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A Hermeneutical Model Based on the First Epistle of John

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A HERMENEUTICAL MODEL BASED ON
THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

A Senior Project
Presented to
the Faculty of
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by
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this senior project is to give the present student an opportunity to synthesize three years of seminary-level training in the area of hermeneutics, with an eye to its operation in the pastoral setting. The project therefore seeks to present a model, directed to the local pastor, of how a biblical book can be prepared for an expositional preaching series. The model endorses three stages of preparation study thought by the student to be essential to a quality pulpit ministry. The stages are history, exegesis and theology. Each stage is contained within a major chapter which endeavors to introduce the topic, present the study data itself and relate it to the modern pastoral setting by means of a summary and/or an evaluation of the tools and methods used. In this way it is hoped that, on the one hand, the student will crystallize for himself the training in hermeneutics he has sought to acquire, while on the other hand, present to the reader a stimulus toward furthering the quality of his own sermonic preparations.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
CHAPTER 1: HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS	1
THE STUDY	1
Authorship	1
Traditional Evidence	2
Epistolary Evidence	3
Date	15
Background and Occasion	17
Purpose	20
THE PULPIT	23
A Suggested Historical Introduction for I John . .	24
THE TOOLS	28
A Suggested Model for Historical Studies	29
CHAPTER 2: THE EXEGETICAL WORK	33
THE STUDY	34
I. Two Essentials for Christian Experience	
1:1-10	35
1. An encounter with the Word of Life 1:1-4 .	35
2. Receiving the message from the Word of	
Life 1:5-10	38
3. Word studies	42
II. The Obedient Children 2:1-29	45
1. The principle of obedience 2:1-6	45

	PAGE
2. Obedient through love 2:7-11	50
3. Obedient to God, not the world 2:12-17	52
4. Obedient to truth, not error 2:18-29	55
5. Word studies	61
III. The Children of God 3:1-24	63
1. The children of God and the children of the devil 3:1-10	63
2. The children who love one another 3:11-18	68
3. The children assured before God 3:19-24	71
4. Word studies	74
IV. The Children of Truth 4:1-21	75
1. The spirit of God and the spirit of error 4:1-6	75
2. The dynamic of love 4:7-21	79
3. Word studies	84
V. The Children Born of God 5:1-21	88
1. The mark of birth 5:1-5	88
2. The witness to birth 5:6-12	90
3. The benefits of birth 5:13-17	94
4. The knowledge gained from birth 5:18-21 .	96
5. Word studies	99
THE TOOLS	100
CHAPTER 3: FINAL STEPS TOWARD SERMONIC PREPARATION .	103
STEP ONE: THE THEOLOGICAL THEMES	104
Encounter	104
Brotherly love	106

	PAGE
The world	107
Antichrist	108
Assurance	109
STEP TWO: THE OUTLINES	111
CONCLUSION	119
REFERENCE NOTES	120
BIBLIOGRAPHY	128

Chapter 1

HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS

If the exposition of a book such as the First Epistle of John is to be sound, it must be founded upon a thorough understanding of historical backgrounds. Chapter One presents such an understanding in a threefold manner. The study itself is first presented, followed by a discussion of the relevance to the pulpit, and finally, a brief evaluation of the tools used for the study. In this way it is hoped that this phase of the model will be most meaningful for the busy pastor engaged in the pursuit of quality expositional preaching.

THE STUDY

Authorship

In writing about the First Epistle of John, Donald Guthrie states, "In one sense the authorship is not the most important issue, for the exegesis of the letter is not greatly affected by our conclusions regarding authorship."¹ Guthrie's statement points to the fact that whether or not one can ever come to a satisfactory opinion regarding the authorship of I John, nevertheless, one can still be confronted by its authoritative witness to Christian truth.

While apostolic authorship would naturally buttress the contents of the Epistle, here is a case where Scriptural truth can be heard for its own sake, transcending time and culture, making real the will of God for His Church. The value of fixing the authorship, says Guthrie, is that the Epistle ". . . becomes more personal if an individual name can with any confidence be attached to it."² Thus, with authorship serving only a secondary role in terms of importance, the evidence in favor and against the traditional Johannine authorship may be examined.

Traditional evidence. Both Guthrie and A. E. Brooke refer to the Epistle of Polycarp as possibly the earliest extant witness to I John. Brooke notes that Polycarp says, ". . . whoever does not confess Jesus Christ as having come in the flesh is antichrist."³ The parallel to I John 4:2 is unmistakable. Brooke says, "No one who has read the Johannine Epistles and the Epistle of Polycarp can doubt on which side lies the probability of originality."⁴ Based upon further parallels between the Epistle of Polycarp and I and II John, Brooke concludes that Polycarp must have been acquainted with the Johannine Epistles. Brooke states that in view of this, ". . . there would have to be very strong reasons to justify us in placing the Johannine Epistles later than the Epistle of Polycarp."⁵ If Brooke is correct, this could date a witness to I John as early as 120-5 A. D.⁶

The first Church Father to quote extensively from

I John and to attribute it to the apostle John (along with the Second and Third Epistles of John and the Fourth Gospel), is Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, whom C. H. Dodd dates at the beginning of the first century.⁷

Traditional Johannine authorship is assumed in the writings of Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, and his pupil Dionysius.⁸ In reference to these Guthrie says,

This evidence is sufficient to show that from very early times the Epistle was not only treated as Scripture but was assumed to be Johannine, in spite of the fact that no specific claim to this effect is made by the writer himself.⁹

Thus, from its earliest days, the Church seems to have assumed Johannine authorship for the Epistle. Since the individuals previously cited form the witness of the late apostolic and post-apostolic eras, their assumptions in favor of Johannine authorship cannot, by reason of the nearness to the actual writing of the Epistle itself, be lightly written off in favor of other theories of authorship. However, traditional evidence finds itself playing a secondary role of importance to that evidence provided by the internal characteristics of the Epistle itself. The Epistle itself places before us the largest amount of authentic data from which to draw our conclusions concerning authorship.

Epistolary evidence. In treating the internal evidences for authorship to be found in I John, Guthrie considers three factors as key: (1) the writer's personal claims, (2) the general impression of I John, and (3) its

relationship to the entire body of Johannine thought.¹⁰

These factors are indeed important, and a careful study of each will shed more light on the authorship question.

The description given in I John 1:1-3 about the writer's encounter with the Word of Life certainly pictures the kind of relationship a disciple would experience with his master. The stress in verses 1-3 is upon having heard, seen, and touched the life which was revealed by God to man. It speaks of personal fellowship. Of this Guthrie says, "In no more vivid way could the writer indicate that he was an eyewitness."¹¹

The Epistle also carries a number of references to the first person plural "we". As Guthrie points out, many of these references such as in 1:8 which reads, "If we say we have no sin . . ." (NASV), are references which encompass common Christian experience. These do not of themselves point to an apostolic author. However, when these references are seen in the context of 1:1-5, a new personal dynamic prevades them. Guthrie states,

What the writer is concerned to claim at the outset is that his proclamation is based on his own personal experience and the experience of those closely associated with him.¹²

Thus the Epistle bears the unmistakable stamp of personal experience, an encounter with the Word of Life which gives authority to its contents. To this Guthrie says,

If this indication is taken at its face value and is not regarded as a literary device to create the impression of authenticity, it narrows the field of possible authors. It is clearly in complete harmony with the traditional ascription to John, the apostle.¹³

In addition to the numerous references to the first person plural pronoun, the Epistle is also characterized by the writer's use of the endearments "little children" (2:1, 18, 28; 3:9, 18; 5:21) and "beloved" (2:7; 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11). "Beloved," of course, is an expression which any Christian might use toward another. However, "little children," Guthrie states, ". . . could have been written only by someone of considerable authority to those who would at once acknowledge his right to address them in this manner."¹⁴

If a study is made of each of the occurrences of these terms of endearment, Guthrie's assertion finds ample support. The writer of the Epistle uses the term in reference to conveying his purpose for writing (2:1, 7), calling his readers to recognition of a truth (2:12, 18), and giving them a strict command (2:28). As Guthrie says, "The author, in short, stands out as a man of considerable spiritual stature."¹⁵

Thus, the Epistle can be said to claim for itself an author who was personally involved in the events surrounding the redemptive revelation of God to man in the person of the Word of Life, and it certainly gives the overall impression of a letter written by such an authoritative eyewitness. The fact that the endearment "little children" is used also points to the possibility of an older, perhaps elderly author. Such is an apt description of the apostle John, whom tradition holds was in his nineties and

still active by the beginning of the post-apostolic era at the time the Epistle was written.

The relationship of the Epistle to the entire body of Johannine thought forms a third arena in which proper investigations pertaining to authorship can be carried out. Such studies again seem to indicate the work of an apostolic writer such as the apostle John. The relationship between the Epistle and the Gospel of John is understood by scholars such as Robert Law as complimentary in nature. Law says that the Gospel is ". . . a narrative of the redemptive ministry of Christ, and the Epistle an analytical study of the Divine Life as it exists in God and in the children of God."¹⁶ If Law's understanding of the relationship between the Epistle and the Gospel is correct, then a harmony both in terminology and in theological concepts should be apparent in these writings. This is exactly what comes to light when careful inquiry is made.

Brooke, in his commentary, devotes several pages in his introductory material to a most detailed presentation of the Greek grammatical similarities between the Epistle and the Gospel.¹⁷ Among those items which Brooke mentions are such similarities as common phraseology, infrequent use of the relative, use of the demonstrative to introduce thoughts, and limited use of vocabulary.¹⁸

Theological concepts common to both Epistle and Gospel are listed by Brooke as:

1. The incarnation (I Jn. 4:2, Jn. 1:14).

2. Life as having its source in Christ (I Jn. 5:11, Jn. 1:4).
3. Life as identified with Christ (I Jn. 1:1-2, Jn. 5:26).
4. Abiding in Christ as means to fellowship with God (I Jn. 2:24, Jn. 6:56).
5. God's Word abiding in the believer (I Jn. 2:14, Jn. 5:38).
6. God's love affirmed in the sending of Christ (I Jn. 4:9, Jn. 3:16).
7. The command to love Christian brethren (I Jn. 3:23; Jn. 13:34).
8. Christians as children of God (I Jn. 5:1, Jn. 1:12-13).
9. Emphasis upon "witness" (I Jn. 5:6, Jn. 5:36-37).¹⁹

The Epistle and the Gospel also reveal many contrasting pairs which are common to both. Brooke notes,

Light and Darkness, Life and Death, Love and Hate, Truth and Falsehood, The Father and the World, To be of the World, to be not of the World, God and the Devil, The children of God and the children of the Devil, To know and not to know God, To have seen and not to have seen Him, To have life and not to have life.²⁰

Brooke concludes by saying, "To quote all that exist would involved printing practically the whole of the Epistle and a large part of the Gospel."²¹

A parallel study of the prologues to both the Gospel and the Epistle also is revealing regarding the similarities of the two writings.

John 1:1-15I John 1:1-3

In the beginning (v. 1)

What was from the beginning
(v. 1)

The Word (vv. 1ff)

The Word of Life (v. 1)

In Him was life (v. 4)

We beheld His glory (v. 14)

Was manifested to us (v. 2)

The Baptist, a witness
(vv. 6-8, 15)

We bear witness (v. 2)

He gave the right to become
children (v. 12)

That you might have
fellowship (v. 3)

The study thus depicts the agreement by both Gospel and Epistle as to:

1. The eternal, pre-existence of the Word.
2. The Word as the source of life.
3. The Word as manifested to man.
4. The Word as witnessed to by man.
5. The possibility of a community or fellowship

relationship with God through the Word.

Clearly then, a unity does exist between the Epistle and the Gospel. However, before one can affirm a common authorship, consideration must first be made of the differences scholars have noted between the Epistle and the Gospel and weigh their importance in light of the authorship question.

C. H. Dodd in his commentary on the Johannine Epistles lists three specific differences between the Epistle and the Gospel. First, Dodd discusses differences in style. For example, Dodd says, "There is surely to be felt in the Fourth Gospel a richness, a subtlety, a

penetrating quality of style to which the Epistle cannot pretend."²² Dodd pictures the Gospel as rhythmic while the Epistle's regularity tends toward monotony. The Gospel is intense, glowing, and exciting, whereas the Epistle lacks all of these. The Greek of the Epistle is less lucid and ". . . does not suggest the pen of a ready writer."²³ Consideration is also given by Dodd to the absence of Semitic idioms in the Epistle which appear in the Gospel. Hence, the Epistle is more Hellenistic in nature than the Gospel. Finally, Dodd notes vocabulary differences between the two writings. He says,

We observe that out of the numerous words present in the Gospel but absent from the Epistle, a list of over thirty can be compiled which are either so frequent in the Gospel, or so closely related to its central ideas, that their absence from a writing claiming Johannine authorship is significant.²⁴

Dodd himself admits that "Such impressions of style are apt to be subjective."²⁵ With this Guthrie agrees, citing the work of W. G. Wilson as representative of a good scholarly attempt to deal with stylistic differences between the Epistle and the Gospel which is based upon a more objective view.²⁶ In response to Dodd and in light of Wilson's investigation Guthrie concludes that it is not possible to ". . . pronounce with any confidence that the two works could not proceed from one author, particularly in view of the disparity in length and variation in purpose."²⁷

Second, Dodd understands the religious backgrounds for the Epistle and the Gospel to be different.²⁸ Dodd

notes that the Epistle has no quotations from the Old Testament, few echoes of its language and only one specific reference to it (I Jn. 3:12). The Gospel, however, like its companions, abounds with Old Testament useage. From this difference Dodd asserts that while the Gospel seems to be a fusion of Hellenism and Hebrewism, the Epistle is much more freely Hellenistic. Dodd understands such things as the "God is light" and "love" maxims, divine "seed" and the "unction" which gives spiritual knowledge all as finding their origins in Hellenism. Dodd asserts that, "The author of the Epistle has followed a mode of thought and expression avoided in all other New Testament writings, including the Fourth Gospel."²⁹

Guthrie's reply to Dodd's conclusions places the source of the differences Dodd claims not in the religious background of the author, but in the purpose for which he wrote. Guthrie says,

The Epistle has always in mind the background of Gnostic ideas and it is to be expected that the writing would be more flavoured by Hellenism than by Hebraic modes of expression.³⁰

Guthrie assumes that a writer will adapt, to some degree, his language to fit the needs of the particular audience to which he writes. In this way the lack of Old Testament useage is not such a dynamic difference, for different writing motives will produce different styles and resulting contents.³¹

Third, Dodd argues that at certain points important theological differences appear between the Epistle and the

Gospel.³² To Dodd, the Epistle holds a much more primitive theological outlook than that of the Gospel. Three examples are given in support:

1. The Epistle exhibits a more primitive eschatology than the Gospel. What is lacking in the Epistle is the profound reinterpretation of primitive Christian eschatology present in the Fourth Gospel. Dodd asserts that it is the Gospel's reinterpretation which does ". . . fuller justice to the teaching of Jesus Christ than the naive thinking of the primitive church."³³

2. The Epistle displays a more primitive understanding of the redemptive efficacy of Christ's death. Dodd says of it that it scarcely goes ". . . beyond the terms of the primitive apostolic Preaching."³⁴ In short, the Epistle is said to focus on expiation (I Jn. 2:2), while the Gospel defines Christ's work in wider, more cosmic terms.

3. The Epistle depicts the Spirit, Dodd says, ". . . within the limits of primitive or popular belief . . ."³⁵ Absent from the Epistle is the high Johannine understanding of the Spirit as operative in the regenerated believer.

The conclusions arrived at by Dodd regarding the aforementioned major differences force Dodd to conclude that the Gospel and the Epistle have different authors.³⁶ Since Dodd is faced with not only the differences, but the strong sense of unity apparent between the Epistle and the

Gospel, he must opt for a disciple of the Evangelist as the author for the Epistle. In this way the author of the Epistle is one who is

. . . not a mere imitator, but he has become possessed by certain of his master's ideas, though not going the whole way with him; . . . he has caught something of his style and manner, though with a difference.³⁷

Dodd therefore asserts that

. . . the First Epistle of John best reveals its character and significance when it is not treated as a great author's second thoughts, but allowed to speak for itself.³⁸

Guthrie, in response to Dodd's arguments for the theological differences between the Epistle and the Gospel, first attributes Dodd's understanding of the Epistle's eschatology to his ". . . own interpretation of the eschatology of the Fourth Gospel."³⁹ Though a term such as "antichrist" does not appear in the Gospel, Guthrie places such an occurrence in the area of differences of expression, not theology.⁴⁰ Secondly, Guthrie does not see any real difference in the interpretation of the death of Christ found in both writings. Guthrie states,

Dodd gives far too little attention to the sacrificial language of the Gospel, and therefore, gives a one-sided picture of the work of Christ in terms of exaltation and triumph.⁴¹

Regarding the differences Dodd reports in the doctrine of the Spirit, Guthrie has nothing to say. However, one need only read I John 3:24 and 5:7-10 to realize that Dodd's assertion that the Epistle does not display the Spirit in operation with the regenerated believer's life

is totally unfounded.

