a cloak to shield them from the cold. He told her about the voice as well.**

**It was getting late, and still the Savior had not come. He looked out one last time before closing, and saw an apple woman scolding a boy who had stolen an apple. He rushed out and made peace. He paid for the apple and persuaded the woman to forgive the boy, and they departed with the boy carrying her basket. That night Martin heard the voice again saying, "Martin, Martin, don't you know me?" "Who is it," he asked? "It is I," and he saw the old snow-sweeper. "It is I," and he saw the mother with the baby. "It is I," and he saw the apple woman with the boy. Then they all vanished, and Martin realized that Christ had visited him that day after all, and his heart felt strangely warm.**

**Tolstoy was saying by this story that where love is, God is. The presence of God and the Lord Jesus Christ is directly linked to love. Love is the fruit of the Spirit, and so if the Spirit is present, the first evidence will be love. If God is love, then love is a sign of His presence, and lack of love is a sign of His absence in Spirit. John says in verse 12 that no one has ever seen God. So how can we know if God is present? John says we know God is present because of love. If we love one another that is the evidence that God dwells in us. When you see love, you see God. When you feel love, you feel God's presence. God is present in love, for God is love. Where love is God is. The more we love, the more we experience the presence of God.**

**No wonder the Paul said everything without love is nothing. Even faith and great knowledge, and even sacrifice, are not worth anything without love, for love alone is our link to God, and only in love do we experience the authentic presence of God. Everything we do in worship is much ado about nothing if it does not lead us to**

**love. Therefore, there is not greater good than to gain an understanding of what the Bible is saying in this simple but sublime sentence stated twice in this fourth chapter of I John: "God is love." The implications of these three words are so vast that one message on them is like trying to harvest a million acres of corn with a comb. There is no way to get all of the infinite riches they contain, but we will at least get a taste of what this love is. First lets taste-**

## **I. THE INEXHAUSTIBLE ILLUMINATIONS OF IT.**

**R. A. Torrey, the great evangelist, said this is the greatest sentence ever written, and voices without number in heaven and on earth echo with an amen! Three little words made up of just 9 letters in English, and yet they are saying something that all the words of every language can never fully convey. They are giving us an inexhaustible illumination as to who God is. Read all the books of men, and search the universe, and you will not find a more important truth about God than these three little words that God is love. It is the brightest light we have by which to see who God is. Torrey said if he had to choose one sentence to sum up the entire Bible and its message to man, it would be these three words.**

**D. L. Moody, another great evangelist, felt it was the essence of the biblical revelation as well, and he had it put above the pulpit in the famous Moody Church in Chicago. This is the Gospel in a nutshell. This is why God sent His Son to die for us. This is why Jesus paid it all, and why he left his church here to carry this message into all the world. In this sentence are included all the unsearchable riches of Christ.**

**Love strong as death and stronger,  
Love mightier than the grave,  
Wide as the world and longer  
Than the ocean's wildest wave.**

**This is the love that sought us,  
This is the love that bought us,  
This is the love that brought us  
To gladdest day from saddest night,  
From deepest shame to glory bright.**

**If God was not love, there would be no Gospel. Only love could come up with a solution to the fall of man and the sin problem. Only love would take on the guilt of the sinner and pay the penalty for their freedom.**

**We have examples of this kind of love in history. Schanyl, the great Circassian leader of his people for 30 years revealed the power of love. Bribery was becoming so prevalent in his government that he announced that anyone caught bribing an official would receive 100 lashes. Not long after, his own mother was arrested for bribery. He could not let her go, for this would make a mockery of justice. His law had to be carried out, and so he brought her to the whipping post and the whipping began. At the fifth lash he cried halt. He released his mother. Then he bared his own back and took on himself the remaining 95 lashes. His love met the demand of justice, and set the prisoner free by taking the penalty on himself. This is what Jesus did for all of us, and not just for family and loved ones, but for the whole world of sinners who were enemies of God.**

**God's love is unique, for it is not directed toward those who love him, but even toward those who do not love him. It is of the very essence of his being to love.**

**Can ice cease to be cold, and still be ice?  
Can light cease to shine, and still be light?  
Can fire cease to be hot, and still be fire?  
Can humor cease to be funny, and still be humor?**

**We could go on and on, and the answer is no, for you cannot take away the essence of a thing and still have it. Its essence is what it is, and God is love. Love is not something that God does, it is something that he is. Love touches all that he is and does. Every theological idea and concept we have must include this truth that God is love. If not, you are dealing with some other god than the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible has given us this truth about himself that illuminates all other knowledge about him.**

**Many people who have rejected God have not really done so at all. They have only rejected some imaginary god of human invention and speculation. When people say they do not believe in God you need to find out if the God they do not believe in is love. If not, then you can say you do not believe in the God they do not believe in either. The Christian does not just believe in God, but he believes in the God who is love. All other gods are not God. The gods that people reject should be rejected, for they do not exist, and they are poor images of the real God. Everything you believe about God must be consistent with this revelation that he is love, or you are walking in darkness rather than in the light of his Word. Hold everything up to the light of this truth to see if it fits, and if not you can be sure it is not a part of God's will.**

**Take prejudice for example. You can never make this evil look good in the light of God's love. All the arguments about differences in races and their abilities mean nothing, for no argument for being unloving towards people can resist being shattered by the laser beam of the light from the truth that God is love. If you want to be unloving toward anyone, you have to do it in the dark, for the light will not support you. God not only loves his enemies, he commands us to love ours, and thereby demonstrate that we are his children. It is a powerful proof that God is present in our lives when we can care about those who have no care for us, and who would not be loved, but hated, by the natural man.**

**Everyone can love family, friends, nation, and numerous other values and relationships. This ability to love anyone or anything is part of what it means to be made in the image of God, who is love. Even lost men love, for they are still a reflection of God's image. The worst of men still have some trace of the Creator, and they can love on some level. But John makes the radical statement in v. 7 that everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. This can be interpreted by the universalistic conviction that absolutely everybody is born of God, for everyone loves. This has been perverted to teach that since everyone does love to some degree, that all will be saved in the end, and none will be lost.**

**This is obviously not what John is telling us. He is giving Christians a simple way of identifying a child of God. Here is the birth mark that means you are in the family of God. The mark of the believer is love. It is love for God; love for the family of God, love for those still lost and not in the family; love for the needy of the world; love for one's enemies who hate all these other loves, and then all of the natural loves shared by all people. We are talking about an all pervasive love that has no cut off point, but is universal. Christians often fall short of this kind of love, but when they do they are not being Christian at that point. If one's love does not rise above the natural love of the world, one should examine his life to see if he really loves God, for he is not letting the God he loves be present in his life and attitudes. This is a test of how much we love God. If we do not have his love in us, we do not love him very much. It is only when we love like God loves that we are born of God.**

**It is not theology that makes us Christians. You can know enough to defend the orthodox teachings of the Bible, but if you are unloving you are not an asset to the kingdom of God. People don't care how much you know. They want to know how much you care. Jesus drew people to himself for a lot of reasons, but the primary one was because they knew he cared. He had bread for their stomachs, and**

**truth for their minds, but they knew that above all else he had love for their hearts. He was living proof that God is love. He was God's visible expression of love.**

**Anyone who claims to be a child of God had better exhibit the key family trait that we see in our elder brother Jesus. That is our birth certificate. It is our proof that we are born of God. You cannot say you are born of God if you do not have the key characteristic of God, which is love. How can anyone say they are born of the Spirit if they do not have the first fruit of the Spirit, which is love? An apple tree that never has any apples is an apple tree in name only. A pear tree that never has any pears is a pear tree in name only. And a Christian without love is a Christian in name only.**

**John's point is that what God is the Christian is to be. God is light, and so the Christian is to walk in the light. God is righteous, and so the Christian is to walk in righteousness. God is love, and so the Christian is to walk in love. Love is to infiltrate and dominate every aspect of our lives until we become Godlike. Clement of Alexandria said many centuries ago that the Christian is one who practices being God. That is a radical way of saying it, but it is the goal. The love of God can only be seen in us when we practice being God, and being channels of his love to others. We are not being God, but we are being Godlike, and Christlike, and this means their love is seen in and through us. This is like trying to channel the flow of Niagara Falls through a straw. Only a fraction can get through, but it can be enough to change the world that we touch.**

**We are never nearer God than when we love, and we are never nearer to being what he wants us to be than when we love. Love comes from God, and love leads to God. God's goal is to complete the circle by making us both the objects of his love, and the source of love for others. We are to be both receivers and transmitters of love. Love can never be content until it is flowing out to others. When we**

are not being loving we are like the parked car, or the light that is turned off, or the heater unplugged. We are not functioning for the purpose for which we are born. Martin Luther concluded that the greatest sin in our lives is simply not being loving. This is especially true when we are aware of how much God has loved, and does love us.

We can never exhaust the love of God, for it illuminates every other attribute of God. Love is eternal. Love is infinite. Love is holy. Love is omnipotent. Love is omnipresent. Love is inexhaustible in its illuminations. We can never exhaust it for all eternity, and so we will be able to grow in our knowledge of God forever. But we can know all we need to know to let this truth fill us with the assurance and security so that we can say with Whittier,

I know not what the future hath  
Of marvel of surprise,  
Assured alone that life and death  
His mercy underlies.

I know not where His islands lift  
Their fronded palms in air;  
I only know I cannot drift  
Beyond His love and care.

The second thing we want to taste concerning the truth that God is love is-

## **II. THE INCREDIBLE IMPLICATIONS OF IT.**

The implications of these three little words are so vast they are beyond our comprehension, for they are infinite, and they influence, not only everything we can know, but even those secret things that belong to God alone that we can't know. One of the really radical

**implications of this reality that God is love is that his being love is why the problems of life, and the evils of the world, are not quickly solved and eliminated. If God was not love, but sheer power without obligation to love, the problem of evil could be solved in seconds. If God was a tyrant whose will was done without regard for the freedom of other wills, there would be no problems in the first place, and any problem that could begin would be nipped in the bud instantly.**

**Sometimes we pray as if God is not love, but just such a tyrant. We assume that being Almighty he can do whatever we feel he ought to do, or at least what he wants to do. We completely forget the enormous limitations that love puts on one's choices. A tyrant whose motto is might is right has only the limitations that are on his power. But to the extent of his power he can do anything he chooses. He can execute millions of innocent people if he wishes. He can rob and plunder, and take from other nations, if he has the power to do so. He is free to the extent of his power.**

**Love has no such liberty. Love is bound to respect the rights of others, and love is obligated to act justly and fairly. Love must even go beyond justice to show mercy, for love keeps the law, but does not stop there. It seeks to find a way to forgive and be reconciled with the offender. You see, love really puts a crimp in your style if you are all-powerful, and expect to get your will done by sheer power. Someone said, and I think it was everybody who ever thought about God's relationship to evil,**

**If I were God,  
And man made a mire  
Of things; war, hatred  
Murder, lust, cobwebs  
Of infamy, entangling  
The heart and the soul**



**I would sweep him  
To one side and start anew  
(I think I would)  
If I did this  
Would I be God?**

**The answer is no. You would not be God. You would not be the God of the Bible, for he is not just power, but he is love, and love has a totally different approach to problems than does power.**

**Power eliminates an enemy by destroying the enemy. Love eliminates an enemy by making him a friend. This is a whole lot harder and slower, but the other option is not open to a God who is love. His greatest asset is also his greatest liability and limitation. His power must be subordinate to his love, and so he cannot be true to his nature and exploit people for his ends without their cooperation.**

**You have the history of God's own people. They were blessed like no other people ever, and yet they were also judged like no other people as well. God could have by sheer power taken them out of Egypt and brought them to the promise land, but he could not by sheer power make them obey him. They had to choose to do that. God could not treat them as mere pawns on a chessboard. It would make the game of history go faster and be more efficient if he could, but he cannot do it without ceasing to be love, and God cannot cease to be love, for that is what he is. Jesus could by sheer power still the raging sea, but he could not by power alone make the rich young ruler sell all and follow him. He could not make the people of Jerusalem accept him. He said, "I would, but you would not." Power was not enough, for they had to choose to believe, and they wouldn't do it.**

**It is superficial when we think that because God has all power he can do as he pleases, whenever he pleases. That is why people blame**

**God for everything that goes wrong. They assume that he could prevent it if he chose to do so. This is practicing theology in the dark, and not in the light that God is love. It is like trying to put together a thousand piece puzzle in the pitch blackness of an underground cave. You do not know God, says John, until you turn on the light and recognize that God is love. We are so hung up on power that we think that is the answer to everything. It is not.**

**I have the power to open my sons mail before he comes home. It comes before he gets here, and it would be no problem for me to simply open it. But I do not do it, not because I lack the power to do so, but because it would be an unloving thing to do. My love for him and respect for his privacy limits my power. Power that is not limited by love is dangerous. God's power is limited by his love, and the paradox is that this is what makes the world a place of such widespread evil. God cannot in power just rid the world of evil, for his love makes it necessary to try and save those who are doing the evil.**

**It is amazing to read in Rev. 2 of how Jezebel has corrupted the church, and has led Christians into all kinds of idolatry and immorality, and then listen to Jesus say in verse 21, "I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling." What kind of nonsense is this? A God with all power, and who can wipe out the whole planet as fast as we can wipe a drop of sweat from our forehead, and he is going to give this evil person a second chance? But this is the kind of God we are dealing with in the Bible. It is the greatest wonder in the universe that a hell-bound sinner can become a heaven-bound saint because God's power is under the control of his love. We sometimes find this hard to take, and prefer the hero to take the evil guy out and ride off into the sunset victorious. God's love is sometimes so slow, and he seems to give the bad guy too many chances. That is the price you pay for God being love.**

**In Uncle Tom's Cabin, the slave George Harris says, "They buy and sell us and make trade of our heart's blood and groans and tears, and God lets them, He does; God lets them." It makes man mad that God lets them, and there are a thousand other evils God lets them do as well, and we do not like it. God stirs up man to fight the evil, and eventually slavery gets eliminated, and eventually the haters of history are pushed off the stage, but where is the lightning? Why all the delay? Why not damnation by dawn instead of by decades?**

**The answer is, God is love. What this means practically is that not even God can have his cake and eat it too. He cannot damn the sinner at the moment of his transgression, and yet still in love provide a way for the sinner to be forgiven and restored to fellowship. We do not like what it does to a world to have God choose the way of love, for it gives too much freedom to evil, but we would like it a whole lot less if he chose the alternative. It would eliminate all evil in the world if God judged all sin and evil on the spot. The only problem is that all of us would end up in hell, and forever separated from God. It is God's love that keeps the life of every sinner going long enough to be forgiven and restored to fellowship. This leads to a world full of suffering because of evil, but remember, God is the one who has to suffer the most. He had to give his Son, and the Son had to give his life in great agony to atone for the sin of the world. The cross is the physical symbol of the fact that God is love.**

**The cross says to us that God takes being love very seriously. He would rather pay the price of the cross than to be unloving. God had other options. He could have never made man in the first place. He could have made him a machine incapable of choosing evil. He could have made him with no plan to save him. The only problem with all the options are that they are not choices that a God of love would make. A God of power alone could have made the other choices, but**

**a God of love had to make man as he did, with freedom to choose, and a respect for that freedom that would let it be exercised. It is hard on all of us at times that God is love, and it is harder on him than anyone, but that is who God is, and we must see all of life, and all truth, in the light of this reality that God is love.**

#### **4. TRUTH IN ACTION Based on I John 1:6**

**The story is told of how years ago a hard shell Baptist returned to his community after visiting Jefferson, Texas, and he reported to his neighbors that he had seen ice made there in July. It is claimed that the first artificial ice in the United States was made in Jefferson. When the word of this got back to the church he attended, he was promptly charged with lying, and was going to be expelled from the church. One of the brothers suggested, however, that in all fairness they should make an investigation first. So the deliberating body appointed this concerned brother to go to Jefferson and investigate. When he returned he reported that as amazing as it sounded he actually saw ice made there with the temperature nearly 100 in the shade. The church voted to expel both members for lying.**

**They were certainly uncharitable and unfair in the this decision, but they were wise to be so concerned about the matter of lying. Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "Sin has many tools, but a lie is the handle which fits them all." We generally think of Eve's sin of disobedience as the first recorded sin of the Bible, but there is one before that. The first sin in the Bible is a lie. It was the lie that they would not die, as God said, if they ate of the forbidden fruit. The significance of this is magnified when we go to the last chapter of Revelation and discover that the very last sin named in the Bible is also the lie. In verse 15 we read of those who are shut out of heaven, and the last on the list is "Whosoever loveth and maketh a lie."**

**In between the first and last reference there are many texts warning about the sin of lying. In Prov. 6:17 a lying tongue is among the 7 things God most hates. In Prov. 12:22 we read, "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord..." Many were the miseries suffered in the Old Testament because of lying prophets. Satan is the father of lies, but man has been of considerable help in multiplying them. It was so much a part of the pagan way of life, out of which the early Christians came, that it was a sin yet wrestled with in the church. Paul in Eph. 4:25 admonishes them, "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor." A Christian is one who must shed the rags of deceit and falsehood, and be clothed in the garments of truth.**

**The Apostle John is very concerned about this matter because the Gnostics, like many false teachers since, were masters at the use of the big lie. John does not hesitate to expose them as liars, and warn believers that if they follow this false doctrine, they too will be liars. In verse 5 John laid down the fundamental concept of God that becomes a standard by which to judge all truth and conduct. God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all. In reference to the current problem in that church it would mean-God is truth and in Him is no lie at all. The Scripture clearly states it is impossible for God to lie. He has nothing in common with a liar, therefore, a liar cannot have fellowship with God.**

**Who then is the liar that John has in mind? He is the one whose profession does not match his practice; whose claims do not coincide with his conduct; whose words do not harmonize with his walk. The man who says, "I have fellowship with God," but who walks in darkness, is a liar, says John. The son of thunder has not lost his forthrightness, but now it is under control, and serving the purpose of warning believers in love. The danger is a real one yet today, and it will be for our profit to do some self-examination on this matter. We want to consider first the danger of the lie in our talk, and then**

**the demand for truth in our walk.**

## **I. THE DANGER OF THE LIE IN OUR TALK.**

**John says, if we say we have fellowship with God, we are making a great claim, and if we do not back it up with action, this is where the lie begins. If the man who walks in darkness does not profess to be in fellowship with God he is still a sinner not doing the truth, but at this point, at least, he is not a liar. The lie that John is exposing here is the one that is most dangerous, and we can see this by considering what the Gnostics taught. They said that spirit is spirit and flesh is flesh. God as Spirit is concerned only about the spirit. The flesh is totally corrupt and evil, and has no part in the spiritual life. They had a dualism that left the body out of one's relationship to God altogether. This kind of thinking leads to a Jekyll and Hyde type of living where the man serves God with his spirit and Satan with his body.**

**What made the Gnostic heresy so dangerous was the fact that they used the same concepts as true Christians, but they perverted them. Salvation they said is all of grace and no works whatever. Any work of the body was of no value in the spiritual realm. Therefore, it makes no difference what you do with the body. You can give your body completely over to sin, and not be any the less spiritual. In fact, you would be more spiritual for recognizing the body is irrelevant to fellowship with God. If good works are no help to salvation, then evil works are no hindrance to it.**

**You can easily see how this subtle lie could be appealing to the pagan mind who wanted salvation in Christ, but who wanted also the old pleasures of his pagan life. The same heresy is at work today. The father of lies may have a new label and a new approach, but the lie is still the same. Christianity is all a matter of talk and thinking is the foundational principle of this big lie. It is all a matter of**

**creeds and words and not action. This error has invaded orthodox movements over and over again, and left them as dead orthodoxy. All of the truth is there, and everyone has the proper vocabulary, and so all are convinced they are in the kingdom of God. Words become everything. If a person does not use the right words, you doubt his salvation, even if he lives a life dedicated to Christ. But if a man is practically indifferent to the work of the kingdom, and lives a mediocre life of godlessness, he is on the in group because he has learned the code.**

**If you examine your own attitude, it ought to scare you how strong the tendency is to move toward the Gnostic heresy. I hear men ridiculed and denounced who are giants of the faith, by men who are spiritual pigmies, and the basis is almost always the subtle Gnostic heresy that true spiritually is in words. Let us note carefully: the primary lesson John is teaching here is that the truth is in the walk. A statement of faith, or a claim to have fellowship with God, is in itself neutral. It is the action of the person that determines its truth. Our second point then is to observe-**

## **II. THE DEMAND FOR TRUTH IN OUR WALK.**

**Saying the truth is a lie without doing the truth. Lack of action, or contrary action makes a lie out of what could have been true. The son in the parable that Jesus told said to his father, "I will go into the field to work." When he said it, it was a potential truth, but it became an actual lie as soon as he failed to act and not go into the fields. Truth is not in words but in actions. It was what he did that made what he said a lie. If he would have acted different, what he said would have been truth. Actions not only speak louder than words, but also much clearer. I can say I have fellowship with God, but if I go and walk in darkness I lie and do not the truth. Truth is not in words but in the walk. Truth is in action or it fails to be true. All we say becomes truth or falsehood depending on our actions.**

**Light must be seen or it is no different than darkness. Talk will never be an adequate means of communicating the truth of the Gospel. Jesus did not say we were to be the sound of the world. If that had been the case, the Gnostics would have been great, for they were all noise. Many of the present day believers also feel that sound is the key to evangelism. If we just get people to hear the Gospel; if we could only get Gospel blimps to fly over every city with loud speakers proclaiming the good news, then we could reach our world. There is so much truth to this perspective it is hard to see the fallacy of it. We need to face the reality that masses of people have heard the joyful sound that Jesus saves, and they couldn't care less.**

**It is time we see that Jesus meant what He said, "You are the light of the world." He said men are to see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven. The Gospel needs to be seen, and so we must walk in the light and let our light shine that the truth might be seen and not just heard. Sound is essential for the truth must be heard, but it is inadequate without a visual demonstration of changed lives. Men must see the truth in action, for they are fully aware that talk is cheap. It costs something to walk in truth and apply truth in action, but anyone can talk about it. Some of the most eloquent praisers of spirituality were the Gnostics. If truth could be fully embodied with words alone, they would have been the elite they thought themselves to be, but truth can only be adequately and finally exhibited in action. In other words, if men cannot see truth in your actions, you just as well save your breath. It took the Word to be incarnated to adequately express God's love. The written word and spoken word were not enough.**

**Without the life of Christ in which He embodied all He taught in action, Christianity would not be what it has been. His talk without His walk would add another philosophy of religion to an already overcrowded field. Jesus not only spoke truth, He lived truth. He was truth incarnate, and truth in action. It is legitimate to test the**



**truth that Jesus taught by the pragmatic standard, which is to ask, does it work? What does not work is not true. All the truth of God is truth that will stand this test if practiced, and it is our task to prove it to the world by doing the truth, and not just speaking it, for truth is not just what you say, but what you do.**

**Shakespeare said, "Be great in act, as you have been in thought." Again he said, "Action is eloquence, and the eyes of the ignorant are more learned than their ears." What a picture of what John is saying. Men will learn the truth faster and more surely by means of what they see than of what they hear. Whittier saw it to be true in his day and said, "Speak out in acts: The time for words has passed, and deeds alone suffice." The church in many ways is alive to this truth, but we each must be alive to it, and avoid the Gnostic heresy like the plague. We must never be content with verbal truth until it is backed up with vital truth, that is truth in action. The world is not interested in essays on piety. They want to see lives that exhibit the reality of the truths in those essays.**

**A man whose house is burning down does not care to listen to a lecture on the principles of spontaneous combustion. He wants help to get the fire out. His ears are not open to advice, but his eyes are searching for those who will act to help him. The world with all its problems is not listening for advice, but it is looking for demonstrations of victorious living that exemplify the teachings of Jesus. Our task is to talk, but with a matching walk that gets the attention of a looking world who want to see the truth of Christ in action.**

## **5. WALKING IN THE LIGHT    Based on I John 1:7**

**John has made it perfectly clear that Christians are still sinners even as saints, and that to claim that one is without sin is to call God a liar. He is not defending sin, but warning against a false kind of perfectionism. The Gnostics attained their perfection by simply denying that anything they did in the flesh was sin. Sinlessness is fairly easy to attain if it is all a matter of words, for all you have to do is define yourself into a state of perfection. Lust is a sin, but if you call it aesthetic appreciation of art, you could define the man who lusts into innocence.**

**As long as men are deceived into thinking that truth is basically a matter of words only, they will be able to rationalize anything as being consistent with perfection. Pious words can be weapons against the truth, and we all need to be aware that virtue is far more than one's vocabulary. Men mean different things by the same words. Humpty Dumpty boasted to Alice in Wonderland, "When I use a word it means just what I choose it to mean-neither more nor less." It was no wonder that Alice was puzzled at his use of the word glory, for he meant by glory "A nice knock down argument." This kind of irresponsible use of words has no place in the Christian life. He is to avoid deception of himself and others by calling sin what it is and dealing with it instead of eliminating it as the Gnostics did by playing with words.**

**Our fellowship with God is not based on words but on our walk, and if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we do not have to rationalize our sin away, for God has made provision through the blood of Christ to cleanse and forgive us. Christian perfection is to be realistic. It is a matter of a very real and practical condition, and a very real and practical consequence, and it is these two things we want to examine as they are revealed in verse 7.**

## **I. THE CONDITION.**

**If we walk in the light we have fellowship with God, but if we do not, we have neither fellowship with God nor forgiveness of sin. This then is no incidental truth, but is essential to the Christian life. No one can be a Christian who does not fulfill this condition. Notice that the believers condition does not consist in making great claims like the Gnostics. They were all talk and no walk. John would caution us against bragging about our marvelous fellowship with God. Beware of laying bare your soul before men, and exalting yourself by speaking of how intimate you are with God. This leads to a superficial and sentimental mysticism that is not edifying to believers nor appealing to unbelievers. The Christian who is edifying and witnessing is the one who does not have to boast because his attitudes and actions make it clear he is walking in the light. He shares the truths and treasures he discovers in fellowship with God, and let's them speak rather than boast of this fellowship.**

**The condition all of us are to strive for is not to talk about light, but to walk in it. Walking has these two characteristics:**

