

Epistles of 1, 2, & 3 John

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(1997 Study with Excerpts from 1982–1983 Study)

The following notes on the Epistles of John were compiled from a Bible study led by Bro. Frank Shallieu in 1997 with excerpts from a 1982-1983 study. They should be utilized with the following understanding:

1. Each paragraph preceded by “**Comment**” or “**Q**” (an abbreviation for “**Question**”) was introduced by someone other than Bro. Frank.
2. The original study did not follow a prepared text but was extemporaneous in nature.
3. Although the transcriber tried to faithfully, with the Lord’s help, set forth the thoughts that were presented in the study, the notes are not a verbatim rendering and, therefore, should be considered in that context.
4. Finally, Bro. Frank did not review the notes for possible errors that may have inadvertently entered the text.

With this disclaimer in mind, may the notes be a blessing as a useful study guide.

FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

(Study led by Bro. Frank Shallieu in 1997 with excerpts from a study in 1982 and 1983)

It is essential to give a little preface before we begin a verse-by-verse study of the three epistles of John. To our understanding and experience, they are probably the least understood epistles in the New Testament. One reason is that when we read the first epistle, it is sort of sonorous and mellifluous; that is, its flow is sweet like honey. If we finished this epistle and were asked four hours later what we had read, very few would know because it has a seeming lack of perspicuity; that is, it lacks a definiteness on the surface. However, if we were living at the time this epistle was written, it would be dynamite—*just the opposite*.

For many years, we found that something was lacking in reviews and considerations of this first epistle, but fortunately, within the past year, we found someone who agreed with us. What we would like to say is the following. While this first epistle correctly conveys the peculiar and affectionate disposition of the Apostle John when it is superficially read and understood, we will endeavor to show that none of the apostles spoke more sharply than John. One consolation is that this epistle proves the *gentlest* Christian can be a *son of thunder* when Christ's honor and dignity are at stake. And that was the situation here.

The question has been posed, Why didn't the apostle descend to particulars instead of using general terms such as exhorting the brethren to holiness, brotherly love, and obedience, which he contrasted with the incipient dangers of worldly fellowship? There is another point too. When considering the class John was speaking of in this first epistle, we should remember that those he was warning against were *all brethren* who believed in Christ at one time, but for various reasons, they went off on their own. In 1 John 2:19, the apostle generalized, saying, "They went out from us." In the third epistle, there was mention, by name, of a very influential *brother* who even dared to oppose the Apostle John.

We will try to understand the background of the three epistles, which the brethren of the apostle's day were thoroughly familiar with through their experiences mostly in Asia Minor. What was the background? The brethren were being confronted with certain erroneous doctrines. We do not want to get inveigled into studying what the errorists believed and taught, but it is necessary to put in succinct form some of the ideas that were prevalent.

One such doctrine was Docetism. Its adherents felt that Christ did not have a material body but that his body was a vision or that he had a phantom body composed of ethereal substance. This belief led to a denial of the reality of the death of Christ and the propitiation for sin. With this type of theology, the blood of Christ was meaningless. Others of this same school of thought of Docetism believed that the story attached to Christ—the Gospel account—was a myth. They felt that it was enough to worship God *in spirit* and that the body could engage in every kind of sex and indulgence *with impunity*. This statement may be hard to believe, but we have given considerable study to this subject. The immoral creed refuted the true doctrine that *every sin* is a transgression. The truth of the matter is that only the pure are recognized as Christ's. John taught that the character of God, as learned from Christ, must determine the Christian's *inward and outward* life, whereas Docetism condoned immorality in the outward life.

Another individual, whose name was Cerinthus, lived contemporaneously with the Apostle John in Ephesus. Originally from Alexandria in Africa, he moved up to Asia Minor and was in the same city with John in the apostle's later life. (Incidentally, these facts are based on fragments of history that we have gleaned.) On one occasion, John saw Cerinthus at a public bath. What was John's reaction? He felt it was urgent to leave lest blood from the bath

contaminate him and his companions. In other words, he regarded Cerinthus as the *enemy*, as a very dangerous heretic.

What did this former brother believe? Cerinthus erroneously taught that the world was not made by the highest God. Probably this belief was a distortion of Genesis 1:2, which mentions the darkness that prevailed in connection with creation. He further taught that the God of earth, a separate being, was ignorant of and far removed in character and thinking from the true supreme God.

In contradistinction to Docetism, Cerinthus believed that the body of Christ was a real earthly body but that it was essentially of spirit (not human) nature. By teaching that the divine spirit first united with the man Jesus at his baptism, he advocated sort of a dual situation. It is interesting that the Catholic religion basically absorbed this doctrine, and instead of talking about Cerinthus as a heretic, Catholics condemn Arius, for example, as a heretic.

Cerinthus is said to have held, just like the Docetists, coarse and sensual but millennial views. In the Kingdom, Christ will be the Father, and the Church is to be the mother, but Docetists took this relationship in a literal sense instead of seeing the *regeneration* aspect of the fallen Adamic race. In other words, they believed they would be the procreators of a new race. This concept was another vast distortion.

We have presented the erroneous doctrines in a simplified form. Additional doctrinal error came from the magi (or Persian) influence, which pertained to the transmigration of the soul. And lastly, the Stoics were quite prevalent. Advocates of this belief promoted the Greek philosophy that the Christian must be free from passion, unmoved by joy or grief. This doctrine led to monasticism and asceticism and other deviations along another line.

As we consider John's three epistles, it will help to keep the thoughts of this brief introduction in mind. We will then realize that certain statements John made were really slamming those who held these erroneous views. Both the views and the proponents of the views were known by the brethren back there, so they understood what John was saying. The epistles give evidence of the affectionate disposition of the apostle, but they also manifest his strong character. Understanding John's motivation brings energy and life to his writings, especially to the first epistle, which at first glance seems to be like a song with beautiful words and nothing concrete to grab onto.

1 John 1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life;

“That [Jesus] which was from the [a] beginning [when the Logos was created], which we [apostles] have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life [at the First Advent].” While Jesus had a preexistence in the past, he appeared on the stage of human history at the First Advent. In this introduction in verse 1, John told what he had personally experienced with Jesus—what it meant to him and what it should mean to others. Notice that John used the pronoun “we” instead of “I.” The reference was primarily to the apostles, of which John was the last living member.

Comment: John was emphatically saying that he had firsthand information: “We have heard, seen, looked upon, and touched him with our hands”; that is, “Jesus was here in the flesh, and we apostles were eyewitnesses.”

Comment: The clauses “which we have seen with our eyes” and “which we have looked upon” are not repetition. The distinction is that the apostles saw him during his ministry but looked

upon him at Calvary, when he was hanging on the Cross.

Reply: Yes, that is a good thought. A lasting impression was left on John, who was probably Jesus' favorite apostle. We have shown from the Scriptures that Paul and Peter were superior to John. Nevertheless, Jesus and John evidently connected in a remarkable way.

Not only was John an eyewitness, but also, as a footstep follower of Jesus for 3 1/2 years, he frequently had opportunity to be in the Master's company—eating, sleeping on the road, and talking with him. In verse 1, John was saying that this gazing was of a more continuing nature or experience. The statement “our hands have handled [him]” was a rebuttal against the erroneous thought of an ethereal body. In short, John had been with Jesus, so who could speak better? Moreover, he was an apostle, not merely a disciple who tagged along. Eyewitness testimony should have more credibility than a secondhand report.

Comment: John was the apostle “whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23; 20:2; 21:7).

Comment: When Jesus was on the Cross, he committed the care of his mother to John. This act proved that Jesus had full confidence in John. Also, the fact that Jesus had a mother proves he had a fleshly body during his earthly ministry.

Reply: While the Docetists thought that Jesus' body was just a vision, those of another school of thought had to admit in principle the existence of a material body. This second class believed that Christ's spirit took over the body of a man named Jesus.

Comment: Since this epistle was written about 60 years after Jesus' resurrection, an eyewitness account was very important.

Reply: As indicated by internal evidence, this epistle was written about AD 90. The Apostle Jude was still alive at this time. However, he had deceased when the Book of Revelation was written in AD 96 or 98, at which time John was the last living apostle. The fact that Jude follows John's epistles and immediately precedes the Book of Revelation supports these thoughts.

There is an additional point. Domitian was the Roman emperor at this time, i.e., up until AD 96, when he died. Reliable tradition says that Domitian called two disciples from Jerusalem to appear before him in Rome, Jude being one of the two. When the emperor saw the appearance of Jude—that he was not a scholarly person—he dismissed him, considering his religion to be insignificant. John's exile to the Isle of Patmos occurred very shortly thereafter.

Verse 1 is the same today in principle, for Christians spiritually commune and fellowship with Jesus here in the Harvest period if they open the door of their heart when Jesus knocks. “Behold, I [Jesus] stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup [eat] with him, and he with me” (Rev. 3:20).

John leaned on Jesus' breast at the Memorial supper, when the emblems were instituted. After his resurrection, Jesus said, “Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended ... unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God” (John 20:17). However, the disciples did touch him several times, and some apparently threw themselves at his feet and worshipped him in thankfulness that he was alive. As the Pastor beautifully expressed, when Jesus said, “Touch me not,” he meant, “Embrace me not.” In other words, he was saying, “You know me. I am the same being, but things are different now. Therefore, decorum teaches that you should have more reserve.” The decorum was proper as opposed to the familiarity they had had with Jesus prior to his spirit resurrection.

Incidentally, John 1:1 has a little different emphasis than 1 John 1:1. The Gospel of John emphasizes the preexistence of Christ and the beginning of creation, whereas this first epistle emphasizes the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry. For instance, 1 John 2:7 reads, "Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning [of Jesus' ministry, gospel, and teachings]. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning."

1 John 1:2 (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)

If John were alive and we were aware of his disposition, we would know that this repetition was done with oomph and power. His earnestness would have been apparent in trying to get across to the disciples the power of his logic.

A problem in refuting the errorists was that not much New Testament Scripture was readily available at that time. Paul's and Peter's epistles were not circulated for the most part until after John's demise, and brethren had access to these epistles for only short periods of time. Therefore, much of a person's doctrinal beliefs depended on his heart condition. Those who got a fragment of truth and really appreciated it tried to go to the source to obtain more information. Those who were of an inquiring and diligent disposition were rewarded. Not until about the third century did the canon of Scripture, as we know it today, become available.

"We ... show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us [the apostles primarily]." John was talking about Jesus' preexistence, which scotches the idea of just the *man* Jesus. We believe that both Jesus and Christ Jesus had a preexistence as the Logos. John was saying, "The one I have seen and been familiar with is the Word of life. He is the one who came from the Father." John was convinced of Jesus' Messiahship, and he strongly defended it here.

1 John 1:3 That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

For the third time in three verses, John emphasized that the apostles had seen and heard Jesus. The triple emphasis was not accidental. John spoke *with power* as he repeated and repeated the thought that he had been there and known Christ firsthand. Those who were doing all the contradictory talking had gotten their information secondhand and selected what information they wanted. God chose the *right man*, John, for this time period. His style of writing was very meaningful and powerful to combat the error. John did not just write words but wrote *words with feeling*. Had he read this epistle, we can be sure he would have spoken as a son of thunder, yet he was humble (Mark 3:17). Peter, a strong and bold character, was humble and soft as far as God and Jesus were concerned. These are characteristics that we, as Christians, have to develop. As the Apostle James said, we should be "swift to hear, [and] slow to speak" (James 1:19).

"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us," that is, "that ye will have our joy." John was saying, "You can see what has moved us all these years to be faithful to Christ. We know him, and we know the Father *through him*."

"Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." Many people love to talk and hold center stage, but John was saying, "What I am telling you is *real*. Our fellowship was not only with Christ but also with God, and we would like to get that feeling over to you, so that you, as individuals, in your worship of the Creator, will have the same motivation,

feeling, and joy that we have. That is my desire and one purpose of this epistle.”

Comment: John was privileged to be on the Mount of Transfiguration to hear God say, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (Matt. 17:5).

Reply: Yes, the favored three—Peter, John, and James—had that experience.

1 John 1:4 And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

Verse 4 is another repetition of the same theme. In His patience, God used this technique in the Old Testament. For instance, He went through the constructional detail of the Tabernacle and then repeated it. Repetition is a form of emphasis.

Comment: The King James marginal reference is John 15:9-11. “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and *that your joy might be full.*” John recorded Jesus’ words in his epistle.

Comment: John was saying, “We apostles are writing these things unto you so that you will know the full message and your joy will be full.” Those who heeded the writings of the apostles would retain their joy and not be deceived by false doctrines, which would take away the joy.

Reply: In other words, he was saying, “Concentrate on that which is constructive and helpful to you, and do not have a craving for the unknown of what others might have. You were satisfied initially when you consecrated.” John spoke on purity and the joy of fellowship and brotherly love because he did not want to depress the ones he was addressing. He pursued that slant lest their joy be diminished, and that was especially true if some of their loved ones had gotten inveigled into erroneous bypaths. How needful it was for the brethren to have a full assurance that they had the source of truth! Therefore, John was saying, “I was with Jesus. As one of his apostles, I have seen, heard, and touched him. I *know* what I am saying is true. Always keep that thought in mind.”

When Jesus was with the Father originally, he loved Him so much and had so much respect for His wisdom that when he got an inkling of God’s plan for the recovery of fallen man, he was very interested. Then the Father asked Jesus if he would like to participate in that work. Jesus was glad to do so because of his love for and his knowledge of God as a result of being with Him. When Jesus came down here, he looked up to heaven and thanked God in his prayers and in connection with the miracles. For example, he was very careful to first make sure that credit would go to the Father for the tremendous miracle of the raising of Lazarus. Then he cried in a *loud* voice, “*Lazarus, come forth!*”

The Gospel of John is very different from the other Gospels, for it goes into the manner in which Jesus spoke. Jesus was so impressed with the Father that he spoke as the Father had taught him. Now John was following the same principle with regard to Christ. Just as Jesus’ intimacy with the Father led him to exhort others to believe him, so now John’s intimacy with Jesus led him to do the same thing. John copied Jesus’ style with meaning and real feeling.

John lived to be over 100 years old. As the tarrying apostle, John represented the last members of the body of Christ, a *class* at the very end of the age.

Comment: Jesus said, “My meat is to do the will of him [my Father] that sent me, and to finish

his work” (John 4:34).

1 John 1:5 This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

“God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” Some erroneously believed that there were two separate Gods—a lesser God, who created the world, and the supreme Deity. However, the God of creation is also the supreme God. The darkness the errorists were thinking of was a misapplication of the principles of God, which it takes a lifetime to understand. It is remarkable that Stephen made his calling and election sure in such a brief time. A firebrand, he could have been the Apostle Paul if he had lived longer, but God had something else in mind because Paul had sat at the feet of Gamaliel. It took time to know the doctrine of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and because that type of education was necessary, God chose Paul over Stephen.

Jesus’ teachings showed that “[1] God is light, and in him is [2] no darkness [3] at all.” This statement, with a triple emphasis, is an overall principle and summation, but why did John give this summation here? God is “the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning,” whereas we are imperfect and inconsistent and have sinful tendencies (James 1:17). Hence we must *ever keep in mind* the *perfect ideal* and strive to do better. God is always firm, true, pure, and right. He is “light”; that is, He is pure and sinless and has moral and doctrinal purity. He dispels darkness and has no imperfection or sin. Also, He *literally* exudes light in his body. In short, He is “light” in every sense of the word—from the intellectual standpoint and from the character purity standpoint, as well as literally. He dwells “in the light which no man can approach unto” (1 Tim. 6:16).

The world became imperfect because of man’s disobedience, but God deals with our freewill moral agency. The New Creation will be the greatest work of all, whereby God will elevate a class of nobodies to the divine nature through the power of His Word and the tutorship of Jesus, the apostles, and the Old Testament prophets.

1 John 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

If we say that we have fellowship with God, but our life contradicts our claim because we walk in darkness, doing whatever we will, then we lie and are not doing the truth. Some indulged the flesh, saying that the flesh was just the human body and nature and that the spirit, the inner man, was the real thing. They felt that the outer man could be forgiven, but the Apostle Paul said, “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid” (Rom. 6:1,2).

A class back in John’s day was actually saying, “We have fellowship with Christ,” but they were walking in darkness. In addressing issues that were confronting the true Church, John used a different frame of reference than Paul. Apparently, John did not have Paul’s capability of reasoning and logic. Hence he could not rebut the enemies of Christ in the same way that Paul did with his background and training. However, John’s reasoning was more effective because the average Christian is not intellectual. Therefore, John was the right man for the job under the circumstance.

The development started incipiently, like a mystery of iniquity, but it began to grow and ferment. At first, the only way to combat this highly intellectual argument was to do so on intellectual terms, but now the doctrine had developed further, so that it was becoming a practice. Wrong character development was being manifested by this class, who said they had fellowship with Christ, but their deportment was *glaringly* bad. The evil they were doing was *very obvious*, so it was better to use a rational practical argument. Accordingly, John reasoned,

“How can you say that you have fellowship with Christ when you are walking with immoral practices?”

In addition, this class had an attitude of superiority and felt that pity, sympathy, tenderness, and compassion were all evidences of *weakness*. This was Gnostic thinking, and the word “Gnostic” has to do with being “know-it-alls.” (Today the “g” is a “k.”) Gnostics liked to debate along their lines, and in the final analysis, they rejected the Gospel of John and only partially accepted the Gospel of Luke; that is, they took what they liked from “Paul’s Gospel.” Not only did they feel that Paul was more authentic, but they looked down on John. Consequently, they did not visit true Christians who were imprisoned. Instead of seeing imprisonment as a sign of faithfulness to the truth, they felt it was the opposite. John’s words about darkness are nebulous to us, but the class back there understood what he was saying. Without background information, we would ask, “What kind of darkness—mental, theoretical, or what?” But in John’s day, the walking in darkness was *glaringly apparent*, and the only way to answer it was to call the individuals *liars*. Although Paul gave the same type of reasoning along another line in one situation, his implication was delicate, whereas John used strong language. If we said today that Bro. So-and-So was a liar, others would respond, “That is a terrible statement—you cannot judge the heart.” However, if a person’s conduct today were the same as in John’s day, we could say he is a liar. When outward conduct is *glaringly wrong*, we can talk tough.

As a son of thunder, John was addressing the situation as if to say, “Common sense should teach you that such conduct is wrong. We know Christ—what he did, what he taught, and what he said to us—whereas these others are two and three generations removed from Jesus’ ministry. They are now taking up the Gospel and giving it their twist.” John approached the error from the standpoint that the New Testament was not available to the Christian in those days. (At best, only fragments were available, and the Book of Revelation had not even been written yet.) John was saying, “We do have something that is clear—the life of Jesus Christ. His miracles and sermons are available. He is our example.”

Some have great difficulty giving up certain habits when they come into the truth. Perhaps smoking is a problem, and for a real addict, the smoke is in his system. What can help the individual to renounce the habit would be to ask, “What would Jesus do?” The person would think, “For Jesus to smoke a cigarette and give a sermon would be incongruous. I would not have respect for him.” Thus, while nothing in Scripture says a Christian should not smoke, that is no argument.

These Gnostics liked certain statements of the Apostle Paul because they felt those statements fit in with their theory. In other words, they were predisposed to think along a certain line, so they looked for Scriptures to justify their thinking. However, to understand a subject, we need to follow the principle of here a little, there a little, line upon line, precept upon precept (Isa. 28:10). *All* Scriptures on a topic have to be considered, not one statement, as these errorists were doing with Paul’s writings. A half truth is dangerous because the other half is error. As we proceed, we will try to point out some of Paul’s statements they were improperly using.

Walking in darkness and being liars were *self-evident* truths. Today if we knew an unmarried consecrated brother was living in sin, we could speak strongly, as John was doing here. Surely we would not reason softly with such a one.

1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

Lines were being drawn by this other class. With their knowledge, these individuals thought of other brethren as immature babes. That type of thinking is dangerous. This other group

disassociated themselves from the brethren at large. As John said subsequently, “They went out from us” (1 John 2:19). In other words, they were a formerly consecrated, dedicated class, but they deviated; they were the ones in error.

Comment: Paul said, “Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth” (1 Cor. 8:1).

Reply: Yes, Paul took a little different approach, whereas John spoke out strongly because that which had started as an incipient seed of error was now beginning to surface.

Q: Does the pronoun “he” refer to God, not Jesus?

A: We do not think so, for John’s main point was that Christians know about God through Scripture and the ministry of Christ. As God’s representative, Jesus manifested who the Father was and His character and plan. In the final analysis, the true Christian has fellowship with both God and Jesus, and both are “in the light” (1 John 1:3). We have fellowship with God, but since He is invisible, it is *through the life and behavior of Jesus Christ* that we know what God is like. Jesus spoke the words the Father gave him. In Jesus’ light, we see the Father’s light. Stated another way, the Father’s light shines, or is reflected, in the face of Jesus.

John was using strong talk. Today such talk does not fit, and that is why many misunderstand John’s writings and think he was speaking gently. With John’s identification of Diotrephes by name in the third epistle, the strength of his letters becomes more apparent (3 John 9). He was speaking of a specific situation that needed drastic action. Diotrephes actually thought and taught that he was superior to John, who was an apostle.

1 John 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

The other class said, “We have no sin,” and they liked the Apostle Paul, for they felt he justified this reasoning by speaking of the new creature and the old creature. The Gnostics considered the new and old creatures almost as two separate entities. It is true that the new creature is in an old-creature body, but they are *together*. The behavior of the body is a *reflection* of the new creature, the inner man. The Gnostics felt Paul was saying that the new creature is not guilty, for the will, the intent, is what matters. A certain measure of truth makes this statement palatable because we can will to be perfect, even though we are imperfect, but that is not the whole story. As an illustration, arsenic can be made a sweetener, but too much results in a corpse.

The errorists were saying that God forgives the outward behavior of the old creature, for it is a practicing machine through which the new creature gets experience. They reasoned further that we get experience by delving into sin. Moreover, they felt that the new creature and the Holy Spirit were separate. In contradistinction, John said that the new creature is responsible for the conduct of the old man. The inner man cannot be seen, but the outer man, as an indication of the condition of the inner man, can be seen walking in darkness. John was saying in strong language, “If you teach that we do not sin, you are a liar.”

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

John revealed two different things: (1) the glaring condition and (2) hope. In other words, one might get involved with this other group and become indoctrinated with their grievous teaching, but if his eyes were subsequently opened to the true nature of this situation, there was a way of escape. However, one had to act in order to be extricated. Thus John gave both positive and negative vibes.

On the one hand, “If we [the Gnostic class] say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” On the other hand, “If we [that same class] confess our sins, he [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Usually we read verse 8 as if that is what others are saying and verse 9 as if it applies to us. It is true that, as Christians, we get forgiveness of sins by confessing them, but John was talking about the class that had become infected. With them, there was the possibility of extrication. John was saying that to teach we can walk in darkness yet have no sin was an utter contradiction of the doctrine of Christ. In fact, it was actually blasphemy. The blood of Jesus cleanses us, but this other group did not believe in his blood. They taught, as we do, that the new creature came to Jesus at his baptism at Jordan. However, they erred in saying that the new creature left him at the Crucifixion and that the one who died on the Cross was a man named Jesus but not Christ Jesus. Doesn’t the Roman Catholic Church teach the same thing—that Jesus was half God and half man? How could Jesus die if he were inextricably both God and man? The Catholic teaching does not make sense, yet that religion stipulates that a person must believe Jesus was divine or he is a heretic.

1 John 1:10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

John repeatedly used the word “liar” in his epistles: 1 John 1:10; 2:4,22; 4:20; 5:10. In summary, John was talking about former brethren he was familiar with, who were living in the same region, but they had gone out and were teaching dangerous doctrines. Thus John was pointing out error, plain and simple. To countenance love toward them was wrong, for theirs was the spirit of “antichrist” (1 John 2:22; 4:3). Incidentally, John was the only apostle to use the term “antichrist” to identify individuals. Erroneous Catholic doctrine that has come down through the centuries is God Incarnate, meaning God in the flesh (half God, half man). In addition, some Adventists in the past taught that when we give our heart to the Lord, all of our previous sins are forgiven but that from the moment of consecration on, we do not sin. Accordingly, they felt that they were righteous and that they were justified by the works of the Law. The subject of failures among the consecrated was not in their vocabulary. To make their calling and election sure, such individuals would have had to change their thinking, for it completely negated the gospel of Christ. Similarly, Paul combated the doctrine of the Galatians, which taught justification by works according to the flesh plus ceremonial works.

1 John 2:1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

The aged Apostle John addressed as “my little children” all of the brethren to whom this epistle was more or less initially sent out. In other words, he was not addressing just the young, the middle-aged, or the old but all. Certainly if we were 100 years old, we would have the liberty of longtime service and of addressing others in this manner. Even the Apostle Paul, who was much younger, spoke in a fatherly style on rare occasions (Gal. 4:19). The brethren would have been very amenable to John’s fatherly term of address.