I John 3:24 reads,

And the one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And we know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given us. (NASV)

Here the Spirit is seen performing the operation of confirming in the believer the abiding presence of God. It is an active work which is performed by the Spirit for it need be so in light of the false spirits spoken of in the very next verses (4:1-2) who have gone out to deceive. The same emphasis is also displayed in I John 5:7-10 where again, the Spirit serves to confirm the witness of Christ in the believer's life (v. 10). Thus, no difference can be seen between the operations of the Spirit in I John and that of His role as "Helper" in John 14:16-17. Granted, the Spirit is not discussed in large degree in the Epistle, but where it is, it is true to the Gospel's understanding of His person and work. Dodd's argument appears invalid.

In conclusion, the issue of authorship for the Epistle must again be affirmed as of secondary importance. The Epistle can stand authoritatively upon its own merit. It has been shown, however, that from the earliest days of church history, tradition has assumed Johannine authorship for both the Epistle and the fourth Gospel. The testimony of early witnesses is not to be taken lightly. Far greater, however, is the witness of the Epistle itself. Not only does it create a picture in which someone the stature of

the apostle John can be seen, but it clearly evidences a dynamic unity with the Gospel in terms of grammar, style, and theological conception. Differences between the Epistle and the Gospel seem best attributed to differences in the audiences and purposes for writing. As B. F. Westcott says, "The Gospel gives the historic revelation; the Epistle shews the revelation as it has been apprehended in the life of the Society and of the believer."⁴² Thus, it is not difficult to adopt Westcott's view and see both the similarities and the differences between the Epistle and the Gospel as evidences for a common authorship. Westcott states,

No imitator of the Gospel could have combined elements of likeness and unlikeness in such a manner; . . . the substance of the Gospel adequately explains the more defined teaching of the first Epistle. The one writing stands to the other in an intelligible connexion of life.⁴³

One can conclude, then, that common authorship for both the Epistle and the Gospel is a far more likely possibility than not. It best accounts for the phenomenon of the two writings and grants to them a deepened authority. Whether or not the author is the apostle John seems a matter of personal decision. Certainly the Epistle does not negate the possibility of John's authorship and tradition supports it. For the purpose of the rest of this project the decision made will reflect belief in the Johannine authorship of both the Epistle and the Gospel.

Date

In seeking to establish a date for the writing of the Epistle, an area which must first be dealt with is that of priority. Which came first, the Epistle or the Gospel? Brooke gives a careful treatment of this topic in his commentary on the Johannine Epistles.⁴⁴ In Brooke's study, seven arguments in favor of the Epistle's priority over that of the Gospel are presented and then dismissed on grounds such as misunderstanding the Epistle, its grammar, or its later use.⁴⁵ On the side of favoring the Gospel over the Epistle, Brooke notes that, "Many passages in the Epistle seem to need the help of the Gospel in order to become intelligible."⁴⁶ Brooke's point is that the Gospel and the Epistle are characterized by the fact that originality and power come from the Gospel while in the Epistle, thoughts seem ". . . derived and generalized."⁴⁷ In conclusion, Brooke asserts that the longer one studies the Epistle, the more evident it becomes that the Epistle is drawing upon a large body of material to further admonish the readers. This body of preceeding material could easily be the Gospel which the readers had heard from the beginning, their source of knowledge which should have been all that was necessary for them to press on in the faith. Brooke says,

The whole aim of the Epistle is to recall to mind and to supplement what has long ago been fully given, but not adequately grasped . . . It is the aftermath, not the first-fruits, of the writer's message to the church.⁴⁸

If Brooke is correct in placing the Gospel first, followed by the Epistle, and scholars such as Guthrie seem to agree,⁴⁹ then the date for the Epistle's publication should next be sought. For accomplishing this task scholars look to such things as the writings, religious developments, and cultural characteristics of the general period thought to correspond with the writing in question, and then try to fix a date based upon the internal evidences of the epistle. E. F. Scott dates the Epistle close to the beginning of the second century based upon the following data:⁵⁰

1. The Epistle of Polycarp, which points toward a knowledge of I John, was written about 117 A. D. Thus I John likely appeared prior to that date.

2. The Epistle by John seems to fall late in the history of the young Christian church, for distinctions between Jews and Gentiles, which concerned the early Church, are not mentioned; presumably, they are no longer important. Also, early church precepts seem to have existed long enough to become considered "Old Commandments."

3. Gnosticism appears in a more or less primitive stage of development. Scott concludes by saying that the Epistle is ". . . tinged with the philosophic ideas which had come in after the apostolic age, but still retains the freshness of outlook and the religious glow which marked the earlier days."⁵¹

Guthrie agrees with Scott's analysis, but prefers an earlier date of 90-95 A. D.⁵² It is worth noting here

that both Guthrie and Scott agree that both the Epistle and the Gospel come out of approximately the same time period, thus making their association even more dynamic in terms of time relationship.

Taking the work of men such as Scott and Guthrie into consideration, plus other notables such as B. F. Westcott⁵³ and F. F. Bruce,⁵⁴ it is probably safe to adopt a late first century/very early second century date for the appearance of the First Epistle of John.

Background and Occasion

Having fixed an approximate date of publication for the Epistle, consideration should be made of the immediate circumstances which fostered it. Guthrie presents a succinct discussion of the background and occasion for the Epistle in his New Testament Introduction.⁵⁵ He identifies early Gnosticism as the false teaching with which the Epistle deals.⁵⁶ Gnosticism would pose a real threat to the Christian community, for by nature, it was a system which, as Justo Gonzalez says, ". . . would take any doctrine . . . found valuable, without any regard for its origin or for the context from which it was taken."⁵⁷ Thus, Gnosticism threatened the uniqueness of the Christian revelation by making it just another plank in a large and unsteady structure of thought.

Gnostics believed that the spirit of man was destined for total liberation, but was at present captured within a wicked scheme of material things, chief of which

was the human body. Deliverance of the spirit could only be realized by the comprehension of knowledge or "gnosis." Of this Gonzalez says,

Knowledge is, then, an understanding of the human situation, of what we once were and what we should become; and through it we can be freed of the bonds that tie us to the material world.⁵⁸

The chief end for the Gnostic, therefore, was to partake of the gnosis through spiritual illumination which would free his spirit from its material bonds though he continue on in the body until physical death.

Gnosticism came into the Christian community by incorporating into itself the doctrine of salvation through Christ. Gnostics saw in Christ the messenger sent from the world of the spirit to impart to the chosen among men the gnosis which would make them free. The dangerous effect of Gnosticism for Christianity can best be understood at this point. If, as Gnostics held, all matter was evil and all spirit good, how then could Christ the messenger from the spiritual realm come and dwell among men in the form of the man, Jesus? The answer was simple: deny the incarnation of Christ, make a distinction between Jesus the man and Christ the divine messenger; the incarnation thus did not take place, the human Jesus being only an illusion. Guthrie states,

The dangerous character of this heresy is at once apparent, for it was an attempt to preserve Christ's divinity at the expense of His humanity, and all in the interests of the higher intellectualism.⁵⁹

F. F. Bruce gives a vivid insight into the kinds of

damage Gnostic teachings could do within the Christian community when he says of the teaching that,

. . . it was specially attractive to people of some intellectual attainment. For the ordinary rank and file of Christians it had less appeal; indeed, it was not intended for them, but rather for an elite of spiritual initiates.⁶⁰

Here, then, was a system which appealed to those who somehow were not satisfied with the simple faith passed on to them by the apostles. These individuals soon separated themselves from the Christian community and began expounding their teachings to all who felt their intellectual attraction (I Jn. 2:19). From this elite group not only wrong doctrine, but wrong modes of conduct such as libertinism were preached, creating conflict within the established Christian community. Westcott sums it up well when he says,

The world was indeed perilous; but it was rather by its seductions than by its hostility. There is no trace of any recent or impending persecution. Now the main temptations are from within.⁶¹

Such a state of affairs seemed intolerable to the apostle John, and thus form the occasion for his Epistle.

Regarding the specific Christian community to which this Epistle was sent, no particular church can be singled out due to the fact that the normal salutation and introduction which accompanied such letters are absent from the Epistle. Guthrie notes that because of this many scholars have ". . . classed this Epistle as a general tractate or diatribe in letter form."⁶² However, Guthrie argues that the phrase "little children" used so often throughout the Epistle ". . . indicates a personal

relationship between readers and writer which would be lacking in a general tractate."⁶³

Since most scholars locate the author of the Johannine literature in Ephesus, which Scott affirms as the ". . . chief city of the province of Asia and the seat of the premier church,"⁶⁴ it is commonly held that I John was written to a circle of Christian communities around the Asiatic area. Guthrie says of these communities that they were people with whom ". . . the author was personally acquainted and who were threatened with the same infiltration of false teaching."⁶⁵

John's own personal acquaintance while in Ephesus with the kind of primitive Gnostic teachings which were harassing the churches in Asia may be exposed if Eusebius' story concerning John's run-in with Cerinthus is true. Eusebius, in his Ecclesiastical History,⁶⁶ tells of a day when John came to a local public bath only to flee for fear God would destroy it once he learned that Cerinthus was also inside. Cerinthus was an early Gnostic teacher who lived and taught in Ephesus. Brooke asserts that either he or someone holding similar views represents the false teaching with which the Epistle deals.⁶⁷ Thus tradition attributes to Ephesus both the apostle who could have written the Epistle and the personal knowledge of the heresy which he would have needed to produce such a work.

Purpose

Having identified primitive Gnosticism as the

immediate occasion for the writing of the Epistle, the next step, that of ascertaining the purpose or aim of the Epistle, should be an easy one. Seemingly, all scholars agree that the Epistle is directed toward combatting some form of Gnosticism. However, before the Epistle is understood as a wholesale polemic against Gnosticism, attention should be given to the scholarly opinion regarding the manner in which the Epistle achieves its aim.

B. F. Westcott states that "The object of the Epistle corresponds with its character."⁶⁸ The object is not strictly polemic, says Westcott, because the character of the Epistle is more in line with that of the Fourth Gospel, which, in chapter 20:31 says, ". . . but these things have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you might have life in His name" (NASV). To this verse Westcott relates I John 1:3 and 5:13, which express the writer's hope that the readers may have fellowship with him in Christ (1:3), and that through their belief in Christ, recognize that they have eternal life (5:13). Westcott thus stresses the positive side of the content of the letter, playing down somewhat its polemic nature. Of this Westcott says,

His object is polemical only so far as the clear unfolding of the essence of right teaching necessarily shows all error in its real character. In other words, St. John writes to call out a welcome for what he knows to be the Gospel and not to overthrow this or that false opinion.⁶⁹

A. E. Brooke agrees with Westcott, stressing that

the Epistle is not even primarily a polemical work. Brooke says, "The edification of his 'children' in the true faith and life of Christians is the writer's chief purpose."⁷⁰

In Brooke's study, the weight of the responsibility for the need of the Epistle's writing is not put upon the false teachers primarily, but laid squarely on the shoulders of "children" whom Brooke understands as second generation Christians who had lost the glow of early Christianity and were beginning to find the world more and more attractive. Brooke says,

They were only too ready to welcome elements of religious and philosophical speculation foreign to the Faith and really destructive to it. They could not tolerate a sharp distinction between Christian and unchristian in belief and practice. And therefore they were easily deceived by spacious novelties.⁷¹

Therefore, scholars understand the Epistle as aiming itself at a positive reaffirmation of Christian truth. By such an approach the believing community is both edified and strengthened against attacks from within and without. As C. H. Dodd says of the writer of the Epistle,

He might have spent his time in discussing and refuting the errors of the heretical propaganda. If he had done so, the epistle would now have had little more than antiquarian interest. But the 'Word of life', that is the Gospel and the Commandment of Christ as delivered by the apostles, commands the prime interest of Christians everywhere and at all times.⁷²

The Epistle sought to cause Christians to truly recognize the benefits and blessings that were theirs in fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. Its message was needed then and it is still relevant for today.

THE PULPIT

After having endeavored to gain an adequate understanding of those issues and data involved in the over-all historical background to the First Epistle of John, the pastor must next seek to relate that which he has learned to the sermon series he intends to present to his congregation. In regard to this step, some observations are here made.

Indepth historical study forms the solid foundation upon which serious exegetical work may be done. It simply is not possible to arrive at a correct interpretation of any text apart from the light of its own historical contextual situation. Obviously, an adequate hermeneutic demands that the exegesis done be relevant to the modern congregation and its needs, but such relevance cannot be found unless it rests upon the original historic relevance of the text. The expositional preacher must be careful that his preaching of timeless truths is rooted in historic reality. Exegesis devoid of historical consciousness produces only shallow devotional dribble. Exegesis practiced in the light of contextual background insures the conveyance of Biblical truth which cannot become detached from its God-intended meaning for the Church at any stage throughout its history. A pastor owes it to his people to do all he can to adequately understand the contextual situation of the text to be preached, for God's truth and its application is the grand issue at stake.

Regarding the actual move from study to pulpit, the pastor can best relate to his people the dynamic influence of his work if he will understand it to be beneficial to them in two specific ways. First, the fruits of the historical study can serve as introductory material to a carefully planned expositional series. Here the pastor relates to his people those items which best set the context for the series to follow. Second, the introduction helps the person in the pew make application of the text to the realities of life. To know that the book or passage was written to meet a genuine historic need experienced by believers will provide the layperson with a basis for incorporating the message and its application into his own life situation.

Essential to a meaningful introduction is the pastor's ability to select and condense the data from his study into a brief, relevant presentation. In light of the preceeding study presented on I John, the following will serve to illustrate this process of selection and condensation of data for introductory use by the pastor.

A Suggested Historical Introduction for I John

The study revealed that the data concerning authorship is of a secondary nature to the impact of the Epistle's message.⁷³ The pastor would do well to capitalize on this aspect of the study. Today when the battle for the Bible continues to rage, the congregation needs

to hear a positive presentation from the pulpit: one which does not seek to lay bare all the lower and higher critical problems of the Epistle, but instead, endeavors to set the vital importance of listening to the Epistle's message before the people. Soren Kierkegaard gives a beautiful illustration of this point in his book, Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing. Kierkegaard, in discussing the listener's role in receiving a devotional address⁷⁴ makes the point that when people go to a theatre to see a play, they, the audience, evaluate the actors as to how well they portray their characters and act their parts. However, in a devotional presentation, it is not the speaker, but the listener who is in view. Kierkegaard says,

If the speaker has the responsibility for what he whispers, then the listener has an equally great responsibility not to fall short in his task . . . the listener stands openly before God. The listener . . . is the actor, who in all truth acts before God.⁷⁵

Thus, the pastor as God's spokesman is responsible for setting out before the people those things which will enhance the clarity and power of the message of truth to be conveyed. As with authorship, so with all other details of the historical study: the emphasis should be on the message of the Epistle, first and foremost. This should be the pastor's guide. For as Kierkegaard says, "God's presence is the decisive thing that changes all. As soon as God is present, each man in the presence of God has the task of paying attention to himself."⁷⁶

In actually dealing with the matter of authorship

in the introduction, the pastor might first refer to the historic tradition of the church regarding Johannine authorship, citing evidence such as the Epistle of Polycarp and such supporters as Irenaeus and Origen. Somewhat greater attention might be given to epistolary evidence, making note of such things as the claims for the author as an eye-witness and the phrases of personal endearment. Special attention ought to be given to the theological unity of the Epistle with the Gospel. Here, perhaps the use of an overhead projector would best meet the need. Transparencies could be made for a list of common theological concepts between the two writings, as well as a look at all the parallels to be found in the prologues for each. The authorship portion of the introduction might conclude by stating that Johannine authorship best accounts for the phenomena of both the Gospel and the Epistle. However, again, the greatest amount of stress should be placed upon the fact that the Epistle can stand on its own as an authoritative revelation of God's truth for us whether or not the apostle John wrote it.

In presenting the introduction, the bulk of the material should be devoted to giving the congregation a clear comprehension of the background, and especially, the occasion for the Epistle. Here, a brief analysis of primitive Gnosticism should be done, highlighting its implications for Christianity. Modern application might be made by concluding with the comment that the situation represented

by the Epistle shows us what happens when Christians try to improve the Gospel for the sake of pure intellectualism.⁷⁷ Since the discussion of Gnosticism affords an open door for dating the Epistle, that information might easily be inserted here or at the conclusion of the authorship portion.

The entire introduction should conclude by focusing on the purpose of the Epistle. The pastor at this point would do well to impress upon his people the positive way in which the author deals with a problematic situation. The Epistle is a lesson to all Christians on the need to dwell on the good and the true as a means of letting the light shine which can dispell the threatening darkness.