**1. It is voluntary. The Christian is not one who walks in the light because he is compelled or pressured to do so. He gladly performs Christ like acts, not because they are required, but because he chooses to do them, and would have it no other way. When Christians do only what the organized church requires, the church has become an institution rather than a living organism, and is a hindrance to the true mission of the church. Christians are to voluntarily do what they know must be done, and what is right and good regardless of any other consideration. He loves and serves just because he loves to serve and be a partner with Christ in reaching the world. Out of gratitude alone he wants to walk in the light, and lead others into the light. If a Christian is fulfilling this condition he will be one who lives for Christ voluntarily, and not because he is pushed.**

**2. Walking is not only voluntary motion, it is continued motion. It**

**is a series of steps. One who takes two or three steps is not walking. The believer may take a step or two into the dark, but this is not walking in darkness. One walking in darkness makes a continuous series of steps in sin, and, therefore, is out of fellowship with God. The unbeliever may take several steps into the light, and do acts in harmony with God's will, but these steps are not walking in the light, for they are not continuous and consistent. To be said to be walking in either sphere of light or darkness means one is making continuous strides in that sphere.**

**In Jer. 9:3 we read, "...falsehood and not truths has grown strong in the land, for they proceed from evil to evil." This is a description of walking in darkness for it is consistent and progressive. They were going on from lesser evil to a greater degree of evil. Paul gives us the same picture in II Tim. 3:13, "Evil men and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived." In contrast, one who walks in the light is proceeding from one stage of glory to another. A Christian who is fulfilling this condition is not in the same place today as he was last year. He is making progress in godliness, and is developing more fruit of the spirit. If you are not conscious of being more Christ like as time goes on, it may indicate you have ceased to walk in the light.**

**Christians can be compared to the strange substance called selenium which is used in photoelectric devices. When it is in the dark it is an insulator, and electricity will not pass through it, but when it is in the light it is a conductor, and the current passes through. The greater the intensity of the light the more effective it is as a conductor. It changes its nature and function according to its environment. It is the chameleon of the non-living realm. It illustrates the truth that the man who walks in the light of God's truth will be a conductor of that light to others, but if he walks in darkness the light of truth will not flow through him. He is a closed channel in the dark. The greater the intensity of the light, or the**

**closer one walks with Christ, the greater will be his communication to others. Walking in the light then is essential to be an effective Christian. John then goes on to describe-**

## **II. THE CONSEQUENCES.**

**The consequences here are so important that it forces us to realize just how much the complete Christian life demands of the believer. Fellowship with God and forgiveness of sins are both conditional upon the believers walk. For the sake of clarity, let me emphasize that John is writing to believers. Therefore, this not referring to a condition of salvation. These are saved persons who need instruction on how to go on and be fully sanctified. This means that all of the acts and attitudes of the believer are important in becoming what God wants him to be. When he walks in the light, the first benefit will be-**

**1. Fellowship with God. This is one of the basic goals of the Christian life, and one of the main purposes for John writing this letter. Fellowship with God is essential to the full Christian life. Harry Emerson Fosdick said, "Opinions about God are a roadway to God, but the end of the journey is a personal fellowship that transfigures life; and to seize opinions as though they were the objects of faith is like a man who tries to reach his destination by firmly clutching the dust of the road." The poet said,**

**By all that God requires of me,  
I know what He Himself must be.**

**God requires us to walk in the light for fellowship with Him, and this is just another way of saying that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. When the believer walks in light he has all things in common with God, and, therefore, has fellowship with God. The second result is-**

**2. The blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin. This means that though the Christian is yet a sinner and cannot claim he has no sin, he can claim to be cleansed from all sin, for this is the promise to those who walk in the light. It is not the light that cleanses, but the blood of Christ. The blood of Christ cleanses from all sin ought not to be quoted out of this context, however, for it is not true unless the condition is fulfilled. It does not cleanse the sin of any who do not walk in the light. Like selenium, it only works in the light.**

**The atonement of Christ is adequate and available for all men and for all sin. But since it only cleanses those who walk in the light, many will never be cleansed, for they love darkness rather than light. Cleansing here is different from forgiveness in that it indicates a removal of the stain of sin, and the desire for sin in the person. It is a part of the process of sanctification. One can be forgiven and yet still go on sinning, but to be cleansed implies a victory over sin. Forgiveness is a change in God, but cleansing is a change in us. This means that one consistently walking in the light could be constantly cleansed, and at least temporarily be sinless. If we take the "all sin" literally, then one could be totally free from sin in his life. The only way to maintain it, however, would be to never take a step out of light into darkness.**

**Here is the possibility of being restored to perfect fellowship just as Adam had with God before the fall.**

**Oh, how sweet to view the flowing,  
Of my Savior's precious blood,  
With divine assurance knowing  
He has made my peace with God.**

**The sacrifice of Christ was once for all, but it is of perpetual effectiveness. Cleanses is the present tense. The blood of Calvary is still working today, and will wash away the sin of the believer. The**

**sacrifice at the cross was unconditional grace, and God's once for all provision for all sin, but the actual application of that blood's power to cleanse in our lives is conditional upon our walking in the light.**

**The two consequences of walking in the light are external and internal. One is made right with God and can fellowship with God. And one is made right in himself so there is inner peace and harmony as he is cleansed from sin. Our action of walking is met with God's action of cleansing. Our words of confession are met with God's word of forgiveness. We see here that just as we are justified through the blood of Christ, so also we are sanctified. Faith in His sacrifice without works saves us, but it is faith plus works that sanctifies us. It is in sanctification that faith without works is dead. Faith alone justifies, but faith and works sanctifies.**

**Since the greatest blessings of God, and the greatest benefits that can be gained from the atonement of Christ, can only be ours if we are walking in the light, it is to be our primary concern to make sure that it is in the light that we walk. The degree of our sanctification, as well as the quality of our eternal life, are dependent upon our walk. Certainly nothing more could be added to challenge us to go forth and voluntarily and persistently walk in the light.**

## **6. CHRISTIAN CONFESSION Based on I John 1:8-9**

**The one thing all people have in common is guilt. Ever since Adam and Eve hid from God, because they were afraid, out of a sense of guilt, man has had to bear the burden, and suffer the effects of guilt, and these effects are enormous. Modern psychiatry is discovering that guilt is enemy number one of good mental health. It is the destructive force behind dozens of different kinds of mental illness. It is the basic cause for the anxiety and fear that makes**

**millions live in dread and depression. It is the cause for the ineffectiveness of many Christian lives. It disarms the believer of the whole armor of God. It cuts at the root of the tree of life. It poisons the springs of living water, and it sends a corrupting worm into the fruit of the Spirit.**

**Everyone who has done something he does not want known has guilt. This of course means that just as all are sinners, so all are guilty. The more we learn about the guilt of man, the more we realize it is a major factor in all of human life. One doctor treating one hundred cases of arthritis and colitis found that a hidden sense of guilt played a role in 68% of these patients. Flanders Dunbar in the book *Psychiatry In The Medical Specialties* reports that, "It has been found that at least 65% of patients are suffering from illness syndromes initiated or seriously complicated by psychological factors." Conclusions like this are being reached in one study after another, and the result is that men are beginning to see that man's ultimate problem is sin. It is sin and its effects that are the greatest plague in the world. And guilt is sin's major effect.**

**Rowe expresses the minds of millions when he writes, "Guilt is the source of sorrow! 'Tis the fiend, the avenging fiend, that follows us behind, with whips and stings." There is no escape from the facts. Modern psychiatry has confirmed what the Bible says: "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." All are caught in the web of guilt. But thank God the facts do not stop there. John knew almost 2000 years ago that this was man's major problem, but he did not just analyze it and diagnose it, but he gave a prescription authorized by the Great Physician Himself. John had to have an answer for the problem of guilt in order to ever bring his readers to his established goal of fullness of joy, and fellowship with the God of light. Guilt is just the opposite of this, and no amount of truth could ever lead to that goal that did not first show a man how to be relieved of guilt. That is why John begins with the matter of sin and**



**forgiveness, for all Christian maturity begins with clear understanding of this basic issue. John shows us three basic steps from guilt to God.**

## **I. CONSCIOUSNESS OF SIN-V 8.**

**John says that if we try and live on the hypocritical level of non-admission to guilt and sin, then we are self-deceived. The truth is not in us, and in such a state we cannot be forgiven. Such a person, and they are not rare, suppresses his guilt and tries to give the impression that there is nothing wrong in their lives.**

**Meanwhile, though they have succeeded in hiding their guilt from their consciousness, it is invading their whole being like a poison, and will reveal itself in either a psychological or physical problem, or both.**

**Many unbelievers do not respond to Christ just because they refuse to admit they are guilty. They are hiding their guilt, and they are saying we do not need a Savior, for we are not so bad. The natural man is fighting for survival, and does not let himself be conscious that he is a mass of guilt in need of cleansing, for to do so he knows must lead to repentance and death for the old man. The same is true for the Christian who lets the old man revive and live again in his body. He hides his guilt because to admit it is so painful, and his old man does not want to die. This is why guilt so often leads to mental illness. It is an escape. It allows the sinner to say he is sick rather than guilty. This sounds foolish, but this is just how hard man struggles against admitting he is a guilty sinner.**

**This may sound like a harsh and cruel judgment on mental patients, but the facts being discovered by competent men are reversing the idea that there is nothing to be ashamed of in mental illness. It could well be that such illness is, as Dr. David Bellgum calls it, "An involuntary confession of guilt." Unconfessed and**

**unforgiven sin acts like a cancer of the soul. It effects the total person in body, soul, and spirit. O. Hobart Mowrer in his book *The Crisis In Psychiatry And Religion* comes right out and says that neurotics and psychotics are not sick so much as they are sinners caught and condemned by their own conscience. Dr. Bellgum says this applies also to many with physical problems, for he says physical "symptoms are often the amplified voice of conscience." In other words, you might suppress it, but one way or another guilt is going to show itself.**

**The saying was never more true than when applied to this area of life, that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. Let us not jump to the conclusion that all mental problems reveal suppress guilt. There are many other causes; some uncontrollable which result in brain damage, and for which the person is not responsible. There are many exceptions to what we have stated, but there are many cases in which it is true, and it shows that the church has the only answer to man's greatest problem-sin. People do not need to be psychoanalyzed, they need to be saved. They need to stop lying to themselves and admit they are guilty sinners, for it is only then that they will be conscious of their need for forgiveness. This is the first step on the road to recovery.**

**To make it clear that we are not only dealing here with non-believers, let us consider some actual examples of Christians who fell into the category of those who refuse to admit guilt. Paul wrote to the Corinthians , and said it was for this very thing that many of them were weak and sickly, and some had even died. In I Cor. 11 he explains that the reason was, they had been guilty of unworthy participation in the Lord's Supper. They were observing this remembrance of His death for sin, but were refusing to do so with a consciousness of their sin. In lightness and carelessness, and with no sense of guilt for their heathenish attitude, they remembered the sacred event of Christ's death. The result was**

**hardness of heart. They sought no forgiveness, for they were not conscious of sin, and the result was all kinds of symptoms in body and mind, and in some cases leading even to death. These early Christians were experiencing the consequences of repressed guilt and unconfessed sin.**

**All of the facts support the statement that holiness is the best way to health, just as sin is the surest way to sickness. Even the pagan philosopher Seneca observed that guilt always punishes even if the law does not. He said, "Let wickedness escape as it may at the bar, it never fails of doing justice upon itself, for every guilty person is his own hangman." Plautus said, "Nothing is more wretched than the mind of a man conscious of guilt." It is true and it is painful, yet, as John says, and as science supports, to be conscious of guilt and to admit your sin is the only way you can be ready to take the next step to the wholeness for which all men seek. Admit your guilt and then take the next step.**

## **II. CONFESSION OF SIN. V.9.**

**This verse is tree with so many branches, on each of which hangs so much fruit, that we cannot begin to taste all of its riches in one message. James Edwin Orr said, "Clear teaching concerning the confessing of sins by Christians is one of the most neglected doctrines of today." Here is a concept given by inspiration of God to aid people against the most destructive force in the world, and yet it is ignored as if it were incidental. The result is, all things have not become as new as they ought in the lives of believers, because they have not availed themselves of God's provision. Christians have needlessly borne mountains of guilt when they might have had it dissolved and cleansed through the blood of Christ. Continuous and consistent confession of sin is a must for a Christian who truly desires to attain the fullness of the stature of Christ. If your aim is any lower than that, that too is a sin needing to be confessed and**

**forgiven.**

**Many are uninhibited when it comes to the confession of the sins of others, but John is writing to Christian people who need to confess their own sins. Confession is no part of the life of the unbeliever. No doubt many deceive themselves into thinking they can gain God's forgiveness, but John clearly states that only those who walk in the light have fellowship with God, and only they are cleansed by the blood of Christ. Confession is of no value unless one is a believer walking in the light. Sin is a blockade as long as we walk in darkness, but if we walk in the light and confess our sin it becomes a bridge back into fellowship with God, for he loves the sinner and waits in hope that they will confess and come back to Him.**

**The story is told of how Satan approached God with the complaint that He forgives His children over and over again, but He never forgave him, and God replies to him, "You never asked." This illustrates the truth that confession is an essential condition of forgiveness, but it does not go far enough, for even if Satan did ask, it would be to no avail unless he cease to be the prince of darkness, and began to walk in the light.**

**It is important to see this truth, for those who do not see the whole picture abuse this promise and stretch it beyond what it was meant to cover. To think that one can confess, and yet have no sense of guilt about continuing in the same pattern of life is to be deceived. It is of interest to note that some Catholics are perfectly aware of this danger in their own practice of compulsory confession. In a questionnaire sent out to priests asking what kinds of persons failed to gain anything from the confession, one answered in a way that made clear he was aware of all the things that Protestants criticize about the confessional. Here is what he wrote:**

**"The insincere-those who really are not in earnest about breaking a habit of sin. The uneducated who consider the powers of the confessional as magical. A 'bad confession.' They are either so attached to the pleasure or advantages deriving from the sin that they do not really intend to stop the sin or the habit, or they are presumptuous of God's help, thinking God will change them without their effort or cooperation."**

**Not only will the Catholic confessional not be effective for those people, but neither will the personal and secret confession to God alone. No confession will cleanse the sinner who refuses to walk in the light. Confession implies a change in walk, and not merely a change in talk.**

**A basic maxim to be followed in confession is this: "Let the circle of the offense committed be the circle of the confession made." That is, if the sin is secret, it is to be confessed secretly to God alone. If the sin is private, that is, against a particular person, you are to confess to that person as well as God. That is called private confession as distinct from public confession. Public confession is to be made when the offense is against the whole church, or a large segment of it. In other words, confession is to always be made to those who have been offended, for they alone can forgive. This is why we do not practice what is called auricular confession by the Catholic church. Auricular means, told in the ear, and refers to telling the priest one's sins. A party not involved in the offense can not be involved in the forgiveness. We feel that no party who is not offended can honestly be a party to the forgiveness. We do not deny that it can be effective in relieving guilt, but we feel there is a better and more Biblical way that exalts Christ rather than man. That is by direct confession to God through Christ, who is our High Priest, and who daily intercedes for us.**

**All of this is not to say, however, that God does not use men as instruments of conveying his message of forgiveness. All of the reformers such as Luther and Calvin rejected auricular confession, but still retained what they called private confession to the pastor. They simply recognized that in exceptional cases a child of God gets burdened with guilt, and cannot sense the forgiveness of God. Such a person can gain victory by confessing to a pastor, and by receiving his assurance, as God's ambassador, that He has been truly forgiven. This is more a matter of counseling than confession.**

**John R.W. Stott, the well known English pastor and author, has written a book on confession. In it he rejects auricular confession, but retains the concept of private confession. He stresses, however, it is exceptional and not to be habitual. The normal pattern for believers is to confess to God alone, or to the persons offended. This would be the position and practice of most, if not all evangelicals. The important thing to see is that the normal Christian life is to be one in which there is a consciousness of sin whenever we have departed from God's will, and an immediate confession of it to Him since He is ever present. These two steps are essential for Christian maturity. The third step that John mentions is-**

### **III. CLEANSING FROM SIN.**

**This is God's step in the process. There is nothing we can do to cleanse our life once we have stained it. God does not ask us to do this. If we confess, He is faithful and just to forgive. This is the step He promises to take if we take the others, and the result will be fullness of joy and fellowship with the Father and the Son. Cleanliness is not next to godliness, it is godliness, for this is the final goal of Christian confession.**

## **7. PERFECTION Based on I John 2:1**

**There's an old story about a couple who lived by the sea and kept a boarding house. Their boarders had only one complaint, and that was lack of variety on the menu. Breakfast consisted of fish, chicken, and eggs; dinner consisted of chicken, eggs, and fish, and for supper they had eggs, fish, and chicken. The boarders finally rebelled and insisted on something different. The woman said, "All right, what would you like?" The spokesman said, "We don't care just so its meat. Why don't you make some sausages." She said, "I've never made them, how do you do it?" The spokesman was no cook either so he just said, "The same as you cook fish." The next evening as they all sat at the table a large tray was brought in as they sat in excited anticipation. They could hardly wait for it to be uncovered. When it was, it was a tragic sight, for in the center of the dish were some dark brown looking things huddled together like sand bugs in the desert. The old lady was on the verge of tears. She broke out in a sobbing voice, "I know something went wrong, but you know there just isn't much left in those things after they are cleaned."**

**She certainly made a mistake in cleaning or gutting her sausages as she did her fish, and some people feel it is just as big a mistake to cleanse your life from sin. These are people who consider this as a destruction of life, for if all evil were removed life would be nothing but an empty shell, or dried up skin with all the meat of life removed. They hesitate to receive Christ, because they feel that giving up sin is giving up the best part of life. They want to go to heaven, but they think the path of getting there is so drab and lifeless they just can't see it is worth it.**

**As Christians, we can recognize the folly of their thinking, for they only know the pleasures of the flesh, and have not experienced the joys of spiritual blessings and the peace of God. They are unable**

to conceive of the superior pleasures of abundant life in Christ, so they hold back and cling to their sins and lose life's best. There are two kinds of people then. There are those who feel life's best is in sin, and those who feel it is in salvation from sin. But as one has said, there are only two kinds of people in the world: Those who think there are only two kinds of people in the world, and those who know better. We know better, for in the second category there are also different kinds of people. There are Christians who believe in entire sanctification, or, that one can be completely victorious over sin in this life. Then there are those who feel that this is impossible, and that we must remain sinners to some degree all our life.

The amount of literature and debate on this subject is staggering, and the more one reads the more he becomes aware that both sides of the issue can be well defended. When godly men can be equally convinced of opposite points of view, it usually indicates that there is truth on both sides, and what is needed for a total view is to combine the truths of both. This, I feel, is exactly what the Apostle John does. Both those who hold to the doctrine of Christian perfection, and those who reject it, quote I John for support. John teaches the paradoxical truth that the Christian can be victorious over sin, and yet at the same time be always in need of cleansing from sin. The first verse of chapter 2 brings out this paradox very clearly. We want to examine this verse in detail, and look at two key aspects of John's teaching. First-

## **I. IDEALISTIC PURPOSE.**

John is writing to these Christians in order that they may cease to sin. It would be possible to read all that John had written so far and come to an opposite conclusion. One could say, since we are all sinners, and there is no use denying it, and since all we need to do is confess and they will be forgiven, then there is no point in getting excited about sin. Why bother to fight it? In other words, the good



**news of forgiveness could lead us to a lite view of sin.**

**John says for us not to get any such misconceptions. I am writing, not so you can sin and not worry about it, but that you sin not. Complete freedom from sin is the idealistic goal for which John is aiming. The sinless Christ is our model, and it is to be our aim to be conformed to Him, and to obey His command, "Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." This goal can only be attained by a continuous walking in the light with Christ, and that is why John speaks so much about the Christian walk. B. H. Benson said, "No man can advance three paces on the road to perfection unless Jesus Christ walks beside him."**

**Many feel that even then one can never make it, but none can deny that John had the goal of perfection as his ideal. John refused to set the Christian goal lower than that of the Gnostics he combated. Their goal was perfection, but they attained it by watering down the definition of perfection so as to exclude sins of the flesh. John says the Christian aim is for perfection, and he includes victory over sins of the flesh. There is no true sanctification that does not include the body. It is nothing but self-deception to think you can separate the soul and body, and be perfect in spirit while our body like a snake slithers in the slime of sin.**

**The Gnostics may pursue their goal of perfection without ceasing to sin, but John says, I am writing that Christians attain the goal by ceasing to sin. Forgiveness is not to entice us to further sin, but to make us so grateful for the chance to begin again with a clean slate that we go forward, determined more than ever to keep it clean. John Wesley, the father of Methodism, and also the father of all the modern perfectionists movements, felt it was possible to keep the slate clean and be filled with perfect love, and there are testimonies of hundreds of his followers who claim to have attained this goal. Wesley himself never claimed to have reached the goal but he felt it**

to be the most essential doctrine for Christians to believe and aim for. He wrote of visiting one place: "I was surprised to find 50 members fewer than I left in it last October. One reason is, Christian perfection has been little insisted on, and wherever this is not done, be the preacher ever so eloquent, there is little increase, either in the number or the grace of the hearers."

John Wesley felt he was only following the path of John the Apostle when he urged Christians on to entire sanctification, and it is hard, if not impossible, to dispute it, for John could say that the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin and all unrighteousness, and then go on to urge us to sin no more, he certainly believed this was possible. We must be aware, however, that both John the Apostle and John Wesley were speaking of a perfection that cannot rightly, or without confusion, be called sinless perfection, for this leads to such criticism as that of F. Osborn who writes, "He that seeks perfection on earth leaves nothing new for the saints to find in heaven; as long as men teach, there will be mistakes in theology, and as long as they govern, errors in state." Entire sanctification does not eliminate mistakes, errors, and ignorance, nor sins of omission. There is plenty left for the saints to find in heaven even if they reach the highest goal in this life. John says in 3:2, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him for we shall see Him as He is."

In the context of what John is saying, and knowing the conduct of the Gnostics which he is combating, it is clear that John is saying that willful disobedience to the known will of God can be eliminated from the Christian life. Wesley defines the sin that Christians can be free from as, "Willful transgression of a known law." In other words, even the perfectionists like Wesley recognize that the Christian is far from perfect, and will never be that until he is transformed at the second coming of Christ. But he feels the New Testament warrants the belief that the Christians can be so filled

**with love, and in such fellowship with God, that he never willfully breaks anything he knows to be God's will. F. Faber wrote,**

**O keep thy conscience sensitive  
No inward token miss;  
And go where grace entices thee;  
Perfection lies in this.**

**There is much more than can and ought to be said on this matter, but since we will come to it again in this epistle we will conclude that all must agree that John had an idealistic purpose in writing this letter, and that he certainly must have believed that it could be attained, and that believers could cease to sin in the sense of willfully transgressing God's known will. In this sense I believe the New Testament clearly teaches Christian perfection. Even the Old Testament suggests it when it says, "Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might sin against thee." John wants Christians to hide the truth he writes in their hearts for the same idealistic purpose that they sin not. But then John goes on, and we see his statement on a-**

## **II. REALISTIC PROVISION.**

**"And if any man sin we have an advocate." It may seem that John is the enemy of his own purpose here. He says do not sin, but if you do, here is the good news, for we have an advocate. Those who reject the possibility of Christian perfection say that John is clearly revealing that he knows it will never be, and so as soon as he mentions it he follows up by making it clear we will need a constant defense, for we will always be sinners. This is reading too much into John's statement, however, all John is doing is being realistic. He knows many will fall in their climb to perfection, and he wants to assure them that they are not eliminated from the race. They can be pardoned and forgiven, and still press on for the goal.**

**John did not say they would certainly fall. He simply says, if they do, they have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.**

**We learn from this verse the necessity of combining realism with our idealism. If we do not, it will lead to a perversion of truth. Many who have set their goal where John says it should be set, have not gone on to include John's provision for those who fall as they strive for the ideal. For example, many perfectionist retain their perfection by denying sins, just as the Gnostics did. They do not want to admit that they have done wrong, and so they call their disobedience a mistake, or in some other way cover it up. This is the very danger that John was afraid of, and that is why he went on to immediately point out the only realistic way for a Christian to deal with sin. Plead guilty; seek a pardon, and go on. The Christian does not arrive at the goal of Christian perfection by denying sin, and neither does he maintain his relationship with God by covering up sin. He does so by admitting his sin, and taking full advantage of God's provision for pardon and cleansing.**

**Just as the only way a sinner can become a saint is through Christ, so the only way a sinner can remain a saint is through Christ. The Christian who is truly sanctified and living close to Christ will be sensitive to sin, and as soon as he offends, he will seek a pardon. There are only two ways to deal with sin: The Gnostic way of denying it, and the Christian way of confessing it and being cleansed. John wants to make sure that the high ideal of the Christian does not lead them to fall into the same error with the Gnostics, and so he adds this realistic provision to his idealistic purpose. This provision does not mean the ideal is not possible. It only means it is not necessarily permanent. One can only maintain it in a moment by moment walking with Christ, and if he stumbles off the narrow path he loses his state of perfection, but this loss is also not permanent, for God has provided a way to restore him.**

**Christian perfection is relative, and not a once for all experience.**

**The provision is an Advocate, who is Jesus Christ Himself. And advocate is a defender, or a lawyer. We get a picture here of the court of heaven. A just God is judge, and everyone who breaks His holy law is held accountable. Even the Christian whom He has redeemed cannot violate His law and expect it to be overlooked. Every sin must have its day in court. The Christian, however, does not stand before God alone, as does the unsaved. He has a defender-Jesus Christ the righteous. The fact that we are there in itself shows that the sin that John is speaking of is willful transgression of a known law. The believer knows he has offended the holiness of God. He is there to plead guilty, and he has an advocate, not to defend his innocence, but to plead for mercy, and to gain his pardon. John Wesley wrote,**

**Guilty I stand before thy face, on me I feel thy wrath abide,  
Tis just the sentence should take place, tis just, but O, thy Son  
hath died;**