The apostle continued, “These things write I unto you, that ye sin not.” On the surface, his words would seem to be needless advice because every Christian knows that the calling of God is a holy calling. It is a calling to forsake sin and to ask repentance for sin. Therefore, John’s words would seem to be not only repetitive but also unnecessary because they were so obvious. However, as already previewed, the conditions that existed at the time this epistle was written necessitated such an admonition. Not only were there Gnostics, but Cerinthus, an enemy and a contemporary of John, lived in Ephesus, where this epistle was probably written. Cerinthus taught that sinning with the outer body was not that important because the inner man was what mattered. The term “Gnostics” comes from the term “knowledge.” Considering

themselves intellectually superior, they felt that God looks on the heart and the spirit rather than on the deeds of life. This class felt it did not much matter how one lived as long as he believed in God and Jesus. John did not want the brethren to heed the Gnostic teachings, which belittled the walk of the Christian.

Then John added, “And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” Why did John use this phrasing? Why did he say in one breath, “Sin not,” and in the next breath, “And *if* any man sin”?

Comment: He was saying, “Do not sin willfully. However, if any man sins unintentionally, he has Jesus Christ as his Advocate.”

Reply: In other words, the door is open for the forgiveness of *unpremeditated* sin.

Comment: John was being practical. The ideal was not to sin, but since he realized that fallen men do sin, he was saying, “Do not be discouraged if you sin, for God has provided Jesus Christ the righteous as our Advocate.” For “advocate,” the NIV has “one who speaks to the Father in our defense.” The Greek word is *parakletos*, which *Strong’s Concordance* defines as “an intercessor.” An advocate is like a lawyer, whom we would take to stand alongside us at the bar of justice.

Sometimes a Christian has difficulty overcoming certain sins. Paul called this kind of sin a besetting sin, saying, “Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us” (Heb. 12:1). Daily we go to the throne of grace to get our robes cleaned and to be forgiven of any transgressions, but sometimes we have other problems that are inherent in our genes, as it were. We were born in sin and shapen in iniquity, and try as we will to walk the perfect line like Jesus, we find we have failings (Psa. 51:5). Certainly Jesus is our Advocate, our Forerunner, our Helper.

Notice the emphasis on the pronoun “we”: “We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” This statement applies to the Christian, not to the world, because the world has not given their heart to God and accepted Jesus as their Redeemer. This epistle is addressed to *Christians*, whether Jew or Gentile.

1 John 2:2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

Jesus “is the propitiation for our sins [the sins of his followers in the present age]: and ... also for the sins of the whole world [in the next age].” Jesus Christ “taste[d] death for every man” but in due time or order (Heb. 2:9). “The man Christ Jesus ... gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time” (1 Tim. 2:5,6). The due time for the Christian is now; for the world, it is the next age.

Jesus is the propitiatory lid (Greek *hilasmos*), the satisfaction for our sins. Verse 2 refers back to the Tabernacle of Moses where blood was sprinkled on the Mercy Seat. John was saying, “Justice is satisfied with the blood of Jesus.” Thus Jesus is the go-between, or the means, to help us make our calling and election sure. He is our Advocate with the Father. We pray especially to the Father but *through* Jesus, who is there on our behalf, covering our failings with the robe of his righteousness.

1 John 2:3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

In observing the behavior of John and James Zebedee, Jesus gave them the nickname of

Boanerges, meaning “The sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17). James used blunt, practical reasoning in his epistle to wake up Christians in regard to their daily conduct. John’s reasoning was very much like that of his brother, but this particular epistle was given a little different slant. James told Christians to be introspective, to examine themselves. He taught that faith is meaningless if it is not backed up with some works. Faith *justifies*, but works *evidence* one’s faith. Thus James admonished Christians to look *inward*, whereas John, also using practical reasoning, more or less pointed out the behavior of *others*. John said that when we see glaring misconduct in others, we should get a lesson on *what not to do*. He then told *what we are to do*.

John’s reasoning is beautiful. His level of thinking was not as high as that of Paul, but he was just the man for this time period in the early Church. A Christian who had not been educated and brought up in a cultural fashion to try to reason with the intellectual Gnostics on their grounds would not get anywhere. Not only would he not be able to convince them, but he would get disturbed in the process. Therefore, John advised Christians to look at the Master. John recorded the life and sayings of Jesus in his Gospel, and those he was addressing knew he had walked and conversed with Jesus. The apostles had seen Jesus with their eyes, they had looked upon him, and they had even handled him. He was not an apparition, a vision, or a myth as the Gnostics claimed.

Now John was saying, “The proper way for followers of Jesus to walk in this life is to observe him—what he said, did, and commanded.” This type of reasoning is most effective for uneducated Christians, who are largely the ones God calls. He is looking for those who are weak, weary, and heavy-laden to draw them to Jesus (Matt. 11:28). For the most part, God calls the poor of this world—those who are poor in spirit and sometimes literally poor (Matt. 5:3).

“Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.” John’s practical advice was the simple thing to do—to obey Jesus’ commandments and not try to be a theologian and meet the intellectuals on their grounds.

Comment: Jesus spoke similarly in John’s Gospel. “If ye love me, keep my commandments.... He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.... If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.... If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love” (John 14:15,21,23; 15:10).

Reply: There is nothing wrong in studying Greek and Hebrew, but the main thing is to study God’s Word. As recorded in the Gospels, Jesus (the Son of God) certainly manifested the character of his Father in all that he did. We need a *hunger* for the Word of God, not a college education. There is a difference between reading and studying. Reading is more superficial and a form of hypocrisy, whereas studying is reading *with intent*. Today we live in a genteel society with a modicum of civilization in manners, dress, cleanliness, etc., but in John’s day, the common people were poor. They wore sandals and did not have the best in education or clothing. The behavior of others was very recognizable, for living and working together in the same small village, everyone knew everyone. People had a rapport and an intimacy that does not exist today in our artificial society. Christians may meet together on Sunday, but when they part, there is little or no contact during the week. Back there the behavior of other Christians, with their idiosyncrasies and misconduct, was easily discerned, whereas when a brother leaves a meeting today, he basically does not know anything about the others for the rest of the week. The point is that John’s writing was very meaningful to Christians in his day. Today it is harder to live the Christian life for many reasons. Our surroundings are evil.

1 John 2:4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the

truth is not in him.

Comment: John seemed to be saying that profession is not enough for the Christian. Actions must accompany profession. To say, “I know Jesus,” refers to profession, but in addition, the Christian must obey Jesus’ commandments. Otherwise, he is a *liar*, and the truth is not in him. John used very strong words.

Christians back there were familiar with those who said they did not sin. Even today some believe that sins before consecration are all cast over the Lord’s back. However, willful sins, which are done against light, are the exception. That type of sin is different from inherited Adamic sin. Adamic weakness is one thing, whereas willful sin cannot be forgiven but must receive stripes proportionate to the level of guilt (Luke 12:47,48).

“He that saith” indicates that others were saying, “I know Jesus,” but were not keeping his commandments. Today a lot of excuses are made for sin. The general attitude is to let everyone do his own thing. At least in puritanical times, sin was not a gray area but was more stark. Right and wrong are more difficult to discern today unless one studies God’s Word.

Comment: John’s saying, “The truth is not in him,” was not referring to factual knowledge but to the Holy Spirit of truth, the attitude with which a person *evidences* what is in his heart.

Reply: Yes, and there are two kinds of truth. The Gnostics thought their intellectualism was the way of truth. They felt they had the truth, but what they had was not God’s truth; it was not what Jesus taught.

Comment: In 1 John 1:8-10, the Gnostics were saying they did not sin, but they were sinning because they did not have *God’s* truth in them.

Reply: If we lived back in John’s day and knew that a particular individual who professed to be a Christian was constantly saying he had no sin, yet it was glaringly apparent from his outward conduct that he was grossly sinning, we would know he was a liar. In fact, the followers of Cerinthus, Gnostics, and some who came into the brotherhood from pagan religions did not make distinctions with morals. Asian art, sculpture, and paintings show that lust was right in the pagan temples, where women engaged in prostitution to enrich the temple coffers. Vestal virgins were a common practice. Today we do not know what happens with brethren during the rest of the week. Who knows what is occurring on the side? Back there the brethren knew about one another’s conduct because those committing immoral practices were not ashamed. They reasoned that God looks on the heart and not on the outer man.

John kept repeating and returning to the theme of keeping God’s commandments and trying to do His will. If that attitude characterizes our desire and walk, then (1) we know that we love God and (2) God will know that we love Him. Nevertheless, we have Jesus as our Advocate with the Father when we sin unintentionally. Otherwise, we would become very discouraged in trying to walk in the Son’s footsteps. God does judge our heart in these matters, but we have to recognize that Jesus’ *blood* covers our sins—that he was actually made in the flesh, died on the Cross, and is the propitiation for our sins. The Gnostics rejected John’s Gospel as a part of the Word. Certain heretics back there took only what they pleased and rejected the rest of the apostles’ writings. This selectivity was promoted by higher critics.

It is phenomenal that the Epistles of John are part of Holy Writ. In fact, the very testimony of Scripture and the unity of thought bespeak Divine Providence and prove that the whole counsel of God is contained in Scripture.

Back there Christians knew those who were saying, “I know Jesus,” but were not keeping his commandments. Peter and Paul identified several individuals by name, and John named Diotrephes. The *simplicity* of the gospel in knowing what to do by looking at Christ and following his commandments was very helpful in that intellectual society. The Greeks loved knowledge and the Jews looked for signs, but Christians are to look to God’s Word.

1 John 2:5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

Comment: Ephesians 4:13 is a tie-in: “Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” As we each individually draw closer to Christ, we naturally come closer to upholding the truth and to the brethren who are like-minded.

Reply: Yes, those who are similarly minded and have the same goals and intent are unified in Christ despite their diverse backgrounds.

1 John 2:6 He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

A person who said he was abiding in Christ ought to walk as Jesus walked. In other words, John was talking about someone who purported to be a follower of Christ. He would now start to criticize the party who made that claim.

Q: Was John still talking about the “liar” of verse 4?

A: Yes, he was talking about that group; that is, the pronoun “he” referred to whichever ones of that group were making such a statement. The individual being addressed was outside of John’s fellowship and the fellowship of the disciples John was serving.

John was saying, “He who says he abides in Jesus ought to walk in harmony with his own profession.” It is one thing to say we are a follower of Christ and to be thinking along doctrinal lines, but John said that the speaker, who thought he was walking according to Jesus’ doctrine, should look at his conduct. An individual’s conduct should be compared with *Christ’s* conduct and behavior—with what he exemplified in his life. One does not need a college degree to understand this common-sense line of reasoning. John would go on to explain what Jesus’ walk was like. His first point was, “Note the conduct of those who profess to be followers of Christ.”

Comment: The following poem is helpful:

I’d rather see a sermon than hear one any day;
I’d rather one should walk with me than merely show the way.
The eye’s a better pupil and more willing than the ear;
Fine counsel is confusing but example always clear.

1 John 2:7 Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning.

“Brethren, I write ... an old commandment which ye had from the beginning [of Jesus’ ministry].” This new doctrine, the Christian calling, had opened up not too many years earlier when Jesus brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. Since this epistle was written around AD 90 and Jesus’ ministry began in AD 29, that was approximately 60 years previous—a short enough time for the disciples to have a fairly good comprehension of what had happened back there, especially with someone as important as Jesus.

John was saying, “I write no new commandment but an old commandment, which ye have heard from the beginning.” In criticizing those who said, “I am in Christ,” John was voicing what Jesus had taught, not something new. The brethren had been taught along this line ever since they had come into the truth, and now they were to exercise judgment based upon the principles John had faithfully been teaching them. Brethren of all age categories were being thus instructed. John’s point was, “I am not giving you a new teaching. Here is an instance where you can use your judgment to put these principles into practice.”

1 John 2:8 Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.

The “true light” is Jesus—his teachings, his conduct, and his walk. The statement “the darkness is past” means that when one comes to a knowledge of the truth, he is translated out of darkness into light. There was a time when those John was addressing were not consecrated and thus were in different depths of darkness. But once they consecrated, they came into light, and the darkness was past.

“Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him [Jesus] and in you [those John was addressing].” Those who said they were Christians had Jesus as an example, and whatever he did was true, for he was the Son of God, the true Messiah. John was reasoning, “Jesus was true; he was the light. When you accepted him, you experienced that light. You believe in Jesus, so now that light is in you.”

John was giving a heart-to-heart pep talk to fellow consecrated brethren who had been under his influence for some time—whether in the same class in Ephesus or elsewhere, for he visited seven different ecclesias in Asia Minor regularly: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. The value of his instruction is that in time it became a *general* epistle to the believer.

1 John 2:9 He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.

An alternate reading in some King James Bibles changes “even until now” to “even this very hour.”

Comment: The Revised Standard reads, “He who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in the darkness still.”

“He that saith he is in the light” referred to those who thought they had an insight into Jesus and his doctrines. Their attitude was, “You do not have to tell me anything, for I know as much as you do.” Actually, the implication was that they felt they knew *more* than the Apostle John. They were saying, “I abide in Christ and his teachings. I have the light.” Those who made such statements were *confident*, but John was saying, “The light is not really intellectual knowledge but moral character deportment. One’s daily walk is as important as an intellectual understanding. It is essential to have a proper understanding of daily Christian living.”

These individuals felt they were abiding in Christ and were in the light. Intellectually they thought they knew the truth, but their walk was exactly the opposite, for they were doing their *own* thing. They attributed the immorality to the old creature and felt that God looked only on the new creature. John was attacking this reasoning in a very pragmatic way by calling attention to their walk.

First, they *hated* their brother, and this hatred was not hidden. Today the hatred is usually not seen, for the brotherhood knows very little about the personal lives of one another. Thus in our day, hatred can exist but not be evidenced, whereas in John's day, the sins were flagrantly done. The immorality and the cursing of other individuals, telling them they were of the devil, were outwardly done. Therefore, when John said, "He that ... hateth his brother," the deeds of the individual were known. Conditions today are the opposite, where everything is subtle. We live in a veneered generation, an artificial environment, where everyone is polite.

Thus when John wrote, "He that saith he is in the light ... hateth his brother," the hatred was evidenced. At the time John was writing, we believe he was the apostle and messenger to the Smyrna (or second) stage of the Church. In that period, things changed, as fragments of religious history will verify. For example, letters of hate were written, animosity was verbally expressed, and there were confrontations in walk. The point is that to understand John's epistles, we have to understand the conditions that existed among the brotherhood at that time. John was meeting strength with strength. The Apostle Paul said, "To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22). By implication then, to the strong, he was strong. John met with strength the attitude of those who walked confidently, feeling they had the intellectual supposed mystery of light while outwardly they were not obeying what Christ had said plainly in some of his sermons. Their sin and hatred were obvious, so their confidence had to be shattered by the apostle.

One's outward conduct can belie or negate what he thinks his standing is. The life of a Christian should comport with his profession and with the walk originally exemplified in the Master himself.

1 John 2:10 He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.

In verse 9, John said, "Those who openly hate their brethren betray that they are walking in darkness and not in light, as they claim." Now he took the opposite tack and encouraged those who had love for their brethren. "He that loveth his brother abideth in the light." John commended those who faithfully obeyed his type of apostolic teaching and thus abode in the light, the truth. Not only did they not follow the heretical teaching, but also that thinking was alien to them. They would have felt uncomfortable making open charges against the brethren and manifesting their feelings. The temptation was to render evil for evil—to revile those who reviled them, to slap those who slapped them, etc., but those whom John commended resisted the evil. After all, if Bro. A hated Bro. B and punched him, the natural reaction would be for Bro. B to punch him back. John was encouraging the ones who did not so react, for their refraining from retaliation was a good sign that they loved their brethren. They controlled themselves because they recognized that the behavior of the others was improper, and they did not want to follow a bad example.

"There is none occasion of stumbling in him." John was saying to those who followed his counsel, "There is no occasion of stumbling in you along those lines because you are not given to the wrong behavior. Your type of behavior engenders peace."

1 John 2:11 But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.

"But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness." The others did not realize the inconsistency of their conduct and their saying, "I abide in Christ." How great was their darkness! "He that hateth his brother ... knoweth not whither he goeth, because that

darkness hath blinded his eyes.” There was not much hope in the rescue of such individuals, but by talking tough like this, the Apostle John helped those who were with him to see that his words were true. They could see that the conduct of the others conflicted with their profession. In their heart, they would say, “Amen. We agree with what John is saying. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and he who hates his brother abides in darkness.”

1 John 2:12 I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name’s sake.

What did John mean by the clause “because your sins are forgiven you for his name’s sake”?

Comment: Because of the consistency of their walk with their profession, John was saying that their sins *up to that time* had been forgiven.

Reply: Yes. Their sins were forgiven for Christ’s sake, because they had made a sincere consecration. It was not that they could follow Christ perfectly but that they were trying to understand his teachings, copy his behavior, and obey his advice. Of course they knew in their heart that they were not obeying 100 percent, but John was saying, “Because you are trying and you are abiding in Christ, you are in the right path.” This type of assurance is needed from time to time because we may question ourselves: “Am I really in the truth?”

John said, “I write unto you, little children.” In this verse, the term “little children” covered *all* of the brethren and thus was a general term. No matter how old brethren are or how long they have been in the truth, they are all “little children.” The use of that term is different here than the way it is used in verse 13 of this same chapter. Here “children” is the Greek word *teknion*, which does not emphasize the age category but is a broader term such as saying “the children of Israel,” meaning the nation. In verse 13, the term “children” is the Greek word *paidion*, which has a limited application, for several age categories are mentioned: “fathers,” “young men,” and “little children.”

1 John 2:13 I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father.

1 John 2:14 I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.

In verse 13, John mentioned three categories—“fathers,” “young men,” and “little children.” In verse 14, he repeated “fathers” and “young men.”

“I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning.” The “fathers,” the older brethren, had known Jesus “from the beginning” of his earthly ministry. When Jesus performed miracles and gave sermons, many of those who were present were children. Thus they could testify later that they knew Jesus, but they did not necessarily know him in the sense that the apostles and the 500 knew him.

“I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one.” These brethren had not known Jesus personally because they were born later, but they believed what they had heard about him. They had overcome “the wicked one” in accepting the truth and consecrating. John was not saying they had finished their calling but was encouraging them.

“I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father.” With the little children,

why did John bring in the Father, not Jesus? Parents who were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah would instruct their children and tell them about both Jesus and the Father. However, the parents would put more emphasis on the Father when the children were young because, having a *natural* father, they would more easily understand about the *Heavenly* Father. Instruction about Christ would require a more advanced explanation, bringing in his paying the Ransom, his role as the Advocate, etc. Therefore, parents would tell their young children about the invisible God, who is called “Father.” Then as the children grew and matured, they could overcome the Wicked One and consecrate.

John’s approach was father-like in this epistle: “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not” (1 John 2:1). Being older, he adopted a paternal attitude that encompassed all of the age categories. Not only was he an apostle, but also he was like a patriarch. Thus he could take the liberty of doing what Jesus did at the Memorial in calling the apostles “little children” (John 13:33). Jesus had a long preexistence, so he was not just 33 years old at his First Advent. Thus he addressed apostles who were older than 33 as “little children,” and they understood. Even though Jesus looked like a young man, he was much, much older. As a young man, John did not have the liberty to call others “little children,” even if he was an apostle, but when he was long in the truth, an apostle, and older, he had more of a feeling of endearment than when he was a young “son of thunder.” The paternal aspect of John came out in his elderly years, so that as an *older* father, as a patriarch, he addressed the “fathers,” the “young men,” and the young ones.

Q: Why were the “little children” omitted in verse 14?

A: John did not include them the second time because he was addressing only those who had consecrated: the fathers and the young men. The little children attended the meetings; they had heard the truth and were obedient to their parents, but they had not yet made a consecration. Being perhaps 10 to 15 years of age, they knew that God is love, that He is the Creator, and that Jesus is His Son.

1 John 2:15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

1 John 2:16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

Verse 15 is rather nebulous. One would have to understand a little more truth in order to know what is of “the world.” However, verse 16 provides more information. John was saying, “All that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father, but is of the world.” Thus he gave practicality to the expression “love not the world.”

What is the distinction between the “lust of the flesh,” the “lust of the eyes,” and the “pride of life”? All of these characteristics are commonly found among the unconsecrated, among those in the world.

1. The “lust of the flesh” would be uncontrolled appetites and passions along almost every line, including pleasure, sports, money, sex, etc.
2. The “lust of the eyes” is a comprehensive term that encompasses covetousness, envy, a desire for what others have, or a desire for wrong gain. Objects of desire or envy can be a house, a car, clothing, etc.—anything along material lines.
3. The “pride of life” is pride in any form whether along temporal or spiritual lines, the latter

being the attitude that we have *all* truth. Those who said they were abiding in Christ and in the light were manifesting a proud disposition.

1 John 2:17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

John was comparing *transitory* joys with *eternal* bliss. One who does the will of God abides forever. One who refuses to do the will of God will not abide.

1 John 2:18 Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.

Here the term “little children” has a broad connotation, including all of the consecrated.

Comment: The *Diaglott* has, “Children! it is the last hour; and as you heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many have become Antichrists; whence we know that it is the last hour.”

The first half of verse 18 makes one statement, and the second half makes another statement. The two statements should be separated. First, John was saying, “You are familiar with what the Apostle Paul stated about the Antichrist.” As the messenger to Ephesus, the first period of the Church, he wrote, “Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (2 Thess. 2:3,4). The “Antichrist” Paul wrote about was the Papacy, but John was going to talk on a different subject. Therefore, he was saying, “You are all familiar with the teaching of the Antichrist, but now, to change the subject, there are other antichrists that have already come and are already in existence.”

Q: Jesus was asked, “What shall be the sign of your presence and the end of the age?” (Matt. 24:3). Part of his reply was, “There shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matt. 24:24). Does this verse have a bearing on John’s reasoning?

A: In John’s day, Bar Kochba allowed people to draw the inference that he was the Messiah. John seemed to be thinking more about Jesus’ personal life and the Sermon on the Mount, for he reasoned the same way that James did in his epistle: “Look at the Savior—how he lived, what he said, etc.” Matthew 24 becomes more significant in regard to the *other* antichrists, which are not the same as *the* Antichrist.

The “antichrists” (plural) of verse 18 were quite different from *the* Antichrist, especially in regard to the latter’s claim. The others diminished Christ, putting him in the background. While at one time, they may have been believers, they now began to think of themselves as having the light and being every bit as understandable as Jesus. John styled the leaders of those who left his company and were teaching destructive doctrines as “antichrists.” They felt they were walking in the light and had no sin, etc. Thus the plural “antichrists” were *obvious* different “Christs.” When we think of Jesus, we think of him as either a person or a title (“the Messiah”) or both. However, the Greek word “Christ” is “Messiah” in the Hebrew, so when individuals claimed to be the Messiah, they were dropping out Jesus and saying that others besides him were pioneers in new thoughts. Thus on the one hand, they diminished Christ’s role, and on the other hand, they advocated their own role as teachers.

What did Papacy do? In embracing Jesus and using his name, the system claimed to be his

representative. Ostensibly Papacy did not push Jesus out of the picture, for they claimed to be his *mouthpiece* and called the pope “the Vicar of Christ.” In contrast, the open and obvious individuals, the other antichrists, claimed to be the Messiah themselves down through the age. Hence John was talking about individuals who claimed not to be Christ’s representatives but to be Christ, the Messiah, the Teacher. In that way, they openly and flagrantly differed with Christ, whereas Papacy speaks with two tongues. Actually, as Christ’s representative, Papacy wants to be the teacher—the mother Church wants to teach the children. Thus Papacy is the pseudo-Christ, a diabolical representation of Christ, whereas the antichrists (plural) pushed Christ aside, feeling they were more advanced, and promoted their own thinking. Therefore, we think that John was referring to Jesus’ statement in Matthew 24:24 rather than to Paul’s statement in 2 Thessalonians 2:3,4. To reiterate, John was saying, “We all know about the coming Antichrist from what Paul said, but I am telling you now that several other antichrists are already in existence.”

The situation can be shown another way. Satan’s first method for opposing Christianity was to be an *adversary*. Part of the message to the church of Smyrna, of which John was the messenger, was, “Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10). Thus it was not until Pergamos, the third period of the Church, that Satan became a “Christian,” an “angel of light.” After John’s day, he adopted a different technique. Satan could not beat Christianity through opposition, so he joined it. In AD 314, Constantine, the pagan emperor, said that Christianity was a viable religion, as well as the pantheon of pagan gods. A few years later he adopted Christianity and made it his banner.

At first, in an effort to draw people away from Christ, the Adversary was *anti* or “against” Christ, not *pseudo* or “instead of” Christ. (Pagans and Muslims fall under the “anti” category.) With the departure being very apparent, John was warning about “antichrists,” who obviously differed from Christ. In contrast, the Adversary *joined* Christianity through Papacy and became the head of both the Roman Empire and the nominal Church. After a while, Papacy’s attitude in anything pertaining to religious matters was, “We are supreme, and no one can question us. Let the state run by itself. We will do the blessing.” Thus Papacy adopted the Christian religion but was really a *false or pseudo-Christ*, whereas the others were obviously *against* Christ.