In the interest of time, perhaps the best way to present such introductory material to a congregation within a worship setting would be to make use of a neat one-page sheet or bulletin insert from which the pastor could highlight various specifics and supplement via the overhead projector presentations. On the back of the insert space might be given for sermon note taking and the pastor could encourage his people to take it home to keep with other helps on the Epistle which might follow. If expositional preaching is worth doing at all, it is worth doing well and such historical materials ought to be conveyed to the people in a meaningful and practical manner.

Once the expositional series has begun, the pastor should take care not to allow himself to become so concerned

with historical details that the message of the Epistle is clouded. The historical materials should serve as a resource to which the pastor can turn selectively in order to clarify for his people grammatical expressions and theological concepts. In this way the background study is of benefit to the series in an ongoing way.

In conclusion, it has been shown that the fundamental rationale for a pastor engaging in historical research prior to the exegetical and homiletical tasks of sermonic preparation rests at the level of interpretation. To proclaim the profound depths of the meaning of God's truth to the people is the pastor's chief end. Such work is thereby unavoidably wedded to sound hermeneutical principles. If these principles fail to employ the benefits of adequate historical research, then the pastor has not been totally true to his calling. How a pastor can do such work and give himself to all the other demands of the shepherd's life is the subject of the final section in this chapter.

THE TOOLS

Today's pastor faces a host of administrative and pastoral duties each of which makes great demands upon his time. This final section of chapter one attempts to deal in a practical way with the dilemma of the pastor who longs to do quality preparation study for his pulpit ministry and yet finds himself continually confronted by an ever-burgeoning schedule. The answer to the dilemma is simple and twofold in nature: first, make study time a high

priority, and second, use the right tools.

Quality study takes time. For some, it means taking more time than for others, but no matter how one looks at it, a strong pulpit ministry is not built upon a book of suggested sermon outlines and a late night session every Saturday. Pastors should place great importance upon their sermon preparation times, especially if they expect to keep giving for years to come. Therefore, the observations and suggestions which are presented in this section should not be taken as a quick way out for the busy pastor. Instead, they should serve to increase the quality of the study time being set aside, and are offered in the hope that larger and larger quantities of that time will find their way into the pastor's schedule. In any case, the right tools, used properly, can spell the difference between adequate and inadequate pulpit preparation.

A Suggested Model for Historical Studies

In doing the work for the study of the historical background for the First Epistle of John, two types of scholarly works formed the primary reference tools for the study. These were a New Testament introduction and commentaries for the Epistle.

Donald Guthrie's New Testament Introduction is an outstanding tool and should be in every pastor's library. In the case of the Johannine Epistles, Guthrie gives an excellent treatment of all the critical issues involved.

Guthrie was the first work turned to for the study and it was his procedural order of dealing with the various aspects of authorship, date, purpose, etc., which became the guide for the study. Guthrie is valuable also due to the fact that his treatment of each topic includes consideration of a wide range of varying viewpoints or alternate theories. For the busy pastor, a work such as this gives access to a wealth of scholarship in a concise and readable manner.

In addition to Guthrie, commentaries were also consulted. This was done for two reasons. First, a good commentary should contain a section of introductory material for the book being treated. Depending upon the commentary, these introductions are often smaller in length than a treatment such as Guthrie's, yet no less valuable in their contribution to a study. Second, since the use of good commentaries should form a part of the later stages of exegetical work done, reading introductory chapters offers one a chance to gain insight into the direction and quality of a commentator's work. For selecting commentaries for the study, a bibliographic guide is most helpful. In regard to this study, David M. Scholer's A Basic Bibliographic Guide For New Testament Exegesis was used. Other guides are no doubt larger, but Scholer offers a concise survey of the more important and usually available works in all fields of New Testament study. Through Scholer, five commentaries were selected and considered.⁷⁹ Of these five, the ones by

A. E. Brooke, C. H. Dodd, and B. F. Westcott proved to be the most illuminating regarding introductory materials. The commentary by F. F. Bruce is a small-scale work aimed at the general lay reader rather than the professional or serious Biblical student. The commentary by Robert Law presents a good study, but can easily be forsaken in light of the work done by Brooke, Westcott and Dodd. By the use of these commentaries and Guthrie's work, a nice balance was struck between classic and modern scholarship so that the study could benefit from a recognized authority while remaining free from the limitations of historical studies done at the turn of the century.

Due to the fact that the Epistle is understood by scholars as being a response to a heresy which later developed into what is now known as Gnosticism, part of the historical study included some attention to the heresy itself. Guthrie and the commentators each gave space to a discussion of the heresy in relation to the Epistle. In order to throw yet a little more light on the subject, A History of Christian Thought, Vol. I, by Justo L. Gonzalez was also consulted. Such a work is helpful in that through it the historical implications of a specific situation in church history can be comprehended. In regard to this, a work such as The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church⁸⁰ can also be used with profit, especially for the pastor who wants to bring greater depth into his study, but cannot afford a lengthy treatment.

In conclusion, if the use of all of these works sounds far too time consuming to the busy pastor, let it be stated that some would not find it so, and certainly, would regard it as worthwhile. However, selective use of a few of the tools presented here will still enrich any pastor's study. Therefore, let the reader choose as he is able. The point is to choose well, if not extensively, for the reasons for quality sermon preparation should be evident to the discerning preacher.

Chapter 2

THE EXEGETICAL WORK

Bernard Ramm has said,

This is the primary and basic need of hermeneutics: to ascertain what God has said in Sacred Scripture; to determine the meaning of the Word of God. There is no profit to us if God has spoken and we do not know what He has said. Therefore it is our responsibility to determine the meaning of what God has given to us in Sacred Scripture.¹

Having gained a good understanding of the historical circumstances surrounding the First Epistle of John, the next step is to plumb the depths of the Epistle itself. As Ramm has shown, the profit is in the meaning. Therefore, a pastor carries the heavy responsibility of interpreting correctly the truths which God would have His people know. Because of this the pastor should be motivated to do the most careful exegetical work of which he is capable, for upon his exegesis of the Sacred text rests the nurture and edification of his congregation. Chapter two seeks to present the fruit of the exegetical work done on I John for this project. The format will be that used by many commentaries. The translation of the text at the head of each section represents my own rendering of the Greek text. The model here presented makes use of both English and Greek for the inductive study. Commentaries are referred to in support of the interpretation, these reflecting a later

stage in the study, which came only after careful personal inductive study. It is hoped that this phase of the project model will stimulate the busy pastor to continue to improve his own exegetical skills, ever mindful of his sacred trust to equip the saints ". . . for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ." (Eph.. 4:12)..

THE STUDY

Suggested outline for I John:

- I.. Two essentials for Christian experience 1:1-10.
 - 1.. An encounter with the Word of Life 1:1-4.
 - 2.. Receiving the message from the Word of Life 1:5-10.
- II.. The obedient children 2:1-29.
 - 1. The principle of obedience 2:1-6.
 - 2. Obedient through love 2:7-11.
 - 3. Obedient to God, not the world 2:12-17.
 - 4. Obedient to truth, not error 2:18-29.
- III.. The children of God 3:1-24.
 - 1. The children of God and the children of the devil 3:1-10.
 - 2. The children who love one another 3:11-18.
 - 3. The children assured before God 3:19-24.
- IV. The children and truth 4:1-21.
 - 1. The spirit of God and the spirit of error 4:1-6.
 - 2. The dynamic of love 4:7-21.

- V. The children born of God 5:1-21.
1. The mark of birth 5:1-5.
 2. The witness to birth 5:6-12.
 3. The benefits of birth 5:13-17.
 4. The knowledge gained from birth 5:18-21.

I. Two Essentials for
Christian Experience
1:1-10

1. An encounter with the Word of Life 1:1-4.
 - 1 What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands have touched, concerning the Word of life;
 - 2 And the Life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness and announce to you the Life eternal which was with the Father and He was manifested to us.
 - 3 What we have seen and heard we announce to you also, in order that you may have fellowship with us. And indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.
 - 4 And these things we write to you in order that our joy may be fulfilled.

The first four verses of the Epistle serve to ground everything which follows in the rich soil of a dynamic encounter with the Word of Life. The verbs to hear and see (perfects) and to touch (aorist) point to the fact that John and the other apostles and disciples have experienced a relationship with ". . . what was from the beginning . . ." (v. 1), which was audible, visible and sensory in nature and that this experience forms the basis for the witness (v. 2) which, when proclaimed, leads to fellowship with ". . . the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ . . ."

The purpose, then, of I John 1:1-3 is summed up in verse 4 in which John makes it clear that he and his fellow disciples will find their joy completed when the readers of the Epistle receive the witness which stems from their encounter and thereby come into the kind of fellowship they enjoy with God and His Son.

1 The Epistle opens without the customary salutation and thanksgiving so commonly used in other New Testament Epistles.² Instead, the language parallels that of the prologue to the Gospel of John. As has already been noted in the historical section of this study, the parallels between the prologues of both the Epistle and the Gospel are striking.³ Here it is important to recognize that the stress in verse one is true to the emphasis of the Gospel as well. In John 1:1-15 the pre-existent Word of Life is manifested to and experienced by the disciples and this encounter is clearly witnessed to as the basis for becoming children of God. Thus, the Epistle, like the Gospel, begins with an affirmation that God has revealed Himself in the Person of the Word of Life and that it is at this point where revelation and man meet that the truth concerning God and His will for man can be found. Of this Westcott says, the Epistle ". . . treats of the revelation of life . . . which culminated in the Incarnation, and leads up to a view of the position and privileges and duties of the Christian."⁴

2 The second verse seems to form a parentheses between verses 1 and 3, serving to identify the Word of Life as the bearer of the eternal life ". . . which was with the Father." Christ, in this light, is understood as the one in whom the eternal quality of life resides and therefore, the medium through which it can be conveyed to those who receive the witness. Fellowship with the Word of Life leads one to experience eternal life.

3 Following verse 2, the triumphant strain of verse 1 is once more taken up, this time adding the key note of proclamation. One cannot help but picture the time several years earlier when Peter and John, having been brought before the Council for preaching Christ and charged by them to cease, replied, ". . . for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard"(Acts 4:20). Just as then, so now John writes, compelled to witness because of the experience he has had with the Living Word. A witness to such a tangible experience of seeing, hearing and touching vividly contrasts the Docetic line of thought evidenced in the primitive Gnostic heresy with which the Epistle deals. The proclamation is that the true knowledge of God which leads to actual fellowship can be experienced due to the fact that God so revealed Himself to the disciples that they could communicate with Him in the context of their own physical reality. Brooke states that knowledge of God cannot be adequate except by revelation through

. . . a real human life, by one who is an only-begotten Son of God. Only a Son can reveal the Father.

Only an only-begotten, . . . sums up in Himself all the qualities of His Father, which are completely reproduced in one heir . . .⁵

Thus, back of the proclamation is the real Life, and what He has revealed concerning the Father motivates John and his disciples to make the witness known. For through the witness fellowship with God is really possible.

4 The joy of fellowship sums up John's reason for bearing witness to the Word of Life. Wescott says, "The fulfilment of Christian joy depends upon the realisation of fellowship."⁶ Facing a heresy which had already begun to dismantle the unity of the community of faith, John writes, not a detailed polemic against the false teachings, but instead, a positive affirmation of the reality of God in Christ, and issues a call for the restoration of true fellowship. This alone is understood by John as the remedy for a divided church.

2. Receiving the message from the Word of Life 1:5-10

- 5 And this is the message which we have heard from Him and we announce to you, that God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all.
- 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and we walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth.
- 7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.
- 8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.
- 9 If we confess our sins, faithful and righteous is He to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

- 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

Having opened the Epistle by affirming that right knowledge about God is rooted in the encounter between man and God's revelation in the Word of Life, John now turns his attention to the message which the Living Word has given to those with whom He had fellowship. It is this message which sets the tone for all John has to say concerning the nature of the fellowship God wants man to experience with Himself.

5 Essential to having a relationship with someone is the need of knowing them: to understand their character and personality. This is even more true in regard to the divine and human relationship, for here, if proper fellowship is to be realized and maintained, understanding of the Person of God and its implications for life must be obtained. Therefore, John announces that the crux of the divine message conveyed through the dynamic encounter with the Word of Life is that "God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." While to phos commonly refers both in and outside Scripture to illumination, here it has to do with God's essential character. This is borne out by the parallel contrasts of light and darkness, and truth and lie which John definitely links to moral and ethical behavior both in verses 6-10 and in the context of the Epistle as a whole. F. F. Bruce asserts, "God . . . is the source and essence of holiness and righteousness, goodness and

truth; and in Him there is nothing that is unholy or unrighteous, evil or false."⁷

6-7 John applies the message that "God is light" to the sphere of personal conduct. Certainly the false teachers were claiming to have fellowship with God and it was because of this that some Christians were being led astray. However, John calls them into question regarding their behavior. Jesus once said, "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). John knew that no one could truly claim fellowship with God unless it made a difference in the way they lived. To claim fellowship and then to continue to live a life contrary to the holy nature of God was, to John, simply incomprehensible. Brooke points out that the very concept of truth in Johannine thought in relation to man ". . . has to do with the whole nature, moral and spiritual as well as intellectual" ⁸ Thus, to John, the Gnostics might claim fellowship with God on intellectual grounds, but in truth, such a claim is a sham, for moral darkness has no fellowship with light. In contrast, John asserts that it is walking in the light ". . . as He Himself is in the light" which marks true fellowship. Only when a life is characterized by an active willingness to live in and by the light cast from the revelation of God in Christ can it be said that true fellowship with God exists. Such a life lives under the cleansing fountain of the redemptive work of Christ,

having all sins made known by the light cleansed. This is the Christian's calling. For, as Paul understood it, the ministry of Christ was "That He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds" (Titus 2:14).

8-10 The final three verses of chapter 1 each begin with the conjunction "if." Verses 8 and 10 may very well refer to common maxims popular among the Gnostic Christians, i.e., "We have no sin . . ." (v. 8), and "We have not sinned . . ." (v. 10). In contrast to these, John asserts that to say one has no sin is self-deceiving (v. 8), for the truth is that man has sinned and does need the blood of Jesus Christ to make him clean. Proverbs 20:9 asks, "Who can say, I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin?" The answer is, no one, for apart from the blood of Christ all are guilty still. This is especially true of verse 10, for John concludes the chapter by making it clear that to disavow actual sin not only manifest self-delusion, but proclaims God a liar, for His word testifies that actual sin is a reality for all mankind (Rom. 3:10-19). Thus, John condemns the Gnostic approach to God which bypasses ethical and moral behavior on the grounds that such an emphasis cannot be reconciled with the revealed Person of God. True fellowship only comes by way of confession (v. 9), for only then does man recognize his own true nature and his critical need for help from on high. C. H. Dodd says that we believe in sins forgiven through confession

not as an excuse for wrong behavior,

. . . but because no other course would be consistent with the perfectly good will by which the whole universe is created and sustained . . . It is because the principle of forgiveness is built into the structure of a moral order created and determined by the character of a just and faithful God.⁹

Word Studies

Logos tes zoes. The logos concept in the Greek world began in the realm of communication. Logos clarified and brought understanding, being thought of as a rational power, as Kittile says, ". . . in virtue of which man can see himself and his place in the cosmos . . ."¹⁰ Later, the logos concept took on metaphysical proportions, thus entering the philosophical and theological spheres. Logos became associated with a kind of universal law of creation by which man could ascertain reality, not just theoretically, but in regard to life and behavior.

Through the Christian revelation the logos concept is transformed by the person and work of Christ. No longer a metaphysical expression of a cosmic law, now the logos stands for the One through whom God has revealed Himself. The logos has now become flesh and taken His dwelling place among men (John 1:14). This can also be seen in I John 1:1-3 regarding the logos tes zoes, for the term clearly refers to the life and ministry of Jesus with His disciples. Thus, as logos tes zoes, Jesus not only brings to man the logos of revelation from God, but is in Himself, through His life and ministry, the logos.¹¹

John, in writing the Epistle, can thus introduce the logos tes zoes in the prologue, and thereafter, for the remainder of the Epistle, speak in terms of the historic Jesus, for to him, the two are really one. This useage of the logos concept in the context of John's Epistle forms a beautiful polemic against the Gnostic teachings which are in view. What John is witnessing to is the very source of man's knowledge about God. Since gaining the gnosis which unites man to that which is spiritual is the prime concern of the Gnostic, John opens the Epistle by proclaiming the ultimate in divine-human interchange: namely, his audible, visual, and sensory encounter with the logos tes zoes Himself. It is upon the ground of this encounter that John can point out the Gnostic error and assure the believing community that true fellowship with God comes by Jesus Christ alone (1:3, 7)..