**See where before the throne He stands and pours the all  
prevailing prayer,**

**Points to His side and lifts His hands and shows that I am  
graven there.**

**The Christian has an advocate to gain mercy and not justice, for God will always do justice anyway, but justice will lead to condemnation. We who have Jesus as our Advocate will gain mercy and be pardoned. Jesus, who was innocent, had no advocate at His trial, and the result was He was condemned and suffered the punishment of the guilty. Now, as a result of that, we who are guilty can be pardoned, for He who bore our guilt is present before the throne of God to plead for us. Jesus not only bore our guilt and sin on the cross, He now lives to make intercession for us that we might gain the full benefit of His sacrifice.**

**There is some controversy over the matter as to whether or not the intercession of Christ is necessary for our salvation. I personally believe it is and feel the Scripture definitely teaches this, but this will have to wait for another sermon. We have accomplished our goal for this message. We have seen that Christian perfection is definitely possible, and every Christian is to aim for a life in which all willful disobedience is eliminated. We have also seen that he must, like John, recognize that his perfection, even when attained, is relative, and he who stands must beware lest he fall, but if he does, he does not need to be saved all over again, but needs to plead guilty and trust his Advocate to gain him a pardon. The conclusion on the whole matter is this: Is it possible to be entirely sanctified? The answer is yes. Will Christians always need provision for pardon and cleansing from sin? The answer is yes. Both are true and only as we combine the idealistic purpose of John, and his realistic provision, do we have a total picture of the doctrine of Christian perfection.**

## **8. WE HAVE A LAWYER Based on I John 2:1b**

**Two men were looking at the epitaph on a tombstone which read, "Here lies an honest man and a good lawyer." One looked at the other and said, "I wonder why they put two men in the same grave?" Lawyers have not gained the best reputation for being honest men. One doctor asked another how his lawyer patient was doing, and he replied, "Not well, he is lying at deaths door." "Well, that's a lawyer for you, "responded the other, " At deaths door and still lying." It is reported that a lawyer should be a good sleeper since he can easily lie on either side.**

**The very nature of the profession leads one to be tempted to bend the truth by manipulating words. Thomas Jefferson referring to**

**congress said, "How can expedition be expected from a body which we have saddled with an hundred lawyers, whose trade is talking." When one does a great deal of talking and debating he learns how to convey a message in such a way that you get the opposite impression of what you would if you knew the truth. For example, a lawyer out West did not want to admit that his first client was hung, so he reported to his friends back East that he got him a suspended sentence.**

**Like every profession, that of the lawyer is the object of many slams and jokes, but in spite of them we know it is a necessary and valuable profession. It is essential to our sense of justice that every man have a right to defense, and that he have a defender skilled in the law. Our Constitution guarantees this, and that is why even the worst criminals are provided with a lawyer if they cannot obtain one. It may bother us that known criminals, who are obviously guilty, have such skilled defense that they often escape the penalty of the law. But let us not forget that everyone of us who have received Christ as Savior are in that same boat. We are guilty of breaking God's law, yet, because of our adequate advocate and divine defender we gain a pardon and escape punishment.**

**The difference of course is infinite in quality, for an earthly lawyer by immoral and unethical means, or through weaknesses of the law, gets his client off, but as we shall see, Jesus fulfills the demands of justice in gaining our pardon. The fact that Jesus is our advocate raises this profession to the highest possible level. Jesus was a carpenter for a few years on earth, but ever since His ascension He has been the believers lawyer in the court of heaven, and He will remain in that ministry until He comes again and takes the throne of judgment. This means that all who do not have Jesus as their defense attorney now will have Him as their judge when He comes again. This shows that Christ's present ministry is exceedingly important for every person to consider, and our purpose**

**in this message is to gain a better understanding of His present ministry by examining the three factors of it brought out in John's statement: "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."**

## **I. HIS CLIENTS.**

**A big burly man called at the house of a woman known for her charitable impulses, and when she came to the door he addressed her in a broken voice, "Madam, I wish to draw your attention to the terrible plight of a poor family in this district. The father has been fired; the mother is too ill to work, and the nine children are starving. They are about to be turned out into the cold streets unless someone pays their arrears in rent which amounts to fifty dollars." The woman exclaimed, "How terrible! May I ask who you are?" The sympathetic pleader applied his handkerchief to his eyes as he said, "I am the landlord." Here is a case where the advocate obviously had only one client, and that was himself. His pleading was not for their need, but for his greed. But we have in Jesus and Advocate who is ours-literally ours, in that His purpose in the court of heaven is not for His own defense, but for our pardon.**

**John says, "We have Him." That is, He is always available, and is never too busy, or tied up on another case, or on vacation. Hebrews tells us the same thing by saying, "He ever lives to make intercession for us." In earthly courts there are cases backed up for months and years, but we who are clients of the eternal Advocate have immediate defense when we sin. It is tragic when Christians let their sin go unconfessed and suffer needless pain and guilt when they could have immediate pardon before the court of God.**

**It is important that we recognize, however, that Jesus is not the Advocate of every sinner. The "we" here includes only those who believe and have trusted in Christ as their Savior. One must be a**



**child of God before he can be a client of Christ's and be a beneficiary of Christ's present ministry. The unbeliever will have to face God alone, and with no advocate, and the result will be, he will loose his case and suffer the full penalty for breaking God's law.**

**Someone has said, "He who appears as his own advocate has a fool for a client." This may not always hold true in an earthly court, but it is certainly true concerning the court of heaven, for only a fool could hope to defend himself before God and expect to prove himself righteous, and thereby escape judgment. One does not need to be rich to be a client of Jesus. Barton Holyday said, "A man may as well open an oyster without a knife as a lawyers mouth without a fee." A pelican, it is said, would make a good lawyer, for he knows how to stretch his bill. These things do not apply to the ministry of Christ, for it is free to all who claim it.**

**John says in verse 2 that Jesus has already paid for our sins, and the sins of the whole world. Every sin in the world then can be freely pardoned though the ministry of Christ. The poorest can benefit fully from His services. One does not even need to be right to be His client. Sometimes mothers say to their children when they are naughty, "If you do that, Jesus won't love you anymore." This is the world's worst theology, for if Jesus only loved us when we are good, like everyone else, who is to our helper when we most need it, when we are not good? It is when we are guilty that we need an advocate, and not when we are innocent. When the Greek lawyer Phacian was criticized for appearing on behalf of an unworthy client he said, "The good have no need of an advocate." Jesus said, "It is the sick who need the physician and not those who are well." We conclude this point by making it clear, there is only one requirement to be a client of Christ. You need not be rich or right, but you must be redeemed. You must be one who has Christ as personal Savior. Only then are you in this, "We have an advocate." Jesus is a specialist, and thus, and advocate only of believers.**

## **II. HIS CALLING.**

**He is an advocate with the Father. We have here His profession and the place where He practices that profession-with the Father. The place of His service is important, for it is that which makes His ministry distinct from that of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is also our Advocate, but His ministry is within us. When Jesus said to His disciples in His last discourse before He went to the cross, "I will pray the Father and He will give you another Comforter," He used the same word that is used here-paraclete. It is used four times of the Holy Spirit and just once of Christ. Jesus calls the Holy Spirit our Advocate, and the Holy Spirit through John calls Jesus our Advocate. Jesus, however, says He will send another advocate, and by saying another He claims also to be one, even when He was with the disciples. The terms comforter, counselor, advocate, are all descriptive of the one Greek word paraclete. It means one who is called to one's side to help and give aid. When summoned to court the paraclete is at your side to aid you. The Christian then needs two advocates, for he needs aid in two realms and in two ways. He needs earthly and heavenly aid, and he needs subjective and objective aid.**

**In the last part of the first century, not long after John wrote this letter, the Roman Emperor Adrian in a letter to Minucine Fundanus said, "If, therefore, the people of the province will appear publicly and in a legal way charge the Christians, that they may answer for themselves in court, let them take that course, and not proceed by importunate demands and local clamors only. For it is much the best method." Here was an earthly court situation, and Christian lives were at stake, but they were given the right to defend themselves. Here is where the Holy Spirit's ministry came in. Jesus said they would be taken before courts, but they need not worry, for the Holy Spirit would teach them what to say. Time does not permit us to examine the great Christian defenses of the early Christians,**

**but we do want to refer to one more modern example of how the Word of God has made great victories through Christians being tried before men.**

**F. O. Nilsson, the first Baptist preacher in Sweden, was summoned to the supreme court of Southern Sweden in 1850 on the charge of heresy. He was found guilty and sentenced to banishment. The news media, however, carried the minutes of the trial and the convictions of Nilsson were spread over the land. Nilsson reported, "From this day the Baptists and their doctrines were no longer confined to an obscure corner of the land, and to a few poor despised laborers. The truth was with trumpet voices proclaimed on the housetops, and the sound thereof re-echoed from cottage to palace, throughout the length and breadth of the land. Thus my appearance before the High Court at Jonkoping was the public introduction of Baptist principles into Sweden." In 9 years there were 95 churches; 4,000 members, and it all began in court. This is of additional interest because the banishment of Nilsson was even a blessing, for he came to America and became one of the founders of the Swedish Baptist Conference which is now the Baptist General Conference.**

**The point of all this in relation to our subject of advocates is that it is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to give guidance and counsel here on earth as we defend the faith before courts or elsewhere. It is he who aids Christians in bringing good out of evil situations. It is also the ministry of the Holy Spirit to defend us before the court of our own conscience, and to help us experience the pardon and peace of God. It is not enough that we are pardoned objectively through the ministry of Christ, for we need to sense its reality within also. We need to know we are free from condemnation, and this is the calling of our other advocate the Holy Spirit.**

**Christ is our Advocate on high,**

**Thou art our Advocate within;  
O plead the truth and make reply  
To every argument of sin.**

**The statement of Christ being our Advocate with the Father is not incidental and insignificant, for it designates his specific calling and sphere of ministry, for it is with the Father. Jesus does not plead for us in the state court, or the supreme court of the nation, nor in the international courts of the world, but rather, in the highest court in the universe. It is there where, not just a man's rights or property, or even his life is at stake, but his eternal destiny. This is the high calling and present ministry of Christ. It is said that three Philadelphia lawyers are a match for the very devil himself. But all the Philadelphia lawyers combined would be of no benefit to us before the judgment seat of God. Our need there is not to outwit the devil, but to satisfy the demands of God's holiness, and that is impossible unless we have an Advocate who is not just brilliant, but who can also satisfy God's holiness. That is why John writes to believers and says if you sin you need not despair, for you have an Advocate whose calling is to gain your pardon in the court of heaven. If this truth alone does not add to our Christian joy and fulfill one of John's purposes for writing this letter, then we must be deaf to the Holy Spirit. We who love Christ are His clients and benefit daily because of His ministry before the throne of God.**

### **III. HIS CHARACTER.**

**Jesus is called the righteous. It is not just incidental either that John adds this word of description of Christ's character as our Advocate. Unless He was righteous, it would be of little comfort to be His client, for it is His righteousness alone that enables Him to gain our pardon. On earth and advocate need not be righteous to win his clients case. In fact, he may be more guilty than the man he is defending. None of the cleverness of men and loop-holes in the**

**law, however, can help the guilty sinner before God. If there is no just way for God to grant pardon, than he cannot and will not do it. And the only way He can justly pardon the guilty is, if there is a compelling cause such as a substitutionary sacrifice on behalf of the guilty. Even God's mercy must be in harmony with His holiness. Jesus Christ the righteous is the only being in the universe who can meet the need at the throne of God. He is not just the best, He is the only lawyer that can win our case.**

**Jesus died for our sins and took the wages of sin on Himself, and since He was righteous and, therefore, totally undeserving of any punishment, His sacrifice makes it possible for God to pardon all for whom He pleads. Justice demands mercy since it would be unjust to punish again for the same sin. This would be to deny the value of Christ's sacrifice. It would be unjust to deny the substitute his right to suffer for another. If I take ten lashes that you deserve, because out of love I do not want you to suffer, that should be my right to so express my love, and it would be an injustice to me, and a denial of my right to so love, if the punishment were also then given to you. That would make my suffering be for nothing, and it would be injustice. Justice demands that the penalty be inflicted only once.**

**How much greater wrong it would be to take the suffering of Christ the righteous, and count it of no value. God's justice demands that He hear and grant every plea of Christ for pardon. Jesus can never loose a case, for since He died for all sin, there is no sin that cannot be pardoned if He is the sinners Advocate. Sir Walter Raleigh sat in prison waiting for his trial for high treason, for which he was to be condemned to be executed. He felt all was unjust in the courts of earth, but he looked to the court of heaven and wrote,**

**From thence to heaven's bribeless call,  
Where no corrupted voices brawl,**

**No conscience molten into gold,  
No forged accuser bought or sold;  
No cause deferred, no vain-spent journey,  
For Christ is there, the King's Attorney.  
And when the grand twelve-million jury,  
Of our sins with direful fury,  
Gainst our souls black verdicts give,  
Christ pleads His death, and then we live.  
Be thou my Speaker, Taintless Pleader,  
Unblotted Lawyer, True Proceeder!  
Thou giv'est salvation even for alms,  
Not with a bribed lawyer's palms.  
This then is my eternal plea,  
To Him that made heaven, earth, and sea.**

**If Christ is your Advocate, this too is your hope.**

## **9. BLESSED ASSURANCE Based on I John 2:3**

**Storms had ravaged the ships; the Pinta had lost her rudder; the food was getting wormy, and the crew was threatening mutiny. Conditions could hardly have been worse, for there was darkness, danger, hunger, panic, and exhaustion. All of these stared them in the face, and yet the Admiral of the ship refused to turn back. Day after day he wrote in his log, "This day we sailed on. When Joaquin Miller read that log that Columbus had written on his first voyage across the uncharted Atlantic, his imagination caught on fire, and he felt he was right there with him.**

**He could feel the sting of the spray on his cheeks, and he could hear the roar of the sea, and in spite of the fact that all he could see was endless darkness he felt secure, for he knew he stood by a man**

of steadfast purpose, who was assured of his goal, and knew he would reach it. Miller was so possessed with the amazing perseverance of Columbus that he spontaneously poured out his feelings in poetry. I want to share just a part of that poem. The mate is speaking.

**"My men grow mutinous day by day; My men grow ghastly, wan and weak."**

**The stout mate thought of home; a stray of salt wave washed his swarthy cheek.**

**What shall I say, brave Adm'r'l, say, if we sight naught but seas at dawn?**

**"Why, you shall say at break of day: Sail on! sail on! sail on! and on!"**

**They sailed and sailed, as wind might blow, Until at last the blanched mate said,**

**Why, now not even God would know Should I and all my men fall dead.**

**These very winds forget their way, For God from these dread seas is gone.**

**Now speak, brave Adm'r'l; speak and say-"He said: Sail on! sail on! and on!"**

**They sailed and sailed. Then spake the mate: This mad sea shows its teeth tonight.**

**He curls his lip, he lies in wait, With lifted teeth, as if to bite!**

**Brave Adm'r'l say but one good word: What shall we do when hope is gone?"**

**The words leapt like a leaping sword: Sail on! sail on! sail on! and on!**

**We all know that in spite of the number and magnitude of the obstacles, Columbus did sail on and on until he reached land. The**

**question naturally arises, why did he have such assurance when all others feared for their lives? Was he just stubborn, or did he have no fear of death, or was there another reason for his assurance in the midst of great trial? Columbus answers this question for us himself in the first sentence of his will. He wrote this: "In the name of the Most Holy Trinity, who inspired me with the idea, and afterward made it perfectly clear to me, that I could navigate and go the Indies from Spain, by traversing the ocean westwardly..."**

**By his own testimony in which he gives all the glory to God he tells us his assurance was due to the fact that he knew he was following the leading of God. If a man knows and is assured that he is on a course charted by God, then nothing can cause him to forsake it. Therefore, the most important factor in any person's life is assurance, for it will enable a man to ride out any and all storms, and finally to arrive at his goal.**

**All people are on a voyage across an uncharted sea of time heading for the new world of eternity. Some will go down in the storms; others will lose their way, and still others will chose to change their course and give up the goal. But there will be many also who will, like Columbus, sail on and on and on, and at last arrive because they have God's assurance that they will. We want to consider two facts about assurance that John makes clear, for these two facts are precious gems from the vault of God's own treasure. To know them and believe them, and then to obey them is to be partaker of the very riches of Christ. First we observe that-**

## **I. ASSURANCE IS POSSIBLE. v. 3.**

**"Hereby we do know that we do know Him." John is saying, not only can we know God, but we can know that we know Him, and it is this knowing that we know that is called assurance. It is not enough just to know that Jesus died for the sins of the world, and**



**that He is the Advocate of all who believe and trust Him. We must know that He died for my sins, and is my Savior, and my Advocate. John says that such assurance is possible.**

**This is good news in itself, and adds greatly to the Christians joy, for it gives him a solid foundation on which to build in a world where uncertainty seems to rule. One cannot be stable and secure unless he can know something significant for sure. It is not enough to believe that you can be sure about what Benjamin Franklin said, "In this world, nothing is certain but death and taxes." If certainty is limited to these things, then the skeptics are not far off who say, "The only certainty is that nothing is certain." Or, "Nothing is more certain than uncertainties." You cannot build very high on the hope of such men, for they have no hope, and life to them is one big tragic sham. Omar Khayyam said,**

**"One thing at least is certain-this life flies.  
One thing is certain, and the rest is lies."**

**Such pessimism is the natural result of men who see only with the eyes of flesh, and not the eyes of faith. Faith alone sees God's revelation, and this changes the whole picture. The materialistic and secular mind is blind to spiritual truths, and can only speak of relativity and probability. Nothing is absolutely certain, and as a result there is no assurance. This makes everyone and everything unstable. A teacher asked the son of a weatherman, "How much is two plus two?" And he said, "Four probably." She asked him, "How old would a person be if they were born in 1920?" And he asked, "Man or woman?"  
Some people think of life in terms of the weather and a woman's age, and so they feel that probable conclusions are the best we can have.**

**In these areas probability is good enough, for we do not have to be certain of the weather or of a woman's age. But when it comes to**

salvation and the goal of life, we can never be content with anything less than certainty. Those who talked about hoping they are saved cannot have the peace necessary to be happy in the Lord. A man has to know he is saved, and the point here is that such certainty and assurance is possible. John had to write to this to the Christians of his day because with all the false doctrine and false claims being made, they could easily be confused and wonder if they were among the true Christians, or the deceived Christians. Today Christians still get confused and wonder for sure if they are right or wrong, and how they can be sure that they are really saved.

Theologians of both the Calvinist and Arminian school agree that it is possible to be saved on not be sure of it, for salvation and assurance of salvation are not the same thing. Charnock, a Calvinist, wrote, "The characters of faith may be written in the heart as letters engraved upon a seal, yet filled with so much dust as not to be distinguished.." Watson, an Arminian, wrote, "A child of God may have a kingdom of grace in his heart and yet not know it. O Jacob wept for his son Joseph, when Joseph was still alive; thou mayest weep for want of grace, when grace may be alive in thy heart."

Because it is possible to be saved and lack assurance of it, it is of the utmost importance that we know that assurance is possible. Some not knowing of this go on living in a hope-so-salvation, when a know-so-salvation is possible, and it is God's will for each believer to know. R. E. Neighbour wrote,

What wondrous blessings overflow,  
When we can truly say, I know.  
I know in whom I have believed,  
I know the one I have received,  
I know His blood avails for me,  
I know that I was blind, but see,

**I know that my Redeemer lives,  
I know the gift He freely gives,  
I know He'll keep me till the end,  
I know He's my unfailing Friend.**

**In order to gain the full benefit of God's plan, the Christian must know this primary fact, that he not only can know God, he can know that it is God that he knows, and thereby have full assurance of his salvation. After stating that assurance is possible, John goes on to explain that-**

## **II. ASSURANCE IS PRACTICAL.**

**It is the result of a very practical test. If we keep His commandments is the test. We know because we obey. If there is no obedience, there can be no assurance. It is not the result of some mystical experience such as seeing a vision; being caught up in a trance, or hearing the voice of God. It is not a matter of being transported to heaven, speaking in tongues, or any other extraordinary experience.**

**All the debates on whether or not these unusual experiences are of value is beside the point that we are concerned with here. If they were necessary for the Christians assurance, John would certainly have mentioned them at this point, but he does not. He makes assurance rest on such a simple and practical test that a child can understand it. It is simply obedience to God's commands. Jesus said in Matt. 12:50, "For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." The way into the family of God is by simple obedience, and doing what God expects us to do.**

**The Gnostics had some of the early Christians confused, and had them doubting their own security in Christ. They made such**

**amazing claims about their unique and superior knowledge of God that the average Christian would start to wonder if their experience could begin to match it. Considering their inferior experience, they may begin to doubt if they are even Christians at all. Many Christians feel the same today when they hear of the marvelous experiences of some believers. They feel so ordinary that they wonder if they are indwelt by the Spirit at all.**

**John says not to look to the unusual experiences to give you assurance, but rather, examine your life, and see if you are keeping God's commandments. If you are not, all the extraordinary experiences in the world will not give you the certainty that the simplest Christian has who gives heed to the message which says, "Trust and obey for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey." The happy Christian is the Christian with assurance, and the Christian with assurance is the Christian who obeys.**

**My gracious Lord, I own Thy right  
To every service I can pay,  
And call it my supreme delight  
To hear Thy dictates, and obey.**

**The Gnostics said that only the elite can rise to the highest knowledge of God. The masses must remain in their near animal state without this knowledge. This is reserved for the intelligentsia. John says that this thinking has no part in Christian theology, for Jesus died for all men, and every man can rise to the full assurance of the knowledge of God, and of his salvation. All that is necessary is obedience, for as we obey God He draws nearer, and reveals Himself and His will more fully. Obedience is the way to assurance for every man, woman, and child.**

**Let us not be deceived, for the higher and deeper Christian life is**

not reserved for pastors, Sunday School teachers, and a few superior laymen. Full assurance which leads to full fellowship with God is placed on such a practical level of attainment that every Christian can reach it. They need to simply obey what they do know of God's commands, and they can have the same certainty as anyone else. How do I know I am a good citizen or not? If I obey the laws of the land I can be assured that I am recognized as a good citizen. How can I know I am a child of God? I simply need to look at my life and see if I obey God's laws. Do I really love to do what is good, pure, and right? Do I rejoice when I see God's will revealed so that I can obey it?

This practical test is so vital, and yet we often neglect it and assume that all a person needs to say is that they believe in Jesus as the Savior. Many people have said that who do not obey God's commandments, and John does not hesitate in verse 4 to call them liars. Any kind of salvation that goes no further than changing a man's tongue so that he speaks pious words once in a while is not worth having. Whatever men claim, if they cannot back it up with a life, John says do not pay any attention to their claims. They might say they know God, but Jesus will say in the day of judgment that he did not know them. This verse puts a heavy responsibility upon the professing Christian. If he does not keep the commandments of God, the Bible authorizes the community to consider him a liar. It will do no good for the disobedient to say judge not, for he is already judged by the Word of God, and he stands convicted as one in whom the truth does not dwell.