We believe that John was referring to Matthew 24:24 when he wrote, “It is the last time.” Jesus predicted that after his death, different false Christs would arise (see also Matthew 24:11). John was not referring to *the* Antichrist, who would appear as a great enemy, especially at the end of the age, but was talking about precursors. In using the term “antichrists” (plural), he was giving a precursory warning. The Apostle Paul spoke about the time being short, yet almost 2,000 years have elapsed since his statement (1 Cor. 7:29). He also said, “The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly” (Rom. 16:20). And the Apostle Peter said, “But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer” (1 Pet. 4:7). Because of such Scriptures, the Lord’s people all down the age thought the time was at hand in their day. The phrase “at hand” means “right at the door.”

Paul could use this terminology because he was so zealous that he considered his whole life as nothing. His attitude was, “I would rather be with the Lord than to remain down here.” He was ready to die at any time, as long as he would be with the Lord, and he urged the brethren accordingly.

1 John 2:19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

“They [the antichrists] went out from us.” Of those who went out, some were leaders, and some were followers. For example, if an ecclesia has divided thinking, usually certain individuals are ringleaders who agitate the issue, and others follow. Therefore, when the split comes, the ones who were more pronounced in voicing their differences leave, and others who agreed with them follow them out.

Thus the primary agitators—the teachers, or leaders, whom John was speaking of—drew out disciples with them when they left. The followers agreed with the reasoning of the ones who started the exodus from the truth movement back there. “For if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.”

Today it is not unpopular to be a Christian. One can be a Baptist, a Catholic, an Adventist, or whatever without antagonism, but back in John’s day, there was antagonism because, for instance, Julius Caesar used the title “Savior.” The Pergamos period of the Church was the rise of Papacy, and Thyatira was its peak. Protestantism developed in Sardis and Philadelphia.

John continued to use simple talk, which is the best type of talk, rather than to enter a theological argument. It was very obvious that this antichrist element left. The Adversary took a lesson from the situation and then began to use John’s type of reasoning against true Christians, calling them Protestants, schismatics, etc. The Catholic Church hierarchy said that everyone who left them was a heretic. Therefore, in order to understand why John wrote as he did, we need to understand the very different conditions in his day. Today everything is “love.” Any discussion in which one tries to differentiate or to be exclusive is considered wrong, but Christ’s religion is a religion of separateness from the world. In the Gospel Age, it is a religion of exclusion, for there are terms for being recognized as a Christian. We would be doing someone more harm than good to recognize him as a Christian if he had not made a consecration. With conditions being different today, Paul’s reasoning is more apropos now than John’s reasoning, whereas John’s reasoning was more apropos at the time he wrote his epistles. However, John’s reasoning is still helpful today to a smaller segment or spectrum of society, while Paul’s writings address a larger spectrum of delusion in our day. The reverse was true in the past. Back there the segment John dealt with was bigger, and the spectrum Paul addressed was smaller. In other words, the Word of God through both John and Paul is efficacious for us today but in a different proportion.

1 John 2:20 But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.

Right away, we know the last part of verse 20 is a wrong translation because we do *not* “know all things.” As Paul said, “We see through a glass, darkly” (1 Cor. 13:12). The Revised Standard and other versions render verse 20 better. “But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all know [it]”; that is, “You all know that you have an unction from the Holy One.”

“But ye have an unction [an anointing] from the Holy One [the Father].” In the type, the anointing was done with oil, which is a lubricant. There is no friction with oil. Verse 19 called attention to the fact that the others were troublemakers. They were slanderers, they belittled Christ’s role, and they got heady and high-minded. This type of thinking was Hellenistic. In this period of the early Church, pagan philosophy was a great trial to the brethren. Pergamos and Thyatira were another situation.

“Ye have an unction.” The others were thorns, thistles, and briars—they hated brethren and they said so. By looking at fragments of the early fathers, we find quotations of what other individuals said about some of the brethren. A number of the remarks were very bad. John had the correct perspective in calling them “liars” because *Jesus* was the Christ, the Anointed,

not the others. John had a right to say they were going out of the truth. They thought they were walking in light, but they were walking in darkness. Those who held to Jesus and the blood of the Cross were walking in light. The Greeks also did not like the idea of a vicarious sacrifice, for they liked to reason along philosophical lines.

“But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know [it].” John was saying, “The teachings of Jesus Christ are unctuous—they are blessed, they are upbuilding, they are encouraging, and they are sympathetic.” The Greeks emphasized sophistry and wisdom, but Jesus said, “Blessed are they that *mourn*: for they shall be comforted” (Matt. 5:4). To these others, mourning was a sign that one was a babe in understanding. They taught that the Christian should never mourn. Jesus also said, “Blessed are the *meek*: for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). The others were not meek, as their writings show—in fact, their characters were the antithesis of meekness. When we read all the “blesseds” of Matthew 5:3-11 and Luke 6:20-22, we see that the very class Jesus deals with lead a wholly different type of life. They are humble, honest, open-minded, meek, and teachable; they are not fractious. The others were stern and stoic. For example, they did not visit brethren in prison. Their attitude was that brethren would not have been imprisoned if they had done the right thing. Because they openly voiced these attitudes, it was easy for the true Christian to identify the enemy. Today that is not true, for everyone is lovely, as it were. In John’s day, wrongdoing was very conspicuous, and it was completely different from what Jesus taught, as John emphasized in saying, “Go back to the beginning and look at Jesus. What he said, what he did, and how he behaved are your example.” It was obvious that the others were not in sympathy with that type of doctrine.

Comment: Not only the action of leaving but also the lifestyle and attitude of those individuals, the antichrists, became manifest.

1 John 2:21 I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.

John was saying, “I have written unto you because you know the truth, and no lie is of the truth.” The real reason John was writing is that “no lie is of the truth.”

1 John 2:22 Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.

In verse 21, John used the word “lie”; in verse 22, he used “liar” and “antichrist.” The only place in the New Testament where the word “antichrist(s)” is specifically stated is in John’s epistles. With strong language, he accused the others—those promoting dangerous doctrines—of being liars and of being antichrists.

Denying the Father and the Son ties in with the latter part of verse 21: “No lie is of the truth.” What is this lie? It is the denial that Jesus is the Christ, and that lie is a denial of the Father and the Son.

A little review, which will be an oversimplification, is in order. Three theories were rampant at this time: those of (1) the followers of Cerinthus, (2) Gnosticism, and (3) Docetism. We believe one reason why this epistle was written later is that these theories, or doctrines, entered the Church *after* the preaching of Peter and Paul; that is, the doctrines were identified more with the second century, but they had little beginnings at the end of the first century and when John wrote his epistles around AD 90. The very fact John argued against doctrines the apostles Paul and Peter had not specially addressed shows that those teachings were now prevalent.

For now, we will just consider Cerinthus, who was in Ephesus, his headquarters, at the same time John was there. Thus two strong individuals with opposing doctrines were in the same city. Cerinthus taught that only the human Jesus suffered on the Cross and that the whole story of the gospel, which John referred to, was a fable and hence was untrue (1 John 1:1-3). Cerinthus was not denying that Jesus died on the Cross, but he was saying that Jesus' death did not have the significance that John and others attached to it.

John said, "No lie is of the truth" (verse 21). To prove Jesus was a real person, he mentioned, "We have seen [Jesus] with our eyes," "we have looked upon [him]," "we have heard [him]," and "our hands have handled [him]," but those statements did not fully answer the followers of Cerinthus. They felt that Jesus did not have a preexistence—that he did not come down from above and become a human. Stated another way, they did not believe that the human Jesus Christ was previously the Logos in heaven. This erroneous teaching was one of the doctrines of antichrist.

The four Gospels recorded what Jesus said and did, whereas John, in his epistle, was not quoting what *Jesus said* but talked about *Jesus and his life*. John took the liberty of addressing Jesus as the "Son of God," not the "Son of man" (1 John 3:8; 4:15; 5:5,10,12,13,20). Actually, Jesus was both, but the followers of Cerinthus did not believe in the preexistence of Christ and thought he was only a man. In using the term "*Son of God*," John was emphasizing the *preexistence* of Jesus.

Unitarians believe that the man Christ Jesus existed as a historical figure and that he died for his convictions. They admire him as a way-shower, as a pioneer, but not as a Redeemer who satisfies sins. The teachings of Cerinthus were very similar. He believed that the man Christ Jesus lived and that he died. After all, Cerinthus lived near the time of that well-known historical event. However, he and his followers were saying that everything else that the four Gospels said about Jesus was fiction.

Here, then, was a situation where each side accused the other. They were saying that John was a liar, and he was calling them liars. Also, John emphasized love of the brethren, but he certainly did not love the proponents of the heretical doctrines. He called them liars and antichrists. How would one resolve this situation and decide who was right? That very point is what John's epistle was all about. Fortunately, one thing greatly in John's favor was that at the time he wrote this epistle, some were still living—and were with John—who had known Jesus and had followed him back in Israel.

Traditionally, John was now in Ephesus in Asia Minor. External evidence seems to support that he wrote the epistle while he was the apostle in Ephesus, and although it was not addressed to the churches in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, etc., he was basically writing to those under his influence in Asia Minor. The epistle had to be written after Paul's decease because he had founded the church of Ephesus, and when he was there, he was the apostle, not John. And what did Paul do in his absence from Ephesus? He appointed Timothy to help the brethren. Thus John was not there up to AD 66. He went to Ephesus as a result of the pogrom in Jerusalem in AD 70 when Vespasian and Titus came down. John fled to Asia Minor in accordance with Jesus' instruction to depart when they saw Jerusalem encompassed with armies (Luke 21:20,21). Thus John's coming at a later stage is another indication that the epistle was written after AD 70.

How did one tell which side was the liar? The "fathers" knew and could testify that John was telling the truth about Jesus and that the facts of Jesus' life as recorded in the four Gospels were bona fide. Right away it could be seen who was doing the lying. Thus, when John made the statements in his epistle, those living back there knew what the problem was—and we have to

realize the situation in order to get the gist of John's words. They knew that Jesus professed to have existed with the Father, for he had said, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). He also said, "The Son of man came ... to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). In other words, he had a previous existence, was made flesh, and eventually died on the Cross. The "fathers" knew that the followers of Cerinthus were lying.

John then used another line of reasoning: "Now that you see they are lying, this has a bearing." In a trial today, crimes a person committed prior to the current crime are considered irrelevant, for such knowledge would prejudice the judgment of the jury. However, there are times when previous behavior should prejudice the case—for example, if one is found to be a *habitual, chronic liar*. The veracity of the defendant's statements would then be questionable.

To deny Jesus was also to deny the One he said was his Father, who had sent him. Jesus came down to earth as a human for a purpose. To think of him as just a normal human would not bring much conviction, but to know about his miraculous birth in fulfillment of prophecy gave much stronger significance to the fact of his being a historical figure. Thus John was now identifying who was doing the lying and being antichrist.

1 John 2:23 *Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: [but] he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.*

The last part of verse 23, "[but] he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also," is italicized in the King James Version, indicating it was supplied by the translators. However, the wording conforms to the apostle's reasoning. Later on, John made a statement that is practically the same.

"Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father." We know about the Father through the Son. When Jesus professed to be the Son of God, the chief priests and officers said he was a blasphemer because he made himself like God (John 19:7). In other words, the scribes and Pharisees knew that the term "Son of God" meant he was previously with the Father, and even to be the *Son* of God was blasphemy to them.

In three or four other places in this epistle, we try to give a background in order to see the *power* in John's logic. The power is not perceived by simply reading the epistle without knowing this history. Sometimes a little history is helpful, as in the study of chronology. Approximately one third of the Bible is history, one third is prophecy, and one third is doctrine, character development, and commandments. History includes the reigns of all the kings of Israel and Judah.

Comment: If we think in terms of Papacy as the Antichrist, the heretical doctrines in John's day were the seeds of the doctrine of the Trinity, which denies the separate and distinct personalities of the Father and the Son.

Reply: The unusual thing is that Catholics see Cerinthus, the Gnostics, and the Docetists as heretics, yet everything these doctrines promulgated back there is blended together and taught by the Catholic Church today. The system has the seeds of that thinking: God Incarnate, God the Son, etc.

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

"Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning [of Jesus' ministry

and the gospel].” Also, what they had heard from John and the other apostles—their testimony about Jesus’ ministry—was true.

Q: Is the implication also here that what they had “heard from the beginning” was *fundamental* truth? They had learned basic truth right in the beginning and were not to go away from it.

A: The Hellenist Jews were very influential in Asia Minor, for the cities there were under the Greek influence more than the Roman. The Greeks, who were known as teachers, were wonderful orators and very fluent speakers. For that reason, John was fearful the brethren might get mesmerized in listening to them and thus be gradually led astray, or seduced, so that they would forget what they had learned. Therefore, John kept hammering on the basic truths, which they had heard from the beginning.

“If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.” In addition, they would have the joy which the message of truth brought.

1 John 2:25 **And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.**

John frequently used the term “eternal life” in his Gospel and his first epistle, and he quoted certain isolated statements of Jesus that attracted him—but why? Paul held out the chief prize of the high calling, not spirit life in the Great Company. He urged brethren to run as if only one person would win the prize, whereas John came down to the level of “eternal life” because of the time frame in which he lived. He encouraged the brethren that if they remained and abode in the doctrine of Christ, they were guaranteed eternal life, not the high calling. That should have been enough common sense to say that, without question, it is worthwhile for the Christian to continue in the truth, even if he does not make the top grade. John repeatedly mentioned this point.

The Gospel of John mentions certain things that the other Gospels paid little attention to. About half of John’s Gospel pertains to the last week of Jesus’ life and his sermons rather than the parables. One of John’s themes was eternal life. He knew that many Christians in their humility in examining themselves are prone to be discouraged because they think they are not capable of making the high calling. As a result, some forsake the way altogether and go back into the world. Then everything is lost. If they give in to that type of reasoning, their entire hope perishes. The difference between Paul and John is that Paul was more optimistic, whereas John emphasized eternal life. James, who was much like John, was one of the leading apostles, yet he did not have John’s tenderness. John had the qualities of James, but he also had emphatic qualities of love, forgiveness, and mercy. Peter hardly talked at all on love in his two epistles, but he showed his love for God and Christ by his zeal. He was a leader. For example, of the 11 apostles present on the Day of Pentecost, he and John spoke out, Peter being the chief spokesman. Peter had the qualities of practical reasoning. The subject of the resurrection greatly excited him because he had gone down to the depths when Jesus died and also earlier when he denied Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus, as well as his mercy in receiving Peter back into the fold, resulted in Peter’s exceptional zeal and development. We feel that he has the qualities of John and James, and that Paul has the qualities of all three plus his own. Paul held up the banner to the extreme height in running for the high calling, but the Christian needs all kinds of encouragement. Paul reasoned that God would not call us unless we could make our calling and election sure. It takes faith to lay hold on that promise. The point is not to give up our anchor within the veil, and that anchor is *life*, not death (Heb. 6:19). And life is what John was holding out in verse 25. Anyone who gets life overcomes, but there are degrees of overcoming—Little Flock, Great Company, the world of mankind, etc. Eternal life is resurrection.

John would have emphasized the word “promise”: “This is the *promise* that he hath *promised* us, even *eternal life*.” This statement was a part of his reasoning, and he reasoned emphatically as a “son of thunder.”

1 John 2:26 These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.

John saw that brethren were beginning to get mesmerized by the influence of the other leaders; they were being seduced. He was saying, “Consider (1) that the others lie and (2) that the gospel you have accepted is a gospel of *life*—and what is *their* gospel?” Whenever we are studying a different doctrine, we should sit back and ask, “Where would this teaching lead?” John was talking about a wonderful joy of hope, but what did the others have with all of their supposed knowledge and doctrine? What they had was a dark and foreboding future.

Comment: *Strong’s Concordance* defines “seduce” as “to cause to roam.”

1 John 2:27 But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

“But the anointing which ye have received of him [God] abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you [that you received this anointing].” The meaning is clear in the *Diaglott*, but the King James wording for verse 27 contradicts other Scriptures that show there is a need for teachers. For example, Ephesians 4:11,12 tells us that Jesus appointed apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” There is a need for teachers and other helps, but there is not a need for others to teach that something happened to us when we initially came into the truth. When we look back at our previous experiences, we *know* our consecration was a bona fide experience. Each of the consecrated has his own personal experience of how he came into the truth and what convinced him. He knows of that personalized experience and does not need anyone else to describe it.

John called the experience an “anointing.” An anointing is done with oil, an unguent, which is soothing and eases friction. Olive oil is used for light; it is an illuminant. It is also a food. Thus John carefully chose the word “anointing.” This anointing, this unguent, this salve, this healing, this enlightenment, is the message of love. We sing the words, “I love to tell the story, because I *know* it’s true; it satisfies my longings, as *nothing else* would do.” John was doing this type of appealing to the brethren. He was saying, “The experience that you had is very real. Do not let it go down the drain. Hang in there and obey God and His teachings. Do not listen to these other orators, who would like to mislead you into following them.”

1 John 2:28 And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.

“And now, little children, abide in him [Jesus]; that ... we may ... not be ashamed before him at his coming [presence, Greek *parousia*].” The presence covers the entire Kingdom Age, but it will be a little stronger in the initial phase, when both God and Christ are “revealed.” They will reveal themselves literally to the Church and figuratively to the world.

Comment: A related text is 2 Timothy 2:15, “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” By faithfully studying and obeying God’s Word, we will not be ashamed.

Reply: Yes, and there are degrees of shame.

Comment: The Great Company will experience a measure of shame at the marriage supper when they receive their secondary reward.

Reply: Even on this side of the veil, the consecrated who are left behind when the door is closed will experience shame, let alone beyond the veil.

1 John 2:29 If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.

“If ye know that he [God] is righteous, ye know that every one [every Christian] that doeth righteousness is born [or begotten] of him [God].” Jesus said that a tree is known by its fruitage (Matt. 7:17-20). At this particular period of time, based on another doctrine, much licentiousness was practiced—not when Paul and Peter were on the scene but in John’s day. These other philosophies did not come into the Church until the end of the first century. As the name Ephesus indicates, the apostolic era was “desirable,” but now, in Smyrna, those who followed pagan ideas such as Gnosticism engaged in immoralities.

Comment: Of the Smyrna period, Jesus said, “I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews [true Christians], and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan” (Rev. 2:9).

1 John 3:1 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

The startling difference in the Gospel Age from any time previous is the call to sonship—to being *sons* of God. Previous calls were to be the servants or the friends of God. For example, Moses was called the “servant of God,” and Abraham was the “Friend of God” (Neh. 10:29; James 2:23).

John was different from the other writers of the epistles except for his brother James, both being sons of Zebedee, sons of thunder. The similarities are a subtle argument confirming, in our judgment, that the Epistle of James was written by James Zebedee, not James of Alphaeus.

The consecrated are all called “sons of God” *now*. Therefore, all who have accepted the call have this common heritage in the present life.

Comment: John wrote in his Gospel, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12).

As John said earlier, his purpose in writing this epistle was to bring joy to those of the consecrated who had responded to his tutorship. This epistle was open-ended. As a general epistle, it was not addressed to a specific individual, church, or location. At the time John was writing, he was the special servant, for Paul and Peter had already deceased. If John went to Ephesus, which seems to be the case, he was addressing those whom he had instructed and influenced over the years as an apostle; that is, from Ephesus, he was writing not just to one location but to brethren in all locations where he had been. As the last surviving apostle, he was a steward now in a special sense.

“Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.” The scribes and Pharisees could not understand Jesus’ preaching because they were of their “father the devil” (John 8:44), whereas the consecrated are of God, their Heavenly Father.

Q: Can the pronouns “him” in verse 1, “he” and “him” in verse 2, and “he” in verse 3 apply to either God or Jesus?

A: Yes, both applications are appropriate. In regard to verse 2, our hope is to see both God and Jesus, and all who get a spirit resurrection will see God. The angels see God as He is—His form and nature. Certainly the very elect will know God on a higher level, or plane of thinking, than any below that plane, but all who remain faithful unto death will see Him as He is. This manner of reasoning was peculiar to John. Paul centered on *winning the prize*, and John emphasized *remaining faithful*—on not abandoning the Christian walk and on obeying God’s will.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed that all of the very elect “may be one,” even as he and the Father are one (John 17:11). However, it will take an eternity to know God, even if one is of the very elect, because He is so unfathomable in all His ways.

Comment: 1 John 2:28 reads, “And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming [presence].”

The presence (Greek *parousia*) will last the entire thousand years. During that period of presence, different things will happen. God willing, if we make our calling and election sure, the very first one we will meet is Jesus, who will say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:21). Then Jesus will escort the 144,000 and introduce them to the Father. However, to a lesser but very real sense, anyone who gets spirit life will see Jesus and God.

1 John 3:2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

Of course verse 2 refers to Jesus, but it also applies to God. Our hope is to see God and to hear Him sing. First, Jesus will individually and separately introduce each of the 144,000 to the Father. Then, when the formal group acceptance takes place at the marriage ceremony, God will sing, as well as do certain other things at the marriage supper. “The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing” (Zeph. 3:17). For those Christians who maintain their consecration and hang in there, this will be their very special experience.

If faithful, we will see God and Jesus, and we will partake of the divine nature and be immortal like them. As stated in verse 1, what “manner of love” to “be called the sons of God”? We should most desire to see (in descending order) God, Jesus, and the apostles.

1 John 3:3 And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

Therefore, “every man that hath this [glorious] hope [and prospect] in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” Verse 3 shows the importance of the doctrine of *hope*. Faith alone is not enough. We should *personally* identify faith in God with the hope of the high calling, *expecting* to receive the reward of divine nature if we are faithful. Just as credulity is not faith, so there is a false hope. *True* hope is based on *true* faith. Faith, *hope*, and love are essential—and equally important.

John was reminding the brethren of things already explicitly inculcated by the Apostle Paul. Themes of love, sin, and eternal life were stressed over and over. Practical instruction of Christian living came from Paul, and John gave *general* exhortation afterwards.

In regard to sin, John took the opposite tack elsewhere. We sin; we do not sin. We must be

careful in studying his epistles, for unlike Paul, he did not give the specifics. In order to understand John's epistles, it is necessary to study his Gospel and the Book of Revelation. The false Church has used John's epistles to justify wrong deeds.

1 John 3:4 Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.

The thought of "whosoever committeth sin" is "whosoever *practices* sin" because everyone sins. As the Apostle John said, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a *liar*, and his word is not in us" (1 John 1:10). However, John also said, "Do not sin," meaning that the Christian tries, with all his might, to live a righteous life to the extent of his ability and then asks for forgiveness whenever he transgresses. However, to *practice* sin is another matter, for that would be sinning as a creature of habit.

"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth [not only the gospel but] also the law." Not only does the committing of a sin transgress what we see exemplified in Jesus' ministry—in his gospel light—but also it is a transgression against the Old Testament. Thus it is a double sin. The Old Testament is the thinking of God, and in the New Testament, the "God life" is seen in the person of Jesus. Stated another way, if we see Jesus, we see what God would do if He could appear in the flesh. Thus we have the example of Jesus in the New Testament and the principles of righteousness in the Old Testament. If we sin, we transgress both the letter and the spirit of the Law. Both willful and unintentional sins are transgressions. New creatures do sin, but they do not practice sin. *Habitual* wrong behavior is not part of the new creature.

1 John 3:5 And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.

All three major anti-Christian doctrines that existed when John wrote this epistle denied the vicarious sacrifice of Christ—that his death, the shedding of his blood, cancels sin and is the basis for repentance. Therefore, when John wrote, "And ye know that he [Jesus] was manifested to take away our sins," those whom he was addressing realized he was pointing out the fundamental error of the prevailing heretical doctrines. "In him [Jesus] is no sin."

1 John 3:6 Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.

"Whosoever abideth in him [Christ] sinneth not [does not practice sin]." However, if anyone says that he does not sin *at all*, he is a liar (compare 1 John 1:10). The Christian is not to practice sin, but John did not mean that a Christian could not be overcome or overtaken in a sin.

Comment: The NIV reads, "No one who lives in him keeps on sinning."

Both "abiding" and "sinning" involve a *period* of time. The epistles of John must be *harmonized*, not considered as isolated verses. The new creature does not allow sinful thoughts to nest or take up residence in the mind, for little sins can lead to big sins. The new creature does not *continue* in sin.

1 John 3:7 Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.

"Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is [reckoned] righteous, even as he [Jesus] is righteous." Those who *practice* righteousness—righteousness is their pursuit—are trying to do God's will as it is exemplified in Jesus and recorded in Holy Writ.

Verse 7 must be qualified. Many in the world do righteous works, but that is not the thrust here. Romans 10:3 reads, “For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.” To be acceptable to God, we must be sure that our righteousness is according to *His* requirements.

A new creature not only thinks good thoughts but *practices* good acts in harmony with the Word of God. That a tree is known by its fruits is a general, overall rule.