Koinonia. The basic meaning of koinon is to become a shareholder with someone in something.¹² Hauck states that in Pauline theology, koinonia arises only through faith in Christ, ". . . which implies the identification of our life with His."¹³ This concept would certainly hold true for I John. In 1:3, proclamation of the encounter with the Word of Life and the readers' reception of that witness is understood as essential to gaining koinonia with the Father. The seeds of conformity to the image of Christ seem already evident in the prologue. However, there can be no doubt that identification with the life of

Christ by belief and conduct is understood as the requirement of true koinonia for the rest of the Epistle, for John makes himself clear when he says, ". . . the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked" (2:6). Walking in the light, therefore, links koinonia not with intellectual illumination as the Gnostics would have it, but rather, to a moral and ethical response by the believer which conforms to the person and character of the God who is Himself light (1:5-7). Such a response is best seen in terms of love and right moral behavior toward other members of the body of Christ (3:14-18; 4:7-8). Thus, Hauck states that in the Epistle, Koinonia describes ". . . the living bond in which the Christian stands."¹⁴

Phos and Skotia. In the Gospel of John, phos is understood both in terms of normal illumination such as from the light of a lamp (5:35) and as the brightness of God's revelation from which the evil flee, their deeds being exposed (3:20), and to which the righteous come, for it confirms their deeds as ". . . having been wrought in God . . ." (3:21). In the prologue to the Gospel, Christ is understood as the life which is ". . . the light of men . . ." (1:4), the light which ". . . shines in the darkness . . ." (1:5), and the ". . . true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man . . ." (1:9). Thus, in the Gospel, Christ is the light of God's revelation which identifies the person and will of God and

thereby exposes the nature and depth of sin in the world.

In the Epistle the central affirmation is that God is phos. Here the concept of illumination held by the Gnostics is transposed by John into that which issues from God's essential being and demands of man an appropriate moral response. Walking in the phos means living in the truth (1:6), and obeying God's command to love one another (2:7-11). Such a concept of phos forms the contrast to skotia which the Epistle portrays as the sphere of the world's influence. As Conzelmann states, ". . . darkness is a sphere-power, but not, as in Gnosticism, a substance too; it is the world's proper nature in which it flourishes."¹⁵ Further, Conzelmann says, ". . . the world is darkness as it asserts itself as such against the light. Its nature is due to guilt, not fate."¹⁶ Therefore, the Epistle portrays a dynamic contrast between phos and skotia, one which serves to clearly identify for the reader the sphere of influence represented by a particular belief or behavior.

II. The Obedient Children 2:1-29

1. The Principle of obedience 2:1-6

- 1 My little children, these things I write to you in order that you sin not, and if anyone sins we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.
- 2 And He is the propitiation for our sins, not only ours, but for all of the world.
- 3 And by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.

- 4 The one saying that I know Him, and keeps not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.
- 5 But whoever keeps His word, truly in this man the love of God has been perfected. By this we know we are in Him.
- 6 The one saying I am abiding in Him, ought to walk as He also walked.

Chapter two expands on the germ theme of obedience to Christ as essential to fellowship with God which is presented in 1:5-10, especially verses 6-7. The expansion in chapter two gives attention to the role of Christian obedience in relation to Christ and His commandments (2:1-6), loving the brethren (2:7-11), loving the Father rather than the world (2:12-17), and holding to truth instead of error (2:18-29). Always the underlying emphasis is upon true fellowship among believers and their Lord. In presenting his affirmations of Christian truth, John lays bare the errors to be found in the Gnostic teachings and exposes their destructive impact upon the Christian community.

1a For the first time the apostle John refers to his readers as "My little children . . ." The term of endearment, while calling to mind the quaint picture of an elderly apostle writing to his little flock, also vividly portrays John's concern for the solidarity of the Christian community to which he writes. The endearment speaks both of John's authority and of their participation in the fellowship of Jesus Christ. On this basis John declares his purpose for writing: "These things I write to you in order that you sin not . . ." Thus the stress on walking

in the light presented in 1:6-7 and its corresponding relationship to the question of sin in 1:8-10 is reinforced by the further casting of the principle of obedience in its light. Essential to a healthy Christian community is the commitment on the part of its members not to commit sin. Brooke refers to the fact that in the phrase ina me amartete the aorist denotes ". . . definite acts of sin rather than the habitual state."¹⁷ Westcott says of this, "Nothing is said in one direction or the other of the possibility of a Christian life actually sinless."¹⁸ While both of these commentators are correct regarding the Greek text, their statements must not overshadow the principle John seeks to communicate. F. F. Bruce notes that in treating the false teachings regarding sin in 1:8-10,

John does not wish to give his readers the idea that sin may be regarded as a normal phenomenon in the christian life . . . Sin, indeed, is so thoroughly uncharacteristic of the christian life that a life which is marked by sin cannot be called christian. . .¹⁹

Thus the foundation upon which the principle of Christian obedience is built is none other than a vital commitment by the believer not to live so as to commit sin.

1b-2 However, John never paints the portrait of a completely sinless Christian perfection (here is where Brooke and Westcott make valuable contributions by their comments). 1:8-10 makes it clear that for a Christian to deny the reality of sin is none other than self-deception. John's assertion that ". . . if anyone sins we have an advocate . . ." further illuminates the meaning of 1:9

and the confession of sins by the believer, pointing again to the fact that sins may take place, but if they do, there is a way to forgiveness and cleansing. The advocate of which John writes is "Jesus Christ the righteous." It is He who pleads on behalf of the believer and that on the strength of His righteousness alone. Verse 2 connects John's theology with that of the Old Testament and its understanding of the concept of propitiation. Brooke says, God is holy and ". . . no man can approach, till he has put away the sin which cannot enter the presence of God."²⁰ John understands that sin is the barrier to fellowship with God and sees in Jesus the sacrificial offering which alone pleases God and removes the barrier, not only for the believing community, but for the sins of the whole world as well. Thus, to John, the rule is "sin not," but should sin, the exception to the rule, enter the Christian's life, then all the more reason for maintaining fellowship with Christ through confession of sin and by faith in His propitiatory work. As Westcott says, "It follows that the efficacy of His work for the individual depends upon fellowship with Him."²¹

3 John, faced with a group of false prophets supposedly teaching the way to God, proclaims to the Christian community that a real divine-human relationship can only be realized in direct proportion to their willingness to keep His commandments. Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15). To John,

the mark of the true gnosis of God is obedience; to know Him is to obey Him; nothing else will suffice.

4-6 Using the same teaching model as in 1:5-10 John follows his assertion in 2:3 with a practical illustration. Verses 4 and 5 form a contrast which pits disobedience and the resulting false fellowship it incurs (v. 4) against obedience and the perfecting of God's love in the believer (v. 5). Thus, the motifs of light verses darkness (1:5-7) and truth verses lie (1:8-10) find their expression once more in terms of obedience verses disobedience.

Regarding the phrase ". . . truly in this man the love of God has been perfected" (v. 5b), one recalls Jesus's words when He said, "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love" (John 15:10). Here the point is that keeping the commandments allows the individual to remain in God's love. Thus the stress is on the keeping of the commandments with the abiding in God's love understood as the necessary result. In I John 2:5 the concept remains the same. The believer keeps "His word" and as a result, experiences the perfection of God's love within him. Growth and maturation both of the believer's knowledge and love toward God result not from the Gnostic concept of divine illumination, but through practical obedience to Christ's commands. Therefore, John sets before his readers the model of the One whom they say they know, urging them to realize that to claim fellowship with Him

calls for them ". . . to walk as He also walked" (V. 6b).

Fellowship is thus founded upon the principle of obedience.

2. Obedient through love 2:7-11

- 7 Beloved, I do not write a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning, the old commandment is the word which you have heard.
- 8 Again I write to you a new commandment, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.
- 9 The one saying that he is in the light and hates his brother is in the darkness until now.
- 10 The one loving his brother remains in the light and no offense is in him.
- 11 But the one hating his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

7-8 In furthering the discussion regarding a Christian's obedience to the commandments of Christ, John further defines "commandment" under a twofold heading. In verse 7 John refers to ". . . the old commandment which you have had from the beginning." John here appears to refer to the Old Testament commandments to love God (Deut. 6:15) and one's neighbor (Lev. 19:18). Since these commandments predate the birth of the Christian community they form in a very real sense the old commandment, ". . . the word which you have heard." In contrast, John, in verse 8, refers to the new commandment, ". . . which is true in Him and in you." Here Jesus Christ and the Christian community are definitely in view. In John's gospel Jesus says to His disciples, "A new commandment I give you, that

you love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35). Christianity affirms that in the Person of Christ a new order has arrived, ". . . the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining" (I John 2:8b). The old commandment finds a new dynamic meaning in the life ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ. He is the personification of all that God ever intended to convey through the Mosaic Law. Thus, in one sense, John is referring to the old and familiar commandment, one which men should always obey, and yet, it is a new commandment as well, finding new strength and authority in the One who said, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill" (Matt. 5:17). In light of this the commandment is all the more binding upon the members of the community which claim to have fellowship with Christ.

9-11 True to form John backs up his statement in verses 7-8 with an illustrative application. Here love and light are set in contrast to hate and darkness. Verses 9-11 seem to echo Jesus' words, "If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. . . But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him" (John 11:9b-10). In the Epistle John equates obedience expressed in love for the brethren with the light which keeps one from stumbling (2:10), while disobedience expressed in hatred for a brother

plunges one into the black darkness which makes for stumbling (2:9, 11). Thus John shows us that the evidence as to whether or not an individual has appropriated the propitiatory benefits of the redemptive work of Christ is clearly focused in the issue of obedience to Christ's commandment to love our brother. Such obedience keeps the individual in the light which fosters true fellowship with Christ and the community of believers. Love unifies the community of believers, whereas the jealousy and hatred generated by an elite group, separated from the body, manifests the darkness which makes true fellowship impossible.

3. Obedient to God not the world 2:12-17

- 12 I write to you, children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of His name.
- 13 I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.
- 14 I wrote to you, children, because you have known the Father. I wrote to you, fathers, because you have known Him from the beginning. I wrote to you, young men, because you are strong and the word of God remains in you and you have overcome the evil one.
- 15 Do not love the world nor the things in the world, if anyone loves the world the love of the Father is not in him.
- 16 Because all things in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, are not of the Father but of the world.
- 17 And the world is passing away and its lust. But the one doing the will of God remains forever.

12-14 John now specifically addresses three groups

within his reading audience. Commentators have wrestled with these groupings as to whether John is referring to distinctions in age or spiritual maturity. Since the Epistle has been dated late first century or very early second,²² it is most certainly addressing a Christian community composed of members who span three generations. Therefore, rather than thinking in terms of children, teenagers and adults, it seems more probable that John is writing to members of three generations of Christianity. However, such an assertion should be qualified by the consideration of the fact that nothing disproves John's also addressing people at various stages of Christian maturity, a view to which F. F. Bruce subscribes.²³

Attention turns from the more overtly polemic discourse (2:1-11) to a section of rejoicing over the spiritual victories won by the members of the community. Four key elements are mentioned by John: 1) Forgiveness of sins (v. 12), 2) Knowing Him (v. 13a), 3) Overcoming the evil one (v. 13b), and, 4) Abiding in God's word (v. 14).

The passage clearly serves an important function in the overall letter and especially in the context of John's admonition not to love the world (2:15) which immediately follows. Beset by doubts raised by the false teachers the Christian community is unsure of itself. Of John's response Brooke says,

He knows that they are harassed by doubts as to validity of their Christian position, so he hastens to assure them of it, and to use his assurance as the ground of the appeal which he is making.²⁴

Each of the key elements John mentions in his song of victory thus serves to remind his readers of their position in Christ and its meaning in light of the current heresy. They need not turn to new teachings in order to draw closer to God, for through Christ, they already possess all that is necessary to conquer the forces of darkness and have fellowship with God. These elements form the necessary groundwork for the appeal which follows.

15 The exhortation by John not to love the world and the explanations which follow it in verses 16 and 17 appear to be somewhat of a climactic point in John's argument thus far. The central focus is ". . . the love of the Father . . ." which, to John, cannot have fellowship with love of the world and its things. Here, then, as C. H. Dodd says, is ". . . the irreconcilable opposition between the Christian, who belongs to the new dispensation, and the pagan world, which belongs to the old order, doomed to destruction."²⁵ Thus, John, who makes such vivid use of contrasts, once again sets in opposition two elements central to his entire thrust. Whereas before, the discussion centered upon light and darkness, truth and lie, and love and hate, now, all are brought to bear in the concepts of love for God and love for the world.

16 The reason why the love of the Father cannot abide with the love of the world is due to the content of worldly love. John lists three characteristics of worldly love: 1) lust of the flesh, 2) lust of the eyes, and

3) pride of life. Various attempts to relate these three characteristics of worldly love to such passages as Genesis 3 or, as in the case of Westcott, to the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness²⁶ have been made: however, the point of verse 16 is very clear as it stands. Worldly love is characterized by the sum and substance of everything God is not. Lust and pride have nothing to do with the God who is light. On the other hand these characteristics do fit in nicely with everything John has said thus far concerning the nature of spiritual darkness at work in humanity.

17 John concludes his exhortation with a contrast. The world and all that it contains is temporal in nature. It is "passing away." In contrast, God and all that His love enfolds is eternal, and so, ". . . the one doing the will of God remains forever. . . ." Therefore, John dramatically summarizes his argument by saying, in effect, that it all really boils down to one basic question which everyone must give an answer to: "Are you going to be obedient to the world and the darkness which envelops it or the God who is light? Take care," warns John, "for the world and its darkness is passing away (2:81, 17a). "Only the light of the Father's love, which is already shining, will abide forever (2:8b, 17b)."

4. Obedient to truth, not error 2:18-29.

18 Children, it is the last hour, and as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many

antichrists have arisen. Whence you know it is the last hour.

- 19 They went out from us, but they were not of us, for if they were of us, they would have remained with us, but they went out in order that it might be manifested that they are not all of us.
- 20 And you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things.
- 21 I wrote to you, not because you did not know the truth, but because you know it, and because every lie is not of the truth.
- 22 Who is the liar if not the one denying that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one denying both the Father and the Son.
- 23 Everyone denying the Son does not have the Father.
- 24 What you have heard from the beginning let it remain in you! If in you remains that which you heard from the beginning you will remain in both the Father and the Son.
- 25 And this is the promise He has promised to us, eternal life.
- 26 These things I wrote to you concerning the ones leading you astray.
- 27 And the anointing which you received from him remains in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you, but this anointing teaches you all things, even what is true and what is a lie, even as He taught you, remain in Him.
- 28 And now, little children, remain in Him, so that if He should be revealed we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him in His presence.
- 29 If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone doing righteousness has been born of Him.

The entire last section of chapter 2 stands as reinforcement for the exhortation in 2:15-17. It is in this section that the specific world situation of the last days

is outlined, thus forming an urgent call for Christians to remain obedient to the truth which God has revealed through Christ and shun the error which will prevail in the final days. Here truth and error are pictured in their most dynamic terms, i.e., Christ and antichrist.

18-19 The evidence which makes clear John's assertion that the world, ". . . is passing away. . ." (2:17a) is the appearance of the spirit of antichrist among men. However long the last hour takes to be completed, the antichrist spirit assures the Christian of its finality. F. F. Bruce states,

In the Christian era it is always five minutes to midnight. But as the course of things runs along the edge of the final consummation, that edge at times becomes a knife-edge, and at such times the sense of its being 'the last hour' is specially acute.²⁷

Such is the state of affairs as John writes his Epistle. The predecessors of the one who will come at the close of all human history to challenge Christ in the final cosmic battle are already harassing the Christian community. John's identification of these antichrists as those who ". . . went out from us. . ." links them to the Gnostic Christians who originated within the Christian community, but then departed from it in order to establish their own elite intellectual group. Such a group manifest its antichrist spirit by virtue of this self-proclaimed reason for existence. Their exclusivistic brand of intellectualized spirituality opposes the profound simplicity of God's redemptive work in Jesus Christ. As the apostle Paul has so aptly pointed

out, an improved or different gospel is really no gospel at all (Gal. 1:6-9).

20-21 The greatest weapon that John can encourage Christians to use against the spirit of antichrist is the knowledge of the truth. The very fact that John can make an appeal to the anointing from God, which the text implies is a common experience for all believers, cuts across the Gnostic concept that divine knowledge is only for a select few. The truth is available to babes (Matt. 11:25) if they will but receive it. Paul asserts that Christian wisdom is ". . . not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away" (I Cor. 2:6b). The wisdom that comes to the believer from God is the truth of His great love, not some mystic gnosis. Thus, John says that his purpose for writing was to reaffirm these things to his readers, for in the brilliant light of such truth error can be clearly seen and dealt with.