John says in verse 5 that if we are professors who keep the Word of God, then we will have the love of God perfected in us. He says we will then have the assurance that we are in Him. Obedience, which all can understand, is the road open to all that leads to perfect love and full assurance. John then closes this line of thought with the perfect example, which is Jesus Christ. He says in verse 6 that

**we who profess to be in Christ ought not to make being a Christian a mystery or hidden secret of any kind, as did the Gnostics, and those of mystery religions. We ought to walk just as Jesus walked, and we know He walked the same way Columbus sailed. He walked with the assurance that he was in God's will, and he was determined to reach his goal whatever the obstacles.**

**He walked the common lanes, the city streets He trod,  
And in His heart was beauty....the beauty born of God.**

**The beauty of Jesus can be seen in us when we walk as He walked, for beautiful is the life that has a fullness of love and purpose because we can say, "Blessed Assurance Jesus is mine."**

**When Rudyard Kipling was a lad he went to sea with his father. Soon after the vessel was on its way Mr. Kipling went below. He heard a commotion above him, and soon the officer was banging on his door. "Mr. Kipling," he cried, "Your boy has crawled out on the yardarm, and if he lets go he'll drown." "Yes," said Mr. Kipling, glad to know it was nothing serious, "But he won't let go." Here was confidence expressed in another human being that gave peace and assurance. Even on the human level this kind of assurance is beautiful, and it leads to calmness in the midst of life's storms. How much greater the peace if we are assured that God will never let go of us? Often we might rightly feel that if God let's go of us, we are sunk, but assurance says, "But He won't let go."**

**We need assurance to face persecution. Many fall away in times of trial, but those who have assurance count it a joy to suffer for their Lord who suffered so much for them. Valerim, the Emperor of Rome, issued a decree which required all Christians to sacrifice to idols or be put to death. Cyprian was arrested and brought before the proconsul of Carthage. Maximus said, "Art thou he who hath borne the highest offices of their religion among the Christians?"**

**"Yes," said Cyprian. "The Emperor commands that you offer sacrifice to the gods of Rome." Cyprian responded, "I will not. Do as thou art ordered, nothing can move me from the stand I have taken." "Let him be beheaded," was the sentence, and he was led to an open field outside the city. He prayed and tied the bandage on his eyes, and then ordered his friends to give a sum of gold to the executioner to show that he had no unkind feelings toward him. He bowed himself to the earth, and with a simple blow was ushered out of this life into the presence of his Redeemer. One does not die like that without assurance.**

**Moody said, "There's no liberty, peace, rest, joy, power, until we have assurance." It is found in simple obedience to the commands of Christ. When the lawyer came to Jesus asking what he had to do to have eternal life, Jesus said he was to love God and his neighbor. If you want to live, you need to love. It's really that simple, for to love is to live. To walk as Jesus walked is to relate to everyone you confront with love. The level of our maturity is measured by the degree to which we let love control us. If we have little love, we live on a low level. If we have greater love, we live on a higher level. If we have the sacrificial love of Christ, we live on the highest level.**

**Karl Menninger in his book Love Against Hate says the world will not listen, but modern psychology has discovered that the disease of the world is the disease of the individual. He says the sickness of the individual is the lack of love, and thus the sickness of the world is lack of love. He is saying that they have discovered that the two great commandments of Jesus are the basis of a happy meaningful life. If this be so then it follows that the greatest sin is to lack love for God and neighbor. Lack of love is a violation of the greatest commandments, and is the root cause of all the unhappiness in the world. It is no wonder the world is sick and cannot find a cure. Christians who have the cure in their hands fail to inject it into their own hearts. How often do we hear it, or think about it even,**

**that our greatest sin is lack of love? Smiley Blanton, another psychiatrist, said so much when he titled his book simply, Love Or Perish. The greatest commands of God are to love, and when we live in obedience to these commands, and we are loving people toward God and man, then we can have the blessed assurance that the Spirit of the Christ we trust as Savior truly dwells in us, and we can know that we are children of God.**

#### **10. HATRED HIT HARD Based on I John 2:7f**

**One of the most exciting books you can read is The Count Of Monte Cristo. The hero of the book, Edmund Dantes, had been unjustly cast into a dungeon. Fortunately, by means of a tunnel he met an old man in another nearby dungeon. The old man told him of a great treasure that was hidden on the island of Monte Cristo. It seemed to be a worthless bit of knowledge, for he was just as trapped as the old man. His chance for escape, however, did come when the old man died. His body was put into a sack and was to be thrown over the cliff into the sea. Edmund Dantes saw his chance for escape. He managed to drag the body of the old man through the tunnel into his dungeon, and then he returned and got into the sack himself. He, of course, was thrown into the sea, and thereby became a free man.**

**He was far from free, however, for he so despised those who put him into the dungeon that he was a slave to hate. He spent the rest of his days, and his great wealth in tracking down, one by one, those who were responsible. He was clever enough to escape the bondage of the dungeon, but he remained a prisoner of the chains of hate. When one is intoxicated with hatred, he is not even free to choose to how to respond to persons, but is compelled to be hateful, and**



**therefore, is among the least free of all men. None are so bound as those who are wrapped in the chains of hate.**

**Catallus, the Roman said, "I hate and I love. Perhaps you ask why I do so. I do not know, but I feel it, and I am in torment." He was a victim of his own depravity, and though he hated to hate, he knew of no way to escape. Hatred is just a part of the very being of unregenerate man. John says if a man hates, you can be sure he is still in the darkness. Even Freud, who was no great friend of Christianity, recognized the truth of man's depravity. He said, "Those who love fairytales do not like it when people speak of innate tendencies in mankind toward aggression, destruction, and in addition cruelty." Everyone who has their eyes open to the facts are compelled to believe that hatred and hostility are basic problems of our world. In the United States alone there are on the average every hour 15 persons who are stabbed, clubbed, or shot. The daily news could appropriately be titled-who's hating who.**

**The big question is what can be done? Is there any escape, or will man's hatred eventually be the force that brings down the curtain on the stage of history, and then blows up the stage to boot. Bombs and missiles are not the problem, for it is the hatred of men that makes them so dangerous. The most popular panacea for overcoming man's hatred is education. Herbert Hoover once said, "If we had just one generation of properly born, adequately educated, healthy children, developed in character, we would have Utopia itself." This is the view of numerous leaders, but it is unrealistic. Even though it is known that hostility is not inherited, and, therefore, you could presumably begin with a generation of unhateful babies. But there is no way to raise them without them learning to hate, for they must grow up in a world where hate is always on the loose. Their parents hate; their relatives hate, and their neighbors hate. It would not be long before these potential utopianites would be responding as J. Petit-Senn who said, "We are told to walk**

**noiselessly through the world, that we waken neither hatred nor envy; but, alas! what can we do when they never sleep?"**

**You cannot educate men out of hatred when the most powerful influences in their lives are teaching them to hate. Men are born with the tendency to hate, but the actual hatreds they acquire are learned from their parents, relatives, and associates. Dr. Leon J. Saul a professor of Clinical Psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine says in his book, *The Hostile Mind*, that studies indicate that very definitely that hostility begins in the home. Man is depraved, but the expression of that depravity in hate and prejudice are not in the child. These things have to be taught, and so the very cause of man's hatred is evil education. Oscar Hammerstein II captured this truth in poetry:**

**You've got to be taught to hate and fear,  
You've got to be taught from year to year,  
It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear,  
You've got to be carefully taught.**

**You've got to be taught to be afraid  
Of people whose eyes are oddly made,  
And people whose skin is a different shade,  
You've got to be carefully taught.**

**You've got to be taught before its too late,  
Before you are six or seven or eight,  
To hate all the people your relatives hate,  
You've got to be carefully taught.**

**The Christian recognizes that education is essential, but it is inadequate to solve man's hate problem. Hate is more a matter of the heart, and so man needs his heart change before education will be of any profit. Man needs to know God through Christ, and he**

**needs to know the commands of Christ, and live in obedience to them, for only then can the love of God be perfected in him, and only then can he have the power to snap the chains of hate that bind his heart. Education can help get men out of bondage, as Edmund Dantes clever thinking got him out of the dungeon, but only the love of Christ can get men free from the chains of hate. The most brilliant of men are still slaves of hatred if their education has not included a knowledge of God through Christ.**

**For example, take Joseph Goebbels of Hitler's Germany. He was a smart man, and he earned his PH.D. from Heidelberg. He rejected the Gospel, however, and he wrote in his diary just before his 28th birthday: "I have learned to despise the human being from the bottom of my soul. He makes me sick at my stomach." His brilliance only enabled him to hate with greater power and cruelty.**

**We have spent a lot of time setting the stage. We have seen that the problem of hate is great. We have seen that man's solutions to it just do not work, for these very solutions are infiltrated by the forces of hate. We have arrived then to where man has always been. The stage is set the same as in John today. Only the actors are different. The Gnostics said knowledge is the cure-all. You can just attain unto full knowledge, then you will be in the light. They, of course, despise and hated those who were ignorant. Their knowledge did not free them from hate. John warned the Christians of his day that they ought not to be duped into thinking that brilliance is the key to the realm of light. Love alone can get you in. If a genius says he is in the light, yet hates his brother, John says he is still in the darkness. He is not a free man, but is bound and blind, and like captured Samson, he is a slave to the Philistines of hate.**

**There is only one way out of the darkness of hate says John. We must hit hate hard with the only weapon that can snap its heavy chains, and that weapon is obedience to the supreme commandment**

of love. John had just said in verse 3 that assurance grows out of obedience to God's commands, and now he explains the commandment which is the essence of them all. He begins in verse 7 where he addressed them as brethren, or beloved, as the modern versions have it. He assures them that he is not introducing any new idea like the Gnostics were doing. He is only writing of the old commandment which they had from the beginning. Cults and heretics always stress the fact that what they have is new and different. This is even more so with those who want to exploit the masses who crave for the novel in religion. The faith once for all delivered to the saints is often labeled as old hash, and discarded, but John, and all of Scripture, says it is this old hash alone that can nourish the soul and give it life and strength.

John says the commandment you need to obey is the old one you heard, and he is referring to the words of Jesus in his Gospel in 13:34, "A new commandment I give you that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." John has just said in verse 6 that we are to walk as Jesus walked, and He walked in love, and commanded us to also walk in love. This command is the foundation stone of the Christian life. Then in verse 8 John seems to deliberately contradict himself, for he says it is a new commandment he is writing. It is not hard to see how it can be both old and new. The old songs are often the new songs, and old subjects dealt with in a new approach become fresh and new. John is simply saying, the Christian answer to the problem of hate, and all other problems is an old answer that goes back to the author of truth-Jesus Christ. Yet, it is ever new and fresh. The message is old, but the experience of it is always new in the lives of those who obey it.

The commandment to love thy neighbor as thyself goes back to the early days of Israel, but it became new in Christ, for he did not just repeat it, he lived it. It was an old truth made new and fresh by

being exhibited in life. John says it is true also in you, for in following Christ the old commandment of love becomes new because it is experienced and exhibited. This is so says John because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. Darkness is not past, for if that was the case John would not even need to write. The Gnostics were still a force of darkness, but they would be conquered. John was optimistic and says the light will continue to shine until the forces of darkness are destroyed. The speed of the process will depend upon believers obedience to the command of love.

John says even Judaism was darkness in comparison to Christianity, for the true light was not shining in the Old Testament. The Jews despised the Gentiles. One Rabbi said, "The Gentiles were created by God to be fuel for the fires of hell." The true light in Christ, however, came to shine upon the Gentiles, and they became children of God. Jesus came, not as a light of Israel only, but as the light of the world. All walls were broken down, and all hate and prejudice were excluded from His kingdom. John Paul Wheelock wrote,

I lift my gaze beyond the night, and see,  
Above the banner of man's hate unfurled,  
The holy figure that on Calvary  
Stretched out wide enough for all the world.

God's new age of grace and light has begun says John. The message supreme is that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. He goes on to say in verse 9 that this makes hate incompatible with the Christian life and fellowship with God. John hits hatred hard. It is a black and white area. Regardless of what you say, if you hate your brother you are not a part of this new age of life. You are still free-Christian, and you are yet in darkness. We do not judge the hater when we say he cannot be a Christian. It will be of

**no avail to tell us we cannot judge, for God has given us this revelation that the man who hates his brother is still in darkness.**

**Hatred hurts the hater far more than the hated for it excludes him from the fellowship of God. It is he who obeys and follows Christ, who loves as He loved that becomes the recipient of God's blessings, and in turn becomes the greatest blessing to society. The only answer to man's hate is love, and not just natural love, but the love that God imparts into the hearts of all who receive His Son as Savior. This is the Christian message to the world, and it is our responsibility to exhibit the love of Christ to the world. Henry Longfellow wrote,**

**The sole thing I hate is hate; for hate is death and love is life,**

**A piece, a splendor from above; and hate, a never ending strife,  
A smoke, a blackness from the abyss. Where unclean serpents coil and hiss.**

**Love is the Holy Ghost within; Hate the unpardonable sin!  
Who preaches otherwise than this, betrays his Master with a kiss.**

**Let us neither betray Christ by word or deed, but obey the great commandment of love and be free from the chains of hate. Only then can we be living examples that give the prisoners of hate the hope that they too can be delivered by putting their trust in Christ.**

## **11. LOVE'S LIMITATIONS Based on I John 2:15-17**

**"Atlanta's Race" is the title of Sir E. J. Poynter's most successful paintings. The story behind the painting is from Ovid's Metamorphoses. Atlanta was the daughter of Schoenus of Boeotia,**

**and she was famous for her matchless beauty. She was also so swift of foot that none could outrun her. To everyone who asked for her hand in marriage she gave the same answer. She would be the prize of him who could vanquish her in the race. Defeat, however, would carry the penalty of death. Many lost their lives in trying to outrun her. After a lull there appeared a youth by the name of Hippomenes who challenged Atlanta once more to race. He knew he could not conquer her by fleetness of foot, so he carried with him three golden apples, for he had received this advice from Venus:**

**When first she heads the from the starting place  
Cast down the first one for her eyes to see,  
And when she turns aside make on apace.  
And if again she heads thee in the race  
Spare not the other two to cast aside,  
If she not long enough behind will bide.**

**The race began, and he followed these instructions. As Atlanta was about to pass him he dropped the first apple. She looked down, but ran on. He dropped the second apple and she seemed to stoop, and when he dropped the third she did stoop to pick it up. It was only a few seconds lost, but it was enough, for Hippomenes had touched the maple goal, and Atlanta had at last been defeated. Poynter's painting pictures Atlanta at that decisive moment when she turned her eyes from the goal and stretched her arm toward the golden temptation which brought her to defeat.**

**The painting is an illustration of the danger that faces every believer in the race toward the goal of Christlikeness. We must be looking always unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, but along side of us runs the world competing for our love, and John says it also has three golden apples to cast in our path: The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. The world casts these down before us hoping we will take our eyes off Christ and**

**stoop to gain these earthly prizes and forget the goal.**

**All of life is a competitive battle between the love of the eternal and the love of the temporal. One or the other must win, for one excludes the other. You cannot have your cake and eat it too. Atlanta must either win the race by keeping her eyes on the goal, or she must sacrifice the race to gain the golden apple. A choice must be made, and John says the Christian must make this choice as well. He cannot love God and the world, for love must be limited to one or the other. John knows that Christians will be tempted to stoop and pick up the golden apples of the world, and that is why he warns them and commands them to love not the world.**

**He had just written about love being the very essence of the Christian life, and that to be without it is to be in darkness. Now, however, he makes it clear that love must have its limitations, for it cannot be indiscriminate. The object of one's love must be God, and if this be so there are some things that cannot then be loved, and they are called in one word-world. Fortunately John goes on to tell us just what he means by the world. He names the three golden apples of the world's appeal, and he thereby defines the worldliness that we are to avoid. It is important that we see this clearly lest we misunderstand and pervert the statement, "Love not the world." Many have done so.**

**St. Bernard would spend days by the shore of Lake Constance and keep his eyes glued to his book lest he raised them and see the beauty, and be seduced away from God. John did not mean the creation when he said we are to not love the world. Jesus loved the world in that sense, and He said, "Behold the lilies of the field and the birds of the air." The heavens declare the glory of God and all of nature shows forth His handiwork. The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. It is not the work of the devil. It is legitimate for us to love the world in the sense of delighting in God's creation.**



**It can be excessive to the point of worshipping the creation rather than the Creator, and this of course is folly. But to love and enjoy nature is a part of our appreciation of God's nature.**

**Not loving the world does not mean we are to not love the people of the world. This would be a denial of what is commanded. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to die for them. We are to love the world in this sense of loving the people. We must see that the world in this context is what we call worldliness. It is that order of fallen society, and the attitudes of fallen people. It is the lust, pride, and all that is opposed to the light of God's righteousness. The world is that realm where darkness reigns. David Smith says the world here equals, "The sum of all the forces antagonistic to the spiritual life." This is the world we are not to love.**

**John does not just give a command and leave it at that. He says love not the world, and then he goes on to give reasons for command. God expects man to use his intelligence and to weigh values. He does not compete with the world by brute force. He offers reasons for choosing His way rather than the way of the world. We want to examine the 2 reasons that John gives us here for not loving the world. First-**

## **I. IT IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH THE LOVE OF GOD.**

**The Christian cannot love the world, for to do so is to forsake the love of God, since it is impossible to love both. Paul said, "Demas has forsaken me having loved this present world." Demas had no choice but to forsake Paul if he was going to love the world, for loving it and serving God are opposites that cannot be reconciled. He had to forsake Paul if he was going to love the world, just as he would have had to forsake the world to truly serve God with Paul.**

**To love is to give someone a supreme and central place in your life. You cannot have two supreme loves. It must be either God or the world on the throne, for neither of them will share the throne with the other. If you love the world you are electing to lose the love of God. Show me a man who is lustful and proud in an evil sense, and I will show you a man who may be very kind, helpful, and even religious, but a man in whom the love of God does not abide. I believe, however, this can even happen to a Christian. John is wasting his time and ours if he writes to warn Christians about what they can never be tempted into. Who needs to watch out for what is impossible. It is possible for a Christian to lose the love of God, and cease to be a servant of Christ by letting the love of the world overwhelm their hearts.**

**Each of us must constantly examine our hearts lest we end up as castaways, and no longer worthy contestants for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. We are not talking about losing salvation, but about losing one's usefulness for the kingdom of God. Our love and loyalty must be continuously examined to see if its object is Jesus Christ or some selfish and worldly object. Just as a person can get a dishonorable discharge from the army and still be a citizen of the country, so a Christian can be set on the shelf and no longer be an active member of the soldiers of the cross, and yet still be a part of God's family. But this is a terrible demotion.**

**When two people get married they limit the expression of their romantic and sexual love to their partners. So it is in the spiritual realm. When a person is saved and enters into a relationship with Christ as Savior, he becomes a part of the bride of Christ. From that point on his love and faithfulness is to be to Christ alone. To love the world is to commit spiritual adultery. This was the most common sin of the Old Testament people of God, and it is doubtless in first place also in the New Testament dispensation. The message of the prophets is the message needed today. We need to forsake all**

**other gods, and be loyal to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Set your affections on things above and not on the things of the earth, for these things are incompatible with the love of God.**

**The challenge of John is for believers to be loyal to the Lord in their love, and not corrupt it and diminish it by allowing the world to gain their affection. Young put it, "Let not the cooing of the world allure thee, Which of her lovers ever found her true?" E. J. Poynter, whose painting we earlier considered, painted another well known picture called "Faithful Unto Death." It is picture of a soldier at his post during the great volcano eruption that buried Pompei in hot lava. All the people were fleeing for safety, but the soldier grasped his spear firmly and stood erect. His eyes revealed terror, and one can sense the struggle that rages in his mind between duty and the desire to save himself. Obedience wins, however, and he remains at his post faithful unto death.**

**The Bible nowhere says it will be easy to be a Christian, but if a pagan soldier can be faithful to his superior even unto death, then any Christian should be ashamed to do less for his Lord who died for his eternal salvation. The world desperately needs Christians who will love Jesus supremely, and forsaking all others keep themselves to Him alone. To love the world is incompatible with God's love, and so the degree to which you love the world is the degree to which you suffer the loss of God's love. Let our decoration then be that of F. W. H. Meyers:**

**Who so has felt the Spirit of the Highest  
Cannot confound nor doubt Him nor deny;  
Yeah, with one voice, O world, tho' thou deniest,  
Stand thou on that side, for on this am I.**

**II. IT IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH THE WILL OF GOD.**

**Not only is it impossible to reconcile the love of the world with the love of God, but it will be impossible to do so in eternity, for the things of the world have no part in God's will for the future. These things will not last is what John is saying. They will pass away, for they are temporal and transient, and will have no place in God's eternal plan. To love them is to trade the solid diamond of eternity for the melting Popsicle of time.**

**The love of the world, which is really lust, is centered around pleasures that are purely a matter of the flesh, and do not go deep and affect the soul. The lover of the world has only surface pleasures. They are real, but not lasting pleasures. They do not produce joy and a sense of ultimate purpose and meaning.**

**Fading is the worldling's pleasure,  
All his boastful pomp and show.  
Solid joys and lasting treasure  
None by Zion's children know.**

**This is why it is of no profit to gain the whole world if one loses his own soul. You can never come out ahead by trading the timeless for the temporary. The world throws down its golden apples of present pleasure and say enjoy yourself, for its later than you think. The world appeals with the same urgency as the Gospel. The world says today is the day to satisfy the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, and so let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die. Now is the time to live.**

**The Christian, however, with the eyes of faith looks ahead and sees the world and its lusts pass away. We claim the promise of God that those who do His will abide forever. John fights worldliness, not by shouting and getting angry, but by the calm appeal to the believer to consider how incompatible it is with God's purpose and will. He appeals to their sense of values and makes it clear that to choose the**

**world is a poor investment, for the world and its lust are going to go out of style for good, but those who are in God's will have a style that will last forever. Omar Khayyam wrote,**

**The worldly Hope men set their hearts upon  
Turns to ashes-or it prospers-and anon,  
Like snow upon the desert's dusty face  
Lighting a little hour or two is gone.**

**The Christian does not invest his time and trust in that which is fading and passing away, but in the will of God which is lasting and eternal. Love for both are incompatible. The world has a strong appeal in spite of the fact that it offers only fading pleasures, and the Christian can only refrain from stooping to snatch up its golden apples of temptation by keeping his eyes on Christ. John Henry Newman wrote,**

**Unveil, O Lord, and on us shine in glory and in grace,  
This gaudy world grows pale before the beauty of Thy face.  
Till Thou art seen, it seems to be a sort of fairy ground,  
Where suns unsetting light the sky, and flowers and fruits abound.  
But when Thy keener, purer beam is poured upon our sight  
It loses all its power to charm, and what was day is night.**

**Do not love the world, for it is incompatible with the love of God and the will of God. To love the world is to lose the best for time and eternity, and so limit your love to the Lord. Keep your eyes on Him as your ultimate loyalty, and make sure all other loves are compatible with loving Him supremely.**

## **12. WORDS OF WARNING Based on I John 2:18f**

**A deaf but pious English lady visiting a country town in Scotland went to church with an ear trumpet. It was a new device then, and the elders of the church had never seen one, and they viewed it with great suspicion. After consultation one of them walked over to her and wagging his finger at her warningly said, "One toot and ye're out." This, of course, was a warning that was unneeded.**

**Not so the warning a man received in New York. He was walking down fourth Ave. and stopped on a temporary bridge to watch some work being done on the subway. A worker told him to move on, for he was in danger of being hurt. He said he had a right to be on a public street, and he refused to move. A few moments later he was struck on the head by a piece of metal and was severely hurt. He sued for damages, and the courts decision is of real interest. The court agreed with him that he had a perfect right to stay where he was. However, since he was warned of the danger of doing so, it is presumed that he accepted the risk involved, and, therefore, could not collect damages. The contractor had no right to remove him by force, and so had fully done its duty when it gave warning. Here was a warning that was needed, but was unheeded, and so was of no effect in preventing what it was meant to prevent. To be forewarned is not to be forearmed if the warning is ignored.**

**In Scripture there are no warnings but those that are needed, and so we ought to make sure that we give heed to every one of them. Our study of I John has brought us to a warning concerning antichrist, or antichrists. John only mentions the anti-Christ, but his warning covers his numerous predecessors which he calls antichrists. The thing that impresses me about this passage is the fact that John is judging who these antichrists are, and he lays down a standard by which Christians of all time can judge the antichrists of their day. From a superficial point of view this would be contrary to the words of Christ that we judge not. These words of Christ are so often quoted and given such an absurd application that I wanted**

**to call your attention to the fact that there are clear areas where they do not apply. This saying comes up all the time in conversations where the character and conduct of persons are being discussed. Even non-Christians quote it to throw up a smoke screen to avoid being examined.**

**Nothing can be more absurd than to suppose that Christ meant for us to suspend our critical and moral faculties, and refuse to determine the worthiness of any man's character and conduct. Such an application of the words of Christ would lead to the neglect of all the warnings of Scripture to beware of false prophets. It would make John's warning and advice both wrong and worthless. Not applying the truth of the Bible to life is a common problem, but to give it an absurd application is even worse. A boy said to his father, "Dad, did you go to Sunday School when you were a boy?" Dad said, "Why yes son I always went to Sunday School." The son replied, "Well then, I think then I'll quit, it isn't doing me any good either." Lack of application of what one learns leads to no good, but an absurd application of what one learns can lead to definite harm. Therefore, let us give heed to these words of warning by John, and recognize that some things we must judge. The first thing we must judge is-**

## **I. THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES.**

**In 3:1 John says it is the last time, and we know it by the signs we see. All of the New Testament authors indicate that Christians will be able to know when the end is near, for there will be signs. In Matt. 24 the disciples asked Jesus what the sign of His coming will be, and of the end of the world. They assume there would be signs of the end of history. Jesus told them not to be alarmed at false messiahs, wars, and rumors of wars, nations rising against nations, famines, and earthquakes in various places, for all of these are to characterize all of history and not just the end. Many have**

**perverted the clear words of Christ and quoted these things as signs of the end, but Jesus says they are only the beginning of sufferings. Jesus goes on to say there will be much tribulation for the church to go through, and there will be a great falling away, and many false prophets, but the church will still succeed in taking the Gospel to all nations, and then will come the end.**

**Paul later explains more concerning this falling away, and the man of lawlessness who will arise before the end. John, now later yet, adds some more details to the picture. He says to the Christians of his day that they have heard that antichrist would come. He does not say that he has come, but he says that there are so many antichrists already that it is a sign of nearing the end. We will consider the problem this raises in a moment. I want to pause here and draw a conclusion that I feel is inescapable and important for our whole understanding of the doctrine of last things. The Christian who studies the Word of God will be able to see signs of the approaching end of the world. Christians have made many false judgments, and given many erroneous applications of the signs of the end, but, nevertheless, the whole New Testament justifies us in believing we will be able to know when the end is near. To deny this and say we will have no idea is to make a large portion of the New Testament meaningless. Everything the New Testament says about signs is worthless if we cannot judge the signs of the times.**

**Now we must consider what seems to be an embarrassing problem arising out of John's dogmatic assertion that it was obvious 1900 years ago that it was the last hour of history. John had good reason to believe the end was near in his day, for except for the fact that the antichrist himself had not yet appeared, the other signs seemed to be almost fully fulfilled. The great falling away due to the Gnostic heresy seemed to fulfill Paul's first sign, and since the known world then was practically all reached with the Gospel, it would appear that Christ's major sign was also fulfilled. When**



**John wrote at the end of the first century, it looked as if the last hour was at hand, for all that was left was for the man of sin to appear. Many, especially of those who are liberal, just say that John had good reason to believe it was the last hour, but it turned out he was wrong for antichrist did not appear.**

**Others say that John is referring to the fall of Jerusalem in 70A.D. and that it was the last hour for Judaism. This is highly improbable, for there is not the slightest hint that would lead the reader to get this meaning. If John meant this, he could not have done a better job of being obscure. If this were true, it would solve the problem, but not convincingly. Bengel, the conservative Greek scholar, solves the problem by an even less likely interpretation. He says John is referring to the last hour of his life. He was old and the end was near for him, and he knew it. It is hard to see any connection with the text in this interpretation. The fact of many antichrists is what caused John to know it was the last hour, and not his feeling that he was not long for this world.**

**The most obvious interpretation is to recognize that John is only speaking in the common Christian language of his day. Christians looked at time as being in 3 ages: The former age, the present evil age, and the age to come. The present age is the last age of history as we know it. It is an age that is passing away. The age to come has already broken into the present age, and runs parallel with it. We who know Christ already partake of the things to come such as eternal life. It has already begun, and we are rescued from the darkness of this present evil age and are made citizens of the kingdom of light. This concept leads the New Testament authors to refer to this age as the last. It does not mean it will end soon, but that it is passing away, and will give way completely to the age to come. For the Christian then, it is always in the last days.**

**The book of Hebrews begins by referring to the former days,**

**when God spoke by prophets in various ways "but in these last days he has spoken to us by His Son." When Jesus came into history that was the beginning of the end. The last days began, and Peter at Pentecost said that what was taking place there was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel that in the last days God would pour out his Spirit upon all flesh. The coming of the Holy Spirit was another sign of the last days. In other words, from the Jews point of view in the Old Testament there was only the present age and the age to come-the last age. That last age began with the coming of the Messiah to establish His kingdom. The present church age is the last age. God has no other plan. He has given His final and fullest revelation in His Son, and when these last days are over, eternity begins.**