1 John 3:8 He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

Comment: Here is an example of John’s using a limited vocabulary. The word “beginning” is in 1 John 1:1; 2:7,13,14,24; and 3:8,11, but the references are not all to the same beginning.

Reply: Yes, and this verse mentions “the devil” three times.

“The devil sinneth from the beginning.” For instance, about four years before the Apostle Paul died, he took a boat to Israel but stopped en route at Miletus on the coast of Asia Minor. He sent word ahead to the elders of Ephesus to meet him there, and they did. In his rather long dissertation, he spoke prophetically, warning them that they would not see him again or receive any more advice from him in the future because this was his last journey. (From there, he went to Israel and then was shipped to Rome as a prisoner, where he served a little time, was released a short time later, became incarcerated a second time, and was put to death by Nero—all within four or five years.) Thus, shortly before his decease, he said to the elders of Ephesus, “For I know this, [1] that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also [2] of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, [seeking] to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:29,30). Both conditions are reflected in John’s first epistle, which was written about 25 years after Paul’s prophetic statement. If John was now the bishop (or overseer) at Ephesus, he was encountering grievous wolves entering the Church and some from within speaking perverse things.

Now we can understand why John worded portions of his epistle two different ways. (1) He told about evil ones, grievous wolves, who had never been of the Church. They had a wolfish nature when they entered, and they were still wolves. In other words, while they professed Christianity, there was no change in their conduct. (2) John also told of a class that arose within the Church speaking perverse doctrines. They were of the truly consecrated, but they began to err and go out of the truth. Thus there were two different classes.

In this first epistle, then, John went back and forth in speaking of the two classes. He said that those of the grievous wolf class were of the devil—they were of the devil previously, they were of him now, and they would be of him in the future. Those of the other class left of their own volition. They tried to draw disciples by dividing the class and getting some to leave. Down through history, the Catholic Church has called such individuals schismatics and Protestants, but sometimes brethren leave a class because of faithfulness and sometimes because of unfaithfulness. Each situation has to be studied to see which side is right when crucial issues arise. Is the division in harmony with doing God’s will, or is it at enmity with Him? In this case, those who left John were in the wrong, and they were of both classes—the grievous wolves and those who arose speaking perverse things (3 John 9-11).

In summary, Paul prophesied of coming turbulence in the Smyrna period of the Church, of which the Apostle John was the messenger. John delivered the message that Jesus is “the first

and the last,” but those who drew disciples after themselves felt that Jesus was merely a good man and a leader and that now they were leaders (Rev. 2:8). This type of thinking was the early beginnings of the development of Papacy. Advocates of that system claimed to be the representatives of Christ, and they forbid reasoning on the Scriptures separate from the doctrine of the nominal Church. Such subterfuges took away from the efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice. In his own way, vocabulary, and thinking, John was saying that Jesus is the Head of the Church. He is the beginner and the finisher, the first and the last, the Alpha and the Omega.

The message of John in the Smyrna period of the Church continued: “I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews [Christians], and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan” (Rev. 2:9). In other words, the grievous wolves and those who arose from within speaking perverse things were of the devil, of the synagogue of Satan, but they claimed to be Christians and said that John and those with him were not Christians. However, John pointed out that Jesus, as the first and the last, was the Teacher of the Church, and not the others.

Another portion of the message to Smyrna, but applying to the latter part of that period, was the following: “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days [the ten years of persecution under Diocletian from 303 to 313]: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).

Of the Ephesus period of the Church, Jesus said, “I know ... how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars” (Rev. 2:2). Faithful Christians hated “the deeds of the Nicolaitans” (Rev. 2:6). Paul pointed out about five of these errorists by name, cutting their influence, and Peter mentioned Ananias and Sapphira.

Thus the devil’s seed did not prosper until “men,” the apostles, fell asleep in death (Matt. 13:25). John was the last living apostle, so we can imagine what happened after his death. The seed thoughts were there, and he was fighting the error. He tried to countermand and rebut the reasoning and thinking of the others, and his message was successful until his death. He commended the “little children,” the “fathers” (the old-timers), and the “young men” for courageously siding with him when this test came (1 John 2:12-14). Truly John, with the effective type of reasoning he used, was the best man for the job at that time. When he died, doctrinal chaos ensued. The woman with the gospel light on her (the true Church) became pregnant and labored in pain, showing trouble *within* the Church. “And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered” (Rev. 12:1,2).

While John was alive, the errorists left because they knew they could not countermand his reasoning. Having been an eyewitness, he could say, “I knew Jesus. I saw him, and I was his disciple.” Thus the errorists left and tried to needle and seduce others to come and listen to their thinking. When John died, real trouble occurred in the Church. The woman gave birth to an illegitimate man-child, which was caught up to heaven to become the man of sin (Rev. 12:5).

“For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works [the deeds, the outward manifestations] of the devil.” In other words, there was no gray area in John’s day. Everything was either black or white. The conduct of those who were evil was manifestly evil. Today, to the contrary, there is a great and wide gray area between good and evil because no one wants to draw a line. For example, legislators do not know where to draw the line between pornography and what is allowable.

1 John 3:9 Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

“Whosoever is born [begotten] of God doth not commit sin [willingly]; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot [practice] sin, because he is born [begotten] of God.” The consecrated knew that if they joined the others, they were leaving the fellowship of the Son and of God. The children of God in John’s day were manifest. In contrast, the children of God in our day are not obviously manifest. Sometimes a hypocrite is thought of as a Christian in good standing, for those who observe him see good works. As we get nearer and nearer the end of the age, evil will increase, and the condition John spoke of in this first epistle will be most appropriate. The Book of Jude shows that a real problem will surface in the true Church. When that problem develops, John’s practical, common-sense reasoning will be very effective. The longer one allows the little foxes to nibble at the vines, the less are the chances of retrieval through repentance. The longer one remains in sin, the deeper the nails are driven into the coffin.

We can and should judge right and wrong *deeds*, for if we close our eyes to them, we will incur responsibility. The Scriptures tell us when to excommunicate and/or rebuke and when to be silent. Incidentally, we should try to determine if repentance is genuine, that is, whether there are real or crocodile tears. Following repentance, one is restored to God’s favor—to life at least but not necessarily to the Little Flock.

Thinking of the new creature and the flesh as two separate entities can be dangerous, for the wicked old heart can then excuse sin as being “my flesh,” “my nature.” It is helpful to have a measure of doubt in regard to our degree of responsibility and our standing with the Lord. This type of “fear” was illustrated by Paul’s saying he could not judge himself.

There will be 144,000 new creatures in the Little Flock, but the Great Company are new creatures too. Some of the consecrated become fully developed but slide back to the Great Company. Others never develop to Little Flock status and thus remain unripe wheat. With sin, we cannot determine the fine line between the new creature and the flesh—only God can make that determination. The instruction is to work out our “own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). We are to have the *highest* standard possible, which is *God’s* standard of perfection. If the standard is lowered, we will not measure up to the Little Flock. We are to “fight the good fight of faith,” which means to *continually* fight the old man (1 Tim. 6:12).

Only in a few limited cases can we judge the *degree of willfulness*. Denial of Christ after consecration is sinning the sin unto death. We do not pray for such individuals, for praying would be a waste of time. In other cases—the “grayer” areas—our prayers should be in proportion to the possibility we see of retrieval and repentance. As time goes on, our prayers become less frequent. We are not to pray for Satan or for those avowed (formerly consecrated) enemies of God who, in essence, are following Satan’s ways.

We are studying about “love” in John’s epistles because some back in his day did not help suffering, hungry, and poor brethren but believed in a form of stoicism. They said the Christian should be impervious to both *sorrow* and *pleasure*. In fact, they said that those who sorrowed were not faithful Christians. Hence John was opposing the harsh puritanical spirit and those who were not merciful toward their brethren undergoing trials. This element thought power and prosperity came because of faithfulness. John was combating these extremes—he was *not* saying to disregard sin in others.

Before consecration, we were of our father the devil (John 8:44). If we lose our begetting after consecration—our begetting with the seed of the life of the new creature—then we will once again be of our father the devil. Notice that it is the “seed” of *life*, not the seed of immortality,

for new creatures, if faithful, will be of either the Great Company (eternal spirit *life*) or the Little Flock (immortal spirit *life*). It is one thing to lose the anointing and another thing to lose our begetting, or sonship. The anointed body is just the 144,000. We can lose that anointing yet still get life in the Great Company, or we can lose both the anointing and the begetting and go into Second Death.

1 John 3:10 In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

“Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God.” How simple to discern! Those who were doing evil could be seen, and the evil was extreme, for most of it was along the lines of lasciviousness and immorality. In addition, the love of the world and of money occurred. Money was so attractive that it created deeds of cruelty to others. We speak of corporations as having no soul because the stockholders are looking for profits. For example, the product may contain additives, the object being to maintain the price or to boost it higher for more and more profit.

With regard to immorality, footprints were incorporated into the stone in Ephesus to lead people to the brothel, and the brothel was conducted in the name of Diana, the goddess of love. The criticism of the Ephesus period of the Church was that the brethren had left their first love. With the Smyrna period, there was no criticism, for those who stayed with John were loyal. However, Smyrna was not the most prolific period in developing members of the very elect, for the harvest of numbers occurred in Ephesus and Laodicea. Nevertheless, those who remained with John will get life.

“Neither [is] he that loveth not his brother” of God. This lack of love was manifested in different ways such as not visiting the brethren who were imprisoned for their faith. Instead those who were imprisoned were criticized and thought of as immature. Those who did not love their brethren were sophists, who believed in wisdom. They maintained that God was interested in the new creature, the new mind. There is a measure of truth in that statement, but each step of knowledge has to be followed by a step of deeds, or works. Just as the Israelites entered the Promised Land foot by foot, so it is with the progress of the new creature. Joshua said, “God will give you the victory, but you first have to put your foot forward.” Then faith will follow. Knowledge is essential but not necessarily a great degree of it. Grace and obedience are the primary objective; that is, character development is the bottom line as to where each of the consecrated stand with God. Faith is necessary, but character development is more proof.

John was speaking plain language to those of his time, and they knew what he was talking about. There was a lack of brotherly love, even when great atrocities were being committed, as well as injustices in the Church. Those who listened to John’s counsel were very much profited, and he was successful in his ministry of that time in regard to Smyrna.

1 John 3:11 For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

Those to whom John was writing this epistle had “heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.” John’s warning was directed against those who were influenced by Gnosticism in thinking they “knew it all.” Feeling they were spiritual, they believed that God was interested in the new creature. Consequently, they minimized the old creature, allowing all sorts of abuses to take place. They felt their immoral conduct would not jeopardize their standing with the Lord, for they were intellectually serving God in the inner man. Actually, the Christian needs both—moral conduct and knowledge. For each step of knowledge, there should be a step of grace and obedience.

What was the message that the brethren had heard “from the beginning”? John was referring to the new and living way preached by Jesus Christ. After his crucifixion and resurrection, the apostles, including John, went out and preached this new message of love, life, and liberty in Christ, summarized here as “that we should love one another.”

1 John 3:12 Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous.

Comment: The Parable of the Penny indicates that some of the consecrated at the end of the age will have an “evil eye,” an improper heart condition (Matt. 20:9-15). Since John’s writing seems to indicate a spirit of jealousy, these two conditions show that trouble is coming.

Reply: Yes, there is a relationship, for certainly the Parable of the Penny is a prophetic picture of a situation that will arise at the very end of the age, at the *twelfth hour* of the parable, at the time of the giving of the penny to the laborers. We have defined the “penny” as the responsibility of obeying present truth at that time, the cost of which will be a very severe experience. As shown in the parable, the murmuring will occur right in the brotherhood because the Lord will reward with the same privilege those who come in at the eleventh hour and participate in the Harvest work.

There is a danger in becoming hypercritical. To critique a situation is one thing—to judge right from wrong dispassionately in our mind. We may differ with brethren in regard to policy, direction of service, etc., and certainly the Lord’s Word does not stultify differences of opinion. However, conduct that absolutely contradicts the character, life, and deportment of Jesus, the apostles, or the prophets is a more serious matter that can degenerate as it did with Cain. For example, the Israelites’ murmuring on ten occasions in the Book of Numbers was really against God, although it was manifested in some cases against Moses or Moses and Aaron. And Miriam and Aaron even murmured against Moses. Thus there are different types of murmuring, and the question is, Where will the murmuring lead?

Here John said to love one another, but he was not saying to love those who had left him. Rather, he bluntly called them liars and antichrists because of their fruits. As Jesus said, it is incongruous for both bitter and sweet waters to come from one mouth, orifice, or well. Thus the Gnostics, who had great intellectual knowledge about God, revealed the true heretical nature of their doctrines by their contrary conduct, which they openly manifested. In this epistle, John was encouraging those who were still with him that they were doing the right thing and that they had the truth. Since the others were openly transgressing, the right and the wrong of the matter were plain and simple to see.

Another strong argument was as follows. Had those who were all intellectual known Christ from the beginning? Had those who differed with John heard the Sermon on the Mount? Were they among the 500 brethren who had seen Jesus after his resurrection (1 Cor. 15:6)? Almost without exception, they were not, but they gave the impression of having known the truth for a long time. In contrast, John *knew* Christ and *had seen* him. John had *followed* Jesus from place to place and *leaned* against his breast. He had *heard* Jesus’ sermons and *seen* the miracles. A testimony from someone like that carried more credibility than the word of the empty talkers despite their oratorical skills.

“Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother.” This statement is strong, for John was likening those who had left him and disagreed with him to Cain, who “slew his brother.” They did not mince any words as to what they thought about John. Even though he was an apostle, they felt they had *superior* information. From their standpoint, morals were

given the back seat and knowledge the front seat, whereas knowledge and conduct were to coalesce and harmonize.

“And wherefore slew he [Cain] him [his brother]? Because his [Cain’s] own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous.” Jealousy was one problem, for Abel offered up a better sacrifice, which was ostensibly a lamb, whereas Cain gave a cereal (or material) offering that indicated self-justification. Those whom John addressed understood what he was saying.

If we had lived back there, we could have recognized the false class from their rejection of John. They ceased to heed his instruction. Just as Cain slew Abel, so this false class “slew” the true brethren. There was a sharp line of demarcation back there that we do not have today.

The allusion to Cain and Abel will apply at the very end of the age. Today we see seed thoughts, but as time goes on, conditions will greatly deteriorate. Both in the world and in the Church, the pendulum swings from one extreme to the other. Feeling they are right, the erring element will differentiate between the new creature and the flesh, and thus will justify their wrong deeds. Some in the early Church betrayed their own brethren to be put in the arena with lions. The same type of betrayal will happen at the end of the age.

1 John 3:13 Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.

Verse 13 is a comforting thought. John was concerned that some who were with him might be seduced into this other line of reasoning (1 John 2:26). To answer the situation, he talked bluntly and straight from the shoulder, that is, without innuendo or fine words. Proof that the others did not know what they were talking about was that their actions did not square with the doctrine of Christ.

Comment: It is one thing for the world to hate the Christian and a more serious matter for brethren to hate other brethren.

1 John 3:14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

Comment: John subsequently wrote, “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments” (1 John 5:2). Verse 14 should not be taken out of context, for it is describing a proper love, not an emotional love.

John was saying that the Holy Spirit was leaving the others. Whatever they were before, they were now manifesting the spirit of the world and of the god of this world, Satan. They were using worldly, human wisdom and reasoning in trying to seduce the brethren. They were not using truth that squared with God’s Word.

The statement “We know that we have passed from death unto life” does not mean, as some would say today, “once saved, always saved.” The implication is, “We know that we have passed from death unto life, *because we love the brethren.*” In other words, passing from death unto life is *conditional*, for *we can lose that love for the brotherhood.*

An appropriate text is 2 Corinthians 6:8,3, which shows that the Christian should think of the brotherhood and its standard: “By [through] honour and dishonour, by [through] evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; ... Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed.” The words “All one body we” in the hymn “Onward, Christian Soldiers” are like a principle or a platform with regard to those whom God is calling. In thinking of the brotherhood, we are not thinking of individuals, for the personalized aspect changes to a

brotherhood, to those whom God is calling as members of Christ. This epistle indicates that some who were with John at one time subsequently deflected and were no longer with the brotherhood. The brotherhood is a standard, and that standard has to be held up high. Even if we ourselves cannot do all we would like, we need to keep the ideal as high as we can and not let it suffer loss. From that standpoint, “we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren”—and, therefore, we should *continue* to love the brethren. That abiding love, or constancy, assures one of life, and its absence brings death. When John said, “He that hateth his brother,” he was referring to a hatred that was openly manifested.

Comment: Cain had opportunity to change his thinking, for the Lord spoke to him in between the time he offered the unacceptable sacrifice and the killing of his brother. The warning was, “Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door” (Gen. 4:6,7).

Reply: Yes, God told Cain what the problem was, but instead of asking for forgiveness, he slew Abel, his brother.

Comment: Cain’s response after killing Abel was, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen. 4:9). The question was raised in the negative when, in reality, Cain was his brother’s keeper, and we are our brother’s keeper too in terms of the brotherhood at large in the context of this epistle.

Reply: Yes, for there are two extremes in being our brother’s keeper. (1) With Cain, there was a *complete absence* of the keeping. (2) The other extreme is where one becomes a *dictator*. In that case, one is so concerned for his brethren that he does not want them to differ with him in any way, and he tries to force them into bondage. The middle ground between the two extremes is the proper ground. Stated another way, the two extremes are libertarianism and bondage, and in between is the liberty wherewith Christ makes us free and where one communicates with “him that teacheth in all good things” (Gal. 5:1; 6:6). The proper love and keeping of one’s brother is alerting him to danger if he pursues a course that would jeopardize his future.

However, to become judgmental in the sense of relegating a brother into a certain class is dangerous. There are a few but very rare instances today where it can be observed that an individual goes into Second Death. In the past, for example, one who came into the truth as a brother subsequently denied Christ, even thinking of him as Antichrist. Such an experience may seem impossible, but it has happened.

1 John 3:15 Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

The opponents of John manifested *open* animosity. Consider Cain as an example. The climax of his anger occurred when he slew his brother Abel, but surely, prior to the slaying, hatred was reflected in his face and attitude. Wouldn’t there have been a spirit of enmity and jealousy in his relationship with Abel? The inference, too, is that there were providences where the Lord favored Abel. However, Cain saw those providences in an improper light, and his hatred ended up in the extreme act of murder. We can be sure that he gave plenty of other digs before committing that ultimate act.

Comment: While all of the consecrated will get the penny in the future, the Judas class will turn to the same spirit of hatred and murder that Cain manifested.

Reply: Yes. Judas acted for monetary reasons. When his conniving did not pan out as he had intended, he experienced pangs of conscience—but too late. Whatever his motive was, the deed of betraying Christ sealed his fate. Incidentally, there are several ways of betraying Christ. In

the Middle Ages, a family member sometimes betrayed another family member—the father the son, the son the father, the wife the husband, the husband the wife, etc.—but why? In some cases, the reason was not money but the avoidance of death. Some wanted to disassociate themselves from a family member in order to escape persecution, and the disassociation was accomplished through betrayal. Thus there are different motives, all pertaining to gain. One may gain his life through betrayal but lose his soul.

“Ye know that no murderer hath eternal life *abiding* in him.” The suggestion is that the murderer experienced a change of attitude. Life was in such an individual at one time, but his love grew cool and changed.

John’s message of encouragement was that, generally speaking, if those who loved the brethren and were standing up for the truth remained faithful, they had the assurance of receiving life after death. They might not be members of the Little Flock, but they would get life. John was giving that slant so that the faith of a greater number of his fellowship would be strengthened. He wanted to encourage them to continue.

Why, in verse 13, did John insert the thought “Marvel not ... if the world hate you”? Verse 12 mentioned that Cain slew Abel and they were *brothers*. Hence John was warning that such “murder” will occur right *in the Church*. Verses 12-15 are warning us not to be surprised if the world hates us because Satan controls the world, but right in the true Church, brother will hate brother as Cain hated Abel. John went back and forth from negative to positive reasoning and vice versa.

Those who love the brethren pass from death to *eternal* life (that is, not necessarily to immortality). However, those who manifest the Cain disposition will go into Second Death. In John’s day, the hatred of this class was easily recognizable through abusive words and deeds.

Cain’s works were evil; Abel’s works were righteous. John used common-sense natural reasoning here. Works and actions are to be observed over a *period* of time, for *cumulative* actions and deeds should be judged. The wrong element in John’s day taught that Christ did not come in the flesh, they thought they did not sin, they did not manifest compassion, etc. These things could be *observed*. As Christians living in the end time, we should pray about these matters and watch. We should not judge by an isolated word or incident but by *cumulative* words and deeds.

Abel’s sacrifice with the shedding of blood was more acceptable than Cain’s. Back in their day, some information was probably available that God preferred animal to grain sacrifices. The sacrifices of Cain and Abel were *habitual*, not a one-time offering. Cain, who was not meticulous enough with regard to his own offerings, was jealous of the preference God showed to Abel. “Works” (plural) were either righteous or evil *habitual* sacrifices, and on one occasion, Cain’s envy got out of control with the result that he killed Abel.

“Hateth” was a *strong* manifestation in John’s day. We should not look down on a brother, for an ill-will disposition is not Christlike. One who hates his brother will not get eternal life. Note: One who is sweet and gentle in speech can still be a *murderer*. John was a “son of *thunder*,” and he *loved* his brethren.

1 John 3:16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

“Hereby perceive we the love [Greek *agape*]” that God is looking for, as exemplified in Jesus. Jesus laid down his life for us, and we should “lay down our lives for the brethren.”

How does one lay down his life for the brethren? There are many ways, some of which are sacrifice along lines such as moral, financial, and prayer support; service; visiting the sick; and correspondence to offer encouragement. Common menial things done for our brethren are also in order. For example, Jesus, who could do great miracles, washed the disciples' feet. Another mode of service, one not usually thought of, is being properly and constructively critical when a brother is doing something seriously wrong. The eternal spiritual welfare of the individual is considered rather than personal temporary fellowship. Therefore, in view of the fact that we are interested in the outcome of one's life, there are times when we may have to say some hard things, as John was doing here.

Laying down life for the brethren can center on our *motivation*. For example, a brother might refuse a promotion so that he (1) will not compromise principle and (2) will have more time to help the brethren. However, we should not allow ourselves to be taken advantage of or to become so busy with activity for the brethren that we actually jeopardize our own spiritual welfare by not having enough time for study.

Those who were trying to seduce the brethren with John probably talked about the *wonderful* light they had. They would have emphasized their *freedom* of conduct. How appealing that approach would be to the flesh! To base our love for God on just knowledge, while ignoring the moral aspects of the Christian life, would be having one foot on the earth and one foot in heaven. It would be getting the best of this world's goods and the best of the spiritual life. How nice to get the new creature to agree with the old man, the flesh, in this thinking! The Scriptures say that the natural heart is exceedingly deceitful and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9). The new creature must predominate over the old man and be the superior.

1 John 3:17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

1 John 3:18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

Verses 17 and 18 remind us of two texts in the Epistle of James. "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22). "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?" (James 2:15,16). The family relationship of John and James Zebedee can be seen in their similar writings. The difference is that John's common sense was more emotional, and the common sense of James was more severe and strict in its practicality.

"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue." What is the difference between not loving "in word" and not loving "in tongue"? "Tongue" refers to a dishonest statement or profession, to an untruth, whereas "word" is an honest profession that is not acted upon. We are not to withhold help from brethren truly in need. The instruction is to love *in deed* and *in truth*, not in words only.

1 John 3:19 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

If one has love for the brotherhood, that concern will be manifested in various ways. In varying degrees, we are either an extrovert or an introvert by nature. An extrovert is often confident where he should not be, while an introvert is too critical and constantly condemns himself. Those who are given to frequent self-examination should try to evaluate themselves in

a dispassionate way. Considering all of their good points helps them to come out of the cycle of introversion. Since none are perfect, we need to ask, “Am I really trying to serve the Lord?” Yes, we are trying with all our might, but we find that we are imperfect and need Christ’s robe of righteousness and the forgiveness of our sins and shortcomings.

John was trying to encourage the brotherhood. His opponents, who were extroverts by nature, were prospering and confident. Their message to those loyal to John was to come up to a higher level and experience their joy. Although they were speaking falsehoods, this salesman type of mentality seems to prosper in Satan’s world—with recognition, better pay, and better jobs.

While the opposers were more prosperous, they did not share that prosperity with the brethren who were in need. John was calling attention to the disparity that existed. Some people wrongly regard temporal prosperity as God’s blessing and favor. Thus providence is very difficult to discern unless we train ourselves to see what is right and what is wrong. The Apostle Paul spoke of those who “have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:14). And what enables one to discern between good and evil? *Maturity in Christ.*

1 John 3:20 For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

God is able to read our hearts. Therefore, if we know we have done something wrong, then certainly God knows it too. If we know a wrong has been done, we should try to correct the situation and then do better the next time. There are things we do not know about ourselves that only God knows. And sometimes others know something obvious that we are unaware of. In other words, some people have secret faults that everyone can see except the one who has the fault. In either case, the situation is thoroughly apparent to God like an open book, for He looks on our heart like a lapidarian with a jewel. He looks at our true character to see if something is salvable.