22-23 The nature of the error is now presented and through it the great tragedy of the antichrist spirit can be seen. For John, all falsehood and error are summed up in one concrete act, that of the conscious denial of Jesus as Christ. Here the total impact of the Gnostic heresy can be felt. Referring to Paul's comments regarding God's wisdom once again, it is worth noting that the apostle links the lack of it to the crucifixion of Christ. Paul says, this is ". . . the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would

not have crucified the Lord of glory . . ." (I Cor. 2:8). Applying Paul's statement to the context of the Epistle the point is clear. The Gnostics in their pursuit of divine gnosis have totally failed to apprehend the wisdom of God in Christ. Therefore, by building their system upon false knowledge they have crucified the very One who can lead them to the Father they so dearly desire to know! In tampering with the Person of the Word of Life, the Gnostic Christians have embraced the darkness which will not endure. To John, confession of Jesus as Christ the Son, sole advocate and propitiator for our sins to God, is the key which unlocks the door of fellowship between God and man. Nothing else will do.

24-25 John exhorts his readers to remain in that which they heard from the beginning. Certainly John refers to the gospel which was preached in Asia and gave birth to the Christian communities now addressed by the Epistle. Like 2:21, the exhortation sets no new truth before the readers to counteract the Gnostic error, but instead, issues a call for them to return to the source of all their victories (2:12-14). It is adherence to the good news about Christ alone, which assures continued fellowship with both the Son and the Father. Christians have no business seeking it in any other place, for only there can the promise of eternal life be found (v. 25).

26-29 John concludes this portion of his argument by restating the role of the anointing which the readers

have received and making another appeal for them to abide in Christ. Three major notes are sounded in this section:

1. The anointing which comes from fellowship with Christ serves to counteract falsehood (vv. 26-27).
2. Abiding in Christ grants confidence, especially should He appear (v. 28).
3. The practice of righteousness is characteristic of those who abide in Christ. Thus everyone ". . . born of Him. . ." should give evidence to their abiding fellowship by the conduct of their lives (v. 29).

In summary, John rightly relates the matter of discerning truth to his concept of true fellowship. Anti-christs should be plainly visible to all who have true fellowship with Christ, for against Him their falsehood is easily seen. For John, true fellowship is characterized by five important elements:

1. It leads to true knowledge of God and thus discerns error correctly (2:20-21).
2. It is rooted in confession of Jesus as the Christ, which is the essence of the gospel message (2:22-24).
3. It is linked to eternal life (2:25).
4. It grants confidence in the day of judgment (2:28).
5. It results in righteous conduct (2:29).

Such is John's concept of true koinonia and as such it forms the basis of the Epistle itself.

Word studies.

Parakleton. Parakleton is a term peculiar to the Johannine writings. Behm notes that I John 2:1 and John 16:7-11 give the impressions of a trial before God's court, thus the meaning of "advocate" is arrived at.²⁸ In the Old Testament men such as Abraham (Gen. 18:23-33), Moses (Ex. 32:11-14) and Samuel (I Sam. 7:8ff) each are pictured as representing their people before God, pleading for them and revealing God's will to them. In both Job 1:6-12 and Zechariah 1:12; 3:1-10, angelic advocates are pitted against Satan, resisting his accusations.

The Gospel of John links the parakleton sayings with Old Testament Judaism.²⁹

1. He is the authoritative teacher of believers (14:26).
2. A witness of revelation (15:26).
3. A speaker in the trial of the world before God (16:8-11).

It is this third link which plays such an important role in I John 2:1-2. There, it should be noted, that the advocate pleads on behalf of the believer on the basis of His, not the believer's righteousness and propitiatory work (2:2).

Ilasmos. In Leviticus 17:11 expiation is made with the blood God gives for the altar, for in the blood is the life which must be given. Herrmann says,

. . . anything affected by sin or uncleanness needs expiation. It cannot stand before the Holy God. The

destructive reaction of God, with its mortal threat, is provoked against that which needs expiation and is not expiated.³⁰

Thus, man's preservation rests in his expiation. Since the life is in the blood of the animal sacrifice, substitution is a dominant concept.³¹

In the New Testament the use of ilasmos refers to propitiation, the action wherein God is pleased and man's sin is expiated.³² The only New Testament passages where this useage occurs are I John 2:2 and 4:10. John follows the basic Old Testament idea and yet ". . . does not imply propitiation of God. It refers to the purpose which God Himself has fulfilled by sending the Son."³³ Thus, the meaning refers to ". . . the setting aside of sin as guilt against God. This is shown by the combination of ilasmos in 2:2 with parakletos in 2:1 and with the confession of sin in 1:8, 10."³⁴ The results are:

1. Confidence before God's judgment 2:28; 4:17.
2. It begets love for the brethren 4:7; 9-10, 11, 20f.

"For John the ilasmos is much more than a concept of christian doctrine; it is the reality by which he lives."³⁵

Kosmos. John 14:27 and 16:33 make it clear that peace can only be found in this world through Christ. John's use of kosmos understands salvation history as a conflict between Christ and the kosmos or Christ and the poneros in which Christ will have the ultimate victory.³⁶

I John 2:15 and James 4:4 are closely paralleled. In both the world is understood as oriented away from God,

hostile toward Him (James 4:4) or without His love (I John 2:15). Sasse says of I John 2:17, "This is not negation of the world or contempt for it. It is the faith which has overcome the world."³⁷ For the Epistle, kosmos is used by John to represent all that is characteristic in the lack of true fellowship with the God who is light.

III. The Children of God 3:1-24

1. The children of God and the children of the devil 3:1-10.

- 1 You see what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us in order that we may become children of God, and such we are. Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.
- 2 Beloved, now we are the children of God, and it has not yet appeared what we shall be. We know that if He should appear we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is.
- 3 And everyone who has this hope in Him, purifies himself as He is pure.
- 4 Everyone doing sin does lawlessness and sin is lawlessness.
- 5 And you know that He was manifested in order that He might bear sins and in Him is no sin.
- 6 Everyone who abides in Him, does not sin. Everyone who sins has not seen Him nor knows Him.
- 7 Little children, let no man lead you astray. The one doing righteousness is righteous, as He is righteous.
- 8 The one doing sin is of the devil, because the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this reason the Son of God was manifested in order to destroy the works of the devil.
- 9 Everyone having been born of God does not sin, because His seed remains in him and he cannot

sin, because he has been born of God.

- 10 By this the children of God and the children of the devil are revealed; everyone who does not do righteousness and does not love his brother is not of God.

Chapter 3 continues the discussion relative to the Christian's relationship to the world pictured especially in 2:15-17. Three specific points concerned with this relationship are considered by John. In 3:1-10 the discussion centers on the Christian as recipient of the Father's love which distinguishes him from those under the powers of darkness. In 3:11-18 the Father's love is applied to the practical outworkings of life in terms of brotherly love. Finally, in 3:19-24, John speaks of the assurance the believer gains when he receives and practices the Father's love. In all, John attempts to show his readers that it is God's love which sets them apart from the world. Indeed, it is the love of the Father which, on the one hand, serves to increase the world's hostility toward God's children, while on the other hand, it forms the basis for their assurance before God.

- 1 In 2:15 John has said, "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." At that point the emphasis was upon those characteristics of worldly love which evidence a total lack of the Father's love. Now in chapter 3 John turns his attention to a positive presentation of the Father's love, especially as it relates to the Christian in the world. Verse 1 explains that the Father's love is evidenced in great degree because, due to

it, Christians are understood by God as His children. In the Gospel John has said, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever would believe in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Both the Gospel and the Epistle understand God's love to be a free gift initiated by God to man (I John 4:9-10) which, when received by faith in Christ, grants the believer the right to be called a child of God (John 1:12). It is this love bestowed by God and received by man which sets the Christian apart from the world. John says, "Therefore the world does not know us because it did not know Him" (v. 1b). To John the reason why the world is at odds with the Christian community is due to the acceptance on the part of Christians of Jesus Christ as bearer of God's love to man. Such knowledge reveals the light which parts the world's darkness and causes it to flee. Brooke agrees when he says that John is calling his readers back to their first love and enthusiasm. Being His children is a reality they need to recognize ". . . and these facts are the cause of the hostile attitude of the world."³⁸

2-3 Having reminded his readers that they are children of God, John next defines for them the meaning of the title. A child of God in the world is:

1. Not yet clear as to the form of the total reality of his being (v. 2a).
2. Assured that He will, in the end, be like his Lord (v. 2b).

3. To be pure as He is pure (v. 3).

Brooke says of this, ". . . the more fully Christ is revealed, the closer will be their likeness to Him."³⁹ Here John offers a positive polemic against the Gnostics whose teaching is aimed at conformity to the spiritual image. The assurance that the children will be revealed in the image of their Lord provides the motivation for a purity of life which cuts across the moral indifference of the Gnostics. Brooke states, ". . . the purity aimed at is absolute. The standard is nothing less than the perfected human life of the glorified Christ."⁴⁰ John reaffirms that no one who claims to ". . . walk in the light as He is in the light . . ." can be indifferent to the responsibility to live a life consonant with that life which such a claim places upon the individual.

4-5 John points to the dividing line between Christians and pagans. The practice of sin is the living of a lawless life (v. 4). Such a chaotic state is totally incompatible with being a child of God. The Gnostic Christians had begun to play down the impact of the divine decree against sin, relativizing it by their intellectual system. To cut them short, John defines sin as a reality understood in terms of a discernably lawless life style. Against this John also affirms in verse 5 that the sole purpose of Christ's coming into the world was ". . . in order that He might bear sins." And if any doubt still remains as to the Lord's position on sin, John states,

" . . . and in Him is no sin." Thus a child of God cannot condone or participate in a lawless life style for everything which makes him God's child is directly opposed to it.

6-9 Therefore, by way of practical application, children of God do not sin, for their motivation to live sinless lives rests in the work of Christ who came to bear away sins (v. 5) and to destroy the works of the devil (vv. 5, 8). The line of demarcation is clear: those who practice righteousness evidence the reality of their fellowship with Christ (v. 7). However, those who continue to live sinful lifestyles have never seen Him or known Him (v. 6). These are aligned with darkness and thus are children of the one whose works Christ came to destroy (v. 8). Thus, it is impossible to John that one born of God should go on practicing sin. For being born of God means that the Father's seed resides in the offspring, causing him to bear the image of his Progenitor. F. F. Bruce says,

. . . the new birth involves a radical change in human nature; for those who have not experienced it, sin is natural, whereas for those who have experienced it, sin is . . . so unnatural, . . . that its practice constitutes a powerful refutation of any claim to possess the divine life.⁴¹

10 In his summary of the characteristics which identify the two realms of spiritual influence, John adds the element of brotherly love and in so doing prepares us for the discourse to follow in 3:11-24. John's conclusion is that ". . . the children of God and the children of the devil . . ." are obvious to anyone with even a small

amount of responsive moral fiber in their life. It is at the level of conduct that family ties are most easily recognizable; one acts like the family he is a member of. John's call is for the Christian community to take a serious look at the way they are living, for by this they will know to which father they, as children, are bearing the greatest likeness.

2. The children who love one another 3:11-18.

- 11 Because this is the message which you have heard from the beginning; that we should love one another.
- 12 Not as Cain, who was of the evil one and who slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his works were evil, but his brother's works were righteous.
- 13 And do not marvel brothers if the world hates you.
- 14 We know that we have moved out of death into life because we love the brothers. The one who does not love abides in death.
- 15 Everyone hating his brother is a murderer and everyone who is a murderer has no eternal life in him.
- 16 By this we know love, because He laid down His life on our behalf; and we ought to lay down our lives on behalf of the brethren.
- 17 Whoever has the goods of the world and beholds his brother in need and has no pity for him, how does the love of God abide in him?
- 18 Little children, let us not love in word nor tongue, but in deed and truth.

11-12 Having set forth the Father's love as the distinguishing mark of the Christian as opposed to the pagan, John now focuses on the practical outworkings of that love as it should be expressed within the Christian community.

Love has been the foundation on which Christian fellowship has always been built (v. 11). The words koinonia and agape are inseparable within the Christian context. Thus, for John, Cain is a perfect example of what must never take place within the body of Christ (v. 12). Genesis 4:1-9 represents Cain as filled with anger and jealousy for his brother. Thus he acted out his murderous deed with a total lack of love and concern for Able. The issue was righteousness and John, in the context of his previous argument, reaffirms the issue in view of the Gnostic false teachers who are harassing his readers. Christians must understand that it will always be at the point of righteousness that hostilities will arise. Therefore, John's readers must never allow the slightest taint of Cain's evil example to mar their fellowship, for the world will bring them trouble enough.

13 Because of the hostility which will arise whenever righteousness becomes prominent John strikes up a note of encouragement for his readers. The negative use of the imperative, me thaumazete is John's way of saying, do not be amazed brethren at something which will always be your common lot in life! Of this Brooke says,

The hatred of the world was an abiding attitude, always liable to provoke unchristian retaliation, and always a temptation to the more 'intelligent' to neglect their duty to their weaker brethren.⁴²

Surely the world will be ever opposed to God and His love (2:15-17), therefore it stands ever ready to lash out like Cain in an effort to dispose of the righteous ones in its

midst. Such should be of little surprise to those who have been born of God.

14-15 John contrasts life with death, asserting that love for the brethren gives evidence to the transfer which has been accomplished wherein the believer has moved out of the realm of death into the sphere of life (v. 14). This being so, then the absence of love means that the individual remains in death's hold. In fact, the one who refuses to love is no different than a murderer, for hatred and jealousy were the underlying motives for Cain's crime against his brother (v. 12). Such a person can, therefore, lay no claim on eternal life whatsoever (v. 15).

16 For John the great model is always Jesus Christ. Verse 16 forms a vivid contrast to the preceeding verses. The one who hates his brother is in essence like Cain, his brother's murderer (vv. 12, 15). In this light hatred and death are interrelated. Death may result for the one hated, but hatred will always effect death in its host. In contrast, John refers to the example of Christ, who by His death on behalf of His brothers, manifested His love for them, ultimately bringing life to them. Thus, John urges his readers to follow the example of Christ, for the one who hates his brother lives in death, while the one who lays down his life in love for his brothers lives. F. F. Bruce states,

No christian should speak readily of his love for others unless he is prepared, if need be, to show

that love as Christ showed His, by giving up his life for them, . . . by regarding it as his plain duty so to do. This is what is meant by showing the love of Christ in one's life.⁴³

17-18 The proof of love is in the deed of love far more than in its verbal assent. Love is meant to be a visible, tangible, expression of our fellowship with God and our brethren. C. H. Dodd brings good insight into the interpretation of verses 17 and 18 when he notes that in light of Christ's example in verse 16 it is ". . . easy, if the occasion for heroic self-sacrifice has not arisen, to pretend to ourselves that there is no call to lay down our lives!"⁴⁴ John always follows his sublime statements of truth with seemingly mundane examples of practical application. However, in so doing he also brings true spirituality within the grasp of every man, woman, and child on this earth, for through such an emphasis even a cup of cold water in the name of Christ can bring the glory of His sacrificial love into the human sphere. John's charge against the Gnostics could easily be understood as an over-spiritualization of the moral and ethical implications of the Christian faith. As Dodd says, "To over-spiritualize religion is to weaken it ethically."⁴⁵ Therefore, John concludes the section with an appeal for the Christian community to live out their Father's love in the most concrete terms of expression. Such forms the greatest antidote to the moral indifference of the heretics.

3. The children assured before God 3:19-24.

19 And by this we shall know we are of the truth,

and shall persuade our heart before Him.

- 20 Because if our heart blames us, God is greater than our heart and He knows all things.
- 21 Beloved, if our heart does not blame us we have confidence with God.
- 22 And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do what is pleasing before Him.
- 23 And this is His commandment; that we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and should love one another, as He has commanded us.
- 24 And the one who keeps His commandment abides in Him and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit He gives us.

19-20 The practice of God's love assures the believer that he stands in the truth (v. 19), for God is with him (v. 20). John sees the need for such an affirmation especially in the face of the doubts being raised among his readers by the Gnostic Christians. John assures his readers that if they are loving their brothers as Christ loved them, then not even the fears and doubts of their hearts can overcome the reality of God's presence with them.

21 The matter of the heart is of prime concern to John, for he knows that it is at this point that a believer can be most dramatically shaken. The Gnostics had no doubt confused many of the more simple believers, reeking havoc with their faith by means of their high intellectualism. Therefore, John points his readers back to practical Christianity as the means of assurance that they are indeed living in the truth and can rest in the confidence that God does not condemn them (v. 21). Of this F. F. Bruce

When God, who is greater than our conscience and pronounces a more authoritative verdict, one based on perfect knowledge of us and of all the relevant circumstances, assures us of the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake, we enjoy peace of conscience.⁴⁶

22 The child who walks in the light of his Father, obeying His commandments and doing that which is pleasing in His sight can also expect to have his Father's ear. John here links the principle of obedience with the believer's desire to be heard on high, thus rounding out the picture of confidence to include not only heart-felt assurance, but confidence that the lines of communication between child and Father are open and in service as well. The Gnostic who seeks after spiritual gnosis as a means to entering the realm of the divine, is thus cast aside by John in favor of practical Christianity which enables the believer to have direct access to the throne of grace.