**John was simply saying that we are seeing the signs clearer than ever that these are the last days, and the end is near. That history has gone on yet for nearly 2000 years does not show that John was in error. It only emphasizes the long suffering of God. John also wrote by God's inspiration the book of Revelation, and told of multitudes of things yet should happen in these last days before the end. The fact that John could sense the real possibility of the end being right around the corner explains why the book of Revelation can be interpreted in so many ways. It can be so interpreted to be nearly all fulfilled in the first century, as the preterists do, or as being fulfilled in every century, as the historicists do, or as being fulfilled at the literal last hour, as the futurists do.**

**The book of Revelation is obviously calculated to keep the church aware that the end is always near for every generation of Christians. John could sincerely believe that the last hour was near and be correct, for it always is, yet God can continue to be longsuffering, and we can only go by the revealed signs in judging if the end is at hand. In a sense the apostolic age was a type of the history of the church to the end. All the signs were fulfilled on what they thought**

**was a universal level. We know now it was not, but know now that the whole world is involved, and when we see the signs fulfilled again on a truly universal scale, we will know it is the last of the last days.**

**Let us be cautious in applying this truth, and not depart from Scripture principles, and start finding signs that are irrelevant. A poet has done a fine job in giving us a sense of the urgency that is to characterize us, but he misses completely the real signs of the end.**

**There are worries in the air, filling men with hope and fear;  
There are signals everywhere that the end is drawing near,  
There are warnings to prepare, for the King will soon be here.  
Troublelous times are gathering around, the days of lawlessness  
and crime.**

**Mighty earthquakes shake the ground, war clouds rise in every  
clime,  
While there comes a solemn sound, we are near the end of time.**

**His conclusion is correct, but not his reasons for thinking so. Earthquakes and trouble have nothing to do with the signs of the end. The reaching of the whole world with the Gospel and the rise of anti-Christ are the signs we are to watch for.**

### **13. SATANIC SEPARATISM Based on I John 2:19f**

**Harry Emerson Fosdick has much thinking that is not acceptable to the evangelical Christian, but he also has many valuable insights that make his writings of real worth. One of his ideas is that a man should not be judged so much by the position he is in, as by the direction in which he is moving. He uses the stock**

**market as an illustration. To judge the value of a figure quoted on a certain stock, it is not enough just to have the figure of its present position, but one must know whether it has reached that figure on the way up or the way down. It is not where it is, but the direction in which it is going, that tells the value of the stock.**

**So it is with people. It is not enough just to know where they are. You must also know which way they are headed, and whether it be up or down. Some start very high by natural endowment or fortunate circumstances, and then head downward, while others start at the bottom and struggle upward, and at some point says Fosdick, they will pass, and be considered equal, but not so, for one is drifting down while the other is climbing up. It is not their position, but their direction that determines the value of their position.**

**This is true, not just for judging for secular success, but it fits the spiritual life as well. The Apostle John is using it as a standard by which to judge the antichrists of his day. In verse 19 John says that they have been made manifest by the direction in which they have gone. They were visibly with us at one time, and could have been judged as equals, for they were in the same church and same fellowship. Now, however, they have gone out from us, and this departure shows us they were really not of us, even when they were with us. Their position fooled us for a while, but once we saw the direction in which they were going, we knew they were not of us.**

**It is significant to note that the antichrists were not outsiders, but were those who were within, but who then went out of the church. This makes sense, for false doctrines seldom have their origins outside the church, for those outside have no interest in doctrine. The heretics down through the centuries were men who were deeply interested in theology, and considered themselves Christians. So it is today with the radical theologians who question orthodox theology.**

**So it was with the Gnostics in John's day. They were not anti-God by any means, but they were convinced they had the real truth about God, and they were deeply religious. Their departure from the true church, and from the deity of Christ revealed that they were really never a part of the body of Christ.**

**What makes this of interest is that John is admitting that the Apostolic Church was not infallible by a long shot. Just like churches today, the membership roles then were filled with those who were not truly saved. Whenever you hear some saint complaining because non-Christians get into the membership of the church, you can remind them that Judas got in on the ground level when Christ began to build the church, and that the church of the first century was also filled with false Christians. That has been the case in every age.**

**It is ignorance of history that causes Christians to look upon the past as golden, and see only rust in the present age. The church is in bad shape in many ways, but is far stronger now than it has been in other periods. The sooner we quit groaning in self pity and recognize we face only the same problems the church has always faced, the sooner we will get moving along the road of fulfilling our task. John says that there was a great apostasy in the church of his day. John doesn't sink into pessimism, but simply says that it teaches us that all who are with us are not necessarily of us. Every church since has had to recognize this, that just as Christians can be in the world but not of it, so the world can be in the church but not of it.**

**When the unsaved within in the church get organized, as they did in John's day, then you usually have a split. This is not to say that all splits are a matter of saved and unsaved factions, for this is not so. This would be giving Christians a credit they do not deserve, for they have often been foolish and unchristian, and have been tools of**

**the devil in causing divisions. In John's case, however, he judges those who have gone out as being antichrists, and he can do so, for he is an Apostle, and knows that the true church is built on the foundation of the Lordship of Christ, which they reject.**

**He knows that anyone who would forsake the group that holds to Christ's deity must be unsaved. By the same standard we can judge persons today. Those who do not accept Christ as Lord are made manifest as antichrists.**

**This passage has been used in false ways. The Catholic church made much of it when Luther went out of the Catholic church. He was branded as antichrist. Any group can take this passage and brand any who depart from them as antichrists, if the main concept of the passage is ignored. It is only in this context as departure from the body of Christ, which holds Christ as Lord, that fulfills the type of apostasy of which John is writing. We cannot judge any person to be an apostate until we can say they have denied the Son. When person have done so they can be labeled as antichrists. B. H. Carroll said, "When you see a star fall you can know it is not a star." So when you see a deserter of the faith, you can know he was not a true disciple of the faith.**

**We see from this verse that there are two sides to the concept of separation. In itself it is not a virtue to be a separatist, for it is as much the method of antichrist as it is of the true church. The multitude of false cults are the product of separation. The truth is irksome to the unsaved, so they depart and start their own religion where they can do and believe as they please. It makes all the difference in the world what you are separating from. If it is from the world and false doctrine, then you follow Christ, but if it is from the truth and God's people, you follow antichrist. John says, when you can see a person going the wrong direction, you can judge him to be an apostate.**

**The New Testament pictures the church as a living organism, and believers are members of it. They are hands, feet, eyes and ears etc. Every true believer is a living part of the body, and if he is not, he is not of the body. John Cotton, the old Puritan commentator wrote concerning these apostates: "A glass eye maybe an ornament to the body, and a wooden leg may support the body, yet they are not true members. So much may be ornaments and supports of the church, but yet not true members. Though they cleave to the body, yet they are not joined by nerves and sinews, nor anointed by the head. Just as not all Israel was true Israel, so not all the church is the true church.**

**It also shows a very close unity of true Christians in this period. The implication of this verse is that only unbelievers would ever leave the church. No true Christian would forsake the body of Christ. This text should have prevented many of the separations that have occurred in history. John Cotton comments on this matter in a way we need to consider. He wrote, "It may be just to separate when a church is heretical, yet that alone is not a sufficient ground. The church at Corinth denied the resurrection of the dead, yet Paul calls them saints; so the Pharisees charged that none should profess Christ, and taught false doctrine, yet Christ charges His disciples to obey them because they sit in Moses' chair. Therefore error, even fundamental error, is not always a just cause."**

**Many Christians built their separatist ideas on political, sociological, and systematic theological foundations, and not on Scripture. Man made differences become a matter of idolatry when they are used to divide Christians. Unless it can be established that a group or man has denied the deity of Christ, it is a Christian obligation to work out any differences in the spirit of Christ, and not be separated. If Christian would have always done so, there would never have been so much disunity among Christians. Christians need to stay in places of leadership in all organizations to maintain a**

**Christian influence, rather than separate and leave the group to become totally secular, or even anti-Christian. R.E.O. White writes to evangelical Christians concerning their relationship to the ecumenical movement and points out all of the dangers and risks involved, but adds, "Nevertheless, evangelicals must remember that to stand aloof from a movement for fear of what that movement might do, when standing aloof may make more likely the thing you fear, involved some responsibility for the thing you foresaw but did nothing to prevent."**

**If Billy Graham was a separatist, he would not be Billy Graham, and the Gospel he preaches would remain unheard by millions. Graham has the attitude of John, and says if men do not like the truth they will leave us, and thereby prove they are not of us. In other words, let the devil retreat, but let not the church forsake territory it has already won. John was doing all he could to keep the church stable and centered on the solid rock of Christ. The influence of false doctrine was everywhere, but John did not advise retreat, but like Paul and other New Testament authors, he encouraged Christians to stand fast for the truth. If any separation is to take place, let it be the satanic separation of those who cannot tolerate the deity of Christ.**

#### **14. THE WINNING WIND   Based on I John 2:20**

**Determining the superiority of either side in either conflict is difficult since the decisive factor in gaining a victory is often hidden. This was certainly the case when the Spanish Armada sailed against England. It was one of the greatest fleets ever assembled, and the Spanish ships dwarfed the English vessels. They towered above the sea, and the very sight of them threw fear into the English. It appeared to be no mystery where the superior power was, until an**



**unforeseen factor entered the picture. A strong wind began to blow up the English Channel and it was discovered that this made the large Spanish ships unmanageable, whereas the smaller English vessels could still maneuver. The result was, the Spaniards were at the mercy of the wind, and were blown up the channel into the North Sea, and around the coast of Scotland, and finally on to the Hebrides where they were smashed to pieces.**

**The wind changed the whole picture, and gave the victory to the apparently inferior. The winning wind was the decisive factor. It is the wind that changed the whole picture in the battle of light against darkness also. Go back to Pentecost, and you find a small group of 120 people facing a Roman Empire, and an unfriendly Judaism. A picture of weakness facing a great strength. Yet, when the wind came upon the 120, they received the promised power of the Holy Spirit, and they went out and turned the world upside down. The wind was the decisive factor, and again, the apparently inferior gained the victory. Pentecost was the day of the anointing of the church, and from that time on all who enter in the body of Christ by faith in Christ are anointed with the Holy Spirit. John is saying to the Christians of his day that it is this anointing that is still the enabling power to be superior over evil forces, and it keeps the believer from being deceived by the antichrists.**

**In verse 20, John with one blow destroys the professed superiority of the Gnostics. They said they were unique and above all others, for they knew what only the initiated could know. Those who had not gone through their particular rites just were not capable of knowing the mysteries of God. John tells the Christians that this is nonsense, for he says to all of them, "You have been anointed by the Holy One-Jesus Christ Himself." He said, you know all things, or as the modern versions have it, you all know. John is contrasting the Christian position with that of the Gnostics. They say only the elite can know the deep truths of God, but John says all**

**Christians know the deepest truths possible to know in knowing Christ. John did not make a distinction between the slave and the educated Roman convert, or the even more knowledgeable Jewish Christian. They all had the anointing of the Spirit, and they all knew the basic truth of Christ's deity, and the need for faith in Him alone for salvation.**

**Every Christian is equal when it comes to the knowledge of God's greatest truth. Educated Christians go deeper, but none can go higher, for knowing Christ is the pinnacle of Revelation. All of the true believers are one here, and this is why John knew that those who went out of the fellowship were not true believers, for had they been anointed of the Spirit, they too would have known Jesus to be the Christ, and could never have forsaken Him or His body.**

**The word here for anointed is chrism, and so all Christians have a chrism from Christ. As He is God's Anointed One, so we are His anointed ones. We are Christ's Christ, or as one has said, we are little christs-miniature messiahs seeking in Christ's stead to bring the world to be reconciled with the Father through Him. Every believer is protected by the Holy Spirit within from being lead astray by the folly and deception of the antichrists. This explains why, when the antichrist comes, that Paul speaks of in II Thess. 2, that though all the unsaved in the world will be deceived, there will be none of the elect deceived. They cannot be, for the Holy Spirit within makes it impossible for them to be deceived, for they know Christ, and can recognize any lie that would seek to deny this most fundamental of all truths.**

**This whole concept of the anointing takes us back to the Old Testament where priests and kings were anointed for God's service. It was a special thing for them only that set them apart to be used as instruments of God's Spirit. Now in the New Testament age all believers are anointed. We see in this another support for the**

**doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Every one of us are anointed by Christ, and not just pastors and missionaries. They have the additional distinction of being set apart by the church, and they must give an account to the church, but all are anointed by Christ, and equally accountable to Him. The layman is not obligated to prepare sermons, baptize, marry, etc., but he is just as responsible for witnessing to the lost as is the pastor.**

**John is not saying this here, but it is the logical result of what he is saying. He makes it clear that all Christians have this in common; that they are anointed, and have the most basic knowledge of salvation in Christ. This fact, plus all we know of the significance of anointing in Scripture leads to the conclusion that every believer is commissioned to be a servant and a witness in the world.**

**When David was selected out of his brothers to be king we read in I Sam. 16:13, "Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brothers, and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward." When one was anointed of the Spirit he was used as an instrument to accomplish God's will on earth. This was for kings and priests, and the thought occurred to me that there should be a doctrine of the kingship of all believers, as well as the priesthood of all believers. Just as we are ministers to the world for Christ, so we also reign with Christ, and are called in Rev. 1:6 both kings and priests.**

**The significance of these Scriptural truths are just being rediscovered, and are the basis for the modern interest in the layman. The church became clergy centered, and the rest of the believers became spectators, and the result is that the church became Americanized to the point of everything centering around the performance of the clergy. With the development of so many more places to go to be entertained, and better entertained, the church has lost a great many spectators to the world, which gives**

**them what they want. The result is the church is trying to figure out how to get the laymen more active. This is a good sign and should bring renewal to the church. It is not enough to have a gland active here and there. The whole body must be active if the church is going to fulfill its purpose. All are anointed, and all are responsible for proclaiming the good news.**

**In verse 21 John says he writes to them, not because they do not know the truth, but because they do. His purpose is not to address the unbeliever, and try to convince them of the deity of Christ, but to strengthen those who are already convinced. Knowing the truth made them able to detect the lies of the Gnostics, but the Gnostics were deceived by lies because they did not know the truth. In other words, truth is only of real value to those who already know the truth, for they alone can appreciate it and distinguish it from error. Those who are deceived cannot tell truth from error. They are victims of the lies of the antichrist.**

**This verse shows us what we often forget: That the Bible is for Christians, and not for the unbeliever. God's written revelation is for believers, while the preached word, and the word of testimony from believers, are God's instruments for reaching the unsaved. Some unsaved people are won by Bible reading, but it is rare. Most people are won through the spoken word. The Bible is not meant to be evangelistic, but is for the purpose of preparing the believer to be evangelistic. Paul gives us a list of the values of the Bible, and not a single one of them apply to the non-believer.**

**He says in II Tim. 3:16, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine," (this is the number one value, and only a believer cares about doctrine,) "reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." The whole Bible then,**

**and not just John's letters, is written to those who already know the truth, that they might grow in it, and recognize all of its implications, and not only avoid the lies of heretics, but be victorious over them. With the word and the wind, that is the Holy Spirit within, the believer will always be a winner in the conflict with evil ideas. May God help us to be more aware of our unique anointing, and to be more conscience of the winning wind within.**

## **15. CHILDREN OF GOD Based on I John 3:1-2**

**When I was a student at Bethel, Lavonne and I were invited as honorary guests to a banquet held each year for students near the top of their graduating class in the colleges and law schools of St. Paul. I was delighted with this opportunity, and it was with a real sense of satisfaction that I put on my best clothes, and headed for the hotel in downtown St. Paul to meet my sponsor. Each student was the guest of a sponsor who bought their tickets, and we were to be at the same table with our sponsor to give the whole affair a personal touch.**

**Lavonne and I walked around a bit and marveled at the beauty of the setting. We were quite excited to be in such an expensive atmosphere. We were always several hundred dollars behind in our bills that we owed to Bethel, and so our experience of eating in fancy hotels was somewhere around zero. When we splurged, we went to The Flame Burger instead of McDonalds. The point is, this was a unique and exciting experience, and we were impressed.**

**Then the pin and bubble met. Our sponsor found us at the appointed place, and we introduced ourselves. Then he said that his family was from such and such a line of descendants going back for**

centuries, and his father was some prominent person in the community. Then he asked where my family was from, and what my father did. I was surprised by the question, and puzzled. I didn't see the relevance of it at all. I stammered out something to the effect that my father worked in a meat packing plant, and that all I know about my ancestors was that my grandfather had been a farmer.

There was a wall between us immediately, for he had apparently expected to spend the evening comparing which of us had the most dukes in our family tree. I thought it was rather unmannerly of him to wave his pedigree before us before he found out if I was also a nobleman like himself. The result was a rather boring evening, probably typical of other such encounters of pauper and prince. The point of all this autobiographical introduction is that I in my first encounter with strong family pride was made to feel embarrassed. His boasting of his superior heritage made me feel aggravated. In analyzing the situation I have concluded that the problem did not consist in his pedigree, but in his pride which was expressed in a self-exalting manner.

Certainly there is a legitimate pride to be had in one's ancestors and line of decent, but one must be aware of the dangers of a false pride. Plutarch wisely said, "It is indeed a desirable thing to be well descended, but the glory belongs to our ancestors." In other words, if we can be grateful for a good heritage, and avoid assuming the credit for it, as if we merited such a heritage, then we are within the bounds of true dignity. Wordsworth put it:

True dignity abides with him alone  
Who in the silent hour of inward thought  
Can still suspect, and still revere himself,  
In lowliness of heart.

True dignity is characterized by a grateful humility, and not

**boastful pride. This is where men fail and allow their good heritage to be a liability rather than an asset. They become proud and make others feel uncomfortable when, by humility, they could use such a noble heritage as a subject on which to express gratitude, and to cause others to also count their blessings. A good heritage is only of value if it makes you a better person yourself. Even a pagan poet can see the worthlessness of a noble family tree as an end in itself. Juvenal said to one who was falsely proud:**

**Your ancient house! No more-I cannot see  
The wondrous merits of a pedigree;  
No, Ponticus, nor of a proud display  
Of smoky ancestors in wax or clay.**

**Sir Thomas Overbury adds this remark against the boasters: "The man who has not any thing to boast of but his illustrious ancestors is like a potato, the only good belonging to him is underground." Unless there is fruit above ground in one's own life, you merit no praise or credit for your family tree, and if there is fruit in your life because of them, the glory is to be shared with them in grateful humility.**

**Now you might say that I have spent a lot of time proving a point that might be of use to those of noble birth, but what good is this to us who have no noble pedigree, and who have every reason to be humble because there is nothing of note of which to be proud? What good is this to those who may have a few horse thieves hanging from their family tree? It could be many of us would be in the same situation as the man who paid a lawyer 200 dollars to trace back his ancestry, and when it was completed, he paid him 2,000 to keep it quiet.**

**None of this really makes a difference, for John wrote to persons whose ancestors were pagans or slaves, and yet, in as clear and**

forceful language as possible, he tells them they are of exceedingly high birth as Christians. John is saying that Christians have a heritage so rich and noble it makes the chain of the succession of the kings of England look like a string of paupers in comparison. We would have to coin a new word to express it anywhere near adequately, for if it is a noble birth to be born of a king, what is it to be born of the King of Kings? This is what John says in 2:29 is the case with those who are righteous through Jesus Christ-they are born of God. He goes on into chapter 3 to dwell on the marvel of it. It is simply amazing and astounding John says that we should be called the sons of God, or more accurately, children of God. What pedigree can match that?

In the battle for producing the greatest pedigree a man in Scotland thought he had cleverly reached the ultimate, for he had this as his epitaph.

John Carnegie lies here,  
Decended from Adam and Eve.  
If any can boast of a pedigree higher,  
He will willingly give leave.

Another with different wording took the same approach:

Nobles and heralds, by your leave,  
Here lies what once was Matthew Prior;  
The son of Adam and Eve:  
Can Bourbon or Nassau claim higher?

We do not know if the Bourbon's or Nassau's can meet that challenge, but we know that anyone who has been made righteous through Jesus Christ, even if their ancestors were slaves, and they themselves are slaves, can claim a higher and holier heritage, for their genealogy goes back, not just to Adam and Eve, but to their



**Creator, and the God and Father of Jesus Christ. Our family tree in Christ contains all the saints of God from the beginning of time. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, the Prophets, Christ and the Apostles, are all in our spiritual ancestry. We have two family trees, and two genealogies-one natural and one spiritual. By the new birth we become members of the greatest heritage and greatest family-the family of God.**

**If anyone has basis for boasting in a marvelously noble birth and rich heritage, it is the Christian. Yet, he cannot boast in pride, for it is all unmerited, for it is all of grace. We did not choose Him for our Father. He chooses us for His children. We only love Him because He first loved us. No matter what comes to the Christian he should be one who is perpetually and humbly grateful that he has been made a child of God. God forbid that we take this great truth and abuse it as men do with their earthly pedigrees. The glory belongs to our Father and not us. A holier than thou attitude in the Christian is offensive for the same reason that the family tree boaster is offensive. This attitude is a display of self-centered pride that acts as if one was worthy of his heritage.**

**John makes it clear that the wonder of our being children of God does not at all lie in us, but rather in the love of God. Paul recognized this also when he said, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of Christ." If anyone had a good pedigree going for them it was Paul, but he counted it as dung that he might know Christ. John makes it clear that those who are truly children of God will be so grateful and humble that they will give themselves completely to the task of being Christlike in purity. The Christian's pride is in his Father and his Savior, and this makes all the difference in the world between an effective witness and a holier than thou attitude that drives people away. The Christian is to look down his nose at no one, even though he be of the most noble blood in history. To be pure as Jesus was pure is to be free from the pride**

**that demands respect.**

**In the third century there was a devastating persecution of the Christians in Carthage by Decius the Emperor. Christians were sought out, imprisoned and killed. At this same time a plague struck and was also taking many lives. Cyprian, the leader of the Christians, called upon them to minister to the heathen people who lay sick and dying, and he gave as his reason for urging such action this statement: "We must be worthy of our birth. Now are we children of God."**

**Cyprian understood John and recognized that children of God are known by their conformity to the only begotten Son of God. We are already children of God, and have the greatest heritage possible, but there is still a greater hope yet to come, for when we see Him face to face we shall be like Him. In other words, Christlikeness is the ultimate goal of the believer, and that being so, John says the proof that one is really a child a God heading for that ultimate goal is seen in the fact that he is right now striving to be Christlike. If Christlikeness is really our hope for eternity, we will be aiming for it in time, and purifying ourselves as He is pure.**

**J. R. Lowell wrote concerning those who boast of a great heritage, but who do not live worthy of it.**

**They talk about their Pilgrim blood,  
Their birthright high and holy!  
A mountain stream that ends in mud,  
Methinks is melancholy.**

**It is doubly sad for one who claims to be a child of God to let the pure stream of living water end in mud. We must be worthy of our birth. We are children of the King of Kings. How we live before the world will determine how they feel about our heavenly Father. Our**

**concept of the Father has been determined by the life and love of His Son the Lord Jesus. Our goal is to be like Him that the world can know God as we know Him. John says the world will not recognize us as children of God, for they do not know the Father or the Son. They will persecute and kill, but if we persist in being as pure as Christ under all circumstances, they will eventually see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven. We are poor branches of the family tree if men do not admire the whole tree because of us. May God help us to live lives worthy of those who are called children of God.**

## **16. GOD IS LOVE Based on I John 4:7-12**

**Tolstoy wrote a story called "Where Love Is, God Is." It is about an old cobbler named Martin who lived alone. One night as he read the story of Jesus visiting the Pharisee, and the poor welcome he received, he prayed that the Lord would visit him. In his sleep he heard a voice saying, "Tomorrow I shall come."**

**The next day Martin waited all day for his visitor. He saw a poor old man sweeping snow, and he called him in from the cold and gave him some hot tea. He kept looking out the window and the old man asked, "Are you expecting someone?" Martin told him of the voice. Sometime later he saw a shivering mother with her crying baby, and he brought them in and gave them some warm soup and a cloak to shield them from the cold. He told her about the voice as well.**

**It was getting late, and still the Savior had not come. He looked out one last time before closing, and saw an apple woman scolding a boy who had stolen an apple. He rushed out and made peace. He paid for the apple and persuaded the woman to forgive the boy, and**

**they departed with the boy carrying her basket. That night Martin heard the voice again saying, "Martin, Martin, don't you know me?" "Who is it," he asked? "It is I," and he saw the old snow-sweeper. "It is I," and he saw the mother with the baby. "It is I," and he saw the apple woman with the boy. Then they all vanished, and Martin realized that Christ had visited him that day after all, and his heart felt strangely warm.**

**Tolstoy was saying by this story that where love is, God is. The presence of God and the Lord Jesus Christ is directly linked to love. Love is the fruit of the Spirit, and so if the Spirit is present, the first evidence will be love. If God is love, then love is a sign of His presence, and lack of love is a sign of His absence in Spirit. John says in verse 12 that no one has ever seen God. So how can we know if God is present? John says we know God is present because of love. If we love one another that is the evidence that God dwells in us. When you see love, you see God. When you feel love, you feel God's presence. God is present in love, for God is love. Where love is God is. The more we love, the more we experience the presence of God.**

**No wonder the Paul said everything without love is nothing. Even faith and great knowledge, and even sacrifice, are not worth anything without love, for love alone is our link to God, and only in love do we experience the authentic presence of God. Everything we do in worship is much ado about nothing if it does not lead us to love. Therefore, there is not greater good than to gain an understanding of what the Bible is saying in this simple but sublime sentence stated twice in this fourth chapter of I John: "God is love." The implications of these three words are so vast that one message on them is like trying to harvest a million acres of corn with a comb. There is no way to get all of the infinite riches they contain, but we will at least get a taste of what this love is. First lets taste-**