John was giving encouragement. If we know we are trying our best to do God’s will, and if our prayer is to that effect morning and evening, we should count that a favorable sign. A review of our past history and God’s leadings is sometimes necessary to encourage us to continue on in the way.

One knows if he is uttering a dishonest or hypocritical remark. Paul said to keep the antitypical “feast, not with ... the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor. 5:8). “Conscience” is a watchdog that helps us to search our heart and make a correction where appropriate. If our conscience is bothered, then we can be sure that God, who is greater than we are, knows about the sin too. We are to strive to have (1) a conscience void of offense toward God and man, (2) an unfeigned love, and (3) an undissembled faith.

1 John 3:21 Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.

1 John 3:22 And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

Even with all of his experiences and his faithfulness, the Apostle Paul said, “I judge not mine own self,” yet he advised Christians to examine themselves (1 Cor. 4:3). We are trusting in Christ and trying to follow his leadings, but we are imperfect beings in an imperfect world. Neither we nor others can be perfect. As long as others give outward evidence of their love and zeal for God, we accredit them as brethren in good standing despite their faults. We want

the same relationship for ourself. Standing apart and viewing things from this perspective sometimes helps us not to be introspective to the point of discouragement and despondency.

Medications are on the market today that were not available in the old days. People lived and died with their medical problems. In addition, dentistry lacked modern techniques, anesthesia, and antiseptics, so when people got seriously sick, they died—and often at a young age. A unique problem today is that in our society, almost everyone is taking medication, pills, and/or vitamins. The drugs play on the emotions and the minds of those who take them. Thus there is sort of a contradiction to some of the things that we read, even in Scripture, about the mind or the body, for pills interfere with our behavior.

If we are misunderstood but know we are doing right, we should have “confidence toward God.” He searches and knows our heart.

We receive what we pray for *if* we ask aright and *if* we keep God’s commandments and do what is pleasing to Him. Thus there are two conditions. To receive, we must (1) not ask amiss and (2) be obedient, doing those things that are pleasing to God. Sometimes we get an experience that prepares us for an answer to a later prayer.

1 John 3:23 And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.

1 John 3:24 And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

Verses 23 and 24 express very simple logic. The verse is not saying, “He who believes in the invisible presence or the sin offering,” but, “Those who believe on the name of God’s Son and love one another and are trying to obey.” These two verses should be encouraging, for they help us to know we are in the way of truth. True, we still have to attain the finished product, but at least the criterion of trying to keep God’s commandments helps us to know which side of the fence we are on.

To “know” Jesus Christ is to know about his preexistence. In fact, John called Jesus the “Son of God” because of his preexistence. If we did not appreciate Jesus’ laying everything aside and coming down here to planet Earth, his becoming flesh, and his dying for us, half of the truth would be lost. To not have this realization and appreciation would be to see Jesus as only a man—and not as a Redeemer sent by God. Jesus had to die to be the basis for our forgiveness. Therefore, with John saying, “Believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ,” we think Jesus had a preexistence as *the* Son of God in a special sense. We have to hold onto that thought so that the *power* of what Jesus has done on our behalf will sink in and become meaningful.

John needed to remind the brethren that Jesus came in the flesh and that we should believe in the name of Jesus as the Son of God and love one another. The necessity for this reminder shows the extent to which doctrine deteriorated so soon after AD 33. Many did not believe in Jesus’ preexistence—they thought he was a man only, not the Son of God. Hence John went into the preexistence of Jesus as the Logos. The vicarious aspect of his life was soon forgotten because heathen philosophies permeated, and Jewish thinking got intermixed.

If we believe on the name of God’s Son, love one another, and keep His commandments, we *know* that He abides in us and we abide in Him. Verses 23 and 24 are showing the bottom line of life and being with God and His Son. Of course, as Paul said, we are to build on that platform, or base, as if only *one* gets the prize (1 Cor. 9:24). John’s chief concern for the life of each individual—for long-term destiny—was love. Love is rewarded with eternal life.

He who keeps *God's* commandments dwells in *Him*. John emphasized God in his Gospel and epistles. For example, "The Father himself loveth you" (John 16:27).

"Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us." A contrary spirit, or disposition, is not one that God dwells in.

1 John 4:1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

"Beloved, believe not every spirit [doctrine, teaching]." Every doctrine or message content that purports to be the truth is to be tested. What was John suggesting?

Comment: We are not to be blown about "with every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:14).

Comment: We should not hastily accept a doctrine without first testing it with the Word of God. For example, the Bereans "received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, [to see] whether those things were so" (Acts 17:10,11).

Reply: Yes, we should not be too naive with regard to what we hear that purports to be the truth and to explain about Jesus. The Bereans were good hearers, but then they chewed over what they had heard to sort it out and see if it squared with Scripture. To be a listener is a good quality. As the Apostle James said, "Be swift to hear, [and] slow to speak" (James 1:19). In other words, we should analyze what we hear.

Q: Although the context pertains to doctrine, does the word "spirits" refer to personalities too, especially since John said that "many false prophets are gone out into the world"?

A: Basically the word "spirits" pertains to doctrine, but it is like the word "conversation" in the King James, which we change to "conduct." Therefore, it is helpful to think of "spirits" as being both the doctrine and the disposition, or character, of the one who is pronouncing the message. The false element professed to be prophets, taking the position that they were speaking the truth. However, the listener had to be cautious. Since John spoke so much about "love" in this epistle, we can add the thought of "conduct" as well. Thus the listener was to test the doctrine of the speaker and observe his character, conversation, and conduct to see if they squared with Scripture and the qualifications of a bona fide Christian. Both the doctrine and the spirit that accompanied the doctrine were to be tested. In fact, testing and careful consideration were essential "because many false prophets are gone out into the world." We are not to be too trustful of what we hear and of what one professes to be.

Comment: Confirmation that the word "spirits" can mean "doctrines" is Revelation 16:13,14, "And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the *spirits* of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty."

Reply: That application makes sense. Of course John saw the dramatization of three froglike creatures coming out of the mouth of the beast, the dragon, and the false prophet as an *unholy* spirit. (In contrast, a gentle dove came down and lighted on Jesus as a *holy* symbol.) The unclean froglike spirits will be boastful doctrines.

1 John 4:2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

Now John gave the clue as to how to be discerning: “Hereby [we] know ... the Spirit of God”; namely, “Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.” Those with John knew the meaning of the term “is come,” that is, that Jesus had a preexistence, that he is the Son of God. Formerly he was with God, but he came down here and was made flesh, real humanity. John was not saying merely that Jesus “is come” from the womb of Mary but that he “is come” *from God*. Jesus’ preexistence is a key feature to help us know the fallacy of the other doctrines that Jesus was just a man. Such a belief vitiates the true meaning of his coming.

John was so familiar with Jesus that he actually used Jesus’ vocabulary. Reading John’s epistles is almost like reading some of Jesus’ sermons in the Gospels. However, John purposely used the term “Son of God,” not “Son of man,” meaning “[the] Son of [the] man [Adam].”

Comment: When Jesus used the term “Son of man,” he was laying the groundwork for the doctrine of the Ransom. He came to earth in the flesh so that he could be the “propitiation for our sins” (1 John 2:2). The only way he could be a corresponding price for Adam was to come as a perfect human man—as Adam was before he sinned.

Reply: The Gospels bring out the ransom aspect with the term “Son of man.” However, John intentionally used “Son of God” in this epistle because a new doctrine had come in that taught Jesus was the “Son of man” but omitted the preexistent “Son of God” aspect. Therefore, one way of determining whether a doctrine was true or false was to ask, “Do you believe in Jesus’ preexistence?” Of course those who believe that Jesus is half God and half man would say they believe in a preexistence, so the error of the Trinity would be treated another way.

Comment: To Peter’s response “Thou art the Christ,” Jesus said, “Flesh and blood hath not revealed it [this truth] unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 16:16,17).

Reply: The Holy Spirit teaches us such miraculous knowledge, as implied by John when he said, “No one else need teach you that the Lord has been dealing with you, for you know from personal experience the miracle that was involved with your consecration and the change that occurred in your life” (1 John 2:20,21 paraphrase). Afterward, however, we realize there are both true and false teachers.

If we think of Jesus’ preexistence, then the love involved in his coming here to earth and dying on the Cross is more evident than if we think of him as just a man. If Jesus was previously the “Son of God,” then he left a glory level, humbled himself, and came down here to teach some of humanity about his Father. Thus the phrase “is come” ties in with the love theme of John. Both the love of Jesus in coming to earth and the love of the Father in sending him are seen. John’s contribution was to emphasize the “Son of God” standpoint. Matthew wrote his Gospel first, particularly for the benefit of the Jews. Then Mark came along and abbreviated Matthew’s Gospel to appeal to a Roman audience. Subsequently, Luke, who was more interested in the Greeks, wrote his Gospel. Finally, John wrote his Gospel, feeling there was more to add.

“Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.” It does not make sense to say that Jesus is half God and half man and then to also say that he came from God and was made flesh. The reasoning simply does not jibe. Thus a litmus test for a true teaching was the confession that “Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.” The test seems simple enough, but flesh and blood does not reveal that Jesus is the Christ. That understanding is supernatural, for Satan will put any other teaching ahead of Jesus’ being the *only* way, the Head. Satan distracts from this truth with antichrist teachings. Incidentally, this simple test was sufficient in John’s day. Now, with the development of the doctrine of the

Trinity by the Adversary, more knowledge is needed.

1 John 4:3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

Verse 3 makes the same statement as verse 2, but from a negative standpoint. A worldly spirit is of Satan. The teaching of “antichrist,” which led to Papacy, is that Jesus did not come in the flesh. The seed, or “mystery of iniquity,” was already working, but it did not develop until later.

John continued to point to some who were erroneously teaching that Jesus did not have a preexistence. They also taught that he was half God and half man, the expression being “God incarnate,” “God in the flesh.” However, Jesus is not *God* in the flesh but the *Son* in the flesh. Once Jesus is recognized as a separate individual, it can be seen that when he was down here, he was to be considered a perfect *man*. He left a *spirit* condition and became a *human* condition. Those who do not acknowledge this truth are off base right away. Jesus came to this planet as a *human* being. A wrong teaching in John’s day was that Jesus only *seemed* to appear and die but did not actually do so. Today’s erroneous version is that Jesus was God incarnate.

John was giving a little clue here in verse 3, among a number of clues both before and after, as to how to identify the distinction between a false and a true prophet. Earlier he zeroed in from the standpoint of Jesus’ statement that we know whether a “tree,” a person, is true or false by the fruit, which is either good or evil (Matt. 7:15-19). The Apostle James added that a spring is either bitter or sweet, for it cannot be both (James 3:11). Therefore, if a person is professing to be pure and sweet but is actually impure in conduct, we know it is not safe to drink from that well or to partake of the fruit of that tree. Consistency in the vessel is important—a mixture is wrong. The mystical aspect seems to have great appeal to humanity, who like teachings to be mysterious and nebulous so that they can manipulate the thoughts to their own liking. The human mind likes to be inventive, whereas truth is truth.

“Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist.” John added, “Ye have heard that it [the spirit of antichrist] should come; and even now already is it in the world.” Where did early Christians hear this warning?

Comment: The Apostle Paul said, “The mystery of iniquity doth already work” (2 Thess. 2:7).

Reply: While John is the only apostle to use the term “antichrist,” Paul referred to it with other expressions or synonyms. “Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is [a] God” (2 Thess. 2:3,4). The “Antichrist” is not God, but he presumes to be and thus is like a pseudo-Christ. The very title of the pope, the head of the Papacy, is “Vicegerent of Christ,” with the Latin *Vicarius Filii Dei* being on the papal crown. The word “vicar” means “substitute.” Hence the pope is thought to be *in place* of Christ as his representative.

John’s followers knew that he was referring back to what they had historically learned through Paul’s ministry. John was saying that the doctrine, or “spirit,” of antichrist was already in the world. (The man-child had not been born yet or ascended to the throne in the false millennium, but the “spirit of antichrist” existed.)

There are several things to notice about John and James. For one thing, the plan of God is not

seen in their epistles. John wrote on love, hate, antichrist, false brethren, and dangerous situations but not on God's plan of the ages. Only in his Gospel is there a hint along that line. He was looking for Christians, not for people who would entertain the hope of restitution. However, Paul, unlike the other apostles, discussed the *whole* counsel of God. He talked about the Kingdom, restitution, the ransom price, the covenants, how the Christian should live, etc. When we read the Gospels, we think of the individual, his background, and what he was trying to emphasize. For example, John was a "son of thunder." In this first epistle, his type of ministry was quite different, for he taught that God's children are products of love; that is, they manifest love versus hate. Now, in verse 3, he was saying that the doctrine of antichrist, which did not square with the teaching of Scripture, was already in the world.

Q: Does John's teaching mean that those who believe in the Trinity, even though they are good Christians otherwise, cannot have the Holy Spirit?

A: No. Bro. Norby once gave a talk about the survival of the Christian in the Dark Ages when barley proliferated instead of wheat (Rev. 6:6). As an illustration, he said that sometimes it isn't how much a person knows but how much the individual *makes* of what little he knows. He then gave an analytical report of earth's atmosphere with the percentages of nitrogen, carbon dioxide, etc., and he showed that oxygen was only a relatively small portion of the atmosphere, yet oxygen gives life. Moreover, if the other elements are separated out, they are death-dealing. Spiritually speaking, the little amount of oxygen in the atmosphere is what the Christian absorbed and survived on during the Dark Ages. Therefore, in the period of the teaching of erroneous doctrines like the Trinity and hellfire, the Lord miraculously developed those who were in the church systems. Also, since they were not called to come out of mystic Babylon at that time, Jesus did not separate the wheat from the tares but let both grow together until the Harvest at the end of the age (Matt. 13:30). Thus true Christians were in the confused bundle, but just because they were members of the nominal Church does not mean they believed in every doctrine that was promulgated. By extracting those teachings which they considered helpful in trying to please God, they survived on a minimal amount of truth. The nominal system committed many atrocities but could not quench the spirit and joy of the truth. The crumbs of truth in the Dark Ages brought such joy to Christians who hungered for God that they survived.

1 John 4:4 **Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.**

"Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them [the false prophets and their wrong teachings]." A separation had already taken place. These disciples, the "little children," had made the right choice in *this* decision not to follow Satan and his proponents. The reason for the overcoming is that God is greater than the Adversary, the "god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4). *Only with God's help* do we understand and overcome.

In the Ephesus stage of the Church, Peter and Paul pointed out false teachers by name. In the Smyrna period, John pointed out Diotrephes (3 John 9). The Greek word for "little children" is *teknion*, indicating that John was referring to all whom he was addressing—from old-timers in Christ to babes.

1 John 4:5 **They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.**

Similar situations exist today. Congregations numbering in the thousands listen to ministers preach messages of no content, yet the people are happy to be members of those churches. Obviously, Satan, the god of this world, has blinded the people. Bro. Krebs used to say, "The

miracle is not how little truth others have; the miracle is that we know the truth.” We have been taken out of darkness into sharp light.

False prophets are popular because they have the vocabulary, character, thinking, and manner of the world. They cater to the flesh, preaching what the world wants to hear. Those who have the spirit of the world have the spirit of the Adversary. Such individuals either never consecrated or consecrated and lost their Spirit begettal through worldliness. Teachers of error are more popular than proponents of truth.

Comment: Some religious leaders speak habitually on political and social issues—worldly subjects.

Reply: That is true, yet they take the title “Reverend.” Very little Scripture is preached.

1 John 4:6 We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

Knowing God and the “spirit of truth” is difficult to define. We sing the words of the hymn “I love to tell the story, because I know it’s true.” John’s reasoning made sense to those on his wavelength who were famished for the Word of God and truth. They knew that the doctrine they had was of God; they could distinguish between truth and error and between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Comment: Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27).

Comment: A corresponding Scripture is 1 Corinthians 2:11, “For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.”

Reply: The “things of God” are spiritually discerned; i.e., they are discerned by the Holy Spirit.

Basic principles of truth are stated here. Incidentally, axioms are statements of truth that are of practical reality.

1 John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God.” Yes, God is love, and love is of God. “Every one that loveth is born [or begotten] of God, and knoweth God.” In John’s day, the Christian religion was only a small fragment of the whole. A comparable situation today is Turkey, where only 2 percent of the population is supposedly Christian, and 98 percent is Muslim. The same situation existed in the second stage of the Church. While the Church was growing in numbers to a certain extent, it was pitifully small compared to the population as a whole. Asian doctrines, Greek philosophies, and the Roman religion of the state predominated, so just to be a Christian right away marked one as a distinct minority. With the vast majority being adherents of pagan religions, it was easy to see the difference, but what concerned John were those who professed to believe in Jesus yet did not accept everything he said and did. Instead they skewed Jesus’ teachings to suit their own ends. Thus John and his disciples were a minority of a minority. Fear, vengeance, and justice were the primary teachings of the Asian religions at that time. The doctrine of love was something new that had come into the world with the teaching of Jesus Christ.

Today conditions are different, for “love” is taught everywhere, and it is popular to be a Christian. John said, “Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God,” and many in our day who are not begotten of God would agree with this statement. They have never made a formal contract to be a follower of Jesus or denied self and laid their little all on the altar to do God’s will. Many casually say, “I am a Christian,” but when John wrote this epistle, his words were very meaningful. Conditions will change when the world enters the Time of Trouble. At that time, the veneer of Christianity will wear off, and hatred, selfishness, and fighting will be so severe that only those who are truly begotten of God will have love. The point is that we cannot use John’s expression today and say that everyone who loveth is begotten of God—unless that statement is qualified as follows. “Every one that loveth [*as God loveth*] is born [begotten] of God, and knoweth God.” In our day, John’s simple slogan cannot mark the difference between a false prophet and a true prophet, between those who are begotten of God and those who are not. In John’s day, the ones who taught error did not have a loving attitude. They manifested hate and a bitterness, and pride was very evident.

The veneer of today’s society is very deceptive. It is thought that if one says grace at the table and does good, he is a Christian. However, those characteristics may or may not be an indication of godliness. A manner of self-righteousness can deceive. God is not interested in perfunctory worship. Although John’s slogan is not applicable at present, it may be pertinent again as world conditions change.

1 John 4:8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

Verse 8, “He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love,” is the same as verse 7 except that it is stated negatively. Here again is a litmus test; namely, those who possess love are of God. Since the opposite of love is hatred, those who manifest a hateful attitude are of the Adversary. The spirits of hatred, error, and worldliness are all of the Adversary. Bitterness, malice, and hatred manifested *constantly* are bad indications. However, there are occasions when anger should be manifested—but not as a *general, prevailing* attitude.

1 John 4:9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

“God sent his only begotten Son into the world.” John was talking about “*the Son of God.*” “Jesus Christ is come in the flesh” (1 John 4:2).

“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.” John was not speaking about restitution. The aged John, who was more than 100 years old, was saying, “My beloved brethren and dear children, God has favored us that we might get life through the Son. Jesus is the manifestation of the Father’s love toward us.”

The thrust of John’s teaching was Jesus’ coming in the flesh and the doctrine of love. These are understood by knowing about and believing in Jesus’ preexistent state. John was saying, “He who had a preexistence—the only begotten Son of God—has come down here. Everyone knows he was crucified, and his dying for us is the evidence of his love. God foreknew Jesus would be faithful to the ignominious death on the Cross that we might have life through him.”

Comment: John’s speaking of the “love of God toward us” helps us to identify what *agape* love is. Seeing what God did for us in sending Jesus out of *agape* love helps us to understand how we can have *agape* love for others. If God first loved us, then we ought to have that same kind of love for one another.

These verses show how to discern between truth and error, between love and hatred. God was concerned for us and for the world while all were yet in sin, and He made preparations accordingly. We, too, should be concerned with the eternal destiny of individuals. We should think of their *long-term* salvation, which will be life or death. Hopefully, we (and others) will *live* through Jesus.

1 John 4:10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

God “sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” In other words, Jesus died; he laid down his life for us. Who were his companions? They were those who loved God and wanted to know Him better. Accordingly, they sacrificed; they forgot home and background and followed Jesus. That is the kind of love God is looking for and has manifested through the Son. The best example of a Godlike person and having God’s love is Jesus.

The ability to discern between right and wrong is based on our receiving help from *God*. We need His help because Satan would be superior to us without the Heavenly Father’s help.

We should beware that we do not love more than God. The false element said they knew God and did not sin, but John said they did not know God. It is important to feel the need to be forgiven. Hence we should always remember our need to depend on Jesus for forgiveness and on God as the Author of salvation.

1 John 4:11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

In John’s day, it was very obvious who the loving brethren were. If God “so loved” us, we should “so love” the consecrated—but on *God’s* terms. We should try to copy God on every matter. It is often helpful to ask, What would the Heavenly Father do in such and such a situation? We should look for scriptural precedents to determine a course of action.

1 John 4:12 No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

Q: Why did John introduce into this context the thought that “no man hath seen God at any time”?

Comment: John seemed to be emphasizing, “Do not expect to literally see God at any time. The closest you will come to seeing Him is a manifestation of Godlike love—first in Jesus and then among one another.”

Reply: Yes, the Father was personified in the Son, and the Son had been seen by John and others. By perceiving Jesus’ walk in life at the First Advent, as well as his teachings, the Christian knows what God must be like without having to see Him. In his Gospel, the same apostle said, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (John 1:18). A manifestation of what God is like is only perceived through the Son and his manner of life.

Comment: Paul said that “no man hath seen, nor can see” God (1 Tim. 6:16).

Comment: God said to Moses at the time of the Exodus, “Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live” (Exod. 33:20).

Reply: Yes, God spoke to Moses “face to face” in a modified sense (Exod. 33:11). Moses did not

literally behold God but was a “friend.”

John said that a manifestation of our love for God is to obey His commandments (1 John 5:3). Many people use words loosely and emotionally, but true love for God is shown by obedience.

Comment: God’s *agape* “love is perfected in us.”

Reply: *Agape* is the Greek word used for “love” most of the time. When brotherly love is intended, even the English usually reflects that sense.

1 John 4:13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

“Hereby know we that we dwell in him [God] ... because he hath given us of his Spirit.” What is the thought of “Spirit” here? Earlier John said we are to “try the spirits,” meaning we are to analyze doctrine and teachings. Now he seemed to be including the thought of love as well as doctrine. In other words, we know that we are dwelling in God, and He in us, because He has given us of His disposition of love and the ability to test doctrine. If we have Godlike love for the brethren in the sense that the Scriptures teach, that is an evidence we love God. In addition, to have correct doctrinal understanding is miraculous. For example, John was not talking about disposition in verse 15, which reads, “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God,” but was referring to a miraculous revelation of who Jesus really is, what he stands for, what his background is, etc.—all of which pertain to knowledge. Thus John used the word “Spirit” to embrace both thoughts. The loving disposition of God is seen in Jesus, who is the propitiation for our sins. God is merciful toward the sinner who is in a repentant attitude and especially toward those who have already taken the step of consecration, desiring that they do not backslide.

Faith is a factor. We are to realize God’s interest in us by the *spiritual* rewards He gives us. As we overcome and obey Scripture, we should proportionately feel, by faith, that we are pleasing Him.

1 John 4:14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

Calling Jesus the “Saviour of the world” reminds us of John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Nevertheless, John’s thrust was not on restitution in this first epistle. His theme was more that God is calling a Bride class and that the present age is the time of opportunity. He emphasized the here-and-now opportunity of God’s manifestation of love to whoever has a hearing ear. Based on other Scriptures and Old Testament pictures, we see that God’s love for the world is not merely the current seeking of the Bride class but also the golden age of opportunity for all mankind in the Kingdom Age. Jesus gave his life for the “treasure hid in a field [the world],” but to get that treasure, he had to buy the field (Matt. 13:44).

Comment: The fact that the Father sent the Son shows they are separate entities, not part of a Triune God.

Again John *seemed* to contradict himself in saying, “We have *seen* ... that the Father sent the Son.” (At the end of the age, many of John’s statements will be used against us to supposedly prove the Trinity.) One might ask, “If no man has seen God, why did John say that we have seen the Father?” We would reply, “We have not literally seen God, but we have experienced the next best thing by seeing Jesus, reading the Word, and receiving the Holy Spirit. Therefore,

we have ‘seen’ God in *fellowship and communion*.” John expressed things in an Asian style; hence we cannot take an isolated statement but must compare many statements in order to extract the sense. With familiarity with Scripture, we should be able, as we mature, to see the distinction between the exception and the general rule. To blur that distinction distorts our spiritual vision.