23-24 John concludes the section with a capsulized summation of the preceeding material. In effect John says, "God's commandments are simple and clear: 1) believe in Jesus Christ and 2) love one another" (v. 23). These two commands form the counter-offensive to the Gnostic heresies. Confession of belief in the historical Jesus as God's Christ counters the Docetic falsehoods and the practice of Christian love destroys the moral corruption which is the inevitable result of Gnosticism. Therefore, John reminds his readers that keeping these two commandments is the only basis upon which true fellowship with God can be established (v. 24). Here are the Christian's grounds

for confidence. Through these, God's Spirit comes to reside in the one who puts them into practice.

Word studies.

Agnos. Etymologically, agnos originates in the concept of the awakening of reverence or religious awe. In time it was linked to deity and came to describe that which lacks defect, i.e. the ritually clean thing. This forms the basis for the more moral connotation as used in the New Testament.⁴⁷

Regarding I John 3:3, Hauck says, "It signifies 'Moral purity and sincerity' as in relation to Christ . . ."⁴⁸ Understood in relation to the outworkings of agnos the Scriptures picture it as:

1. Demanded of those bearing community office (I Tim. 5:22; Tt. 2:5).
2. Expected of the conversation of Christian wives (I Peter 3:2).
3. Characteristic of the wisdom which avoids all self-seeking (Jam. 3:17).

Ginosko. As used in both John's Gospel and his Epistle, ginosko has to do with a relationship with God and Christ in terms of a personal fellowship. Ginosko is not understood as an investigative or speculative pursuit, but rather, as Bultmann states, ". . . it achieves concrete expression in historical acts."⁴⁹ Thus, the love of God is made known and can be known through the sending of His Son (Jn. 3:16, I Jn. 4:9f). In the Epistle the action of

keeping the commandment to love might also be considered a criterion of knowing Him (I John 2:3-5; 3:6). To know Him, therefore, is not just to know about Him, such as the Gnostics seek, but to see Him and become acquainted with Him in ". . . His obedience and love."⁵⁰

Dikaiosune. Schrenk says John interprets ". . . all righteousness christologically and always linking right action with Christ as the dikaios."⁵¹ Thus, in I John 2:29, to demonstrate all that Jesus embodied in righteousness ". . . is a valid sign of being born of God."⁵² Likewise, in I John 3:7, antinomianism is countered by the doing of righteousness, i.e., brotherly love and right conduct. Thus, John ". . . stresses the fact that righteousness follows logically from commitment to Christ the dikaios and thus links true righteousness to the revelation given only in Him."⁵³

Anomian. On a note on I John 3:4, Guthrie observes, "If a man commits anartia his action also stands under the judgment of anomia."⁵⁴ A Gnostic might argue that even if one sins it is not that important a setback to one who has spiritual gnosis. However, John links sin to lawlessness (3:4), and thereby implies that the one who commits sin is actually in open revolt against God. Sin is, in fact, open rebellion against God.⁵⁵

IV. The Children of Truth 4:1-21.

1. The Spirit of God and the spirit of error 4:1-6.

- 1 Beloved, believe not every spirit! But prove the spirits to see if they are of God, because many false prophets have gone forth into the world.
- 2 By this you know the Spirit of God; every spirit which confesses Jesus Christ as having come in the flesh, is of God,
- 3 And every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God, and this is the spirit of the antichrist which you have heard that it is coming and is even now already in the world.
- 4 You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because greater is the One in you, than the one in the world.
- 5 They are of the world, therefore they speak of the world and the world hears them.
- 6 We are of God, the one knowing God hears us, he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Chapter 4 adds the dimension of the Spirit to the ongoing discussion of truth verses error. The Spirit of God and the confession that Jesus Christ ". . . has come in the flesh . . ." are now linked by John to form a striking polemic against the teachings of Gnosticism (4:1-6). The bulk of the chapter (4:7-21) is devoted to the dynamic of Christian love. Love is the focal point from which all knowledge of the fellowship with God radiates. Thus the Spirit and love become the Christian's great weapons in the battle for truth, for against their power the Gnostic error must ultimately succumb.

1 With the opening verses of chapter 4 John ties us back into the discussion concerning the antichrists of 2:18-29. In the former section the last hour is marked by

the appearance of persons who proclaim the way to God and yet in truth deny the very One who can bring man and God together (2:22-23). The discussion in chapter 4 again focuses attention on these false prophets, reaffirming their error to be none other than a direct denial of the incarnation of Christ (v. 3). John's reference to false prophets calls to mind the passage in Jeremiah which reads, "For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, 'Do not let your prophets who are in your midst and your diviners deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams which they dream, for they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them, declares the Lord'" (Jer. 29:8-9). In Jeremiah's day Israel abounded with men claiming to speak on behalf of God, but the real test for their validity lay in whether or not they had indeed been sent by God. Without His seal and commission such prophets were ambassadors of evil. In the situation to which John writes, many so-called prophets were claiming the gnosis which revealed the divine will, but the apostle knew they did not carry God's seal of approval. Thus John appeals to his readers to exercise the gift of spiritual discernment (I Cor. 12:10) and prove the spirits being forced on them to see if they bear the insignia of God.

2-3 The criterion for the test John urges his readers to use is the confession of Jesus Christ as ". . . come in the flesh" (v. 2). Those who confess Jesus as Christ manifest the Spirit of God (v. 2), while those who

deny the incarnation reveal the spirit of antichrist (v. 3). Verses 2 and 3 recall 2:22-23 and therefore evidence that inherent in them is John's assertion that denying the Son is a direct denial of the Father as well which of course is totally incompatible with the Spirit of God. In this way John strikes at the heart of the Gnostic error, making confession of the incarnate Christ the theological watershed for the entire Gnostic issue. Thus, as F. F. Bruce says, "No matter how charming, how plausible, how eloquent the prophets in question may be, the test of their witness to Christ and His truth is the test by which they must be judged."⁵⁶

4-6 The difference between the children of truth and the children of error is obedience to the authority of the Spirit of God. It is He who is greater than the spirit of the world (v. 4). Children who hear the truth listen to Him, while those who are of the world do not hear Him (v. 6), for the world cries to them with its own loud voice (v. 5).

Through his presentation in 4:1-6, John in effect reassures his readers that they need not fear the false prophets, for due to their membership in the family of God (3:1-3), there resides in them One greater than all the spirits of error combined (4:4). So long as the members of the Christian community remain true to their confession of Jesus as the incarnate Christ they will possess the Spirit who will guide them into all truth (John 16:13).

Brooke says,

. . . like associates with like . . . those who are of God, and therefore live their lives in learning to know Him better, in the gradual assimilation of the revelation of Himself which God is making in His Son, receive the message. It is only rejected by those who are not of God, and so are not learning to know Him.⁵⁷

Thus the proper test for the true knowledge of God ultimately rests in the reception or rejection of the gospel of Jesus Christ itself. By this the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error are clearly seen.

2. The dynamic of love 4:7-21.

- 7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.
- 8 The One who does not love, knows not God, for God is love.
- 9 By this the love of God was manifested to us, in that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world in order that we might live through Him.
- 10 In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that He has loved us and sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins.
- 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.
- 12 No one has ever beheld God, if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is made complete in us.
- 13 By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because of the Spirit which He has given us.
- 14 And we have seen and bear witness that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.
- 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in Him and He in God.
- 16 And we have known and believed the love which God has toward us. God is love and the one who abides in love abides in God and God in him.

- 17 By this love has been perfected in us, in order that we may have confidence in the day of judgment, because as He is, so are we in this world.
- 18 Fear is not in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, the one who fears has not been perfected in love.
- 19 We love because He first loved us.
- 20 If anyone says, "I love God" and hates his brother, he is a liar, for anyone who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.
- 21 And this is the commandment that we have from Him, that the one who loves God, should love his brother also.

7-8 Having identified the criterion by which truth and error may be judged, John now turns his attention to the greatest polemic of all against heresy: Christian love. In a most beautiful way John links the knowledge of God with brotherly love. Love thus becomes the evidence for knowing God, indeed of being born of God (v. 7). God's essential being is love, just as it is light (1:5b), therefore the absence of brotherly love is a disclaimer for knowing God (v. 8). Brooke states, ". . . where love is absent there has not been even the beginning of the knowledge of God, for love is the very nature and being of God."⁵⁸ And F. F. Bruce says, "The love which the New Testament enjoins involves a consuming passion for the well-being of others, and this love has its wellspring in God."⁵⁹ Once again John makes it impossible for the Gnostic Christian to intellectualize true spirituality for the God he seeks to know through his association with an elected few demands that he shun his hypocrisy and get down to the business of living

out God's love to all men.

9-10 The love of God, of which John writes, is revealed in the Person of His Son. Far from some abstract concept, the love God shows us in and through His Son is a perfect expression of practical concern for the needs of man. Christ was sent into the world that men lost and suffering spiritual and physical death might find new life through Him (v. 9). John asserts that God, not man, initiated the love which has the sinner and his needs in view (v. 10). F. F. Bruce states, "The christian affirmation that God is love is not sustained by ignoring the cross, in all its stark obscurity, but by setting it in the forefront of the situation."⁶⁰ God's love could not have become any more practically involved in the sufferings of humanity than by its manifestation in the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

11-12 God's love thus becomes the motivation for the Christian's exercise of love for his brother (v. 11). Brooke says,

True love is something which gives itself, neither in return for what has been given nor in order to get as much again: even as God gave His Son not as a reward for the love which men had showed to Him, but as a boon to those who had only manifested their hostility to Him . . .⁶¹

To John the way in which God has so totally loved the loveless must be both the Christian's example and motivation to express his love for God. In this way a world which has not seen God will know He lives and loves (v. 12). Such is the

lifestyle which sees the love of God come to maturity.

13-16 John combines the dynamic of Christian love with the witness and work of the Spirit to set before his readers the true fellowship of those who love one another. The mark of the abiding presence of God in the believer is the witness of the Spirit (v. 13). His witness is bound up in the believer's witness to the fact that "God has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world" (v. 14). Thus true fellowship with God as evidenced by the witness of the Spirit will always be founded upon the confession that "Jesus is the Son of God" (v. 15). Apart from such a confession the fellowship is merely a sham. John rounds out his presentation of true fellowship by once again making reference to God's love (v. 16). In the final analysis it is God's love which breathes life into the fellowship of believers, thus John reminds his readers that to abide in God's love assures them of true fellowship. Dodd says,

The energy of love discharges itself along lines which form a triangle, whose points are God, self and neighbor; but the source of all love is God, of whom alone it can be said that He is love. Whether we love God or our neighbor, it is God's love that is at work in us -- assuming, . . . that our love is that authentic agape which is exemplified in God's gift of His Son, and in Christ's sacrifice for us all.⁶²

17-18 Echoing the discussion of the assurance gained by the practice of brotherly love in 3:18-24, John again turns his readers' attention to the confidence which results when love comes to maturity in the believer's life. The Christian community should be motivated to maintain the

fellowship which allows God's love to mature itself among them by virtue of the fact that perfected love is the believer's ground for confidence in the day of God's judgment (v. 17a). The Gnostic who spends all his time striving after a gnosis which makes him apathetic toward his brother in need (3:17) will not be able to stand confidently before God like his Christian counterpart who has sought to live in the world the kind of loving lifestyle manifested by his Lord (v. 17b). John's readers have no need to fear God's wrath as long as they abide in His love and allow it to come to maturity in their lives (v. 18). Thus, only those immature in love have cause for fear, for as Brooke says, "Where full confidence is not yet possible, love is not yet made perfect, for fear and dread have no place in true love."⁶³ Fear is self-centered and it keeps its eye on punishment. Such fear should find no root in the Christian for he claims to have fellowship with the God who has manifested His love for man in Christ in order to make the removal of punishment possible (2:1-2; 4:9-10).

19-21 John concludes the discourse with a summation of his major concerns for his readers. He wants them to realize that brotherly love must be a prime concern, especially in the last hour when all manner of erroneous spirits are filling the world, because:

1. God has set the example and provided the motivation for Christians to practice brotherly love (v. 19).
2. Brotherly love gives evidence that one has

true fellowship with God (v. 20).

3. Christians are commanded to express their love for God by loving their brothers (v. 21).

Westcott says,

The fellowship of man with God and of God with man carries with it the consummation of love . . . already on the divine side; and it is God's will that men should make its blessings their own in view of the close of earthly life.⁶⁴

For John, it is love, not gnosis which is the key to experiencing the Presence of God. Such fellowship is realized in the world by the concrete expression of love by Christians for others. The world knows He loved, therefore, because His children love after His example.

Word studies.

Pneuma. The Spirit is understood in I John as not merely relating to the eschaton, but as the factor in Christ's abiding in believers (3:24; 4:13). The Spirit comes not by man, but is a gift from God (4:13). As in the Gospel (see 14:26; 16:13-15), the Epistle understands the Spirit as primarily functioning as a witness. The Spirit witnesses along with the ". . . water and the blood . . ." (5:6), as Schweizer says, ". . . as the power of the proclamation of the Word . . . alongside the sacraments."⁶⁵

In addition, 4:1-6 shows the Spirit as prophetic witness in connection with the formula for discerning truth from error (v. 6). Thus confession of Christ is understood as ". . . the criterion of utterances of the Spirit. . ."⁶⁶ The Epistle therefore stresses trusting the Spirit ". . .

who works in the community, who needs no official authorization, who bears witness, not by bringing new and unheard of revelations, but by bringing the old message."⁶⁸

C. H. Dodd gives a fine treatment of the history of prophecy and its use in the early church in his commentary on the Johannine Epistles.⁶⁹ In regard to prophecy and the Spirit Dodd says, "The freedom of the Spirit was the life-blood of Christianity and yet that freedom was being used to disintegrate the life of the Church."⁷⁰ It is because of this that the Epistle is written with such a strong emphasis upon the apostolic witness (1:1-3; 2:7, 24) as a balance to the exercise of prophetic utterance. Of this Dodd says,

The tension between authority and freedom, between tradition and inspiration, cannot safely be resolved either by repudiation of authority or by the repression of inspiration. The Church fares best when apostle and prophet stand together as the firm foundation of its life.⁷¹

Agape. Stauffer says, "For Paul, agape is the principle of the future; for John it is the principle of the world of Christ which is being built up in the cosmic crisis of the present."⁷² Thus, in the Epistle the love discussed is condescending love; however, it ". . . achieves revelation and victory in moral action."⁷³ The light and life of God are revealed to the world through the expression of love in its midst (4:12-13). John's emphasis, therefore, is on the life of Christ as an example of the way in which the Christian should live out God's love before the world (4:9-11).

Regarding true fellowship, Father, Son and believers are all drawn together through brotherly love. Such a fellowship cannot be experienced by the world for it does not really know the Father whose love is the fellowship's life and law. Stauffer states, love is a ". . . vital movement, for of existence, an actualisation of God in this world."⁷⁴ Therefore, John, in his Epistle, repeats the fact that all detailed requirements are drawn up in love ". . . with magnificent monotony."⁷⁵

Teleio. In John's Gospel teleio appears in active aorist forms; however in the Epistle, the forms are passive perfect. In this sense teleio, says Delling, ". . . denotes the completeness or perfection of the love of God or of the Christian in love"⁷⁶ (4:18). For John, love comes to entirety in the person who keeps God's commandments (4:12, 21). Completeness in God's love frees the believer from fear regarding the coming judgment (4:17-18). Delling states,

The choice of the verbal form instead of the adjective underlines the fact that only in parresia . . . in the judgment, only in brotherly love, in obedience, does the love of God achieve totality in the lives of Christians."⁷⁷

Omologeō. John's Gospel focuses upon public confession of Jesus as Messiah (9:22; 12:42). Michel states,

Refusal of public witness in the hour of trial, if due to fear, is tantamount to denial . . . according to John. It is assumed that public confession of Christ leads to honour with God, whereas denial or refusal of witness is grounded in the desire for honour among men, Jn. 5:44; 12:43.⁷⁸

In the Epistle, omologeîn refers to a specific statement designed to counteract the Gnostic heresy (2:22).⁷⁹ Statements such as those found in 4:2f, ". . . seek to express a specific truth, the only possible relation to Christ."⁸⁰ John does not therefore stress intellectualism, but rather, a means to true fellowship with God. The power of confession rests in the fact that it identifies believer from heretic.

Parresia. In the Epistle parresia relates to man's openness to God. It presupposes a good conscience (3:21), and is thus directly related to keeping God's commandments which in turn presupposes faith in Jesus Christ and a willingness to love one's neighbor.

Two other aspects of parresia are also to be noted in the Epistle. First, the Spirit brings confidence to the believer. He dwells in those who keep the commandments of Christ and thus witnesses to the reality of the individual's fellowship with his Lord (3:24; 4:13; 5:7-12). Second, parresia also contains a future element. Of this Schlier says,

Abiding in the love of God, which knows no fear because it keeps the commandments, is brought to light in the future judgment in the fact that we have access and openness, i. e., parrhesia, to God.⁸¹

Thus, to John, the Christian can be confident in his fellowship with Christ both presently as he lives a life obedient to Christ's commandments and in the future when the fruits of such a life will be manifested.