## **I. THE INEXHAUSTIBLE ILLUMINATIONS OF IT.**

**R. A. Torrey, the great evangelist, said this is the greatest sentence ever written, and voices without number in heaven and on earth echo with an amen! Three little words made up of just 9 letters in English, and yet they are saying something that all the words of every language can never fully convey. They are giving us an inexhaustible illumination as to who God is. Read all the books of men, and search the universe, and you will not find a more important truth about God than these three little words that God is love. It is the brightest light we have by which to see who God is. Torrey said if he had to choose one sentence to sum up the entire Bible and its message to man, it would be these three words.**

**D. L. Moody, another great evangelist, felt it was the essence of the biblical revelation as well, and he had it put above the pulpit in the famous Moody Church in Chicago. This is the Gospel in a nutshell. This is why God sent His Son to die for us. This is why Jesus paid it all, and why he left his church here to carry this message into all the world. In this sentence are included all the unsearchable riches of Christ.**

**Love strong as death and stronger,  
Love mightier than the grave,  
Wide as the world and longer  
Than the ocean's wildest wave.  
This is the love that sought us,  
This is the love that bought us,  
This is the love that brought us  
To gladdest day from saddest night,  
From deepest shame to glory bright.**

**If God was not love, there would be no Gospel. Only love could come up with a solution to the fall of man and the sin problem. Only love would take on the guilt of the sinner and pay the penalty for their freedom.**

**We have examples of this kind of love in history. Schanyl, the great Circassian leader of his people for 30 years revealed the power of love. Bribery was becoming so prevalent in his government that he announced that anyone caught bribing an official would receive 100 lashes. Not long after, his own mother was arrested for bribery. He could not let her go, for this would make a mockery of justice. His law had to be carried out, and so he brought her to the whipping post and the whipping began. At the fifth lash he cried halt. He released his mother. Then he bared his own back and took on himself the remaining 95 lashes. His love met the demand of justice, and set the prisoner free by taking the penalty on himself. This is what Jesus did for all of us, and not just for family and loved ones, but for the whole world of sinners who were enemies of God.**

**God's love is unique, for it is not directed toward those who love him, but even toward those who do not love him. It is of the very essence of his being to love.**

**Can ice cease to be cold, and still be ice?  
Can light cease to shine, and still be light?  
Can fire cease to be hot, and still be fire?  
Can humor cease to be funny, and still be humor?**

**We could go on and on, and the answer is no, for you cannot take away the essence of a thing and still have it. Its essence is what it is, and God is love. Love is not something that God does, it is something that he is. Love touches all that he is and does. Every theological idea and concept we have must include this truth that God is love. If not, you are dealing with some other god than the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible has given us this truth about himself that illuminates all other knowledge about him.**

**Many people who have rejected God have not really done so at all. They have only rejected some imaginary god of human invention**

**and speculation. When people say they do not believe in God you need to find out if the God they do not believe in is love. If not, then you can say you do not believe in the God they do not believe in either. The Christian does not just believe in God, but he believes in the God who is love. All other gods are not God. The gods that people reject should be rejected, for they do not exist, and they are poor images of the real God. Everything you believe about God must be consistent with this revelation that he is love, or you are walking in darkness rather than in the light of his Word. Hold everything up to the light of this truth to see if it fits, and if not you can be sure it is not a part of God's will.**

**Take prejudice for example. You can never make this evil look good in the light of God's love. All the arguments about differences in races and their abilities mean nothing, for no argument for being unloving towards people can resist being shattered by the laser beam of the light from the truth that God is love. If you want to be unloving toward anyone, you have to do it in the dark, for the light will not support you. God not only loves his enemies, he commands us to love ours, and thereby demonstrate that we are his children. It is a powerful proof that God is present in our lives when we can care about those who have no care for us, and who would not be loved, but hated, by the natural man.**

**Everyone can love family, friends, nation, and numerous other values and relationships. This ability to love anyone or anything is part of what it means to be made in the image of God, who is love. Even lost men love, for they are still a reflection of God's image. The worst of men still have some trace of the Creator, and they can love on some level. But John makes the radical statement in v. 7 that everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. This can be interpreted by the universalistic conviction that absolutely everybody is born of God, for everyone loves. This has been perverted to teach that since everyone does love to some degree, that**

**all will be saved in the end, and none will be lost.**

**This is obviously not what John is telling us. He is giving Christians a simple way of identifying a child of God. Here is the birth mark that means you are in the family of God. The mark of the believer is love. It is love for God; love for the family of God, love for those still lost and not in the family; love for the needy of the world; love for one's enemies who hate all these other loves, and then all of the natural loves shared by all people. We are talking about an all pervasive love that has no cut off point, but is universal. Christians often fall short of this kind of love, but when they do they are not being Christian at that point. If one's love does not rise above the natural love of the world, one should examine his life to see if he really loves God, for he is not letting the God he loves be present in his life and attitudes. This is a test of how much we love God. If we do not have his love in us, we do not love him very much. It is only when we love like God loves that we are born of God.**

**It is not theology that makes us Christians. You can know enough to defend the orthodox teachings of the Bible, but if you are unloving you are not an asset to the kingdom of God. People don't care how much you know. They want to know how much you care. Jesus drew people to himself for a lot of reasons, but the primary one was because they knew he cared. He had bread for their stomachs, and truth for their minds, but they knew that above all else he had love for their hearts. He was living proof that God is love. He was God's visible expression of love.**

**Anyone who claims to be a child of God had better exhibit the key family trait that we see in our elder brother Jesus. That is our birth certificate. It is our proof that we are born of God. You cannot say you are born of God if you do not have the key characteristic of God, which is love. How can anyone say they are born of the Spirit if they do not have the first fruit of the Spirit, which is love? An apple**



**tree that never has any apples is an apple tree in name only. A pear tree that never has any pears is a pear tree in name only. And a Christian without love is a Christian in name only.**

**John's point is that what God is the Christian is to be. God is light, and so the Christian is to walk in the light. God is righteous, and so the Christian is to walk in righteousness. God is love, and so the Christian is to walk in love. Love is to infiltrate and dominate every aspect of our lives until we become Godlike. Clement of Alexandria said many centuries ago that the Christian is one who practices being God. That is a radical way of saying it, but it is the goal. The love of God can only be seen in us when we practice being God, and being channels of his love to others. We are not being God, but we are being Godlike, and Christlike, and this means their love is seen in and through us. This is like trying to channel the flow of Niagara Falls through a straw. Only a fraction can get through, but it can be enough to change the world that we touch.**

**We are never nearer God than when we love, and we are never nearer to being what he wants us to be than when we love. Love comes from God, and love leads to God. God's goal is to complete the circle by making us both the objects of his love, and the source of love for others. We are to be both receivers and transmitters of love. Love can never be content until it is flowing out to others. When we are not being loving we are like the parked car, or the light that is turned off, or the heater unplugged. We are not functioning for the purpose for which we are born. Martin Luther concluded that the greatest sin in our lives is simply not being loving. This is especially true when we are aware of how much God has loved, and does love us.**

**We can never exhaust the love of God, for it illuminates every other attribute of God. Love is eternal. Love is infinite. Love is holy. Love is omnipotent. Love is omnipresent. Love is inexhaustible in its**

**illuminations. We can never exhaust it for all eternity, and so we will be able to grow in our knowledge of God forever. But we can know all we need to know to let this truth fill us with the assurance and security so that we can say with Whittier,**

**I know not what the future hath  
Of marvel of surprise,  
Assured alone that life and death  
His mercy underlies.**

**I know not where His islands lift  
Their fronded palms in air;  
I only know I cannot drift  
Beyond His love and care.**

**The second thing we want to taste concerning the truth that God is love is-**

## **II. THE INCREDIBLE IMPLICATIONS OF IT.**

**The implications of these three little words are so vast they are beyond our comprehension, for they are infinite, and they influence, not only everything we can know, but even those secret things that belong to God alone that we can't know. One of the really radical implications of this reality that God is love is that his being love is why the problems of life, and the evils of the world, are not quickly solved and eliminated. If God was not love, but sheer power without obligation to love, the problem of evil could be solved in seconds. If God was a tyrant whose will was done without regard for the freedom of other wills, there would be no problems in the first place, and any problem that could begin would be nipped in the bud instantly.**

**Sometimes we pray as if God is not love, but just such a tyrant.**

**We assume that being Almighty he can do whatever we feel he ought to do, or at least what he wants to do. We completely forget the enormous limitations that love puts on one's choices. A tyrant whose motto is might is right has only the limitations that are on his power. But to the extent of his power he can do anything he chooses. He can execute millions of innocent people if he wishes. He can rob and plunder, and take from other nations, if he has the power to do so. He is free to the extent of his power.**

**Love has no such liberty. Love is bound to respect the rights of others, and love is obligated to act justly and fairly. Love must even go beyond justice to show mercy, for love keeps the law, but does not stop there. It seeks to find a way to forgive and be reconciled with the offender. You see, love really puts a crimp in your style if you are all-powerful, and expect to get your will done by sheer power. Someone said, and I think it was everybody who ever thought about God's relationship to evil,**

**If I were God,  
And man made a mire  
Of things; war, hatred  
Murder, lust, cobwebs  
Of infamy, entangling  
The heart and the soul  
I would sweep him  
To one side and start anew  
(I think I would)  
If I did this  
Would I be God?**

**The answer is no. You would not be God. You would not be the God of the Bible, for he is not just power, but he is love, and love has a totally different approach to problems than does power.**

**Power eliminates an enemy by destroying the enemy. Love eliminates an enemy by making him a friend. This is a whole lot harder and slower, but the other option is not open to a God who is love. His greatest asset is also his greatest liability and limitation. His power must be subordinate to his love, and so he cannot be true to his nature and exploit people for his ends without their cooperation.**

**You have the history of God's own people. They were blessed like no other people ever, and yet they were also judged like no other people as well. God could have by sheer power taken them out of Egypt and brought them to the promise land, but he could not by sheer power make them obey him. They had to choose to do that. God could not treat them as mere pawns on a chessboard. It would make the game of history go faster and be more efficient if he could, but he cannot do it without ceasing to be love, and God cannot cease to be love, for that is what he is. Jesus could by sheer power still the raging sea, but he could not by power alone make the rich young ruler sell all and follow him. He could not make the people of Jerusalem accept him. He said, "I would, but you would not." Power was not enough, for they had to choose to believe, and they wouldn't do it.**

**It is superficial when we think that because God has all power he can do as he pleases, whenever he pleases. That is why people blame God for everything that goes wrong. They assume that he could prevent it if he chose to do so. This is practicing theology in the dark, and not in the light that God is love. It is like trying to put together a thousand piece puzzle in the pitch blackness of an underground cave. You do not know God, says John, until you turn on the light and recognize that God is love. We are so hung up on power that we think that is the answer to everything. It is not.**

**I have the power to open my sons mail before he comes home. It comes before he gets here, and it would be no problem for me to**

**simply open it. But I do not do it, not because I lack the power to do so, but because it would be an unloving thing to do. My love for him and respect for his privacy limits my power. Power that is not limited by love is dangerous. God's power is limited by his love, and the paradox is that this is what makes the world a place of such widespread evil. God cannot in power just rid the world of evil, for his love makes it necessary to try and save those who are doing the evil.**

**It is amazing to read in Rev. 2 of how Jezebel has corrupted the church, and has led Christians into all kinds of idolatry and immorality, and then listen to Jesus say in verse 21, "I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling." What kind of nonsense is this? A God with all power, and who can wipe out the whole planet as fast as we can wipe a drop of sweat from our forehead, and he is going to give this evil person a second chance? But this is the kind of God we are dealing with in the Bible. It is the greatest wonder in the universe that a hell-bound sinner can become a heaven-bound saint because God's power is under the control of his love. We sometimes find this hard to take, and prefer the hero to take the evil guy out and ride off into the sunset victorious. God's love is sometimes so slow, and he seems to give the bad guy too many chances. That is the price you pay for God being love.**

**In Uncle Tom's Cabin, the slave George Harris says, "They buy and sell us and make trade of our heart's blood and groans and tears, and God lets them, He does; God lets them." It makes man mad that God lets them, and their are a thousand other evils God lets them do as well, and we do not like it. God stirs up man to fight the evil, and eventually slavery gets eliminated, and eventually the haters of history are pushed off the stage, but where is the lightning? Why all the delay? Why not damnation by dawn instead of by decades?**

**The answer is, God is love. What this means practically is that not even God can have his cake and eat it too. He cannot damn the sinner at the moment of his transgression, and yet still in love provide a way for the sinner to be forgiven and restored to fellowship. We do not like what it does to a world to have God choose the way of love, for it gives too much freedom to evil, but we would like it a whole lot less if he chose the alternative. It would eliminate all evil in the world if God judged all sin and evil on the spot. The only problem is that all of us would end up in hell, and forever separated from God. It is God's love that keeps the life of every sinner going long enough to be forgiven and restored to fellowship. This leads to a world full of suffering because of evil, but remember, God is the one who has to suffer the most. He had to give his Son, and the Son had to give his life in great agony to atone for the sin of the world. The cross is the physical symbol of the fact that God is love.**

**The cross says to us that God takes being love very seriously. He would rather pay the price of the cross than to be unloving. God had other options. He could have never made man in the first place. He could have made him a machine incapable of choosing evil. He could have made him with no plan to save him. The only problem with all the options are that they are not choices that a God of love would make. A God of power alone could have made the other choices, but a God of love had to make man as he did, with freedom to choose, and a respect for that freedom that would let it be exercised. It is hard on all of us at times that God is love, and it is harder on him than anyone, but that is who God is, and we must see all of life, and all truth, in the light of this reality that God is love.**

**17. THE CONQUEST OF THE WORLD   Based on I John 5:4**

**Long ago an Eastern King, who was plagued by many troubles and worries, called his wise men together and asked them to compose a brief motto that would help him to face times of distress. He required them to make it brief enough to be engraved on his ring, and yet so profound and true that it would be appropriate to every situation. It must be such a universal and enduring truth that it would be a guide both in prosperity and adversity. This was no small order, and so the wise men were hard put to come up with anything that could fit every circumstance. At last, however, they arrived at a motto of 5 words they felt would meet the need. Those 5 words were, "This too shall pass away." They felt that the recognition that the circumstances of life are also temporary would be a great source of comfort.**

**This story and the motto have been passed down for centuries. Many poet and philosophers have picked it up and spread its influence. One day over a century ago an American editor by the name of Paul Hamilton Hayne came across the legend and published a story about it. It created such an interest that he wrote a poem that was widely distributed. It was carried around in pockets and purses for comfort in times of trial. Since then many have put the theme into poetry, and one of the best I have read is that by Grace Noll Crowell. It goes like this:**

**This, too, will pass. O heart, say it over and over,  
Out of your deepest sorrow, out of your deepest grief,  
No hurt can hurt can last forever-perhaps tomorrow will bring relief.**

**This, too, will pass. It will spend itself-its fury  
Will die as the wind dies down with the setting sun;  
Assuaged and calm, you will rest again, forgetting a thing that is done.**

**Repeated again and again, O heart, for your comfort;  
This, too will pass as surely as passed before  
The old forgotten pain, and the other sorrows that once you bore.**

**As certain as stars at night, or dawn after darkness,  
Inherent as the lift of the blowing grass,  
Whatever your despair or your frustration-this, too, will pass.**

**William Cowper who wrote many hymns sums it all up briefly  
in two lines.**

**Beware of desperate steps; the darkness day,  
Live till tomorrow, will have passed away.**

**Ordinarily the Christian does not gain comfort from a philosophy growing out of a legend, but in this case the truth of it happens to be biblical. In Job 11:16 we read of one of his comforters saying, "Thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as the waters that pass away." We know he was right, and Job's misery did pass. There is no doubt of it that life is filled with its trials and miseries, yet there is also no doubt that they pass away. There is great comfort in knowing that negative circumstances can change, and sometimes very quickly. This is helpful, but it is still far from being the best news that God has for the believer. John says that the world and its lusts are going to pass away, and elsewhere the New Testament says heaven and earth will pass away, and tears, trials and temptations will pass away. But John goes on to improve on the motto that bad things will pass away. In 5:4 he says that those born of God can overcome the world while it is still here. We do not have to just grin and bear it and wait for all evil to pass away before we can live a victorious life. We can be victorious right now in the midst of it all.**

**It is true that it will all pass away, but why not go one better and**



**make your motto that faith is the victory today. Many Christians are traveling through life second and third class when God has made first class provisions through Jesus Christ. Jesus said that we would have tribulation in the world, but He also said to be of good cheer because He has overcome the world. His overcoming is already a fact that we can celebrate right now. John does not say that the Christian can be victorious over the world, he says that the Christian already is victorious. Those born of God have a faith that is victorious over the world, and in verse 5 John implies that no one but the true person of faith in Christ can overcome the world. By the world he means all of the forces that oppose God and His kingdom.**

**If Christians only believed half of what the Bible says about the victorious Christian life, the world would be in perpetual revival, but most are so pessimistic about the power of God that they are always on the defensive. Victory is almost a foreign word in many a Christian's vocabulary. It is almost as if we were not interested in victory, but only concerned that we keep our defeats to a minimum. It is no wonder that A. W. Tozer doubted that if half of the members of the Evangelical Church were really born again. How can a man or woman have begun a new life and yet no different than they were in their old life? One can hardly claim to have a faith that overcomes the world if they do not have the power to overcome themselves.**

**John makes it clear in 2:16 that the basic battle to be won in overcoming the world is the battle with the self. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life are self-centered vices, and those controlled by these are in bondage to the world. Those who are slaves to self are not servants of God. The self-centered life of lust and pride must be brought to defeat before there is any chance of a victorious Christian life. No victory is so glorious as over one's self to be victorious. If we are ever going to win victories**

**over the external forces of evil in the world, we must conquer the world within first. We must drive out the Canaanites of lust and pride if we ever expect our desert of depravity to bloom with the Rose of Sharon. The Lily of the Valley will not grow in soil filled with the weeds of worldliness. The Bright and Morning Star will not shine in an atmosphere choked with the smoke and smog of sin.**

**They only the victory win  
Who have fought the good fight and vanquished  
The demon that tempts us within;  
Who have held to their faith un-seduced by the prize that  
The world holds high; Who have dared for a high cause to suffer,  
Resist, fight-if need be to die.**

**Paul said, "I die daily," that is why Paul climbed to such a high level of victorious living. He recognized that only as he gained the victory over himself, and as he daily buried the old man, could he begin to approach the goal of Christ-likeness. The sooner we realize that the biggest battle of life is the battle within ourselves, the sooner we will be able to subdue our worse enemy, and be free to live the victorious life. Longfellow wrote,**

**Not in the clamor of the crowded street,  
Not in the shouts and plaudits of the throng,  
But in ourselves, our triumph and defeat.**

**Let us cease to seek for scapegoats and admit that our basic problem is within. If faith is the victory that overcomes the world, and we are not overcoming the world, let us not accuse Satan, or others, or circumstances, for these are the very forces that can be overcome. Let us frankly face it and admit that we are still victims and not victors because we lack faith. We are not overcoming the world because we are part of the world, and we are not interested in overcoming it. The enemy is none other than our own uncommitted**

**self. Edwin L. Sabin tells of his discovery of this in his poem My Enemy.**

**An enemy I had, whose appearance  
I stoutly strove in vain to know;  
For hard he dragged my steps, unseen wherever I might go.  
My plans he balked, my aims he foiled;  
He blocked my every onward way.  
When for some lofty goal I toiled, he grimly said me nay.  
Come forth ! I cried, lay bare thy guise!  
Thy wretched features I would see.  
Yet always to my straining eyes he dwelt in mystery.  
Until one night I held him fast,  
The veil from off his form did draw;  
I gazed upon his face at last and, lo! myself I saw.**

**Wise men have always been aware of this truth. Shakespeare knew human nature, and he has Cassius say, "The fault, dear Brutus is not in our stars but in our selves." Henry Thoreau remarked, "As long as a man stands in his own way, everything seems to be in his way-government, society, and even the sun, moon and stars." James warns Christians not to blame God when they fall to temptation, for God does not tempt. He says that if we resist the devil he will flee from us. That leaves only ourselves to blame if we are not victorious over the world, the flesh and the devil. James states it clearly that we are tempted because of our own inner lust. Pro. 16:32 says, "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city." May God help us to learn this lesson and never forget it, that victory over the world begins with victory over ourselves.**

**But you may say with Paul, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of his death?" The answer he came to that made him more than conqueror is the same we must all come**

**to today, and that is, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Faith in Jesus alone enables a person to live victoriously, and once we have overcome the inner world we are ready to march in conquest over the external world. Alexander the Great wept because he had no more worlds to conquer. He was mistaken, for he never did conquer the inner world. We ought to weep because we have so many worlds yet unconquered because we have failed to fight. The Christian conquest of the world is not a matter of blood battles in which we destroy life and property. We conquer the world by pushing back its darkness that enslaves the lost, and by bringing to them the light of the Gospel. We have a message of deliverance to the captives, and if we are not delivering this message it is sign that we are still captives to the world.**

**The victorious Christian is the one who has first conquered self, and then has moved out to conquer territory outside their own heart. The Christian should have the same drive as Alexander the Great, Napoleon, and other world conquerors. We should feel an inner compulsion to march forward in victory over the forces that oppose God and His kingdom. Lao Tsze said, "To joy in conquest is to joy in the loss of human life." This is not so in the Christian conquest, for when the Christian is victorious people do not lose life, but they gain it and go from death to life. The Christian conquest of the world adds life rather than diminishes it. Campbell in his poem The Battle Of The Baltic expresses a victor's attitude that fits well into Christian thinking.**

**"Out spoke the victor then, as he haul'd them o'er the wave,  
Ye are brothers! Ye are men! And we conquer but to save;  
So peace instead of death let us bring, But yield, proud foe, the fleet,  
With the crews, at England's feet, and make submission meet to our king."**

**This is the Christian attitude as he marches forth to conquer.**

**He does not win by killing the enemy. He wins when he brings the enemy to the feet of his king, who is Jesus Christ the King of Kings. If we are not conquering and overcoming the world we need to reexamine our faith. John says that if we truly believe in Jesus we are born of God, and those born of God are conquerors and overcomers. Paul even puts it stronger yet and says, "We are more than conquerors." Lillian M. Weeks has put this concept into a challenging poetic form. I want to end this message with this poem as a challenge for all of us to be conquerors who are overcoming the world.**

**More than conquerors through Him that loved us,  
Read the promise o'er and o'er,  
Not almost or very nearly,  
But conquerors and more.**

**When the world to sin would lure me, is there victory for me?  
Can I stand against the pressure, and a conqueror truly be?  
When the tempter like an angel garbs himself in robes of light,  
Can I recognize his cunning-be a victor in the fight?**

**And when passions rise within me, anger, jealousy and pride,  
Can I still be more than conqueror, when by these I'm sorely tried?  
By myself I'm weak and helpless, and I'll fall in sore defeat,  
As upon life's rugged highway with temptation I shall meet.**

**But with Christ, Oh blest assurance!  
More than conqueror I shall be,  
As I yield Him full possession,  
And He lives and reigns in me.**

## **18. PROFOUND SIMPLICITY Based on I John 5:7**

**You would think that any problem dealing with only three numbers would be simple to solve, but when it comes to the doctrine of the trinity where three equals one and one equals three the apparent simplicity becomes profound. Two youths left the church after hearing a sermon on the trinity, and the boy said, "I don't get this business of three in one and one in three." "It's simple," said the girl. "Mother is mama to us, Francis to daddy, and Mrs. Jones to others. She is one yet three."**

**If the trinity was really that simple, the hardest thing to comprehend about it would be the centuries of controversy over it, and the many heresies that have risen because of it. If you think the trinity is simple to understand, you only prove that you do not yet understand it. The girl with the simple answer did not have the slightest comprehension of the trinity. If it amounts to only different names that God has, there is no way to stop at three. Just as her mother can be called other names, such as sister, cousin, aunt, grandma, lady, and even hey you, so God can be called by dozens of names beyond Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Her explanation explains nothing, and ignores the basic truth that the triune God is in three persons, and not just three names of one person.**

**If it was only a matter of names and words the doctrine would have met the demand of Thomas Jefferson for simplicity. He wrote in a letter to Timothy Pickering, after hearing Channing, the great Unitarian preacher, and said, "When we shall have done away with the incomprehensible jargon of the Trinitarian arithmetic, that three are one, and one is three; when we shall have knocked down the artificial scaffolding, reared to mask from view the simple structure of Jesus; when, in short, we shall have unlearned everything which has been taught since His day, and got back to the pure and simple doctrines He inculcated, we shall then be truly and**

**worthily His disciples; and my opinion is that if nothing had ever been added to what flowed purely from His lips, the whole world would at this day have been Christian."**

**He demands that all truth be simple, and charge that Christians have added the doctrine of the trinity onto the teachings of the Bible, rather than finding it there. Since he is not alone on this view, but represents the charge of millions, it is one that calls for a defense. But before we defend the doctrine of the trinity, let us first recognize that some criticism is valid. For example, one of the clearest references in the Bible to the trinity is found in I John 5:7. It is now accepted by most all scholars that this is not inspired Scripture. Even the very conservative notes of Scofield say on this verse, "It is generally agreed that verse 7 has no real authority and has been inserted." No Greek manuscript before the 5th century has this verse, nor is it ever used by any of the Greek or Latin fathers in all their writings in defense of the trinity. Erasmus, a Greek scholar in reformation days, refused to put it in his Greek New Testament even though it was in the Latin version. When he was criticized for this he promised if anyone could show him a Greek manuscript with it in, he would put it in his next edition. A late Greek manuscript was found, and he kept his word, and against his better judgment put it in. That is how it got into the King James Version, for it followed that edition.**

**Let us then be honest and admit that it is possible that men have made errors, and have included in the Bible what is not inspired. But let the critics be equally honest and recognize that what has been added, though not inspired, is no less true. We will admit that the Bible nowhere mentions the word trinity, but this in no way detracts from the fact that God is there presented as a trinity. We ought not to ask the skeptic to believe anymore than what the Bible teaches. This verse ought never to be quoted as proof of the trinity, for it is not needed. Thomas Jefferson demanded that we go back to**