1 John 4:15 Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

Verse 15 is a follow-up to the statement in verse 14 that the Father sent the Son, which is a proof of Jesus’ preexistence. The false element understood that a man called Jesus lived, but they questioned the thought that he had a preexistence. Of the many pagan doctrines back there, several of them taught that Jesus did not have a preexistence. Others felt that he had a preexistence but in a *minor* capacity. John’s reasoning gave meaning to the importance of the doctrine that Jesus partook of the human seed.

Verse 15 is another test: We must confess that Jesus is the Son of God. He is the *only* way to salvation. We must recognize Jesus to start with, but much more is needed for salvation. John gave this test to help us know we are in the right way, but we *must* progress.

Comment: Jesus said, “All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him” (Matt. 11:27).

Reply: Yes, we can see the unseen Father through the Son and his instructions and counsel.

1 John 4:16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

There is no question that John was emphasizing the theme of love, but it is equated with *Godlike* love. It was as if John were teaching a class. He repeated and repeated to deepen impression. Not vain, this repetition was given for our edification and instruction.

1 John 4:17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

Verse 17 is somewhat of a summation. The Apostle Paul expressed this same thought another way; namely, he was striving to have a conscience void of offense toward God and toward man and to obtain love (Acts 24:16; 1 Tim. 1:5).

Q: Does verse 17 have an application to the *individual* day of judgment for each Christian rather than to the *dispensational* aspect? All Christians have severe trials, and we hope to develop sufficiently so that we will faithfully stand when a severe trial comes.

A: Yes, each Christian is before the judgment seat of Christ in the present life. From one standpoint, we are on trial for life throughout our consecration, but John was especially referring to an *end* trial (as well as to any *severe* experience along the way). The hope is to have *boldness* in such times based on past obedience. The book is closed in regard to a Christian when he finishes his earthly course. If we are faithful “unto death,” we will get a crown of life (Rev. 2:10). When death closes the door, we can do nothing more. Then comes the verdict.

Verse 17 is a very comforting statement, for in a trial, we need confidence and assurance that we can speak properly. If we obey God and please Him with relative consistency, we can trust

that He will sustain us.

The following commentary was given in the 1982-1983 study:

“Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment.” What “judgment”? The reference is to our *individual* day of judgment or day of special trial. This statement is a general rule, for some, for example, die suddenly of a heart attack and thus cannot offer last prayers and thoughts. John’s comforting statement was very much needed. For instance, suppose we are brought up for trial and probable execution. When we are under fire, we want to be humble but to have some assurance. Of course we need God’s grace at that time, but if we have obeyed God in the present life, we have a basis for assurance. If we do the things that please Him with relative consistency, we have relative assurance that we are pleasing Him. Consequently, when we come up against a severe situation where our very faith is being tested, we have a backlog that is helpful. In other words, following John’s advice in these matters will be helpful if a circumstance should arise where, as individuals, we are under special strain at the conclusion of our ministry.

In principle, we are before the judgment seat of Christ during our entire consecrated life. From one standpoint, we are under constant scrutiny from the time we consecrate until the moment of death, but we think that in this case, John was referring to the end of our career—to those who are in a final experience where their faith is being tested very severely. Nevertheless, that principle also applies throughout our consecrated life and through different experiences, for there are multiple periods in our Christian walk when we have severe tests. With any one of those crises, we could have “boldness in the day of judgment.” Thus the principle applies three ways: (1) from the time we consecrate, (2) in the final experience at our death, or (3) in crucial experiences and trials during our walk.

In summary, we think John was referring to the end, to such as have this experience and have a moment to contemplate. But that does not mean there will not be mixed experiences, for Jesus himself had ups and downs at the end of his life. Finally, however, when he went over the threshold of death, he said, “It is finished” (John 19:30). He had some assurance from the Father in that very last moment, but previously, he went through a very severe trial.

“As he [Jesus] is, so are we in this world.” Since the Christian experience is progressive, we do not just say “love, love, love” but have to be as he was in the world. In other words, we have to look at our Master to see what and how he did things in order to properly copy him in our lifestyle.

1 John 4:18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

Verse 18 brings in the thought of “fear,” for the false prophets felt that reverence for God was based on the Christian’s cultivating an attitude of fear. All of the pagan religions taught fear. Their doctrines taught that if a person cut his flesh, denied himself food, slept on a cold floor, etc., he would appease God. From that standpoint, where one stood with God depended on how one mortified the flesh.

There were two erroneous schools of thought at this time: (1) mortification of the flesh and (2) revelry in the flesh. With the latter philosophy, it was felt that a person should experience all of the illicit pleasures of life so that he could speak with understanding. How absurd! On the other hand, the ascetics tried to please God through fear, believing that the more suffering they endured, the more likely God was to have some mercy on them when they died.

John was saying that worshipping through fear does not develop the fruits of the Spirit the Lord is looking for. Although fear can be a constructive watchdog for the Christian, it is one thing for a watchdog to warn us when we are in danger, and it is another thing when the watchdog barks all the time. We cannot develop under the latter condition, but a watchdog that barks when we are in danger is an asset. Continual barking would get on our nerves and keep us from growing. This theme of *continual* fear inhibits spiritual growth and development and our love for one another.

Some brethren have confidently quoted verse 18 in testimony meetings, saying they have “no fear in love,” but as far as serious development is concerned, it will be very embarrassing if they do not attain what they are so confident in. Some of us are extroverts by nature, and some are introverts. Both characteristics can be harmful if carried to the extreme. An extreme introvert is overwhelmed by despondency and discouragement, which are tools of the Adversary. An extreme extrovert exhibits such euphoria and overconfidence that he does not see things rationally and realistically.

Comment: A way to refute overconfidence about having no fear is to ask the person, “Didn’t Jesus experience fear in the Garden of Gethsemane?”

Reply: That is true, for Jesus had perfect love, yet he feared at that time.

Comment: Solomon wrote in Proverbs 9:10, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.”

Q: The word “perfect” means “complete,” so wouldn’t the ultimate goal be to have no fear? With complete, total, mature love, there would be no fear. We are reaching for that goal, even if we can never fully attain it in the present life. John was continuing his definition of love, covering different aspects of the subject. In verse 17, he said that a boldness comes with love. Therefore, when we have difficult trials, fear should not be part of our love. Rather, the perfect goal would be to have enough confidence and faith.

A: The point is, What is “perfect love”? Some may think they have perfect love and no fear, yet they are not good examples. Those who are outgoing by nature are prone to have no fear, and those who are introverts are prone to have fear. Verse 18 does not say that the ones who have no fear are the only ones who will please God on the highest plane. There is a lot to life. Life is made up of millions of seconds of conduct, and Christians have mood swings, up and down, up and down, throughout their walk. Thus we cannot take verse 18 and say that when we get perfect love, we will have no mood swings. Some brethren have burned themselves out, but while they were in the way, they were very confident.

Comment: For any one of us to say we have no fear seems like a foolish statement because we have not experienced all things. Until we are in a certain situation, we do not know how we will react.

Reply: We do not see how those who worship God in *constant* fear could develop to be of the Little Flock class. The Great Company class remain faithful and get life, but they fear death and are in bondage all their lifetime (Heb. 2:15). Nevertheless, God has mercy on them.

The point is that verse 18 does not say that in no circumstance does a person with “perfect love” not have a moment of fear. Such a statement would be untrue. Incidentally, a person’s emotions on his deathbed are not a true indicator of his eternal destiny. The litmus test is a person’s overall life.

The following commentary was given in the 1982-1983 study:

The understanding of verse 18 is crucial. “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.” For John to say, “There is *no fear* in love,” the question would be, What kind of “fear” was John speaking of? The Word of God teaches that fear is proper, so how do we harmonize the two thoughts? Those who fear and tremble at God’s Word are His “jewels”; that is, they fear to displease God, but they also tremble at His Word, for it is meaningful to them (Mal. 3:16,17). We are also told to “fear God” and to honor the King (1 Pet. 2:17). “Perfect love” would not cast out this kind of fear in *any* sense. Therefore, we have to modify John’s statement here in verse 18.

A testimony was given some years ago in which the person said, “I have no fear of God—none whatsoever. He is our Father.” That was a scary testimony. Probably the person did not realize what was being said, for to have that kind of confidence would mean the individual was like the Apostle Paul. We believe the individual had the wrong concept because God teaches us to have fear along certain lines. This example shows why we have to be very careful with John’s writings, for he had specific conditions in mind in his day.

Back to the earlier question. What did John mean when he said, “There is no fear in love”? Whatever kind of fear he was talking about, there could be *none* of it in love. Certainly he was not speaking of the reverential fear of God. Another kind of fear is a bondage that is slavish and paralyzing. It is the *fear of man, the fear of an organization, and the fear of what friends or others might think*. We want to obey God, so the fear of man has no place in our life. The fear (or reverence) of God, the fear of displeasing Him, should motivate us and be uppermost in our mind because the other—that which is of man—is very dangerous, for it is predicated upon pleasing the flesh. And that is what happened in John’s day. Those who left him were false prophets, who judged the brethren and made bold assertions that caused those of a humble disposition to question their stand. What John wrote gives some indication of what the others said, did, and thought.

“Fear hath torment.” If we *know* we are pleasing God by doing what He wants us to do, we have no fear of man or of what others might think. If we love God supremely and desire His fellowship and approval, then when we take a stand for principle, what others think should be immaterial to us. The ideal (or perfect) love, for which we all strive, is not to waver. The desire to grow up into the fullness of the stature of Christ is the goal we are running for. To be Godlike, to have His love, and to have the love of Christ and his fellowship are our objective. In running a race, we become distracted if we think of the next fellow, and we may lose the race. Many who excel in whatever they do—in mathematics, sports, etc.—need *complete concentration* on their objective. Paul said, “This *one thing* I do” (Phil. 3:13). He also said, “I therefore so run,” indicating he was running *all out* for the prize (1 Cor. 9:26).

1 John 4:19 We love him, because he first loved us.

1 John 4:20 If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

John mentioned love and hate frequently in this epistle, and “hate” truly meant *hate*, not “love less.” Back in John’s day, some in the brotherhood really hated other Christians and openly manifested the hatred in their deeds; that is, their works betrayed them.

We have to continually modify many of John’s statements and consider them contextually and from the standpoint of conditions in his day. The pendulum keeps swinging. Today in the minds of many, “gushy” love covers everything, whereas John was counteracting puritanical

ideas and open hatred. This epistle has been important all down the Gospel Age in helping Christians to recognize a wrong spirit when circumstances arise that manifest a heart attitude of malice and bitterness.

1 John 4:21 And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

Although verse 21 is true as a general statement, there are rare occasions when we have to make a discrimination. However, John was not using the exceptions because in the day in which he wrote, it was very apparent whom he was talking about.

Q: Can we say that as long as someone is still our brother, it would be wrong to hate him?

A: John also wrote, “There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it” (1 John 5:16). At that point, the individual is no longer our brother, although he may feel that he is and is still in our presence. For example, many years ago I unknowingly had private studies with some Universal Salvationists. When the fact was brought to my attention, I immediately said, “I can no longer call you ‘brother’ or ‘sister’ if you continue with that view.” Of course as Universal Salvationists, they were all for “love.” Then I formed questions that forced them to say they believed Satan would be saved. I pointed out that Satan is the *enemy* of God and said that if they held to that view, they were *my* enemy as well. Many brethren would not act with such strength, but that doctrine is being more loving than God. It was not a good atmosphere to meet in.

Comment: If the person *really* is a “brother,” there are no exceptions to the wording of verses 20 and 21 as stated. Some individuals may *think* they are brothers, but if in reality they are not because of serious error in doctrine or morals, we would not regard them as such (1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9).

Comment: If there are some who, according to our understanding of Scripture, have violated the Word of God by their actions, then according to conscience, we would have to exercise some reserve.

Reply: Yes, that is true. We have a higher regard for those who we feel are walking closer to God. Thus there are degrees, or levels, of love, and even though we still recognize that they are brothers—as long as nothing questions the bottom line—we can have reservations. For example, the Scriptures say that if someone comes into our midst who does not work, we should not give him the hand of fellowship (2 Thess. 3:11-15). Our action does not mean we do not love him. Rather, we are thinking of his long-term salvation.

Comment: Stated another way, *agape* love does not have to be accompanied by *phileo* love. We can love a person in spite of his attitudes and behavior.

1 John 5:1 Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.

“Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born [i.e., begotten] of God.” Even to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the promised Messiah, was a favorable sign because of the evil and doctrinal darkness that prevailed during John’s ministry. Incidentally, when we consider the first period of the Church, of which Paul was the “angel,” the larger part of those brethren had already deceased at the time this epistle was written (Rev. 2:1). Thus by now, a new generation was carrying on in a pagan world in Smyrna, the second period of the Church, of which John was the “angel,” and he was up in Asia Minor (Rev. 2:8). Very few believers remained in Israel,

relatively speaking, for the Diaspora of AD 69-70 (the dispersion, the scattering) had already occurred. In this pagan world, to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, was a very clear demarcation, for the second period of the Church is pictured from a doctrinal standpoint. The “red” horse signified the prevailing pagan doctrine (Rev. 6:3,4).

To truly believe that Jesus is the Christ is a miraculous conception, for Satan blinds men’s minds to this truth. Not the pope, the nominal Church, or Mary—no one and nothing else—is the Savior or the Mediator.

Comment: John wrote in his Gospel, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12).

Reply: The thought is “to them that believe *into* his [Jesus’] name,” meaning they made a formal consecration to be a Christian. Such have taken up their cross and are following Jesus.

1 John 5:2 **By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.**

In order to know that we love the brethren, we must love God and keep His commandments (plural). To love God back there was something different, whereas today no distinction would be apparent, for most people in so-called Christian countries would say they believe in and love God. Today millions professedly believe in Christ and God but not in John’s day, when it was unusual to believe in the God of the Old Testament, Jesus’ preexistence, and the fact that when Jesus began his earthly ministry, he was the true Messiah. Thus that type of expression could be used as an indicator of who did and who did not have the truth.

To not only “love God” but also to “keep his commandments” was a more serious dedication and application. God’s commandments and precepts are mostly in the Old Testament.

1 John 5:3 **For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.**

John repeated the thought that to love God is to “keep his commandments.” Then he added, “His [God’s] commandments are not grievous [burdensome].” Jesus said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30).

Comment: The love of the brethren is, *first*, the love of God and His commandments. In other words, if we love God and obey His commandments, then we are loving the brethren.

Reply: Yes, to properly love the brethren means that we love those who are in the family of God, those who have made a consecration.

1 John 5:4 **For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.**

If verse 4 is read, “*Whosoever is begotten* of God overcomes the world,” it needs qualification, for it does not prove “once saved, always saved.” We must *continually* overcome the world, or the seed of life (begettal) will be quenched by the worldly spirit. However, if the word “born” is used instead of “begotten,” then the statement is true in regard to the Little Flock and the Great Company, for those who are *born* will have *previously* overcome the world. The victory that overcomes the world is our *faith*.

1 John 5:5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

If one believes today that Jesus is the Son of God, is that a proof he has overcome the world? No, but it was a proof in John's day. Back there the distinction, or difference, between the world and the Church was very glaring and obvious, externally speaking. Again, though, the overcoming was an *ongoing* situation until the end of one's earthly course.

John wrote on a higher plane, which assumes that we know more than we actually do. From that assumed standpoint, John's writings are misunderstood because he did not go into the details. He made statements that are qualified by what we are supposed to already know. The statements are true—but they are true based on *what he had in mind*.

1 John 5:6 This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.

Verse 6 requires a little more examination. "This is he that came by water [baptism] and blood [crucifixion, death], even Jesus Christ." Jesus began his ministry with water baptism. At that time, John the Baptist made a startling announcement, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Earlier John had said he was not worthy to stoop down and unloose the latchet of Messiah's shoes (Mark 1:7). The start of Jesus' earthly ministry was quickly noised abroad in Jewry. "Water" was the start of his ministry, and "blood" was the conclusion of his ministry, when he died on the Cross. Both events were startling, and both were accompanied by signs.

1. When Jesus was baptized, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). John was told in earlier life that Messiah's coming would be in relationship to when he was baptizing people, and at that time, a dove would come down upon the individual who was to be the Messiah. Subsequently, John testified that he had seen the dove come down and that Jesus was the Messiah.

2. When Jesus died on the Cross, the outstanding signs included the earthquake, the rending of the Temple veil, and the awakening of some of the sleeping saints (Matt. 27:51-53).

The third witness of Jesus' being the Son of God was the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit [itself] ... beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth." Jesus said, "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he [it] shall testify of me" (John 15:26).

Notice the sequence: (1) Water baptism started Jesus' ministry, (2) blood finished his ministry, and (3) the Holy Spirit came on the disciples at Pentecost. Moreover, the Holy Spirit came in a dramatic fashion with the sound of a "rushing mighty wind," the shaking of the house, tongues of fire, and the ability of the disciples to speak in various tongues (Acts 2:1-4). Thus there were marked manifestations pertaining to the aftereffects of Jesus' ministry.

Q: John 19:34 reads, "But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water." Was John now referring back to that incident?

A: We do not think so, although there is an added significance in principle. The blood and water flowing out when the spear pierced Jesus' side showed, from a natural standpoint, that the cardiac sac had been broken beforehand. Otherwise, only blood would have come out, not water too.

The following commentary was given in the 1982-1983 study:

How did Jesus come “by water and blood”? He was introduced to the nation of Israel by water baptism, and he is introduced to us by his death (crucifixion). Many believed in Christ not during his ministry but subsequently.

The Christian consecrates to death (and then life), whereas the world’s consecration in the Kingdom will be just to life. Down through the Gospel Age, many have felt that the suffering of Paul and others was not necessary and that the Christian in the present life is in a ruling or reigning state. It is true that Christians walk in “newness of life,” but these others viewed the “newness” in a radical sense (Rom. 6:4). They could see the “water” aspect but not the “blood” aspect. However, for the consecrated Christian, the narrow way is a *new* walk but unto *death*, and Christ was the exemplar of both. Christians are baptized into his death.

“And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.” John’s vocabulary is different because of its repetition, which goes forward and backward and is both positive and negative. At Jesus’ baptism, an audible voice said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Also, John saw a dove come down and abide on Jesus. John was convinced that Jesus was the Messiah and introduced him accordingly.

The Holy Spirit testified to John that Jesus was the Messiah, and John in turn testified to others, for the multitude did not see the dove. Just as the heavens were opened to Jesus at his baptism, so the Holy Spirit opens our eyes of understanding. The Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness to further study and dedicate himself to what his ministry would be, and so it is with us in principle. For those who actually grab hold of the call, their minds are opened, and as they respond to the call, they are driven to reflect seriously and to consecrate. They try to clarify what their purpose henceforth will be. Flesh and blood does not reveal that Jesus is the Christ; rather, it is God who does the revealing with His miraculous power, or Spirit (Matt. 16:15-17).

Some twist the meaning of the Spirit and look for all kinds of witnesses and testimonies. John was not referring to a feeling or emotion, a dream, or a charismatic atmosphere. He said simply, “The [Holy] Spirit is *truth*.” He stated a general principle of how the Holy Spirit testifies to us. We love to tell the old, sweet story, but its power comes because it is TRUE.

1 John 5:7 For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.

1 John 5:8 And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

As rendered in the King James Version, verses 7 and 8 are confusing, but most of the reading is spurious, not being found in almost 200 manuscripts earlier than the seventh century. The correct reading is, “For there are three that bear record: the Spirit, and the water, and the blood; and these three agree in one.” (The RSV and the NIV support this rendering.) The Holy Spirit, the water, and the blood are the three witnesses, or essentials, that John was emphasizing. The Spirit is really the understanding of the Word of God; it is enlightenment. Again John was repeating himself, but the repetition is helpful, for we have to dwell on these points in order to assimilate them.

The correct sequence for the Christian is (1) heart baptism, (2) Spirit begetting, (3) literal water baptism, and (4) faithfulness unto death (resisting unto “blood”). Incidentally, the Jews who accepted Christ needed this sequence too, whether or not they had John’s baptism.

1 John 5:9 If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son.

The “witness of God” is that He has testified of His Son. What was John referring to? God’s voice from heaven testified at Jesus’ baptism, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17). And again, at the Mount of Transfiguration, a voice out of the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (Matt. 17:5). Peter said, “We actually heard this voice, which came from heaven, when we were with him in the holy mount” (2 Pet. 1:18 paraphrase). Although John did not mention Jesus’ glistening garments in his epistle, we can be sure that he had told the account to others on many occasions during his life and ministry. In other words, by this time, it should have been common understanding that John, Peter, and James had heard God testify. At the time of Jesus’ baptism, only John the Baptist and Jesus heard the voice, but on the Mount of Transfiguration, the three apostles and Jesus heard it. Therefore, John only had to make a brief remark here for the recipients of the letter to know what he was referring to.

Comment: John 8:18 reads, “I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me.” John 5:36 states, “But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.”

Reply: Jesus raised the dead, healed lepers, restored missing limbs, etc. All of the miracles were testimonies.

The following commentary was given in the 1982-1983 study:

“If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater.” Undue respect was not to be paid to some who said, for example, “I knew the Apostle Paul,” but did not base their continued reasoning on the Word of God. Instead they actually led away from the Word, the all-important testimony.

In the Book of Hebrews, Paul spoke of the sure Abrahamic Covenant of God. He reasoned that if what man confirms by an oath is important, then *God’s* confirming the covenant of promise with an oath constitutes a *sure and immutable testimony* (Heb. 6:13-18).

Q: Was the “witness of men” about Jesus or about others?

A: It applies to both. For example, the false element, such as the Gnostics, came and testified they knew Christ, but then they branched off into another philosophy that was contrary to the Word, the testimony of God. However, some, like the Apostle Paul, were true witnesses who had had contact with Christ. John said, “We have seen, heard, and touched the Word of God.” That was a testimony of men but also the testimony of an *apostle*, one appointed *of God*. (Incidentally, the word “gnostic” means “I know,” and “agnostic” means “I do not know.”)

We should not prejudge what a person will say, but what we hear has to be weighed against the Word of God to see whether the testimony is true. Thus we have to go to the Word to prove what is true with regard to Jesus. Other philosophers used their own *human* reasoning, whereas the Word is a revealed utterance *of God*, and not a product of man’s *own* inductive reasoning.

1 John 5:10 He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of

his Son.

“He that believeth on [into—see *Diaglott*] the Son of God [that is, consecrates] hath the witness [of God] in himself.” Next the son of thunder said, “He that believeth not God hath made him [God] a *liar*.” Why? “Because he believeth not the record [the Old Testament prophecies of Jesus plus the New Testament fulfillment of those predictions] that God gave of his Son.” John spoke gently and sweetly, but he also had the needed characteristic of strength and power. He *loved* righteousness and *hated* iniquity.

1 John 5:11 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

John frequently emphasized life. Verse 11 combats the pagan thought that the present life is the only life: “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” The gospel teaching pertains to the afterlife—a life beyond the grave. Of the other religions which teach of a life hereafter, the ideas are usually so nebulous that they are really meaningless. For example, the doctrine of transmigration of the soul teaches that one returns to earth in another life form—a donkey or a beetle or something else—depending on how he lived the present life. To the contrary, the gospel teaching is that the same entity, the same individual, lives again. Even with the divine nature, the individual is the same but on a higher plane of life. John scotched many different theories that were rampant at that time. For the most part, fear was the motivating factor.

1 John 5:12 He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

What a positive statement! He who has Jesus has life; he who does not have Jesus does not have life. There is no other name under heaven whereby one can be saved (Acts 4:12). The Greek philosophers considered this concept of salvation in and through *one person* to be very dogmatic and narrow. The Catholic Church bypasses the Son and emphasizes the Mass, novenas, contributions, statues, saints, Mary, medals, etc.—anything to take the focus off sole dependency on the one and only Savior, Jesus Christ.

The gospel was so miraculous and there was such a paucity of believers in John’s day that a definite mark of demarcation existed between the Christian and others. A cost was involved for those who believed in God and were being faithful. In contrast, it does not cost a person anything at the present time to say he believes in God. What persecution do we get for such a statement? At most, we might be called a religious fanatic. However, to live in the Roman Empire and make that claim would be blasphemy. Therefore, there was a cost just for believing in the Hebrew God and in Jesus Christ, a Jew, as the Messiah. All of Asia Minor was under Roman control at that time. When the Jewish nation rebelled earlier, Vespasian and Titus went down there and destroyed the city of Jerusalem and killed millions of people.

To the second period of the Church, Smyrna, Jesus did not give one word of criticism.

“And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;

“I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

“Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.” (Rev. 2:8-11)

1 John 5:13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

John addressed the relative paucity of believers in Smyrna, the second period of the Church, in a very intimate fashion. He spoke in this simple way because those who believed in God and in Christ and retained their belief did so at such a great cost that they got life—not necessarily the crown of life but *eternal* life. John was the right messenger for that peculiar period of time.

Verse 13 is a summation. Like many of John’s statements, if this verse were taken out of context, one could draw a wrong conclusion. The background of John’s day has to be considered lest one think “once saved, always saved.” Only if we *fulfill* our part and *continue* faithful and obedient *to the end* with this conviction of belief can we be confident of obtaining eternal life.