V. The Children Born of God 5:1-21

1. The mark of birth 5:1-5.

- 1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God and everyone who loves the Father loves His child as well.
- 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and do His commandments.
- 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not hard.
- 4 For everyone born of God overcomes the world, and this is the victory which overcomes the world, our faith.
- 5 Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he that believes Jesus is the Son of God?

In this final chapter of the Epistle John concludes by making sure his readers understand the total meaning of their new birth relationship to God through Jesus Christ. John discusses the mark (5:1-5), witness (5:6-12), benefits (5:13-17), and knowledge (5:18-21) which are related to being born of God. In this way John hopes to lay to rest any lingering notions his readers may have about the Gnostic charge that the gospel which they originally received is not quite complete in its revelation of God. Chapter 5 is thus a brilliant polemic against the Gnostic error and a manifesto of Christian assurance.

1 The mark of being born of God is faith in Jesus Christ. In his Gospel John writes, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12). This is God's will (John 1:13), hence, no other avenue to spiritual birth and thereby, access into God's family, can

be apprehended. Jesus said, ". . . unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3b). To John, the Gnostic claim that divine gnosis leads one to God is totally erroneous because it ignores Jesus' assertion that He alone brings man and God together (John 10:9; 14:6).

True to form, John does not allow the confession of faith in Christ to become separated or spiritualized away from its practical outworkings within the fellowship. C. H. Dodd sheds good light on 5:1b when he says that John

. . . assumes the solidarity of the family as a fact of ordinary experience, and argues directly from it to the solidarity of the family of God . . . This needed saying, because for many people to be a 'Child of God' meant an exalted spiritual status, accompanied by mystical experiences of union with the Divine, without any necessary recognition of social obligations.⁸²

Again, John warns his readers that faith in Christ must not be robbed from men by the intellectual cravings of a select few. No, if one believes in Christ he is born of God and by right of birth he ought to love all those so born.

2-3 John next points to the fact that brotherly love is bound up in the believer's love for God. If one truly loves God then he will live so as to please Him. Such a life is therefore characterized by obedience to God's commandments (v. 2), for it is through them that a Christian can best express his love for God (v. 3). In this way John continues the argument of 4:19-21 which made it clear that God intends for the believer's love for Him to be expressed tangibly in terms of brotherly love. Such should not really be a heavy burden for the child to bear on behalf of his

Father (5:3b).

4-5 Faith in Christ, the mark of spiritual birth, when vitally displayed through brotherly love, grants to the believer the power to overcome the forces of this world's darkness (v. 4). Dodd says, our faith means

. . . committing ourselves to the love of God as it is expressed in all that Jesus Christ was and all that He did. Such faith has its intellectual basis in belief in the Incarnation of the Son of God . . . Granted that basis, we have a faith against which all the forces of evil in the world and in ourselves are powerless to prevail.³³

Therefore, John asserts that no error or temptation to stray from the truth can overcome the one whose faith in Christ is alive and well (v. 5).

2. The witness to birth 5:6-12.

- 6 This is the One who came by the water and the blood, Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by the blood.
- 7 And the Spirit bears witness and the Spirit is the truth.
- 8 For there are three who bear witness, the Spirit and the water and the blood, and the three agree as one.
- 9 If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; because this is the witness of God, that He has borne witness concerning His Son.
- 10 The one who believes in the Son of God, has the witness in himself. The one who does not believe has made God a liar, because he has not believed the witness He has borne concerning His Son.
- 11 And this is the witness, that God has given us eternal life and this life is in His Son.
- 12 The one who has the Son, has the life, the one

who does not have the Son of God, does not have the life.

6 Having identified faith in Jesus Christ as the mark of a believer's spiritual birth, John now moves on to discuss the threefold witness which has been given concerning Christ Himself. The first two witnesses are ". . . the water and the blood." Commentators differ in their opinions concerning the meaning of these terms. F. F. Bruce understands their meaning as direct references to the baptism and crucifixion of Christ which John employs in order to counter the Gnostic teaching that 'the Christ' in fact "... came down on the man Jesus when He was baptized but left Him before He died."⁸⁴ To teach that the Christ of God was not involved in the crucifixion would be to rob it of its full redemptive significance for mankind. Such an error is destroyed by John's affirmation that faith in Jesus Christ is faith testified to by the historical events of his baptism and crucifixion, events which confirm that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." (2 Cor. 5:19b).

C. H. Dodd, unlike Bruce,⁸⁵ regards the references to water and blood to be direct references to the sacraments, serving as counterparts to the actual historical events in Christ's life. Dodd says,

Their value as evidence lies precisely in their being concrete, overt, 'objective' actions, directly recalling (or representing) historical facts of the Gospel, while at the same time they are the vehicles of a supra-historical life in the church.⁸⁶

Thus Dodd would see John employing the sacraments as a means of bringing the reality of the baptism and passion of Christ

to the Christian community in a fashion which makes their significance an ongoing one.

Whether one adopts the view of Bruce or Dodd, the fact that Jesus Christ underwent both baptism and crucifixion, through which He is testified to as the Son of God, is really the point at which John's reference becomes a vital polemic against the Gnostics.

7-8 The third witness to Jesus as the Christ is the Spirit (v. 7). It is natural that John should refer to the Spirit of truth for his Epistle (3:24; 4:2, 13) and Gospel (14:26; 16:13-15). Both understand Him to function as a witness that God has revealed Himself in the Person of His Son. Individually each witness mentioned by John bears strong testimony concerning Jesus as Christ. However, taken together the unified testimony which results (v. 8) makes for an unshakeable platform on which to base the confession that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (4:2).

9-10 John reminds his readers that they indeed originally received the apostolic witness concerning Christ (v. 9a). Through it the community was formed. However, John points out that if the witness of men can be regarded as valuable, how much more the testimony of God, for He Himself has borne witness that Jesus Christ is His Son (v. 9b). One can argue with men, but not with God! To John, the evidence is clear and safe from all attempts to discredit it. As Rothe says,

If God did not will that men should believe on Jesus, He led men into a terrible temptation. So if we would keep our conception of God pure, we must ascribe this intention to Him in His ordering of the world.⁸⁷

Therefore, John asserts that for the Christian who believes in Christ, the witness of God becomes his own means of inner assurance (v. 10). To disregard such a strong and available witness is literally to call God and everything upon which He orders the universe purely false. By implication, this is what John understands the Gnostics to have done, for they have in their teachings denied the testimony which has been given concerning God's Son.

11-12 The outcome of one's reception or rejection of God's witness concerning Christ is none other than the gain or loss of eternal life. In the prologue to the Epistle John has made clear that the Word of Life was the bearer of eternal life (1:2). In the Gospel John states, "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). Therefore, eternal life is to be found in the Son (v. 11). To possess the Son through confession in response to the witness that has been borne is to realize eternal life, to reject the witness is to lose the Son and therefore, the eternal life which He bears (v. 12). Thus John hits hard at the Gnostics by jolting his readers into realizing that eternity hangs on the balance of their faithfulness to their confession. Life is not to be obtained through gnosis, but through faith in Christ alone. Being born of God results from faith in Christ, a faith testified to and thus maintained by the unified witness of the water, blood, and Spirit.

3. The benefits of birth 5:13-17.

- 13 These things I have written to you who believe in the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.
- 14 And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.
- 15 And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask we know that we have the requests which we have asked of Him.
- 16 If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask and He will give him life, to those not sinning unto death. There is a sin unto death, but I do not say that we should inquire concerning that.
- 17 All iniquity is sin, and there is a sin which is not unto death.

13 The first benefit which John lists in regard to being born of God has already been alluded to in verses 11 and 12. Near the close of his Gospel John writes ". . . These have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31). Now, near the close of his Epistle, John once again makes his purpose clear. The readers must understand that belief in Christ results in eternal life. Therefore, the entire Epistle is dedicated to making such understanding a reality among its readers. To believe in the Son is to benefit by becoming partaker in the life He bears.

14-17 The second benefit that John lists in relation to being born of God is the confidence one gains that his prayers and petitions are heard by God (v. 14). This

confidence is expressed in a twofold manner: First, the believer can be assured that his prayers and requests made on behalf of himself are heard by God (v. 15). For far from the Gnostic picture of a man going through elaborate rites to gain a fraction of the attention of the spiritual realm, John portrays the Christian as able to enter with confidence the very holy place of God (Heb. 10:19). Thus the Christian is privileged to engage in the very same intimate communications with God that a child would experience with his parent. Second, a Christian may confidently pray on behalf of the needs of others, especially those who have fallen in sin (v. 16). Here the prayer ministry of the believer takes on the quality of Christ's own ministry as advocate with the Father (2:1). Obviously, Christians are not able to be the propitiation for the world's sins, but they can become the dynamic means whereby sins and other needs may be brought to the One who alone can deal with them. John's assertion that sins leading to death ought not to be prayed for (v. 16b) helps to set the boundaries in which the believer may confidently exercise his ministry of intercession.

In regard to the question of the meaning of the phrase ". . . sin unto death . . ." F. F. Bruce rejects the concept of venial and mortal sins in favor of an interpretation which links the sin with actual physical death. Citing examples such as Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) and those who had fallen asleep due to their profanation of

the sacraments of the Lord's Supper (I Cor. 11:30), Bruce concludes, "It may be, then, that by 'sin unto death' John means an act or course of sin which has resulted in the death of the sinning brother."⁸⁸ Bruce's interpretation seems to be that which John's readers would be most likely to understand in regard to the phrase. Since evidence to the contrary is lacking, it stands as the preferred meaning. Thus Christians are to pray both for themselves and for others. They are to do so with confidence for such is a benefit of their birth right. However, care should be exercised to keep one's prayers within the will of God (v. 14), especially when praying for a brother fallen from grace (v. 17).

4. The knowledge gained from birth (5:18-21).

- 18 We know that everyone who is born of God does not sin. But the one born of God is kept by Him and the evil one does not touch him.
- 19 We know that we are of God and that the whole world lies in the evil one.
- 20 But we know that the Son of God is come, and has given to us an understanding, that we might know the true One and we are in the true one, in His Son, Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.
- 21 Little Children, guard yourselves from idols!

John closes the Epistle with a threefold use of the phrase ". . . we know . . ." Through the assertions given in this final section John makes a last attempt to ground his readers in the truth which will protect them against all error.

18 Westcott says,

. . . the first truth of which the Christian is assured is that, in spite of the abnormal presence of sin even among the brethren, the child of God 'sinneth not.' He has a watchful Protector stronger than his adversary.⁸⁹

Thus, part and parcel with being born of God is the realization that a radical break with sin has been accomplished. John is not teaching sinless perfection as references such as 1:9 and 2:1-2 make clear. Nevertheless, nowhere in the Epistle is the continuance of a lifestyle dominated by sin tolerated. Faced with the moral corruption of the Gnostic heresy John calls a spade a spade by affirming the Christian's awareness of his need to be pure ". . . just as He is pure . . ." (3:3b). Sin should never again control the child who is begotten by the Father who has gained the victory over the evil one (v. 18b).

19 The second thing which John wants his readers to know draws the distinction most clearly between the Christian and the world. Christians belong to God by virtue of their new birth and the marks of their family relationship with God, i. e., their obedience and love for others. Therefore, it is not enough to claim divine gnosis, for John asserts that everyone who lacks the aforementioned evidences of family ties with God is ". . . in the power of the evil one. . ." John thus reminds his readers once again of the dynamic separation between the Father's love and the lusts of the world. Light has no fellowship with darkness. It is time all believers realized this.

20 The final knowledge gained from new birth to which John makes reference is that of the reality of the incarnation of Christ. By knowing that the Son has indeed come the believer benefits three ways: First, he is given understanding in order to know ". . . the true One." Here we are reminded of Paul who says, "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him. . . But he who is spiritual appraises all things" (I Cor. 2:14-15). The Gnostic Christians were making light of the incarnation and to John this evidenced the falsehood of their claim to truly know God. Only confession of Jesus as Christ leads one to the knowledge of Him who is true. Second, once the knowledge of the true One is gained by the believer, fellowship with Him is then possible. John says, ". . . and we are in the true One." Thus, to confess Him is to know Him and thereby to abide with Him. Third, eternal life is the ultimate result of such a relationship. Hence, as in 5:11-12, to possess the Son is to possess His life. The knowledge and fellowship which come as a result of the confession that ". . . the Son of God has come . . ." are therefore invested with the transcending permanence of eternal life.

21 John, true to form closes with a contrast. Having stated in verse 20b, "This is the true God and eternal life," he contrasts his statement with a reference to idols. The final verse of the Epistle is but a restatement of John's warning for his readers to continue to practice

discernment between truth and falsehood. F. F. Bruce comments,

Any conception of Him that is at variance with His self-revelation in Christ is an idol. Hence says John, since you have received the truth, have nothing to do with counterfeits; beware of imitations and refuse all substitutes.⁹⁰

At the close of the Epistle there can be no doubt where John stands. Christianity does not accept any corrupting of its position on the uniqueness of God's self-revelation through Jesus Christ. No other position can be taken than the one witnessed to so surely by the men who lived with Him and beheld His glory (1:1-3) and the Holy Spirit of Truth. As C. H. Dodd says, "Christians believe that the God revealed in Christ and attested in the Scriptures is the one real God, and the worship of any God-substitute is idolatry."⁹¹ The message of the Epistle was meaningful to the readers of John's day and it is certainly relevant to the needs of the Christian community today.

Word studies.

Gennao. John's use of gennao in the Epistle is always in reference to point of origin, i.e., ek tou theou or autou (I Jn. 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18).⁹² John is always careful to stress the religious, ethical and moral consequences of birth. These are:

1. Doing righteousness (2:29).
2. Not sinning (3:7ff).
3. In love (4:7).
4. Overcoming the world (5:4).

5. Faith in Christ (5:1).

Gennao for John thus cannot become merely a spiritual concept. It must rather touch man at the most practical levels of his daily life.

Martureo. In the Epistle martureo relates to the Person of Christ, His nature and significance. In His absence the Spirit bears Him witness (5:6). The Spirit bears special witness in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper (5:5-11). When the witness is given by disciples themselves witness equals confession (4:14f).⁹³

THE TOOLS

Resources used for the exegetical study of I John fall under two major headings. The initial study was done in regard to the Greek text of the Epistle. For this stage of the work the following tools were used:

The Greek New Testament⁹⁴ put out by the United Bible Society supplied the Greek text from which the translation of the Epistle was made. Translation work obviously requires a working knowledge of the Greek language. However, the pastor need not be an outstanding scholar to do work in the original language. Helps are available such as Nathan E. Han's A Parsing Guide to the Greek New Testament⁹⁵ as well as grammars like those by Machen⁹⁶ and Dana and Mantey.⁹⁷ These tools allow the pastor to accurately identify forms and tenses and provide ready access to discussions on a wide variety of essential questions having:

to do with syntax. In matters of vocabulary a lexicon such as the one by Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich⁹⁸ is essential. Such a work serves to define a word not only in terms of its general useage, but in regard to its specific contextual setting as well. Finally, in reference to word studies, the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament⁹⁹ is a must. No other work treats the Greek words of the New Testament with the depth of scholarship than does TDNT. All major word studies for the exegetical work presented in this chapter were done from TDNT.

For the English inductive stage of the study the work was first carried out without the aid of any helps. This was done to insure the originality of the study. Apart from the English translation done for the study and a New American Standard Bible¹⁰⁰ for aid in cross reference work, no other tools were used. Following the initial stage of the inductive study, commentaries were employed in order to compare the personal work done with that of reliable scholarship. All commentaries listed in Scholer's bibliographic guide¹⁰¹ were consulted. The busy pastor may not think it necessary to consult several commentaries such as was the case for this present study. However, one or two quality works ought always to play a part in exegetical work and thus a guide such as Scholer's becomes invaluable.

If, as Bernard Ramm has said, the role of hermeneutics is to ascertain the meaning of what God has communicated to man through Holy Scripture, then the pastor is

obligated to do the finest exegetical work of which he is capable. The tools for such work suggested in this section by no means exhaust the resources available; nevertheless, they do serve to open the door to the field and hopefully, will stimulate the use of such helps in the pastor's exegetical studies of Scripture.