**the simple teaching of Jesus. Let us do just that.**

**Let us go back for example to His final words to His disciples before He ascended. He gave them the great commission and said, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Jesus did not teach a Trinitarian concept of God, He presupposed it, as does the whole New Testament. B.B. Warfield, the great evangelical scholar, said, "The doctrine of the trinity does not appear in the New Testament in the making, but as already made." You cannot read the New Testament without seeing the necessity for believing in the trinity. It is everywhere assumed that the Father is God; the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God.**

**It is this concept of God that makes Christianity distinct and unique. The radical theologians of today who are throwing out the concept of the trinity are right when they say it is a stumbling block to others. The Jews cannot accept it, nor the other religions of the world. It is uniquely Christian doctrine, and you cannot sacrifice this truth to promote unity with non-believers. The folly of this is comparable to a group of modern doctors who want so much to win the friendship of a cult that believes only in taking water for illnesses that they take out all the ingredients of modern medicine, leaving only the water. In coming down to a common level with the cult they have won unity, but they have lost all the advantages of progress. So Christians lose all that is uniquely Christian if they give up the trinity for the sake of unity.**

**We have an obligation to better understand this doctrine lest we be subtly lead astray. It is so easy to be heretical on this doctrine, and it is so easy just to ignore it. I trust this brief study of the mystery and meaning of the trinity will help us to avoid both.**

## **I. THE MYSTERY OF THE TRINITY.**



**The reason the trinity is such a profound and difficult subject is in the very nature of the matter, and of the tools we have to work with. To fix a car with all the modern equipment is one thing, but to do it with a putty knife is a radically different challenge. Such is the challenge of a finite mind trying to grasp an infinite truth. God understands it, for He has an infinite mind, but anything resembling that is conspicuously absent in man. This means that by necessity a full comprehension of the trinity must remain a mystery. There comes a point where, when we wade out into the sea of theology, the legs of reason can no longer touch the bottom, and we must launch off on a swim of faith. There is a sense of security when we can touch bottom, and it is certainly easier, but as in swimming, so in theology, the real fun and adventure is not in wading but in swimming out into the deep knowing that you will be able to remain on the top even though your feet cannot touch bottom.**

**The trinity brings us to a sea of truth so deep and wide that the poet has said,**

**So God the Father, God the Son  
And God the Spirit we adore,  
A sea of life and love unknown,  
Without a bottom or a shore.**

**Cyril C. Richardson wrote, "It has been observed by denying it one may in danger of losing one's soul, while by trying to understand it one may be in danger of losing one's wits." We know that Paul only saw through a glass darkly, and so we cannot expect to see more, but what we can see and understand will be sufficient, for God has enabled us to grasp what He wants us to know, and gives us His Holy Spirit to enlighten us. Our prayer then should be that of Milton in Paradise Lost.**

**And chiefly Thou, O Spirit.....**

**Instruct me, for Thou know'st, Thou from the first  
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread,  
Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast abyss,  
And mad'st it pregnant: what in me is dark  
Illumine; what is low raise and support.**

**With this prayer preceding, let us consider-**

## **II. THE MEANING OF THE TRINITY.**

**The word itself means threefoldness. It became a description of what God is out of the experience of the early Christians. They experience Jesus as God, and the Holy Spirit as God, and, therefore, there were three Persons they had relationship to as God. No one sat down to figure this out; it just grew out of God's self-revelation in history through Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. You would think this would be such a radical new concept that the pages of the New Testament would be filled with controversy over it. But we do not see this because it was not that radical. In the Old Testament God made it clear there were no other God's. The Jews were under obligation to be strict monotheists. They were to say daily, "The Lord our God is one Lord." Yet, Elohim, the Hebrew word for God, is in the plural indicating plurality within the one God. In the New Testament monotheism is not bypassed. God is still one and there is no change in this at all. There is only one God, and that truth must be preserved at all cost. The difference is, in the New Testament God reveals fully what the plurality is of His own nature. He revealed that He is three Persons.**

**Now get this straight: There are three Persons in one God, and not three Gods. If there were three Gods this would be called tri-theism, and this is a heresy. There is only one God and that one God is in three Persons. The only reason this seems hard to grasp is because we come to these words with preconceived ideas that cause**

**us to make problems for ourselves that are not really there. Until we can think of these terms as relating to God in a unique sense, we will think of them as they relate to us, and we will be confused. The whole thing becomes easier to grasp by getting a proper definition of God in our minds. When we start with God defined as three eternal and equal Persons with all the attributes of love, wisdom, justice, etc., it should be easy to see how three Persons can be one God. It is only hard because we start out with a wrong definition of God. If you start with a definition that God is a Person you are headed for problems. If God is only one Person, then to say this one Person is also three Persons is to deserve the contempt of the unbeliever, for it is meaningless.**

**Let us look at how this works on other things. Let us start, for example, a study of the tricycle, and let us begin with a definition that a tricycle is a motorless vehicle with one wheel. Now with this in our mind we proceed to look at the facts about tricycles, and we are told right off that the basic fact is that they have three wheels. Now we are confused. Our reason cannot grasp this contradiction. It seems incredible to believe that a tricycle can be one wheeled and three wheeled at the same time. The doubter will reject it, and the gullible will say I will accept it by faith. Both, of course, are wrong, and all because they started with a wrong definition. If they would go back and start with the definition that a tricycle is a motorless vehicle with three wheels, then the facts are easy to reconcile. One tricycle equals three wheels, and three wheels equals one tricycle. It is simple when you start right.**

**Three can equal one in many ways, just as four, five, or any other number. There are four quarts in one gallon. There are twelve inches in one foot. There are endless examples. All of this would only be confusing if you said, four quarts equals one quart, or twelve inches equals one inch. This is what many people think of when they think of the trinity. This is what Thomas Jefferson called**

**the incomprehensible jargon of Trinitarian arithmetic. He was right, but he was rejecting an error, and not the truth, when he thought he was rejecting what the trinity really is. When we get it into our head that God has revealed Himself as a Three Person Being, and not a one Person Being, we will no longer have the problem of those who begin with a wrong definition of God.**

**The three in one is illustrated in many ways. If you have three lights on in the room, there is only one light filling the room. It is impossible to separate the light coming from any one of the bulbs. The light from all three are so blended into one that they are one, even though three. So it is with the three Persons in the trinity. They are so one that it is hard, if not impossible, to separate them and see them in isolation from the other two. They are one in all that they do. There is nothing that one does that is not the will of the others. Just as a three leaf clover is not three clovers but one clover in three leaves, so God is one God in three Persons. Like the light from three different bulbs, they so blend together that they are perfectly one. The Father is not a trinity, the Son is not a trinity, and the Holy Spirit is not a trinity. It is God who is the trinity and it takes all three to be God. If you take away one of the wheels it is no longer a tricycle and if you take away two of the wheels it is not ever a bicycle, but a monocycle. So the One God is in Three Persons and all of them are necessary to have the God revealed in the Bible. Take away one or two and you have a different type of being than the God of Scripture.**

**Reality is filled with analogies of the trinity. All can be divided into space, matter and time. Time can be divided into past, present and future. Matter can be divided into animal, vegetable, and mineral. Space can be divided into length, width, and height. Water is composed of three atoms=2hydrogen and 1 oxygen. and it can be in three states of solid, liquid and gas. Life is a Trinitarian process with mother, father and child as a result.**

**The issue is simply this: Is God a being who has dwelt for all eternity alone in the solitary confinement of nothingness, or is He a being that can never be alone because He is a trinity, and thus, self-sufficient and complete in Himself, and capable of eternal fellowship within His own being? If one denies this greater concept of God, which He has revealed Himself to be, then he has to reject the deity of Christ, and this is to deny the Christian faith. The whole of the Christian faith depends upon the truth of the trinity. It is a mystery, but greater is the mystery of trying to understand the Bible without the doctrine of the trinity. If Jesus and the Holy Spirit are not God, why does the Bible give them all the attributes of God, and why are we to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? It may be a profound doctrine, but compared to any other explanation of what the Bible reveals, it is profound simplicity.**

## **II JOHN**

### **1. THE MYSTERY WOMAN**

**Some of the worlds great love letters were written to mystery women. As a rising literary star Guy de Maupassant received a charming and flattering letter from Marie, an admirer. He was curious and wrote back, and they carried on a lengthy correspondence. He tried hard to get her to reveal herself, but she never did. All his love letters were written to a woman he never met. That was more mystery than he desired.**

**Believe it or not, a similar thing happened to the great composer Tchaikovsky, but he did know the identity of his lover. For 13 years he and Nadejda van Meck carried on an intimate correspondence. Their letters are filled with love, but they never met. He died at age**

**53 murmuring the Nadejda. She remained a mystery woman.**

**Beethoven, another musical genius, who never married, left behind three short love letters he addressed to my Immortal Beloved. In them he longs to fly into her arms and be at home. He wrote, "Oh, God! Why is it necessary to part from one whom one so loves." He urges her to be his true and only treasure, and laments that words cannot convey all his heart longs to say. The mystery is, nobody knows to whom he wrote these letters, for they were in his cash box when he died. They had never been mailed. The lady he so loved remains a mystery woman.**

**Now we come to this little letter in the Bible, and behold, we are faced again with another mystery woman. The elect lady whom the apostle John loved in the truth is a mystery woman. Nobody knows just who this woman was. There are theories GALORE, but none of them remove the veil of mystery. We will have to wait until heaven to get full light on this, the only woman in all of history to have one of her letters become a part of God's inspired Word for the guidance of His people. There are women who have books of the Bible written about them: Ruth and Esther, but she stands alone as the only woman with a book of Scripture written to her.**

**Matthew Henry, the great commentator, wrote, "Here we find a canonical Epistle not only to a single person, but to one also of the softer sex. And why not one of that sex? In Gospel-redemption, privilege and dignity, there is neither male nor female, they are both one in Christ Jesus." But the fact is, she is unique, and stands alone. No wonder scholars have racked their brain for centuries trying to figure out who this lady was. We will look briefly at the guesses of men on this mystery woman before we look at the message to her, which is no mystery at all.**

**I. Some feel this mystery woman was none other than Mary the**

**mother of Jesus. John, you recall, took Mary from the cross to his own home to care for her. In his travels it makes sense that John would write back home to her. She would also be a very hospitable person, like this mystery woman was, for she never forgot the hospitality she needed the night Jesus was born.**

**The theory has appeal, but it is not likely, for John would hardly have to warn Mary about being deceived by one who denies that Christ has come in the flesh.**

**II. Some feel it is not, "elect lady," but "Lady Electe", Electe being her name. This has been found to be a female name. The problem is, the word is used again in verse 13 for her elect sister, and it is not likely for two sisters to both be named Electe.**

**III. The most powerful arguments for the idea that she is not a specific woman at all, but rather a church, and her children are the members of the church. Her elect sister being a sister church, where John is visiting. This theory is widely held, and there is no good reason it could not be true.**

**IV. I chose to join the majority that I have read, and take it simply as it seems to be-a personal letter to a lady friend of John, just as third John is a personal letter to a male friend.**

**One thing is clear, she was a lady. It is very rare for a woman to be called a lady in the Bible. The word is used only six times in the entire Bible. Two of them are right here in this little letter. All four of the others are in the Old Testament, and two of them refer to groups of ladies, and the other two are used symbolically of a city, and so the mystery lady of our text is the only the specific woman in all of God's word to be called a lady. Again, she is unique, and stands alone as one of a kind. The word lady has always been used to designate a distinguished woman; one of greater than average**

**dignity. In England men of dignity are called lord so and so, and women of dignity are called lady so and so. This makes many speculate that she must have been a wealthy widow. All we know for sure is that she is a mystery woman. But we do know quite a bit about her from this letter, and so let's consider her first as-**

## **I. A LOVED LADY.**

**The very first verse tells us she was loved by God. She was the elect lady, that is one chosen by God. She was loved by the Apostle John, and then, as if that was not enough to satisfy her, John tells her she is loved by all who know the truth-that is, all believers. She is also loved by her children. When it comes to being loved she had quality and quantity. To be loved by all Christians is very near to impossible, for they have a great variety of convictions, life-style, and theology. Things were not so complex in the first century, but the fact remains you have to be some kind of a woman to have this said of you, that you are loved by all who know the truth.**

**This is a statement that cannot be pushed to an absolute. After all, many who knew the truth did not know this elect lady, and many who did likely only knew her superficially. John could not know whether or not some of the ladies envied her for her gifts, or whether or not some of the men resented her influence. I think it would be safe to say no one is loved by all, for not even the perfect man, the Lord Jesus, who loved all, was loved by all. John is not giving us a statistic here as much as a compliment. He did not interview the whole Christian community on how they felt about this lady.**

**What we can assume is that this elect lady was of such a sweet and likable personality that to know her was to love her. If you did not, the problem was likely in you. She was loved because she was lovable. She was a kind of woman who made people feel good to be in her presence. It was always a pleasant experience to share her**



**company. John could hardly get motivated to write to her, because it seemed so cold and empty compared to face to face conversation. He anticipated the joy they would share when he would see her in person. She had charisma.**

**It is not hard to figure out why this mystery woman was loved. It is no mystery at all. Show me any woman who makes others joyful, and I'll show you a woman who is loved. It is human nature to love what is pleasant and enjoyable, and it's God's nature as well. This woman had problems like everybody else. She seems to be widowed, and, therefore, has gone through deep grief. John says that only some of her children follow the truth, and so the door is opened to suspect she had borne the sorrow of seeing some of her children rebel. She dwells in no ivory tower above the rest of us, but lives in the real world of struggle. Yet she is not sour and bitter with life, and anxious to complain and pour cold water on life's laughter.**

**Those who chose a negative response to life are not pleasant people to be with. They may be tolerated, but they are not loved. I have known women to go both ways. I think of one elderly woman who made everyone cringe when they answered the phone and heard her voice. They already knew the world was rotten, and did not need another dissertation on the diseases on a sick society. Her mind was locked into the negative. It was not that what she said was false, it is just that it was tiresome and discouraging to devote all your time to dissecting the depravity of man. She was Godly in her faith, but her personality was not appealing and attractive, and she was not loved.**

**On the other hand, I think of another woman who was old and feeble, and who had lost her husband and a child in death. She had endured deep sorrow. Yet when I visited her I would come away feeling life is so full of beauty. She wrote poetry until her crippled hands could hold the pen any longer. She read inspiring books, and**

**loved to talk of the joys of life.**

**One of these women you dreaded to see face to face. The other you delighted to see face to face. Both were Christians, but both were not equally treasured as company. You might object that Christians are to love all in the family equally. This is true, but this does not mean you will enjoy the presence of all equally. There are different levels of love. John was known as a disciple whom Jesus loved. Jesus loved all of His disciples, even Judas, but we need to grasp this distinction in love. John was a more enjoyable person to be with than others of the disciples. Jesus, in His humanity, enjoyed being with people who were pleasant, and who gave life a lift. John, no doubt, had a good sense of humor, and this goes for the mystery lady as well. I can just hear John saying to this lady, "Jesus would have loved you, for He enjoyed life the way you do, and He would have had a good time in your company, just as I do."**

**John knew Jesus in a unique way, and knew from experience that Jesus enjoyed the presence of certain people more than others. He loved to go to the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, because He enjoyed their company. This elect lady did this for John. She was just an enjoyable person to be with. Most everyone else felt the same way, and so we can conclude, she was loved because she was loving. She cared for other people and made a point of making them feel comfortable. She obviously had the gift of hospitality, for John has to warn her about taking in false teachers. In other words, she was so open and friendly to all that she could be easily taken advantage of by those deceivers.**

**Every positive personality trait can be used for evil if it is not kept in balance. The forces of evil are not without cleverness, and they can see how the very virtues of a Christian can be used to their advantage. This loving lady could be used to support their very work of undermining the Gospel and the church in her area. Do not**

**assume that Christian virtues cannot be abused. The fact is, our greatest strength is often our greatest weakness as well. This loving lady's willingness to open her home to all in love could be the very means by which the enemies of love could gain a foothold in her community.**

**What this means is, the Christian must sometimes choose to act contrary to their nature, even when it is a beautiful nature. The loving Christian must sometimes become intolerant and refuse the very hospitality it has become a custom to offer.**

**This flexibility to act opposite of your usual nature is not a sign of inconsistency, but a sign of one's loyalty to truth. Loyalty to the truth demands inconsistency in the Christian. This is a paradox, but we see it in Jesus when he became very intolerant of the Pharisees. If you are always consistent and love all, even when they use you for evil ends, your love becomes a tool for the anti-Christ.**

**Keeping this balance in mind, the fact remains that a Christian who desires to be loved by all must be a person who creates an atmosphere of joy. Eugenia Price tells women in her book, *A Woman's Choice*, that we are all little creators. We have the power to create, "Friction or peace, rest or strain, reality or phoniness in our environment." She asks this series of questions, "What kind of vibrations does your personality set up in your home? In the office where you work? In Church? There is no possible chance of our being neutral here. We all "create" an atmosphere around us, and this atmosphere which we create is the "world" in which we expect our loved ones, our friends and associates, to live. How are the living conditions around you?" In other words, how many of us could John write to and say, "You are loved by all who know the truth." The second thing we see about this mystery lady is that she was-**

## **II. A LOYAL LADY.**

**She was loyal to the truth, and saw to it that her children were likewise loyal to the truth. Here was a woman who knew that Christianity was a matter of the mind, and not just a matter of feeling. A couple was leaving the church when the wife asked, "Did you see that new purple coat Mrs. Lampert was wearing?" "I'm afraid not" the husband replied. "What did you think of that orange velvet dress that Mrs. Frauley was wearing?" she asked. "I didn't notice that either" he said. "Oh, for goodness sakes," she snapped, "A lot of good it does you to go to church."**

**Truth is not always the main objective of those who go to church, but it ought to be. To know God and His word, and, thus, His will, is to be the goal of our search as Christians. All other goals are to be secondary to this if we are to be loyal believers. Loyalty to the truth is loyalty to God, for they are one. Jesus said He was the Truth, and, therefore, the words of Emily Dickinson are accurate theology.**

**Truth is as old as God,  
His twin identity-  
And will endure as long as He,  
A coeternity.**

**Truth is one of the key words of this letter, for John uses it five times in the first four verses. Love and truth are inseparably linked like Babe and Ruth. The Christian who emphasizes one at the expense of the other, will lose the balance necessary to be a wise Christian.**

**Love without truth leads to license. It becomes an emotion that can be used by evil. The Christian who is all love becomes one the world takes advantage of, for they are open to abuse. Truth without love leads to legalism. Most of the tragedies of Christian history have been due to Christians who fought fiercely for the truth without regard for the consequences. If people did not explain the Trinity properly, they were burned at the stake. Many Christians**

**died at the hands of other Christians whose loveless loyalty to the truth made them more unchristlike than the Pharisees.**

**The Christian has no more business separating love and truth than he has in cutting his coins in half, and separating heads and tails. They are one, and belong together, for neither can be what it is meant to be without the other. Dr. Graham Scroggie said, "To walk only in love would make us soft; to walk only in truth would make us hard; but walking in truth and love we become strong." All the dangers and risks of love are prevented by loyalty to the truth, and all the hardness and cruelty of truth are prevented by love.**

**As I see it, the primary purpose of this letter is to help this mystery woman maintain the balance of these two basic ingredients in the ideal Christian life-love and truth. Thank God for this mystery woman, for because of her we have this simple letter that can help us all maintain the balance of love and truth. Get these two out of balance, and you have opened the door to the subtle serpent who will use your very virtues for the cause of evil. John is telling this mystery woman to beware of the deceiver who denies that Jesus has come in the flesh. They cannot be loved in the truth. They are not one in Christ, but are anti-christ, and, therefore, her loyalty to the truth demands that she not support them with her hospitality.**

**Loyalty to the truth demands that we refuse to give aid to those who goal is to undermine the truth. John has confidence that this mystery lady can easily see this, and not let heretics rob her of the aid that is needed for the proclaiming of the truth. History is filled with many a godly widow who has been sweet talked into supporting religious deceivers. It started in the first century, and it goes on yet today. Men who profess to be Christian evangelists seek the support of loving hospitable widows, and they get it. This love letter of John, no doubt, spared the mystery lady from this embarrassment, but one wonders how often the millions of godly**

**widows in this world ever read this letter and respond by investigating those they support by asking them where they stand on Christ.**

**The goal of every Christian is to be like this mystery woman. We are to combine being loving and loved with a loyalty to the truth in Christ. This balance life will make us pleasant company to both God and man.**

## **2. A LETTER TO A LADY**

**Herodotus, the Greek historian, tells this story from ancient history. Hestiaeus wanted Aristagorus to revolt, but could not get a message to him because the roads were guarded. So he took one of the most trusted slaves and shaved all the hair off his head, and then scratched letters into the skin of his scalp. Then he waited until the hair was grown in again, and he was dispatched to Miletus. All he had to do was ask Aristagorus to shave his head, and see the message to revolt.**

**And we thought body language was something new. They had a head start on us. But clever as it was, this method of sending a letter never really caught on. In spite of its many limitations, however, it had this great virtue: It forced the writer to be brief and to the point. We need to learn this lesson, a few words of concern is of infinitely more value than silence. How often we do not write because we have little to say, when the fact is, it is little that we should say.**

**The great preacher of the last century, T. DeWitt Tallmage, considered the introduction of the post card a national blessing because it forced people to learn brevity. It got to be a custom to spend the first page of a letter in flowery introduction, and the last page in putting on the brakes trying to stop. The post card forces**

**the writer to use an economy of words, and get right to the message. Tallmage was convinced if all used the post card it would add several years to a mans life. The telegraph made it even better. A son sent this message home from college: "No mon, no fun, son." The father got the point and responded, "To bad, so sad, dad." That is what you call brief communication.**

**History has proven that a letter does not have to be long to have a lasting impact on lives. Back in 1850, Harriet Beecher Stove received a letter from her sister. In it she told of the fugitive slave law, and the attempt to enforce it. Then she wrote, "Now, Hattie, if I could use a pen as you can, I would write something that would make this entire nation feel what an accursed thing slavery is!" This simple sentence challenge was like the message on the slaves head. It said "revolt," and Harriet responded to that message. She put her life-blood and prayers into the writing of Uncle Tom's Cabin. She hoped to earn enough to buy a new silk dress, but instead, she became rich. Her books sold like wild fire. Three paper mills needed to run consistently to supply the paper for this book that changed history, and made her one of the most prominent women in the world. It was translated into many languages, and was a key tool in ridding the world of slavery. And it all started with a letter.**

**C.S. Lewis wrote over 100 letters to a widow in America. She was four years older than he was. They never met, but wrote each other for years. He never dreamed his letters would be published. They were just short notes he could dash off in a few minutes, but they now are a book for the enjoyment and edification of the whole Christian world. These letters give us deep insight into this man of God.**

**Never underestimate the power of a letter. God certainly did not. 21 out of the 27 books of the New Testament are letters, and parts of the other six are also letters. God must have inspired the idea of the**

**postal system, for it was basic for His whole plan for mankind, and it still is today. Letters are a key method of communication, and every day the will of God is being fulfilled through letter writing. Some have a gift for letter writing, and can do much good through it.**

**This morning we want to focus again on this little letter of II John. III John is even smaller in size, but you can only tell this by counting the Greek words. John, in this letter to a sweet, lovable, and loving lady, seeks to enlist her in the battle for truth. Many deceivers have gone out into the world says John, and they are a threat to the advancement to the Kingdom of God. John urges her to stand fast in the truth, and to repel these attackers of the truth, and refuse to support them.**

**In so doing John acknowledges the important role that women play in the battle for truth. In the war of good and evil both sides have recognized that women are vital for victory. That side which can enlist the support of women is the side most likely to win. That is why Satan went after Eve in the temptation. We can rejoice that there has always been, and likely will always be, more female Christians than male Christians. That is no sign of weakness, but rather of strength. Begin to lose the women, and you begin to lose the war.**

**I have read much of the history of women in warfare, both physical and spiritual, and I am amazed at the number of women who have been conquerors. Numerous women have led armies and won victories, just as Deborah in the Old Testament. Numerous women have faced the forces of evil with faith in Christ, and they have by that faith driven the darkness from the field. Never underestimate the power of a letter or the power of a lady. We have both here in II John.**

**This letter adds nothing new to Christian theology. Everything**



here is in I John. There is no reference to the cross or the resurrection. It is of little value in witnessing. It's value is in the realm of the practical, as it stresses the importance of balance in the two basic values of love and truth. An army needs to do two things. They need to advance to conquer, and they need to abide and secure the area they have won. This same two-fold strategy is vital in the spiritual fight against darkness. John in enlisting his lady friend in the battle for light, begs her to follow this strategy by advancing in love, and by abiding in truth. Let's look at the need for each of these. First-

## **I. ADVANCE IN LOVE.**

If you want to make progress in the Christian life, it will come as you learn to love more effectively. Thirteen times in the New Testament we are told to love one another. Ten of these come from the pen of John. He not only preached it, he practiced it, and this letter is itself an act of love for this elect lady.

Opposites attract, and this is the basis for romantic love. But likenesses also attract, and this is the basis for Christian love for one another. I am not saying I know John had no romantic attachment to this woman. For all I know, the reason he longed to see her face to face was to propose to her, and win her for his wife. There is no hint of this kind of love, however. What we see here is a love of a male and female that is based on their common love for the truth: The truth here being Jesus Christ.

This has come to be called Platonic love. It is often joked about, because in our sex-saturated society it is assumed that no male-female relationship can be non-sexual. But it is, in fact, a very real and precious human experience. It is one of the great joys of life that males and females can enjoy each other without romantic commitments. Jesus had this kind of relationship to a number of

women. Mary and Martha and Mary Magdalene stand out, but doubtless, there were many others. Paul had Lydia, Phoebe, and Pricilla, and quite a number of close female relationships, some of whom are named in Romans 16. When the Bible says love one another, it does not mean for men to love men, and for women to love women. We are to love the opposite sex in Christ.

This is a road all Christians are to travel, but no road is so hazard free that you can be careless, and that is the case here as well. A good many Christians have gotten their lives messed up by letting their love in the truth develop into a romantic attachment. This is just fine for people who are free to be romantically involved, but all too often it happens to those who are not free.