Some were beginning to forget about Christ. Previously John gave certain symptoms to indicate that one had the doctrine, or spirit, of antichrist. Then he gave characteristics to show whether a person had the true spirit, for example, the belief that Jesus is the Son of God. Such a simple statement inferred that some were starting to forget the *primacy* of Christ—that he is the *only* means of salvation. Only through his blood and the vicarious nature of Jesus’ sacrifice are all sins forgiven. John was saying that we *know* and *can be assured* we are going in the right direction if we *retain* our identity with *Jesus* in these matters and look to him for instruction.

By inference, some did not believe “on the *name*” of Jesus. They all knew he existed, but they had lost sight of the importance of *continued* identity with him and doing things in his name. Jesus said, “Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do” (John 14:13). In other words, one has to petition God and ask for forgiveness through Jesus.

The last part of verse 13, “and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God,” is omitted in some of the early manuscripts, but it may be genuine.

1 John 5:14 And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

1 John 5:15 And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

Verse 15 should not be taken out of context. The key words are in verse 14: “according to his will.” “If we ask any thing according to his [*God’s*] will, [we can be confident that] he heareth us.” Prayer, then, becomes a testimony of the Spirit. John had said, “No man has to teach you whether you are in the right way, for you know what God has done for you.” In the Smyrna period, it was especially appropriate for Christians to have the inner conviction that they were on the right road of understanding and belief if they remained faithful to the counsel of the Apostle John.

For our prayers to be answered, we must (1) be consecrated and (2) ask in harmony with God’s will. At least we can have confidence that God will hear us if these two conditions are met. Of course an answer to prayer might be no. For example, if we earnestly pray for understanding on a difficult Scripture, we will not get an affirmative answer if the due time for

understanding that specific text has not yet come. However, if we pray generally for wisdom to understand God's Word, we will get increased knowledge. Either way, God is pleased if we ask. The principle is shown with Daniel, who was called "greatly beloved" for his desire to understand, even though the words were "closed up and sealed till the time of the end" (Dan. 9:23; 10:11,19; 12:9).

John used the word "heareth" in verse 14 in the sense of approval—that God listens with approval. A Christian goes through various experiences in his life, one example being a "cloud," which he may or may not be aware of. A cloud comes because one is not rendering proper obedience, and his prayers are not "heard" as a result. Only Jesus could say with confidence, "I know the Father heareth me always because I do the things that please Him." Even in regard to continuity of devotion to the Lord, a Christian may not be in a proper heart condition either momentarily or for a period of time. Surely during such a time, the Lord is not looking favorably and approvingly upon the individual. For example, when Nadab and Abihu offered "strange fire" before Jehovah, they apparently approached Him in a drunken condition. Because they did not give due respect to the principles of the Law in the Tabernacle services, they were struck dead. With mankind being fallen, there may be times when God withholds a feeling of intimacy for an individual's good. Feeling alienated and estranged from God, he repents and prays more earnestly for the feeling of nearness to be reaffirmed.

The statements of John's epistles are meant to be general rules. Consider verse 15: "And if we know that he [God] hear us, ... we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." The qualification is, "If we ask ... according to His will." If we come to God with a petition, we know that He will give it serious consideration. He will "hear" our prayer but not necessarily answer the specifics we attach to it. For example, Jesus asked, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. 26:39). The "cup" did not pass from Jesus, yet he was "heard" in that he got God's approval for humbly praying contingent upon not his own will but the Father's. Jesus submitted *fully* to God under the *extreme* experience. Then the Father, who appreciates childlike dependence, gave Jesus assurance, strength, and heavenly peace.

1 John 5:16 If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.

In John's day, it was so rare to be a believer that the believers were genuine and the fakers left. John was not saying that Christians in his day were guaranteed life, but he was saying that the great majority would be saved because of the severity of the conditions that existed. Those who went into Second Death were very obvious by the vulgarity of their departure from the faith in either doctrine or moral deportment. Therefore, the prayers of faithful individuals at that time were more meaningful, even though the only way for one to receive forgiveness when grievous sins were committed was through repentance. However, the prayers of the faithful might produce an experience to alert or awaken the sinner to the danger of his situation. As a result, he would, hopefully, take the proper procedure for forgiveness, which is always repentance. Generally speaking, the brethren were in such a holy attitude in the hostile world of that day that their prayers along that line were answered in a remarkable fashion.

Comment: Verse 16 shows we should watch our brethren from the standpoint of blatant sins that are committed. We do have to make a judgment on the degree of sin.

Reply: Yes, the very fact there is "a sin unto death" indicates that we have to make a judgment in order to know when to pray and when not to pray. We have known some individuals—but very few—who definitely went into Second Death. One such individual, formerly an elder,

wrote a book against God. At the end of the book, he said that he would be willing, as a test of his conviction, to curse God with an upraised fist to see if he would die. That book is one of the most damaging we have ever seen. We have never shown it to anyone because the arguments are so subtle that it is almost as if the Adversary himself were the author.

Comment: After Job's restoration to health, God said to Eliphaz (and indirectly to the other two comforters), "Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept" (Job 42:8). This instruction shows the sinner has to ask forgiveness.

Reply: Yes, certain laws, both spiritually and naturally, have to be followed because they are of divine origin.

To see a brother "sin a sin which is not unto death [Second Death]" means we must make a judgment as to whether or not the sin is revocable. If we can see that a person has not sinned unto Second Death, then we should also be able to see when a person has sinned unto death. In other words, each Christian should try to develop the perspective whereby he can reasonably ascertain when a person has committed a sin unto Second Death and has thus gone beyond the barrier of forgiveness.

Some brethren go through their entire Christian walk without being able to make that discrimination. In fact, they are not even interested in making that distinction. We do not think such brethren will attain the Little Flock and be future judges over the world of mankind, for they are shirking important issues during the practicing period of the present life. Brethren should not be evasive and excuse such gross sins in either self or others by saying, "Perhaps his consecration was not accepted."

Verse 16 is discussing the situation where, as far as we can see, a brother has committed a grievous sin but has not sinned the sin unto Second Death. What, then, is one's responsibility? The observing brother should pray to God on behalf of the sinning brother. "And he [God] shall give him life for them that sin not unto death." The thought is that God will give the sinner life *if he repents*. To receive forgiveness, the sinner must take the necessary step of *asking* a brother (or an ecclesia or a congregation depending on the circumstance) to pray for him. (Of course, even if one does not ask, but we know he has sinned, we can generally ask that he be made aware of his sin through whatever experiences the Lord chooses to give him.)

According to the principle of James 5:14,15, a person who realizes he is sin-sick should come to the brethren and say, "I have sinned greatly before God, and I feel that my prayers are not being answered. I am not able in my own strength to get relief. Therefore, I come to you and pray that you will help me in obtaining relief from this burden that is on my soul." Under that circumstance, the person will be healed because he has evidenced contrition by humbling himself to ask the brethren for help.

In places where brethren are not available, the sinner could go to a close friend, an *individual* brother or sister in Christ, who is very sincere in his devotion and conviction to the Lord. The sinner would say, "I come to you for help because I have a problem." He would then request prayer for his restoration to God's favor. The brother or sister in Christ could then pray with faith and confidence on behalf of the sinner, and the prayer *will be answered*. Reinstatement will occur for that circumstance. In other words, if the sinner repents, he will get a *temporary* reprieve. However, he will get *life* only if he is henceforth faithful to the end of his course. Here, as in so many other places in John's epistles, the statements must be modified.

"There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it." In *continuing* to pray for

someone who is going further and further into gross sin and is not asking for help, we would be *more loving than God*. In other words, if we have already taken certain steps and we find that there is no response, we would give up after a while. But then, should some circumstance happen subsequently and the consecrated one return repentantly, our interest would immediately be aroused. In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the son went to a far country and squandered all his goods. The father was very compassionate, but he did not send messengers to the swine pit to try to persuade his son to return, for the son had made his decision. However, once that son retraced his steps back to the father, showing that repentance and a change of heart had taken place, the father received him gladly. The prodigal son said, "Father, I am not even worthy to be considered your son. I have sinned against heaven, and I have sinned against you."

Where gross sin is involved, we have to be careful. It is one thing to snatch someone out of the fire, but we must not go into the fire lest we ourselves become contaminated (Jude 22 and 23). In doing the snatching, we are to stand outside the perimeter of the fire and hate "even the garment spotted by the flesh." We cannot meddle with either doctrinal error or mixed fellowship without getting contaminated.

We can be sure that if a "righteous" person asks something of God, the Father will give it very serious consideration. How wonderful it is to think that we can pray for another from that standpoint! However, we have to be reasonable in our expectations.

1 John 5:17 All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.

There are different degrees of both righteousness and sin. "All unrighteousness [disobedience] is sin," but there are both black sins and gray areas. The worst sins are unto Second Death. In verses 16 and 17, the emphasis is on conduct rather than on doctrine, for John said, "If any man see his brother sin a sin."

The word "and" should be "but": "All unrighteousness is sin: *but* there is a sin not unto death." Now John was positive. If we see someone who, as far as we can reasonably tell, has not committed the sin unto Second Death, we should pray for him and be concerned for his spiritual welfare. As David said, "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression [unto Second Death]" (Psa. 19:13). The "great transgression" is a sin that, once committed, can never receive forgiveness—the person can never have a recovery. Once that step is taken, all the prayers in the world cannot effect a deliverance.

Most sins are "not unto death," but on the other hand, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). Also, there is a saying: "Sow a thought; reap an action. Sow an action; reap a habit. Sow a habit; reap a character. Sow a character; reap a destiny." The statement "all unrighteousness is sin" means that with regard to sin, nothing should be dismissed or treated lightly. All unrighteousness is dangerous, and repetition creates a habit, which eventually reaches a destiny.

Comment: There seems to be a contrast between the beginning and the end of verse 17. The realization that "all unrighteousness is sin" could cause one to be very despondent. However, there is hope because not all sin is unto death.

Comment: The RSV reads, "All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin which is not mortal."

1 John 5:18 We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.

Whosoever is begotten of God does not *practice* sin or, from another standpoint, does not really at heart consent to, or approve of, the sin. The individual is overtaken in a fault, but he does not agree with the sin or practice it. In judging self, one who is truly begotten of God constantly tries to nip sin in the bud lest it overcome him.

“He that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one [Satan] toucheth him not.” This statement is directly contrary to the statement in the first chapter, “If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a *liar*” (1 John 1:10). John also said that if we do sin, the blood of Christ cleanses us and that we have an Advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous (1 John 2:1). Thus John said (1) there is a sinning and (2) we do not sin. The point is that if we do sin, we are to ask for forgiveness, but one who is begotten of God does not give consent to or practice sin.

Q: Would this verse also make sense if the Greek word *gennao* is left as “born”? “We know that whosoever is *born* of God sinneth not.” Some claimed they did not sin, but wasn’t John saying that whoever is actually born of God will not sin? While we are still in the begotten stage in the present life, we must keep ourselves and not practice sin.

A: Yes, that is true for the first part of verse 18.

The second part of verse 18 reads, “But he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.” Here “begotten” is the correct thought, pertaining to the present life, for all whom God will reward and honor with the divine nature will be “virgins ... which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth” (Rev. 14:4). They *voluntarily* ask for forgiveness, thus keeping their robes clean, whereas the Great Company will be taken out into the wilderness so that they will come to their senses and then ask for forgiveness. Those who will be of the Little Flock do not countenance sin, but nevertheless, sin is in their members, for they are born in sin and shapen in iniquity. However, as soon as the sin is revealed to them, they repent and ask for (and receive) forgiveness.

The thought of “keeping” oneself includes self-examination. The one who is truly begotten of God and wants to please Him examines himself to see if he is making progress or is slipping backward. Taking self-inventory should be done on a regular basis. In one sense, we ask forgiveness for sins at the end of the day. However, another type of self-analysis is more critical; namely, we should sit back and think about what we are doing and examine our motives. “Keeping” ourselves is also working out our “own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). As Jesus said, especially in regard to the end of the age, “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt. 26:41). We are to watch events as well as self. As portrayed in *Pilgrim’s Progress*, sin is very beguiling and enticing. In Greek mythology, sin is likened to a group of sirens whose singing seduced mariners on the water. As the sailors approached, they hit the rocks and became shipwrecked.

“That wicked one toucheth him not.” In the final analysis, Satan will not get a real hold on one who does not practice sin. Sometimes the Lord allows us to have an experience where Satan “touches” us. However, it is one thing to be “touched” and another thing to be “embraced.” The Wicked One does not clutch the faithful Christian or get him in his grasp. He may touch us by causing a condition in which we actually fall for the moment, but to stumble and recover our steps is different from getting in a bear trap, where we are seized and grabbed.

Comment: For a test of endurance, the Lord sometimes permits the Adversary to come in like a flood. God wants to see how we will bear up. We may not always be successful and victorious in shaking the Adversary, but the experience will keep us constantly in prayer. That part alone may be what the Lord is pleased with. Therefore, our prayers may not be answered right

away, for God sees the necessity for us to have the severe test.

Reply: A practical example is what happened to Job. James used the experience of Job in a spiritual sense. “Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy” (James 5:11). Satan did touch Job in the sense that everything was affected—his children, health, property, flocks, etc.—but not his life. Since the Adversary was not successful in destroying Job’s integrity before God, he did not get a victory. Just as Job’s testing did not come because of anything he did wrong, so it can be with the Christian. Sometimes Satan is allowed to bring experiences upon the Christian to prove and test him. As a result, the individual will come forth even better than before and will magnify the Lord’s purpose. However, with other Christians, partial guilt may be the basis for God to allow the testing.

1 John 5:19 And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.

In verse 19, as in verse 17, the word “and” should be “but”: “And we know that we are of God, *but* the whole world lieth in wickedness.”

Comment: The RSV ends verse 19, “The whole world is in the power of the evil one [Satan].”

1 John 5:20 And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

Not only do we know that God is true, but also we are *in* Him by recognizing Jesus’ role, which was being lost sight of in John’s day. In addition, we are *in* Jesus Christ, God’s Son. The departure from the primacy of Jesus began to take place back there, and that is why many later idolized the Virgin Mary. For Christians to give Mary the role of Christ means that earlier there was a neglect of recognizing the need for Christ as the *only* way of coming to the Father. Jesus was more than a way-shower. Papacy could not have developed with the pope claiming to be the vicar of Christ if Jesus’ role had been retained.

“The Son of God is come ... that we may know him that is *true*, and we are in him that is *true*.” John purposely used the word “true” twice because erroneous ideas were abroad. He was saying, “*Jesus is the way; this is the truth*,” whereas others were claiming to be the way of truth. John also emphasized this theme in his Gospel, saying that Jesus is the only door to the sheepfold, that he is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). John was discussing the *principles* of truth in a *generalized, broad* sense. Once we try to take generalized principles and squeeze them down to specifics, we have to watch lest we make creeds, for example, in judging a brother’s standing with God based on his view of the Lord’s presence or chronology. Of course these are important doctrines, but we should not establish creeds.

“This is the true God, and eternal life.” Trinitarians like to say that the word “this” refers to Jesus—“This [Jesus] is the true God”—but the context of verses 18 and 19 refers to God. Also, the pronoun “him” in verse 20, used twice, refers to God. John was saying, “Consider your experience when you accepted Jesus Christ—the conviction that it brought to your heart and the life that you subsequently led in believing in Christ as the Son of God. Such reflection on the past miraculous providences of God is a part of taking stock of yourself. Some of those providences were very favorable, and some were warnings. Will you now listen to some glib oratorical goat, who is expounding error?” Those who differed with John felt that they had superior understanding, and they wanted to disclose their hidden mystery. However, neither God nor Jesus was in their reasoning. For instance, one school of thought taught that there were different gods in heaven and that the God of the Old Testament was not the supreme

God. By not understanding the permission of evil, these false teachers found fault with Almighty God for creating a being that became corrupted. To many Christians in the past, this thinking was a thorny, troubling problem, whereas we are blessed with *The Divine Plan of the Ages*, which gives several reasons for the permission of evil. Job withstood a severe testing without having this understanding. No wonder he is mentioned by name in the Old Testament as being exemplary (Ezek. 14:14,20).

When we hear something new, we have to be careful. Yes, there is a growth in understanding, for the light of truth shines more and more unto the perfect day, but we should analyze that which is new and try to square it with the Word of God. Through a familiarity with Scripture in daily study, the Holy Spirit helps us to discern right from wrong. Thus John was saying to those under his influence, “Sit back and consider what you have learned. Be swift to hear, but advance cautiously.” We should ask, “If I accept this new thought, what will it lead to? Is it profitable? Is it good? Is it helpful?” The false teachers taught fear, and they were uncertain about the hereafter. What a wonderful theme to love the “true God” and His obedient Son!

Comment: The *Diaglott* clarifies the pronouns. “And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us discernment, that we might know the true One, and we are in the true One—by his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and the *aionian* life.”

Reply: John did not emphasize immortality in the Smyrna period of the Church. His Gospel, written earlier, records Jesus’ words about immortality. This short epistle was like a sermon, whereas John’s Gospel was an overall perspective of the things Jesus said and did, especially during the last week of his earthly ministry.

1 John 5:21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

The “Amen” is spurious here. At first, this last verse seems like a rather strange ending to the epistle. We are expecting a climax, and what did John say? “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” What “idols” were the brethren back there to keep themselves from? John was referring to the false teachers, who said that they did not sin and that they knew God. John’s reply was to the effect, “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth” (1 John 1:6). In other words, the behavior of these Christians, who claimed that they knew God, was absolutely contrary to the principles of righteousness and truth. The reality was that they *hated* their brethren because they did not grant support, help, and comfort as needed. In time, they left John and went their way. Not only did the false teachers have seductive doctrines that gave the appearance of superior intelligence, but also they prospered materially. The combination made their teaching even more seductive, for material prosperity was associated with their doctrine. The false teachers prospered because the world recognized them, whereas John and his followers were poor in this world’s goods. In reality the false teachers were children of the Adversary.

The world was also an idol. John said, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). He showed that this worldly spirit, with its philosophy and reasoning, was motivated by Satan.

In other words, there are various idols. Another idol is self—one’s own importance. Inordinate attention to a pleasure is also an idol, for example, music or sports. The particular pleasure might not be necessarily evil in itself, but undue reverence and attention made it an idol. The idolization of another individual was also wrong, for it led to forgetting the importance of God and the primacy of Jesus. The point is that if we die, our hope should be to see God first, Jesus next, then the apostles, and finally others. We can love our husband, wife, child, parent, etc., in the flesh, but God and Jesus must be first. Moreover, desiring the fellowship of a group above

purity and principle can be an idol. We must not bend principle to avoid severing a friendship where disfellowshipping is indicated. In summary, “idols” are anything that distracts from God and/or Jesus and our devotion to them. John stressed the Father and the Son *over and over*.

Love for God and Jesus—love supreme—will be the final test on the brethren. Some, either in the brotherhood itself or in the nominal Church, will use John’s epistles to justify their concept of false love. Stated another way, John’s epistles will be used to prove we are wrong.

SECOND EPISTLE OF JOHN

(Study led by Bro. Frank Shallieu in 1997 with excerpts from a study in 1983)

There is no way of knowing when John’s second and third epistles were written. However, if the first epistle was written around AD 90, then the second and third epistles were written subsequently, somewhere between AD 90 and 100. The Book of Revelation was recorded in AD 98, but it was not really circulated until AD 100. Moreover, it is likely that John wrote all three epistles while he was in Ephesus.

2 John 1 The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth;

Why was this second epistle included in the Bible? The literal lady to whom the letter was specifically addressed was being influenced by the false element.

Why did John call himself “the elder”? The suggestion, already made, is that the letter was written when John was old—somewhere in the AD 90s and after his Gospel. The Living Bible has the correct thought: “the *old* Elder.” The aged John was like an old patriarch, who had been through a long experience and thus could give good advice.

Why was the sister called “the elect lady”? The term “elect” is used elsewhere in the New Testament to refer to the called class, to those who have made a consecration. Such individuals are living a reasonable outward deportment that seems to be in harmony with conscientiously doing God’s will. It is as if John were saying to her, “I am speaking to you, dear one, as one who has been long in the truth and has had much experience.” Probably this lady was a person of means who had brethren stay at her home for long periods of time. In addition, she was a sister of influence. Notice that her husband was not mentioned. Therefore, we assume that either he was not consecrated, or he was dead.

The Greek rendered “the elect lady” can also be considered the personal Greek name Cyria (see the *Diaglott* and the Living Bible). Also, since 2 John 5 seems to be a personal beseeching—“I entreat [or beseech] thee, Cyria”—we feel that she was being named here. It is true that the Greek word means “lady,” but it can also be a personal name. Incidentally, the Greek *kuria* was the feminine of *kurios*, which means “lord” (masculine). Also, there is no “y” in Greek, just a “u.” Ancient Greek had the uncial “y,” which modern translators think of as “u,” but we like to think of it as “y,” for then it would be the female of Cyrus, which means “the sun.”

Comment: A note in the Companion Bible reads, “In all probability a proper name ‘Kyria’.”

Reply: Yes, we think “y” should be in the name. However, we do not know whether the personal name in verse 1 is the female of Cyrus (“the sun”) or *kurios* (“lord”).

Comment: Further support for a personal name is the fact that John's third epistle begins with an individual's name ("The elder unto the wellbeloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth"), and another brother, Demetrius, is named subsequently (3 John 1,12).

Reply: Yes, we believe this second epistle was addressed to a specific person.

It is likely that she was a local sister, relatively speaking, because John was very old and his travels were confined to Asia Minor. Hence he could visit her later. In fact, he said he planned to visit her (verse 12). Evidently, John heard that she was in danger of being weaned from the truth because of contact with other brethren, and he realized she needed a warning right away.

This epistle was also addressed to the elect lady's children, who lived in either the same house or the same town or area. John was happy that her children had accepted the truth and were stable characters. He said that he loved "the elect lady and her children ... in the truth"; hence all were consecrated. The wording "and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth" suggests that these children had been active, and thus their works were appreciated by others as well. Their deeds would have been going on for some time. Many of the brethren who thought well of John also thought well of this lady and her children.

In the first epistle, the Greek word *teknion* was used; here the word *teknon* is translated "children." The elect lady's children were not necessarily full adults, for in the previous epistle, two different Greek words were rendered "children," one word meaning very young children and the other meaning that all of the consecrated are little children regardless of age. Thus *teknion* was used more liberally, whereas *teknon* referred to this sister's literal children. We do not know their ages nor the age of Cyria.

The main distinction we are making is that these "children" were consecrated relatives of this woman who had taken a stand for truth. In the first epistle, John spoke favorably of three categories of the consecrated: (1) youngsters, (2) middle-aged brethren, and (3) old-timers, some of whom had even known Jesus (1 John 2:13,14).

2 John 2 For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever.

Verse 2 does not prove "once saved, always saved." Jesus said, "I will be with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). God does not desert His people, for He and Jesus are loyal. Rather, we are the ones who cause the alienation. Therefore, if an estrangement occurs, it is *our* fault. John was saying, "You can be sure of the truth and God's constancy *as long as you remain faithful.*" Thus verse 2 is qualified.

The purpose of the first epistle was not only to warn but also to encourage the brethren. "Look what you have—life and a future! If you go to the false teachers, you will have darkness instead of light. You would be foolish to depart from the way for the unknown."

2 John 3 Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

Notice that John contrasted "God the Father" and "the Son of the Father," *not* "God the Son." The greeting was, "Grace, mercy, and peace be with you in truth and in love." Truth and love are companions—one cannot exist without the other—and truth, being listed first, gets the priority. John was saying, "Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son." The terminology pertaining to "the Son of the Father" is replete in John's epistles.

2 John 4 I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.

Several translations have the thought that John was overjoyed to find *some* of the lady's children "walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father." Although supplied, the word "some" is the correct thought.

Comment: Like the first epistle, this second epistle emphasizes obedience in *conduct*, that is, *walking* in truth. Obedience is more than just the initial receiving of truth.

2 John 5 And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another.

John was saying, "And now I beg thee, Cyria, not as though I were writing a new commandment to you, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another." John's concern was that she remember the importance of loving one another. He earnestly beseeched her in this matter, reminding her of what she had already learned lest she forget.

What was the problem? Others were making suggestions that would alienate her from John and those with him. These false ones were introducing false doctrines, and John was fearful that she might, as a result, become cool to him and to those close to him regarding doctrine contrary to the gospel taught by Christ.

Comment: The point seems to be that new commandments were going around, deceiving the brethren. John was encouraging this sister not to lose the truth she already knew.

2 John 6 And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.

"This is love, that we walk after his [Jesus'] commandments [plural]." In other words, John was admonishing, "Do not depart from the teachings you formerly heeded so well."

Some Bibles have a break between verses 6 and 7 with the subhead "Enemies of Christ." Verses 1-6 are considered a salutation with greetings, encouragement, and admonition. Then, starting with verse 7, comes the nitty-gritty about the enemies of Christ.