Chapter 3

FINAL STEPS TOWARD SERMONIC PREPARATION

With the historical and exegetical studies completed the final steps in sermonic preparation may now be taken. These steps are two in number. First, the Epistle must be condensed into its various theological themes. Such a step is an important one for it aims itself at building that necessary bridge from the study to the actual sermon itself. Second, before a sermon manuscript can be prepared an outline should be written. The justification for outlining is fairly evident to the discerning preacher. Outlining provides the basic structure and direction necessary for a coherent and dynamic sermonic presentation of the theological truths which have been identified. Also, when considering the entire expositional series as a whole, outlining serves to map out the territory to be covered beforehand, thus giving the preacher specific boundaries in which to work. The following material seeks to present both the theological themes and a series of tentative outlines for an expositional preaching series on the Epistle. It is hoped that through this presentation the pastor will find for himself a model for relating his own exegetical studies to the relevant needs of his congregation.

Step One: The Theological Themes

Taken as a whole, the First Epistle of John is very homogeneous in its theological structure. Rather than a lengthy series of theological propositions, John presents a few basic themes which he interweaves one with another to form a unified affirmation of the Christian faith. In light of this the pastor will find that it will be difficult to present the Epistle by way of a verse-by-verse exposition. John's theological presentation better lends itself to a thematic series as the following discussions makes clear.

Encounter. I John 1:1-10 can be taken as a whole. The theme is encounter with God's revelation in Christ. In verses 1-4 encounter comes by way of the Word of life who is manifested to the apostles. This manifestation and the apostles' interaction with it forms the impetus for the proclamation which leads to fellowship with God. In verses 5-10 encounter comes by way of the message of the proclamation itself. In parallel to the apostolic experience of personal interaction with the Word made flesh, so too, the Christians who follow them find it possible to have a dynamic fellowship with the living Christ when they receive the message and incorporate it into their lives. 1:5-10 especially forms the germinal theology for the entire Epistle, for in these verses John points to:

1. God's holiness of character (v. 5).
2. Man's need to respond to that character (vv. 6-7).

3. The atoning work of Christ which makes fellowship with God possible (vv. 7b, 9).

In addition, the motifs of light versus darkness (vv. 5-7) and truth versus lie (vv. 6, 8, 10) which underlie much of John's latter material are here stated for the first time.

Chapter one serves to impress upon the contemporary Christian the necessity for grounding his experience in an ongoing encounter with God in Christ. Like the apostles of old, the modern believer may hear, see, and touch Christ by receiving His message through faith and letting it transform every aspect of his life.

I John 2:1-2 presents two options for sermonic treatment. Theologically, these verses can either be used in support of the atoning work of Christ pictured in 1:7b and 9 or can serve along with 4:10 as a separate text which more fully develops Christ's advocacy with the Father. The view here is:

1. The righteousness of the Advocate (2:1).
2. The nature of His propitiatory work (2:2).
 - a. For local believers.
 - b. For the sins of the world.
3. His work as an expression of God's love (4:10).

Certainly if 2:1-2 is incorporated along with 1:9 the pastor can find in John's theology a grand opportunity to expound the riches, scope and depth of the advocacy of Jesus Christ on behalf of believers.

Brotherly love. One of the outstanding features of the First Epistle of John is its blend of doctrine with practical Christian conduct. Fellowship is a key note of the Epistle and what better way to express one's relationship to God than through interpersonal relationships with others within the community. For John one shows his love for God by his love for his brother (4:7-8). The theme of brotherly love falls into four major sections within the Epistle. Taken together these provide ample material for an indepth treatment of the subject.

In 2:3-11 brotherly love is understood as the sign that one is keeping the commandments of his Lord. Knowing the Advocate of 2:1-2 is thus linked to the concept of keeping His commandments as expressed in the most practical area of loving one's brother in the faith. Such is a natural outgrowth of the assertion that Christ is advocate not only for the sins of the local community, but for those of all in the world who would receive Him (2:2).

3:11-18 takes up the theme of brotherly love again. This time the setting is the context of the Christian's relationship with the world. As 3:13 and following shows, Christian love is not only antithetical to the world spirit, but in and of itself actually becomes the source of much of the world's hostility toward Christians. Thus the Christian reveals his relationship with Christ in terms of taking of the world's goods and using them to love others (v. 17), and in so doing, stands the chance of receiving the same hostility from the world which led to the

crucifixion of Christ (3:16).

Brotherly love is also directly aligned with confession of Jesus as Christ in 4:7-21. Christian love should be the mark of one who confesses Jesus as the Christ come in the flesh. When love is in operation, then the believer lives in such a way that God's love can come to maturity in his life (4:16-18).

The final passage in the Epistle directly related to brotherly love is 5:1-3. Here again the emphasis is upon loving the brethren as a sure sign of being in vital relationship with God. John's theology is clear-cut; one cannot truly believe in Christ and love the Father apart from loving His child as well (5:1). Such is the very will of God (5:2-3).

The world. Closely akin to some of the dynamics found in the theme of brotherly love is that of John's theology of the Christian and the world. Three major passages present this theology.

In 2:12-17 the overarching theme is devotion to God while living in the world. This theme is presented in two parts. First, in 2:12-14 the emphasis is upon those elements of the Christian life style which secure a person against being seduced by the call of the world. Listed by John here are:

1. Forgiveness of sins (v. 12).
2. Knowledge of Him (v. 13a).
3. Overcoming the evil one (v. 13b).

4. Abiding in God's word (v. 14).

When these are operative in the believer's life the Christian can truly take an offensive stand against the onslaughts of the world.

Second, in 2:15-17 the true nature of the world is disclosed. The world is totally lacking in those things characteristic of God's love (vv. 15-16) and it is temporal, passing away before the light of God (v. 17). Such forms the basis for John's exhortation to the believer not to love the world (v. 15a).

The second major passage concerning the world is 3:13-18 which has already been discussed in relation to the theme of brotherly love. Thus the pastor has the option of treating this passage under either of the two themes.

The third passage concerning the world comes in 5:4-5. Here is a parallel to 2:12-14 for the focus is upon faith in Christ as the means of overcoming the world. The themes of brotherly love and the world offer the pastor a solid theological basis for presenting vivid sermonistic insights regarding the realm of practical Christian conduct.

Antichrist. The theme of antichrist brings John's theology of truth verses error into the strongest of lights. Three passages develop the theme.

In 2:18-29 the theme is introduced in the context of John's discussion of the Christian and the world. The spirit of antichrist marks the final hour of the world which is passing away (v. 18) and thus is identified with

its temporal content (2:16-17). The focus of the antichrist spirit centers on confession of Jesus as Christ (v. 22). In this way it is evident that John sees the crux of the problem with the world in its denial of Jesus as God's Son. Here the true separation between the Christian and the world can be seen. Set over against the antichrist falsehood is the knowledge of the truth gained by the divine anointing (v. 20, 27), which is seen as an outgrowth of the confession of Christ.

While not specifically discussing the antichrists by name, 3:1-12 certainly implies a follow-up to the discussion of 2:18-29. Here the children of God are contrasted by the children of the devil. The issue is over right conduct (3:7-8). Thus, between the two passages the antichrist spirit is identified both with denial of Christ and unrighteous behavior.

The third passage found in 4:1-6 summarizes the issues by contrasting truth with error. In the end, antichrists are those who by teaching and conduct set themselves against the truth of God, especially as revealed in Jesus Christ. In a day when so many so-called prophets clamour for attention the Christian affirmation of God's truth in Christ needs to be sounded loud and clear for there really is no salvation apart from Him.

Assurance. The fourth theme so clearly portrayed within the bounds of the Epistle is that of Christian assurance. Four key elements combine to make John's theology

of assurance vital to the life experience of the contemporary Christian.

In 3:19-24 and 4:17-18 John discusses the Christian's assurance against condemnation and judgment. Both passages are set in the context of the practice of Christian love. Each makes it clear that when love is active in the believer's life he need not fear the condemnation of his own heart or the judgment of God Himself.

In chapter five three other great assurances are given. 5:7-12 portrays the dynamic of the witness of the Spirit. He is the one who testifies to the believer the truth of Jesus Christ. The Spirit thus becomes a vital internal force which strengthens the believer against the doubts of the world. 5:13-17 spotlights the assurance a Christian can experience in his prayer life. Believing in Christ assures one that his prayers on his own behalf are heard (vv. 14-15) as well as those prayers offered for others (v. 16). Finally, in 5:18-21 assurance is given through John's discussion of the knowledge a Christian gains by belief in Christ. Through Christ he knows the keeping power of God against sin (v. 18), the reality of sin's hold on the world (v. 19), and the truth of God's revelation in Christ which grants the understanding which spares one from all falsehood (vv. 20-21).

Thus the believer is one who is assured in his innermost being in those areas of spirit, heart, and knowledge, that Jesus is the Christ. Such assurance finds its victorious

expression in confidence before the throne of grace, both for himself and on behalf of others.

Step Two: The Outlines

In light of the theological themes discussed in step one, the Epistle would seem most easily presented in a series of six sermons. It should be understood that the following outlines are tentative in nature. As with any attempt to lay sermonic foundation, time and further reflection may cause a title or a scheme of points to be altered. The following is but an offering given in the hope that it will complete the model presented in this project.

Text: I John 1:1-10

Tentative Title: "Encounter With Christ - The Basis for Christian Experience."

Thesis: The apostles' faith was based upon the dynamic personal encounter they experienced with the Word of Life. Their encounter led to the message John proclaims. When we accept that message we too may partake of a dynamic personal encounter with Christ upon which our faith may be established.

Introduction: Background for the Epistle - focus especially on the occasion (see chapter 1 - Historical Study).

Major Points:

I. The Encounter (1:1-4)

1. They heard Him - preach (Matt. 5:1ff).

2. They saw Him - heal (Mark 3:1-6).
3. They touched Him - risen (John 20:26-29).

II. The Message (1:5-10)

1. Hearing - receiving the message (1:5-7).
2. Seeing - ourselves as sinners and He as Savior (1:8-10).
3. Touching - God's heart through confession (1:9).

Text: I John 2:1-6

Tentative Title: "Dependent Obedience - The Christian Lifestyle"

Thesis: The rule or norm of the Christian life should be a commitment not to sin. However, such obedience must always be carried out in recognition of our great dependence upon our Advocate and His work on our behalf.

Major Points:

I. Obedience (2:1a, 5-6)

A. Obedience, our calling.

1. Obedience is our calling (2:1a).
2. Obedience allows for the perfecting power of God's love in our lives (2:5a).
3. Obedience evidences our relationship with Christ (2:5b).
4. Obedience should be patterned after the example of Christ (2:6).

B. The example of Israel (Deut. 8:1-10).

1. They were called to obedience (8:1).
2. Obedience meant discipline and hardship (8:2-5).

3. Motivation for obedience rested in their special relationship with God (8:6-10).

II. Dependence (2:1b-2)

A. Dependence, our need.

1. Israel was humbled so as to see their need of God (Deut. 8:3).
2. The Christian life is not sinless perfection (1:8-10).
3. Dependence upon the Advocate is needed (1:9; 2:1b-2).

Text: I John 2:15-17

Tentative Title: "Love Not the World!"

Thesis: Christians are called to be citizens of heaven yet they must live out their lives as pilgrims here on the earth. The question of how one lives here in the world but remains not of it is answered when we consider the disaster of the Fall, the victory of Christ, and the essentials of Christian citizenship.

Introduction: Discuss the libertic and ascetic views of the early false teachers. A key question to consider is how Christians are to regard their place in the world.

Major Points:

I. Love of the World (2:15-17)

- A. The elements of such love (2:16).
 1. Lust of the flesh.
 2. Lust of the eyes.
 3. Pride of life.

B. Origin of the elements (Gen. 3).

1. "She saw . . . a delight to the eyes. . ." -
lust of the eyes.
2. ". . . good for food . . ." - lust of the
flesh.
3. ". . . desireable to make one wise . . ." -
pride of life.

C. Application: These elements turn love into
lust, orienting the individual away from the
Father's love toward the self.

II. Love of the Father (2:17b).

A. The victory of Christ (Matt. 4:1-11).

1. He conquered the lust of the flesh (4:3-4).
2. He conquered the pride of life (4:5-7).
3. He conquered the lust of the eyes (4:8-10).

B. Essentials for Christian citizenship (I Jn. 2:12-14).

1. Recognition of the forgiveness of sins (2:12).
2. The right knowledge of God (2:13a).
3. Overcoming the evil one (2:13b).
4. Abiding in God's word (2:14).

C. Application: Christ refused to be deceived into
forfeiting the Father's love on behalf of the
interests of Self. Because of His victory over
the tempter we may know the victory through
faith in Him. Such a relationship makes us true
citizens of the everlasting kingdom.

Texts: I John 2:7-11; 3:11-18; 4:7-5:3

Tentative Title: "The Nature of Christian Love"

Thesis: The dynamic of Christianity is the love of Christ being lived out in the lives of believers. Christians are commanded to bring God's love into a hostile world. Such love entails great sacrifice for it may bring cursing rather than blessing. Yet the mark of fellowship with Christ is the practice of Christian love. Therefore, as a subject it is of utmost importance.

Introduction: Discuss the destructive effect the elitism of the false teachers had on the fellowship of those to whom John writes. Intellectualism replaced love and as a result the meaning of the gospel was lost.

Major Points:

- I. Christian love and the Commandments (2:7-11).
 - A. The old commandment (2:7).
 - 1. Total love for God (Deut. 6:4-5).
 - 2. Love worked out toward one's neighbor (Lev. 19:18b).
 - B. The new commandment (2:8).
 - 1. Christ's command was to love (John 13:34-35).
 - 2. The newness is in His example ". . . even as I. . ."
- II. Christian Love and the World (3:11-18).
 - A. The negative example of Cain (3:12).
 - 1. Cain was a fallen man (Gen. 4:1).
 - 2. Cain offered God an easy sacrifice (4:3).

3. Cain was hostile toward the one who knew God's love (4:8).

B. The world is like Cain.

1. It is fallen (3:1).
2. It offers God lip service.
3. It is hostile toward God's children (3:13).

C. The positive example of Christ (2:16).

1. Christ was spiritual man.
2. Christ offered God the costly sacrifice.
3. Christ's example becomes our motivation.

III. Christian Love and Our Confession (4:7-5:3)

A. Christian love is tied to the confession of Christ (4:16).

B. Christian love is practiced in the shadow of the cross (4:9-11).

C. Christian love is the dynamic of Christian fellowship (4:20-5:3).

Texts: 2:18-29; 3:1-12; 4:1-6

Tentative Title: "The Spirit of Anti-Christ"

Thesis: In a day when so many false teachers and religious cults seem to be abounding it is vital that Christians understand the nature and consequences of such persons and systems of belief. John was dealing with a similar situation when he wrote the Epistle. In it we can discern the real meaning of the anti-Christ spirit and its impact upon those who embrace it.

Introduction: Discuss the particular religious heresy with

which John seems to be dealing. Focus on its denial of the incarnation of Christ. Point of relevance - they like many of today's cultist groups held to much of the truth concerning Christ, but when it came down to it, they denied Him at the most essential level. What often sounds good in the beginning can often turn out to be a nightmare in the end.

Main Points:

I. The Spirit of Error

- A. The anti-Christ spirit marks the final hour of history (2:18).
- B. The anti-Christ spirit opposes God's redemptive work in Christ and thereby denies God Himself (2:22-23).
- C. The anti-Christ spirit practices unrighteousness (3:7-10).
- D. The anti-Christ confession is a testimony to error (4:1-6).

II. The Spirit of Truth

- A. The one who does the will of God abides forever (2:17b).
- B. The one who abides in Christ has the true knowledge of God (2:20, 24-29).
- C. The one born of God practices righteousness (3:3, 6-10).
- D. The one who confesses Christ thereby testifies to the truth (4:2; 4-6).

Texts: 3:19-24; 4:17-18; 5:7-21

Tentative Title: "Blessed Assurance"

Thesis: John's polemic was a positive one. In dealing with error, rather than devote too much space to direct confrontation he lifts up Jesus Christ and the great benefits which come from fellowship with Him. In this way Christians have always found great comfort and strength for their faith no matter what the world can throw at them.

Introduction: Discuss John's positive polemic of majoring on truth rather than error. Point of relevance: If Christians today would spend less time arguing over doctrinal and denominational differences and instead major on the great affirmations of the Christian faith the world would reel under the impact!

Main Points:

- I. Assurance Through Love (3:19-24; 4:17-18).
 - A. Love in practice assures our hearts before God (3:19-21).
 - B. Love in practice assures us that God hears our petitions (3:22).
 - C. Love in practice assures us on the day of judgment (4:17-18).
- II. Assurance Through Fellowship (5:7-21).
 - A. Knowing Christ assures us of:
 1. The witness of the Spirit (5:7-12).
 2. The ministry of intercessory prayer (5:14-17).
 3. The keeping power of God (5:18-21).

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this project has been to present a model for the preparation of a Biblical book for expository preaching. At each point in the model it has been hoped that the relevancy of the step to the modern pulpit ministry has been made clear to the reader. Today's world demands of the pastor the most dynamic preaching ministry he can possibly exercise. If this project has been a stimulus for the reader to continue endeavoring to improve the quality of his sermon preparation, then it will not have been a wasted effort.

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