I bring this issue up because one of the purposes of John in writing this letter was to help this loving lady see that there are limitations even to love. It must be kept under the control of truth, or it can lead you astray. Her problem was in her indiscriminate love of traveling preachers, and in her not finding out what they were preaching. John is saying love has to be examined. Many Christians have learned to their sorrow that just as God can bring good out of evil, so Satan can bring evil out of good. If love is given free reign without evaluation of the mind, the Christian is led by his emotions into every form of folly. This is not mere theory, for the record of history reveals that godly people can fall into every human vice, if they do not have truth balancing their love.

This is not a put down of love, but a simple recognition that even the best of human emotions needs the guidance of truth to avoid extremes that lead to evil. The Christian needs to be wise in love. You ought to be suspicious of your love if you notice that you are more concerned about what you are getting out of a relationship than about what you are giving. When love begins to turn self-centered it is ceasing to be the agape love that John is writing

**about here. Only agape love will take you forward in the Christian life. Agape is a social kind of love that reaches out to lift and encourage others.**

**John does not want to give this loving lady a wrong impression by being critical of her zeal in being hospitable to even heretics, and so he stresses, even to her, one who is loved by all, that she is to press on in loving and keeping this basic commandment. It is a sensitive issue to try and get a person to put a limitation on their love without turning them off to love altogether. The worst thing John could do would be to turn a loving persons love in on themselves so they cease to be loving to others.**

**Karl Menninger in his book, Love Against Hate says, Love that ceases to flow out to others, and instead, turns inward, leads to serious mental problems. He tells of patients in mental institutions who will walk ten miles for exercise, but who will not lift a finger to help set up a table for the pleasure of others. The reason they are there is because they love only themselves, and the paradox is that total self-love is the worst form of hate, for you make yourself worthless to all others, and thus, unloved by all others. What a sad epitaph this is:**

**Here lies a miser who lived for himself,  
And cared for nothing but gathering pelf.  
Now where he is or how he fares,  
Nobody knows and nobody cares.**

**Agape love is the sharing of one's self for the sake of others. This always leads to advancement in the one loving, if not in the one loved.**

**Agape love is a loan from the heart of God, and God expects it to bear interest. It is not a loan He wants paid back, but one He wants**

**passed on. As you have freely received, so freely give. In loving one another you become a channel of God's grace. Agape love is doing what needs to be done, and what God wants done for others; not because you like them and have positive feelings for them, but because it is God's will. To serve only those you like is not agape love, but self-centered love.**

**Jesus did not like the Pharisees for their hypocrisy, nor the priest for the robbing of the people, but He did love them, for He died for them, and prayed for them to be forgiven. That is agape love, for it is not love that is deserved, but love that is needed. The Christian must do a lot of things in life, not because he wants to or likes to, but because it should be done. It is great when you can enjoy what you do for others, but enjoy it or not, if you do what needs to be done, that is love. John, no doubt, does not like having to warn this good friend of the danger of her very kindness, but he knows love demands it, and so we see him stressing the second point we want to focus on which is-**

## **II. ABIDE IN TRUTH.**

**This sounds sort of contradictory. We are to be ever advancing in love, yet ever abiding in truth. We are to be marching forward, and yet standing fast. These are both a part of Christian warfare. Life that is balanced will be both progressive and conservative. Like any army we need to move forward and take enemy territory, but we need to hold it as well. It does no good to conquer a territory if you let it slip away later. We need to hold fast to that which we have gained.**

**Truth is one of John's key words. The Greek is alethia. In Matt., Mark, Luke, and Acts, the word is used only nine times. But when we come to John it is used 22 times, and in I John it is used 9 times, and in II John it is used 5 times, and in III John it is used 4 times, for**

**a total of 40 times. Only Paul can beat John when it comes to the use of this word, for in all of his Epistles he uses it 45 times. These two master generals recognize that to be Christ-centered you must be truth-centered, for Christ said I am the truth. If we are to live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, here is one of the most juicy and tender of them all. It is a feast for the soul.**

**There's nothing that gives an army motivation like the assurance that they are fighting for what is good, just, and true. Even evil causes must try to persuade their fighting forces they are fighting for what is right and true. The truth that John urges this female soldier of the cross to abide in is Jesus Christ, and the Biblical revelation concerning him. In other words, the truth in this context must be seen as historical and doctrinal.**

**The deceivers believed in Jesus also, but they denied the historical fact of the incarnation-that Jesus the Son of God actually became flesh. They said he only appeared as a man, but never really became a man, for they felt flesh was evil and God would never become a part of evil. They let their theology and philosophy determine how they interpreted God's word. The Christian is to let the revelation of God determine his theology. The Christian says if God came in the flesh, then it is not true that flesh is evil. The flesh can be good, and God intends it to be as it was when He saw all that He had made and said it was good.**

**The truth is objective historical revelation concerning the Person and Words of Jesus Christ. This is the fortress of the true Christian. The Christian can be tolerant and flexible in many areas of life, but here he rests on an absolute foundation of truth. No matter how corrupt the church has become in history, it has never forsaken this foundation of the Incarnation, atoning death, and glorious resurrection of Christ. To cease to abide in these truths is to cease to be Christian.**

**You can differ on how you baptize, in how you worship, in how you govern your church, and in many other ways, and still be Christian. But nobody can be a Christian who denies the truth that Jesus Christ is God incarnate in human flesh.**

**This was the big issue of that day. The Gnostics denied the incarnation and rejected the humanity of Jesus. Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. The way you discover who is the true Christian and who is the deceiver is by finding out where they stand concerning Jesus. If they deny any of the basic truth concerning who He is and what He has done, then you know you are dealing with what is not Christian, no matter how good and clever they are. If people do not deny these basic truths they are Christians even if you disagree with them on many other issues.**

**What is true is not necessarily truth. Truth is permanent, but what is true may be only passing. If I look out the window and say it is raining, that would be true, if it was raining, but it would not be the truth because five minutes later that same statement may not be true. It is certainly not true for all people for all time in all places. What is true may be very limited in time and place, but what is truth is the same for all time, all places, and all people. The truth in Christ does not vary with the centuries or the cultures. Methods and forms may vary greatly, but the truth in Christ does not vary at all. Christians need to make this distinction so they can see where they can be flexible and where they need to take an absolute stand and abide in truth.**

**Differences are legitimate even in the way we use language to convey the truth. John does not use the word Lord to convey the Lordship of Christ. On the other hand, Paul always refers to Jesus as Lord. But then, Paul does not describe the experience of salvation as being born again. John loves this concept and refers frequently to being born of God. That is not Paul's way of**

describing what he prefers to call being justified by faith. Bible authors have many different ways of expressing the truth, but they all agree on the truth in Christ in which they abide. The truth in this letter is the foundation for John's love of this lady. The truth in Christ has been the atmosphere in which his love for her has grown.

The truth, like God, is triune in nature. It is objective, subjective, and relational. By objective we mean it is outside of us as a reality. It is out there in the world and in history. It is truth that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, that He died for our sin, that He rose again the third day. That is true whether or not you believe it or not. But when we do believe it, and accept Christ as Savior, He then becomes the subjective truth, for He is then as true within us as He is true without us in history. Now, it is true for us, and we walk in the truth. Next comes the impact on our lives because this objective truth has become subjective, and the eternal has invaded time. It affects how we relate to other people. This truth now determines our relationship to others. Those who are likewise walking in truth become a part of our family, and they are loved in the truth. Those who seek to undermine the truth in Christ, become our enemies. The truth then becomes the determining force in our relationships to other people.

John loves this lady too much to let her be deceived, and so he warns her of her danger. He has to get tough and tell her of the risks and loss of reward if she does not evaluate those to whom she shows hospitality. This was not a pleasant thing for John to have to do, but it was a necessary thing if this lady was to be spared being deceived by clever men.

In many practical ways this tough love-that is love that is guided by loyalty to the truth-is so important for the church and the cause of Christ. But the fact is, it is hard. Eugenia Price had to tell Christian writers if their manuscripts were of no value. I would

probably beat around the bush and say this has potential, or, not bad for a beginner. Who wants to tell a struggling author nobody will care to read what they have written? But if you do not tell people the truth they will spend their lives following dreams they are not gifted to achieve. Price says, "Nothing could be more cruel than to give false hope." Love for people compels you to be truthful with them and not lead them astray. This is tough love, and may even be resented, but the fact is, it is what they need.

The spirit and method of telling the truth are key evidences that it is motivated by love. John begins and ends his letter with a positive note of love and warm personal affection. This wall of security surrounds his tough remarks about her danger of blowing it. Tough love can only be effective when it is preceded and followed by tender love. The positive must always dominate if the negative is to be effective.

If you really do not love and care deeply about a person, it is not likely you can be effective in constructive criticism. You had best not be the person giving them warning or advice, for there is a good chance you will do more harm than good. Truth without love will seem cruel. If you feel compelled to set people straight that you really don't care for, you need to examine yourself and see if you are being motivated by a desire to hurt rather than to help. Benjamin Franklin said, "Truth and sincerity have a certain distinguishing native luster about them which cannot be perfectly counterfeited; they are fire and flame that cannot be painted." If you can't speak the truth in love, why speak at all? John could do it, and that is why we have this love letter to a loving lady.

### **III JOHN**



## **1. THE FEELING FINE Based on III John 1-8**

**A farmers son, who was about to begin his studies at medical school said, "Dad, when I get to be a doctor, I think I'll specialize in obstetrics." The old man shook his head and responded, "Likely you'll be just wasting your time son. Chances are, soon as you begin making money at it, somebody else'll find a cure for it." Ignorance can be the basis for a lot of humor. A pastor was once visiting an elderly woman in a nursing home, and as he talked to her he noticed a dish of peanuts on the stand by her bed. As he talked, he helped himself to the peanuts. After a while he noticed he had eaten a good share of them and he apologized. The old woman said it was all right because she didn't like peanuts anyway. The pastor was surprised and asked, "Why then do you have them sitting here on your stand?" She replied, "I just like to suck the chocolate off them." Ignorance can be bliss, but revelation can be gross.**

**Ignorance can be funny, but it is no fun when people risk their own health and that of others out of ignorance. Ignorance is probably the number one enemy of health in this world. Medical missions has been a major part of the churches mission to the world because pagan darkness leads people into so many practices that destroy them body, mind, and soul. The Christian world has compassion for the whole man, and so with the light of the Gospel goes the light of the knowledge to bring good health. In our advance Western culture we have overcome most of the problems of pagan ignorance, but ignorance is still alive and well.**

**Back in 1928 women were working for the US Radium Corporation painting radium on various articles like luminous clock dials. They were instructed to moisten the brush in their mouth. They became ill, and one even reported that her hair glowed in the dark. Their health was damaged by ignorance, and we all know of**

**the modern problem with asbestos and chemicals of all kinds. There is no way to know just how devastating human ignorance is to the health of human lives. What we don't know is hurting us all the time. But what we do know is helping us constantly to overcome the ignorance that hurts us, and experience the health God intends for us to have.**

**Feeling good is a good feeling and a feeling that God's Word says is good. Here in the shortest book of the New Testament, with only 219 Greek words, and one of these words is health. It is the same word Dr. Luke uses in Luke 5:31 where he quotes Jesus saying, "These that are whole need not a physician." To be whole is to be healthy, and when you are healthy you don't need the doctor. The implication is that when you are not whole or healthy you do need the doctor. Jesus, therefore, puts His stamp of approval on the ambivalent feelings we have toward doctors. The poet put it-**

**When I am well and feeling fine,  
And not a pain or ache is mine,  
I brand the Doc the King of ills,  
And laugh at all his sugar pills.**

**There is no merit, I contend,  
In any dose you recommend.  
Your punk advise is but a joke,  
Designed to keep the people broke.**

**But when I'm sick and full of aches,  
And get the shivers and the shakes,  
Or when my stomach starts to rock,  
I call upon my friend the Doc.**

**I praise him then and think him great,  
And take his doses by the crate,**

**Until I'm fully cured--and then-  
I tell him he is a joke again.**

**We are glad they are there, but we hope and pray we don't need them, , for not needing them means we are feeling fine, and this is the way we should want to feel. It is the way John wants his friend Gaius to feel, and in wanting that he shows us-**

## **I. THE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TOWARDS HEALTH.**

**It is an attitude of admiration. It is the ideal state of life, and is the state in which God created Adam and Eve, and the state of the risen and glorified humanity of Jesus. It is the state of perfect health that is the goal of God for man. It is perfectly natural then that John would pray for his friend to enjoy good health. That is the one goal of life that all men have in common. Feeling fine is a fine feeling, and nobody doesn't like feeling fine. Adam was made so healthy that even after the fall he lived to the age of 930. His son Seth lived to 912, and five generations later Methuselah lived to 969 and Noah to 950. Then came a sudden change, for Noah's son Shem lived only to 600 and his grandson only to 438. Two generations later it was down to 239, and by the time of David people lived under 100 years old, where it has been for 3000 years. It took centuries of human folly, sin, and pollution to destroy the health of man's body. It is one of God's greatest gifts.**

**Ben Johnson wrote, "Oh health! Health! The blessing of the rich! The riches of the poor! Who can buy thee at too dear a rate since there is no enjoying the world without thee." God's will is that we be healthy, for health is essential, not only for fun, play, and all the pleasures of life that God desires us to enjoy, but it is also essential for our service to Him. Jesus by His many miracles of healing demonstrated that sickness is an enemy, and that health is our friend.**

**John shows a concern for his friends health right from the start. It was a common way to greet people in the ancient world, and it still is today. We meet people all the time and ask them, "How are you?" We do not want a medical report, but it is still an expression that shows an interest in how people feel. Hello is the same thing. It comes from the old Saxon word from which we get words like hale and whole which are terms for health. Hello then is an abbreviation for how are you. So all through history it has been a friends role to be concerned about health.**

**Jesus did not exalt health to the level of life's highest goal. There were plenty of healthy Pharisees and Saducees. Nine of the ten lepers He healed did not even come back to thank Him. They did not get the best Jesus had to give by receiving their health back. Health was far from the ultimate value of life. Locke was wrong when he said, "A sound mind in a sound body, is a short but full description of a happy state in this world." He left out the third leg of the tripod which was number one with Jesus, and that is a healthy relationship to God.**

**Jesus had compassion on those who had sick bodies and minds. He healed them as a demonstration of God's power and love, but his goal was always that men see that the kingdom of God had come, and to get into a right relationship to God. Healing was a sign of God's love. It was a step in the right direction, but healing and health were only temporal values, and unless they led to repentance, and to surrender to God, they fell short of the goal of an eternal relationship with the heavenly Father. Good health only lasts a lifetime, but one's relationship to God is forever. Health is good but not the best thing there is. Sickness is bad, but it cannot rob man of the best. One can lose health and still have an eternal relationship with the Father.**

**The ideal, of course, is to get it all together and enjoy wholeness**

**on all levels of body, mind, and soul. Those who achieve the third level of soundness of soul, because of their trust in Jesus as Savior, will achieve the other two for all eternity. But those who strive only for level one and two and neglect the third, will have their health only for a short while, but lose total health forever. John is happy that Gaius is in good health even as all goes well with his soul, and he goes on to delight in his soul health, which is demonstrated by his walking in truth and being faithful in love.**

**Paul also stresses the relative value of bodily care as compared to the absolute value of soul care. He recognizes the good is less than the best. In I Tim. 4:8 he writes, "For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come." In other words, do not exalt health and body above health of soul. The Christian with a weak body in time will have just as perfect of body in eternity as those who have good bodies now, but the Christian who neglects his soul will not be as well off for eternity as the mature Christian who is always growing in grace and in knowledge. The differences in heaven will not be based on the physical, for all will be equally like Christ in their glorified bodies. The difference will be in the degree to which they expanded their souls by developing their gifts and exercising them in a life of service.**

**This leads to the conclusion that the very healthy Christian who does not use his health for the glory of God is no match for the sick Christian who does use his sick body for the glory of God. It is possible to have a sick body and mind, and a healthy soul. The wise choice is always to go for the healthy soul, for that is a choice that is always open by the grace of God. You may not have the choice to be healthy in body and mind. When the choice is there, the Christian is to always chose health on every level. It is always right and wise as long as by doing so one does not damage his relationship to God.**

**All of this is to say, the Christian attitude is that health is a precious value on all levels. The Christian is to always be pro-health in prevention, education, and in ministries of health care. Some great Christians have made grave mistakes in this area. Timothy Dwight was born in 1752 and he became a great preacher and the president of Yale. He felt that he did not have to obey the laws of health like lesser men. He allowed himself only four hours of sleep a day. He had no exercise and no fun. He was a brilliant man, but also very foolish. He had a total collapse and almost lost his eyesight. By being forced to rest and exercise properly he did recover, but with scars and weakness the rest of his life. He fell for the angelic fallacy which says, if you are spiritual enough you do not need to obey physical laws.**

**One of the first things the Christian needs to do in developing a proper attitude toward health is recognize his or her limitations. Christians make most of their mistakes in the realm of health by neglecting the reality of their limitations. They say God can do anything, and then assume by this that this means they can do anything. Jesus did not think that way. He recognized His human limitations and sought to get away from the constant press of the crowds. He needed rest and sleep or He would hurt His own health. Jesus had a balance between labor and leisure. He got exhausted, but He also got away, and one occasion He even slept in a great storm. Jesus lived with the laws that limited his human body and mind. To think we can neglect them is not being people of great faith, but of great folly.**

**Some of the great Christians of history have fallen prey to what Dr. Bob Smith called the angelic fallacy. It is the delusion that we do not have to live on the level of the laws of nature that determine health. We can live like angels who have no such limitations. Many Christians have lost physical and mental health by thinking they can neglect a good nights sleep. F. W. Robertson, a great English**

**preacher who made the two point sermon famous, was a victim of the angelic fallacy. He burned the candle at both ends. He thought he could labor for the Lord without rest or exercise. It does work for awhile, and so people think they are getting by with it. This supports their delusion and they feel invincible. But then it caught up with him, and he was plunged into a pit of depression. This threw a fear into him and he tried to change. He began to walk and take time to relax, but it was too late. He was an old man in his 30's, and at 36 his candle went out. One of the best minds for exalting the Word of God, but he only lived half a life because he neglected his health.**

**A soldier may lose his health, and even his life, in the service of his country, and a soldier of the cross may do the same for the kingdom of God, but when God's will does not call for such a sacrifice, to give it up because of faulty judgment or preventable ignorance, is not pleasing to God nor beneficial to man. The Christian ideal is exemplified by John Wesley. He preached 42,000 sermons and wrote 200 works, and started a movement that will last until Jesus comes again. He ate well and exercised regularly. He never missed a good sleep a day of his life. His excellent health enabled him to preach twice a day even in his 80's. Had he broken his health we might never have heard of Wesley or Methodism. He labored hard, but he also balanced his life with rest.**

**Every person has a breaking point just as does every fuse. You cannot say I'll trust the Lord and plug in the washer, dryer, toaster, iron, and electric heater in the same socket. You may trust the Lord, but obviously the Lord can't trust you to use common sense. Burn out comes to Christians when they overload their system. It is not necessarily that they are doing too much, or doing the same thing for too long. The problem is lack of balance. The heart of the matter can be seen in the heart itself. This wonder that we all carry around with us is designed as a perfect balance of work and rest. It**

**beats an average of 72 times every minute of your life. You might think that is a good illustration of a workaholic, but not so. It rests a total of 8 hours a day. The upper part works first, and then the lower part, and then the whole heart takes a rest. It rests one third of the time, and that balance of labor and rest makes it the wonder it is.**

**Health is a matter of balance of labor and rest. Add to this a balanced diet of a variety of foods. Variety is the spice of life, and that is why God gave us such a variety of foods. The greater your variety in foods, the more likelihood you have in getting all that your body needs. People who eat only a few of the same things, and do only a few of the same things are risking their health. Health is promoted by variety in activities as well as food. The life of constant new discoveries will be the healthiest life for body, mind, and soul. Health includes having old treasures and new pleasures.**

**None of this is to imply that unhealthy Christians have no role in God's plan. Sick Christians have changed the course of history many times. Kagawa of Japan had TB in both lungs, plus heart and liver trouble. He once saw a doctor who wrote out a death certificate instead of a prescription. This frail little man, always on his last leg, built one thousand churches, wrote 60 books, and became one the worlds most influential evangelist and theologian. Don't knock the sick saints, for God uses them often for His glory.**

**Jesus was the Great Physician, but we sometimes fail to see He also entered into the feelings of the patient, and felt the need for care and healing. After His temptation the angels came to minister to Him. He needed to be nursed and comforted back to strength and health. He became so exhausted sometimes that He had to get away from the crowds to rest. On one occasion He was so tired He slept even as the ship was being tossed by the storm. He loved to slip away to the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus to find**



**refreshment and rest. He needed the comfort of companionship as He struggled in the Garden of Gethsemane.**

**We do not know if Jesus ever had any childhood diseases, or whether He ever got the flu, or a stomach ache and headache. But Jesus did identify with the sickness of humanity when He said in Matt. 25:35-36, "I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was imprisoned and you came to visit me." When the righteous ask, "When did we ever see you in these states?" He said, "As you have done it unto the least of these my brethren you have done it unto me." Jesus is saying that healing and caring for the sick is a ministry to Him. When you bring healing and health to the body of Christ, the church, you bring health to Him.**

**This picture exalts healing to the highest level of spirituality, for it is a ministering to Jesus Himself, and that is why Jesus can use it as a gauge for judgment. The person who does not care about the physical needs of others does not care about them at all, and this means there is no true love or spirituality. If you love people's souls, but not their bodies, Jesus is saying your love is a fiction of fantasy that will vanish as evidence in the court of judgment. You love the whole man, or you do not love the man at all.**

**We need to recognize that secondary things are still vital because the primary things depend on the secondary for their fulfillment. It is like the first commandment of loving God with all your being, and loving your neighbor as yourself. So the love of others is secondary to the love of God, but since you cannot really love God with all your being if you do not love your neighbor, the secondary is essential to the fulfillment of the primary. In a race the primary goal is to win. It would be foolish to say my primary goal is to get my**

shoe laces tied. But the fact is, if I don't get the shoes tied right, it is not likely I will win the race. Lesser values and secondary objectives are still essential when the primary goal depends upon them. The secondary, therefore, is often part of the primary, and what this paradox means is that anything in life that is an aid to the highest value is itself a part of the highest value.

Health of body is a vital factor in health of soul, and the fulfillment of God's will for our life. Therefore, even though it is secondary to health of soul, it is a part of having a healthy soul, and so it is of prime importance. There is no excuse for neglecting a value because it cannot be exalted to the highest value. Nobody will claim that the bolt in the bottom of your oil pan is the most important part of your car. But leave it out and drive that car, and soon all of the most important parts will not be worth anything, for this secondary part is vital to the functioning of the primary parts. Secondary does not mean unimportant, and so it is with health. It may not be life's ultimate goal to be healthy of body, but it is, nevertheless, a Christian obligation to do all he can to protect the health of his body. The Bible makes it clear that health is important. Prov. 3:8 says, "This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones." Prov. 4:22 says, "For they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body." Prov. 15:30 says, "A cheerful look brings joy to the heart, and good news gives health to the bones."

What John is expressing in this letter to his friend Gaius is that the Christian attitude is one of respect for the total man. Holistic medicine is thought to be new, but the fact is, modern man is just getting back to the future. Plato centuries before Christ said, "This is the great error of our day in the treatment of the human body that physicians separate the soul from the body." Modern man is discovering that this has been a great error. Leonard Shattuck wrote, "Sometimes it is more important to know what kind of a

**fellah has a germ than what kind of a germ has a fellah." What kind of a fellah one is not only determines his own health, but the health of others in his environment. Health is not only a personal matter and a spiritual matter, it is also a social matter. Your health, or the lack of it, can help or hinder the health of others. John expresses joy because his friend is in good health. When someone you love feels good, you feel good because of it. Health has a contagious influence.**

**On the other hand, there is Diotrephes who is a pain in the body of Christ. His pride and soul sickness is not confined to his own hide, but spreads into the body and causes the whole body to suffer. His unloving spirit infects the whole body, and other Christians have to endure pain because he is ill. The sick Christian seldom suffers alone, but makes other Christian sick also. The sick person may not even suffer as much as those he infects. A person like Diotrephes who is so arrogant in his abuse of power may actually enjoy their role and feel fine while they are hurting others. The bacteria that makes you sick does not feel sick itself. It feels great while making you sick.**

**John Sanford in Healing And Wholeness tells about how Richard Speck had no feelings about the eight nurses he killed. He writes, "Obviously the illness in this man is not something he experiences as his personal pain....but is to be seen in those on whom his illness is inflicted." None of us want to be linked with illness like this, but all of us have this problem to some degree. None of us is in perfect health of the total man. Sin has infected us all, and we fall short of the glory of God. The result is a world full of psychological Typhoid Marys. I am referring to people who are not aware of it, because they don't feel ill themselves, but who by their attitudes and spirit make others feel ill. That is why healing is of the very essence of the Christian life.**

**C. L. Marshall in his book Dynamics of Health and Disease arrives at an interesting conclusion. "A person can be ill and well simultaneously....Millions of Americans whose blood pressure is too high or whose blood sugar is abnormally elevated function without any difficulty whatever.....Health and disease are not opposites-both may coexist in the same person." This leads to the paradox of the danger of feeling fine. Your feelings may not reflect the true state of your health. You can't go by how you feel, but need the judgment of others. Diotrephes probably felt fine, but he was sick and needed to listen to John and other Christians if he was to get well. The question is not only do you feel fine, but do others feel fine about you.**

**Why do we come to church and sit on furniture no where near as comfortable as what we have at home? We come to experience healing. The healing of truth from God's Word that enlightens our ignorance so we can better know God. The healing of His forgiveness, and the healing of fellowship, and the healing of belonging, and the healing of music are all a part of why we come. Everything we do aids the health of body, mind and soul. It all ties in to the two great commandments of loving God with your whole being and your neighbor as yourself. Fulfillment of these great loves demands that the Christian aim for, labor for, and pray for a body, mind, and soul that work in harmony so that one of the primary feelings you feel in life is the feeling of feeling fine.**