2 John 7 For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

Many deceivers were active, and some may even have been entertained in her home. John was concerned about doctrinal error. One error was that Christ had merely appeared at his First Advent, that he was not really flesh and blood (a human being) but a spirit being and thus an apparition. Hence the false teachers said that Jesus did not really die on the Cross. Angels appeared (materialized) in Old Testament times, ate a meal, and then disappeared. The false teachers thought the same of Jesus by mixing things he did before and after his resurrection. This error paved the way for Satan to later introduce the Antichrist teaching that Jesus was half God and half man and only *seemed* to die on the Cross—that it was *God* on the Cross. This false teaching destroyed the need for a vicarious sacrifice to pay the price for sin, whereas *flesh and blood* had to pay for the sin of Adam. If we do not remember this fact, we will forget that we need to be forgiven for sin, and the false teachers back there said they did not sin—and hence did not need forgiveness. Christian Scientists think somewhat along this erroneous line. Truth was distorted; Scriptures were perverted. This false teaching was the means by which Satan deceived.

Notice, there were “many deceivers”—that is, many *professed Christians* were the deceivers—and thus there were *many* antichrists. Any brethren who harbored and gave hospitality to these deceivers incurred great guilt. Ordinary people whom the lady might entertain could be those the Adversary was using. By realizing there were *many* deceivers, or antichrists, she would be more on her guard. In his first epistle, John said, “Try the spirits” (1 John 4:1). He gave common-sense simple tests of how to know the exponents of error. Two of those tests were (1) the need for forgiveness of sin and (2) the need to beware of those who practiced sin.

The lady was to question a visitor as to whether he thought Jesus was a human being or like an angel. If the latter was his belief, she was to have reserve and not entertain him or wish him Godspeed. This question was a means of determining what was of God and what was of Satan.

“Deceivers ... confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.” The term “is come” infers Jesus’ preexistence as well. However, the aspect of materialization was the real source of error.

John was concerned lest this sister be led away from the truth. She was influential, so if she could be weaned over to new leadership, then all those who loved her and were her children would probably follow her. Thus she would become a target of those who were trying to wean disciples unto themselves.

John was saying that many deceivers had gone out into the world who would not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. A number of the modern translations put a little different twist on verse 7, making the coming of Christ in the flesh *future*, whereas the older translations all agree—and correctly—that the coming is *past*. To an impartial reader, the context clearly indicates a past coming. The Living Bible has, “Watch out for the false leaders—and there are many of them around—who don’t believe that Jesus Christ came to earth as a human being with a body like ours.” Certainly that is the proper thought, for Jesus was not half spirit and half flesh.

One translation has, “Any such person is a deceiver and an antichrist.” Such individuals were originally in the group with John, but they subsequently left him and began to deny that Jesus had come in the flesh, becoming open enemies of Christ. In other words, in the second (or Smyrna) period of the Church, Satan was an open enemy of the Christian religion. In the third (or Pergamos) period, the man-child was born, and the pseudo-Christ arose. Thus there was a blatant, glaring difference between the Smyrna stage of the Church and the subtle, secret, hidden counterfeit Church in the Pergamos period.

2 John 8 Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.

John was saying, “Beware lest you lose what you have wrought and do not receive a full reward [the divine nature, a place in the Little Flock].” If careless, one will be of the Great Company or go into Second Death. Stated another way, the apostle was saying, “Do not throw away all the labor that has been spent on you.”

2 John 9 Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.

“Whosoever transgresseth” by practicing sin or “abideth not in the [true] doctrine of Christ, hath not God.” Our daily walk is to be based on correct doctrine. “Transgression,” the *practice* of sin, means that the individual has let go of correct doctrine.

A “transgressor” obviously walks out of harmony with the principles of divine government. Examples are a drunkard, a fornicator, one who physically beats another, etc. If a person sins in any of these ways, we should not accept him as a teacher (or even as being in the truth) *until* he repents. Nor should we call him “brother” or “sister.”

If we see hatred and animosity plainly manifested, we should not accept the guilty party as a teacher or a brother until such time as he repents. Conspicuously wrong things should not be tolerated. We are to abide by the fundamentals.

These “transgressors” *once walked in truth*, but they subsequently “separated” from John and company. They committed obvious wrong deeds because of wrong doctrines. Therefore, if one manifestly transgresses plain Scripture—no matter how sweetly and eloquently he talks and no matter how educated he is—we should not accept his teachings and reasonings. If his way of life is *obviously* contrary to the principles of Christ—if his “fruits” are bad—he is not of God.

We usually think of “transgression” as meaning disobedience or willful sin, but in this particular setting, John seemed to be saying something very different. It is true that these false teachers were committing willful sin, but John was speaking strong and saying in effect, “Anyone who is so advanced that he is not content with what Jesus Christ himself taught, and thus abides not in the doctrine of Christ, *hath not God.*” John did not mince words in advising the elect lady to see the situation in its proper light. In some respects, this was almost like a farewell letter.

“He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath *both* the Father and the Son.” John spoke very nicely to those who were abiding in the “doctrine of Christ” as they had been taught. But the others, who were so “advanced” that they thought the “doctrine of Christ” was like kindergarten, had forsaken God.

Comment: The principle is stated in Revelation 22:18, “If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book.”

Q: Is there an application for us today?

A: The principle will increasingly apply to “religious intellectuals” the closer we get to the very end of the age.

2 John 10 If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed:

If anyone brought not the true doctrine of Christ that John was speaking about, the instruction was to “receive him not into your house.” Thus there are times when we should ostracize, or excommunicate, a brother or sister. In spite of the lady’s love and charity, she had to be cold to the false teachers in order to be faithful. Not wanting her to be deceived and thus lose the *full* reward, John was saying, “If a deceiver comes to you, do not entertain him, but cut him short as *soon* as you realize his thinking. Do not invite him to stay with you, and do not bid him Godspeed.” In other words, we are not to say “God bless you” to those who espouse serious doctrinal error. John’s instruction was to take a firm stand and not to encourage such persons. He did not teach that we are to love everybody, for “love” must be based on God’s Word and His principles. We are to love others in proportion to their *obedience*.

“Godspeed” is especially wishing “God bless you” upon one’s departure and inviting him to return. It could also include giving the individual money to continue on in his work. In short, John was afraid that this lady, this sister, had entertained some false brethren and was being

affected herself so that she might lose her full reward.

Q: In regard to not bidding Godspeed to those who do not subscribe to “the doctrine,” what should be our attitude toward those consecrated ones still in Babylon who believe in the Trinity in one form or another? Was John saying that if one *understands* the truth and then goes back and accepts the Trinity, we should in no way wish him Godspeed? Couldn't we wish God's blessing on those who have never had the doctrine explained to them yet are sincerely consecrated and believe in the Trinity?

A: The Scriptures say, “Lay hands suddenly on no man” (1 Tim. 5:22). This is a general rule. Wishing God's blessing can be done as an individual or as a group, but the principle is more or less the same. We are to judge each case separately. For instance, if a brother has a wrong view on a certain subject but is performing a good ministry and does not bring up his doubts and opinions in his teaching, he should be regarded in a different light than another person who has the same wrong view but constantly brings it up. Also, there are times when a brother could be invited to speak on a certain subject; that way his wrong view would be purposely excluded. A class could even, on a rare occasion, invite an unconsecrated person to speak on a given subject from a historical standpoint, for example; that is, an exception could be made with limitations. However, wishing “Godspeed” is a more generalized matter, for it would be asking a blessing on the ministry of an individual. Therefore, we must be careful. If we have known the person over a period of time and what his ministry is like, our voting would be influenced accordingly.

Some come not as teachers but just as brothers and sisters, and after a limited conversation, we may wish them Godspeed. However, where we know something of a person's background, we become responsible for our actions. We should not be loose in our approval if we know someone holds a wrong fundamental error.

The first clause in verse 9, “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ,” means that the individual *previously* believed the “doctrine of Christ” and then left it. Hebrews 10:26 indicates the same thing: “If we sin wilfully *after* ... we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.” Thus verse 10 does not apply to a babe in Christ who has not yet come to a full knowledge of the doctrine of the Ransom.

“Godspeed” is so commonly used that we want to know where to draw the line. This blessing should not be wished hastily. Emotionally, we want to be kind and generous. If we have a sincere conversation and like the person, the tendency is to say, “God bless you.” This is okay to do normally, but once one is a recognized teacher, more consideration has to be given; that is, we are to “lay hands suddenly on no man” lest we partake of the injurious effect of his ministry.

John was specifically talking about some who once knew the truth and then left it and were now teachers, going around visiting as pilgrims. We must be careful whom we entertain and upon whom we wish God's blessing.

The clause “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine” refers generally to teachers who were visiting the homes of various believers with the intention of instructing and teaching. These professional spongers did not work, and the brethren became partakers of their evil deeds by entertaining them.

2 John 11 For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

In bidding Godspeed and entertaining enemies of God, a brother partakes of their sins—as long as he knows about them, of course. John was particularly warning about false *teachers*. Those who encourage false teachers become participants in the sin.

“Godspeed” is usually said when a person is leaving, but in this context, it also means, “Do not even receive such an individual.” In other words, two thoughts are included here. (1) A brother or sister was not to encourage this element when they left by saying, “God bless you,” or help them along in their journey. (2) Nor was one to receive them. Some people are effusive by temperament and nature in wishing others well, but at times this attitude is inappropriate.

Comment: This advice pertains to individuals who once knew the truth and then departed from it. In our associations, we might have as guests in our home one from the nominal system who holds the Trinitarian view, but that situation is different, for he never understood the truth.

Reply: Yes, sins before consecration are a lot different from sins after consecration. For those who have known the truth to depart is much different from those who have never really seen the truth.

Comment: The Pastor commented that some who have neglected the plain statement of God’s Word on this subject have suffered spiritually for their disobedience.

2 John 12 Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full.

John hoped to visit the sister to whom this epistle was addressed. At that time, he would tell her many other things in person, filling in details.

Verse 12 leads to further consideration about this woman’s name and location. We believe that John wrote this epistle while in Ephesus and that she lived nearby because, being old, he was not in a position to journey a great distance. Not only was his visit to the seven churches phenomenal at his age, but we think she lived amidst those churches. We conjecture further that her name was related to Cyrus the Persian, who destroyed Sardis, the supposedly impregnable fortress. Following that victory, he resided there with many of his soldiers.

2 John 13 The children of thy elect sister greet thee. Amen.

The lady had consecrated relatives (children of a natural sister) who were there with John in Ephesus. The fact these individuals were with John and supporting him gave added weight to his warnings to the “elect lady.” In other words, these two women were both natural and spiritual sisters.

THIRD EPISTLE OF JOHN

(Study led by Bro. Frank Shallieu in 1997 with excerpts from a study in 1983)

3 John 1 The elder unto the wellbeloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth.

John’s third epistle was addressed to a consecrated individual named Gaius. The aged apostle again called himself “the elder” (see 2 John 1). He loved Gaius “in the truth.” By addressing him this way, John was implying that many were following false teachers.

3 John 2 Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.

The King James is a poor translation using archaic English, but probably Gaius was in ill health. Some translations are similar to the following: "I know it is well with your soul, and I hope you are healthy in a natural sense as well." John prayed that all would go well with Gaius and that he would be in good health, even as his soul prospered. He did not pray for temporal health "above all things."

John's first epistle was general, for it was not addressed to any individual or class; it was like saying, "To whom it may concern." The second and third epistles were pastoral but addressed to individuals. The second epistle was addressed to "the elect lady," which was probably the personal name Cyria, and the third was definitely addressed to an individual by name.

Q: Is Acts 19:29 talking about the same Gaius? "And the whole city [of Ephesus] was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre."

A: It could be the same, but Gaius was a familiar name, so we do not know.

3 John 3 For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth.

John was glad to hear about the zeal of Gaius in the truth. Gaius did not merely believe, know, and speak the truth, but he *walked* in the truth; that is, his deeds matched his good profession.

3 John 4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

John might have been involved with Gaius's coming into the truth originally. Being older, John spoke patronizingly to the faithful younger brethren, calling them "my children."

3 John 5 Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers;

3 John 6 Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well:

As testified by the brethren, Gaius was very hospitable. Romans 16:23 mentions Gaius as the "host" of Paul "and of the whole church." If he was only in his twenties at that time, then John was addressing the same Gaius, who would now be in his 80's.

Other brethren visited Gaius and stayed with him. Many of these consecrated ones were strangers, but he entertained them in good faith. These brethren brought back a good report to John. Possibly this very letter was delivered to Gaius by one whom he would then receive and entertain.

Moreover, when the brethren departed, Gaius gave them a financial contribution to help them on to their next destination. However, one with such a generous disposition had to be careful to properly discriminate in regard to troublemakers and false teachers.

Of course the original word "charity" conveyed the thought of "love," but verses 5 and 6 are emphasizing the generosity and hospitality of Gaius in every way, both spiritually and materially, "to the brethren, and to strangers."

“If thou bring forward on their [missionary] journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well.” In connection with missionary efforts, it was suggested that brothers bring with them letters of commendation identifying them with a particular ecclesia, for example.

3 John 7 Because that for his name’s sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles.

Verse 7 is a further confirmation that Gaius gave visiting brethren temporal help: food, shelter, financial contributions, clothing, etc.

3 John 8 We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow helpers to the truth.

“We therefore ought to receive such [brethren who are sent out as missionaries].” Hospitality is part of Christian service “that we might be fellow helpers to the truth.”

3 John 9 I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.

3 John 10 Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.

Diotrephes was a dominant personality in that area. John had previously written to “the church,” to the ecclesia, which was probably in someone else’s house, that is, not in the house of Gaius. The first letter was not fruitful, so now John was writing to Gaius.

Diotrephes “loveth to have the preeminence” and considered himself superior to the Apostle John. Being high-minded, he did not respect John and was “prating against” him and brethren more favorable to him. Diotrephes wanted to get rid of those in the class who adhered to John’s thinking and advice. By his malicious words toward John and his sympathizers, Diotrephes was presumptuously assuming a false leadership.

The attitude of Diotrephes was entirely different from that of Gaius. Diotrephes not only did not receive pilgrim brothers but cast them out if they did not agree with him, and he forbade others to receive them. John pointed out Diotrephes by name.

Gaius did well to ignore Diotrephes and to continue to entertain the pilgrim brothers, yet Diotrephes spoke against them when they visited the ecclesia. He also spoke maliciously against the apostles. John indicated that if he visited that ecclesia, he would remember what Diotrephes had done and would not just cover everything over with “love.” John would take action and sharply rebuke him.

Diotrephes “casteth them out of the church.” He was *so bold* that he cast out those he did not regard favorably. He wanted to dominate and put himself first, slandering the apostles in the process. This was a blatant manifestation of hating the brethren who were faithful to the truth. No doubt a split would occur in this ecclesia if it had not already happened. In his first epistle, John mentioned those who separated and “went out” from him (1 John 2:19).

Possibly one reason John wrote this epistle is that he had heard what was going on, and he knew of Gaius’s hospitality. Also, he knew that Diotrephes would castigate Gaius and excommunicate him from the class. In fact, Gaius may already have been excommunicated, and if so, John would be encouraging him.

Comment: John treated this situation with strength—similar to the way Paul handled the immorality problem in the Corinthian church. Both apostles acted as if they were present in the ecclesia, making strong statements. John even said that if the problem had not been corrected by the time he came in person, he would remember the evil deeds. He would not let the problem rest because a principle was being violated.

Reply: Yes, instead of being the apostle of love here, he was a son of “Boanerges [thunder]” (Mark 3:17).

Comment: The situation with Diotrephes is a good illustration of where it is necessary to meet strength with strength.

Comment: The RSV reads, “I have written something to the church; but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge my authority. So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, prating against me with evil words. And not content with that, he refuses himself to welcome the brethren, and also stops those who want to welcome them and puts them out of the church.”

Q: Did Diotrephes “cast out” the ones in the ecclesia who received the outside brethren, or was he casting out the outside brethren?

A: He did both. He forbade some from coming in, and he forbade some who were already in but were not in harmony with him.

3 John 11 Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.

3 John 12 Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is true.

John’s advice was, “Beloved, follow not that which is [obviously] evil, but that which is good.” He was speaking pragmatically; that is, “Common sense tells you, from a scriptural standpoint, what to do in regard to Diotrephes.” When we read John’s epistles from the standpoint of their being written in the second (or Smyrna) period of the Church, his advice is easy to understand, but if we read them from our standpoint—from the type of environment and thinking of today—the advice does not square. However, when conditions change at the end of the age, John’s epistles will come back to life again.

Demetrius had a good report of everyone, and his doctrine was sound. “We also bear record”; that is, John put his stamp of approval on Demetrius. According to tradition, this Demetrius is the same one who caused the riot in Ephesus (Acts 19:24-40). If so, he later became converted, and John would have been reassuring the brethren that Demetrius was a changed character from what he formerly was.

Demetrius may have been in the same ecclesia, or else he was in one nearby. John commended him for being both loving and straight in the truth. If he was in another ecclesia, this was a brother Gaius could meet with. Or if Demetrius was in the same class with Gaius, John was suggesting that they split from the class and meet together. Apparently, Diotrephes and Demetrius were teachers but not Gaius.

For verse 11, the Revised Standard has, “Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. He who does good is of God; he who does evil has not seen God.” John was saying to Gaius, “A little leaven leavens the whole lump, so do not stay with Diotrephes and get contaminated by his

clearly manifested evil deeds and words. Separate and follow good with Demetrius.”

“He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.” Someone doing evil can be easily discerned through malicious words and bad deeds, but to discern someone who is doing good is more difficult. Unless one is reflective, observing, and trying to exercise proper judgment, the good can be overlooked. For example, doing good can include visiting the sick, supporting those who are imprisoned for speaking the truth, holy and humble daily living, and being hospitable to the brethren.

Comment: John was recommending that the brethren disfellowship Diotrephes, who would fall under the category of a railer (1 Cor. 5:11). To prate against someone with evil words is railing.

Reply: Yes. John would take care of Diotrephes when he came. In fact, he would do a twofold work: (1) He would nullify the influence of Diotrephes, and (2) he would coalesce, or bring back into good fellowship, those who had been cast out by Diotrephes. John would restore into united fellowship those who could be restored.

Q: Was Diotrephes a further example of the Nicolaitan (lordship) spirit that started in the first period of the Church?

A: Yes, that is true. In the Ephesus period, Peter and Paul right away identified individuals who manifested the Nicolaitan spirit. John was now doing the same thing but somewhat belatedly. There was progressive deterioration. The mystery of iniquity worked in a few individuals in Ephesus. More and more individuals with the Nicolaitan spirit sprang up boldly in the Smyrna period. The Nicolaitan *doctrine* was affecting entire ecclesias during the Pergamos period, impregnating the Church with error.

“He that doeth [*practices*] good is of God: but he that doeth [*practices*] evil hath not seen God.” John was speaking of a *pattern* of doing good versus a *pattern* of speaking malicious and bitter words and doing bad deeds.

“Ye know that our record is true.” Not only was John giving his approval, but he had inside information through communication with the Holy Spirit in a special way.

3 John 13 I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee:

John hoped to soon visit Gaius in person, for certain matters were on his mind that would be burdensome to put in writing. To come personally into their midst would be more efficient.

The epistles were written on parchment with pen and ink. Parchment was first made in Pergamos in Asia Minor, which John visited.

3 John 14 But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to thee. Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name.

“But I trust I shall shortly see thee [primarily Gaius plus those who were in communication with him], and we shall speak face to face.” John *intended* to come in person, whereas Paul had *threatened* to come to Corinth if some did not listen to his advice.

John and his friends sent their greetings to Gaius and his friends. “Greet the friends by name.” This *selective* greeting was to be by name to make sure that everyone walking in truth got John’s love. Some of these “friends” might have been cast-out or separated brethren. Others may have still been in the ecclesia because they had failed to take a stand; being weak, they

needed advice.

REVIEW OF JOHN'S THREE EPISTLES

John did not go into the fine details that Paul did but just enunciated right and wrong principles. Before quoting from John's epistles, we should read all three to make sure we get the right thought.

The Gnostics introduced both Asian and Grecian philosophies into the early Church. Adherents of the Asian philosophy saw nothing wrong with immorality in religion. Adherents of the Grecian philosophy believed in punishing the body. Many of these philosophies and weird ideas were carried over into Catholicism.

In John's day, many claimed they did not sin, but John said they were liars. He emphasized repentance and the confession of sins in his first epistle. Forgiveness is predicated upon repentance.

John commended some "young" Christians for overcoming the Adversary either by not leaving the apostle or by separating from those who opposed him. The reference to "overcoming" was in regard to this particular stand only, as one must strive *throughout his entire Christian walk*, not just in the beginning.

When John said, "Those born of God do *not* sin," he was not contradicting his statement that *all* sin. The new creature does not *practice* sin, does not have a *continual habit* of sin, but he might be overcome in an isolated situation.

John said, "We know that we have passed from death unto life if we love the brethren," but there is more to this statement. Just being kind and gentle is not enough to keep us out of Second Death. 1 John 5:2 completes the thought: "We love the children of God if we love God and *keep his commandments*." What brethren do we love? Certainly not those who separated like Diotrephes. Fellowship can be full, partial, or withdrawn depending on the circumstance. Jesus said that those who do the will of his Father in heaven are his "mother," "brother," etc.

Proper disfellowshipping is an evidence of "love"—in the hope that the erring one will repent and get life. *Long-range salvation* is more important than immediate pacification. Love can be severe, and it has different modes of operation.

"There is no fear in love" was another of John's statements that needs to be qualified, for we are to fear (reverence) and tremble at God's Word. In fact, to fear and tremble at His Word is to hold that Word as the *ruling principle* of our life. Fear should be a watchdog rather than a motivating force of life, for *slavish* fear is wrong and reverential fear is right. We are to fear God, not man.

John directed his message against a high-minded puritanical element and hence had to stress love. Today we should be wary of worldly slogans on love, for true Christian love is not found in the world but is based on *God's principles*.

John warned that if we say we have fellowship with God yet walk in darkness, we lie. In his day, walking in darkness and hating the brethren were obvious and self-evident. The Gnostics felt superior and did not consult much with the Word of God; they regarded Jesus as a teacher but not *the* teacher, *the* Christ. All of our Christian walk we must have Jesus as our Head. The Gnostics stressed the *equality* of other teachers, thus bringing Christ down to their level. This

wrong seed thought, which was an antichrist spirit, eventually led to the doctrine of apostolic succession.

Jesus came in the *flesh* as a human being. Docetism, a prevalent branch of Gnosticism, taught that Jesus came in one of three ways, all of which undercut the Ransom. (1) He came in appearance only, not as a real human being. (2) He came as an angel; that is, he only materialized. (3) He came as a mere man having no preexistence. However, the Scriptures teach that Jesus came in the flesh and that he had a preexistence. These truths are important to see, for otherwise, Jesus is regarded as *just* a human being, equal to us. Others said he was not the Son of God and hence felt free to bring in their own teachings. The blood of Christ is needed for forgiveness.

John said that the love of God is perfected in the one who *keeps* His commandments. Others said they were abiding in God and keeping His commandments, but they were selective in which commandments they kept. False teachers who followed the Asian thinking said that Christians could live a lustful life and not be hurt as new creatures. They perverted Genesis 3:22 to mean that to be good Christians, we have to know both good and evil. Hence they purposely indulged in evil to get experience. To the contrary, the Christian must struggle against evil and not give in to it.

The Gnostics liked Paul's statement that "the things I would, I cannot do" (Rom. 7:15 paraphrase). Instead of fighting against sin, they used this text to excuse sin as the result of the old man. On the one hand, the Christian should not selectively use Scriptures to excuse sin. On the other hand, he should have mercy toward others in regard to the possibility of repentance and retrieval but not as a blanket attitude. The Gnostics also used sophistry. For example, they said that Jesus only appeared to die but did not actually do so. "Gnosis," meaning "knowledge," was the attitude "I know."

To differ with someone does not mean we hate him. "Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things" (Gal. 6:6). We are not to submit on principles, but we should not be hypercritical.

A liar denies that Jesus is the Christ. Anyone who changes the Word of God by adding to or taking away from it has a Nicolaitan spirit and is taking away from the Head.

John's epistles and Gospel indicate that the Trinity will be a touchstone with the nominal Church in the days ahead. For example, John 1:1 will be misused to prove the opposite—that Jesus is God. The *Diaglott* interlinear is the only correct rendition of that verse.

We may have to take a stand in the days ahead that will *appear* to be evil but will actually be right. Therefore, we must be fully armed both in prophetic doctrine and in our daily walk. The moral problems, etc., of the early Church will be repeated at the end of the age. We must take stands where necessary on moral principles as well as on doctrinal issues. Familiarity with, meditating on, and analyzing the Word of God are our only safeguards.

In John's day, those who denied his teachings and went out from him were wrong. That reasoning will be used against us in the future. We will be considered wrong to go "out from," or contrary to, the Trinity. This type of reasoning along other lines can even be used to bind us to an ecclesia. To think the will of the Lord is always done by an ecclesia is erroneous.