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A New Inductive Study of the First Epistle of John

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A NEW INDUCTIVE STUDY OF THE
FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION	1
The Problem Stated	2
The Problem Justified	2
Limitations of the Study	3
Assumptions of the Study	4
Statement of Sources	4
Procedure of the Study	5
II. AN INDUCTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE EPISTLE	7
Method of Analysis	8
Method of Outlining	11
Basic Outline	13
Inductive Analysis	16
Concluding Observations	31
Summary	32
III. INSIGHTS OF THE GREEK VOCABULARY OF THE EPISTLE	33
Basis of Word Selection	35
Method of Procedure	36
Vocabulary Study	37
Concluding Observations	59
IV. THE CONFLICT IN THE EPISTLE WITH FALSE TEACHING	62
Basis of Consideration	63

CHAPTER	PAGE
The Nature of the False Teaching	67
Claims of the False Teachers	69
Historical Comparison of False Teaching	73
Condemnation of False Teachers	81
True Teaching to Counter the False Teaching	82
Concluding Observations	92
V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	94
Summary	95
Concluding Observations	97
Conclusion	98
BIBLIOGRAPHY	100

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

It is the never-ending task of Christian scholarship to interpret the sacred Scriptures in the light of an increasing understanding of the situation contemporary to their writing. The task is attempted anew in each generation, and no single pronouncement upon a given book is accepted as final. The men of each generation desire also to interpret the Scriptures so that they speak relevantly to their own day. Such is the task of this study.

I. THE PROBLEM STATED

This study does not attempt to speak to a newly discovered problem. It merely asserts a fresh, meaningful, and somewhat original approach to the problem of what it is that God would reveal to the men of this day through his written Word, the Bible. This study deals with that problem with reference to the First Epistle of John, in terms of an inductive investigation of the Epistle. The primary aim of the study was to determine the central thrust and the overall meaning of this Epistle.

II. THE PROBLEM JUSTIFIED

Many have taken in hand the task of interpreting John's First Epistle. The writer of this study does not presume to surpass these studies, but seeks simply to approach the same problem from different

directions. It is always proper, in the light of the inexhaustible nature of Scriptural material, and in view of its continuous relevance to changing contemporary situations, to apply new interpretative procedures to the Bible.

The three approaches incorporated in this study consist of three distinct inductive considerations. The first approach is that of an exhaustive analysis, based upon the grammatical thought units of the Epistle. The second approach is a more specific study of the crucial words, based somewhat upon the results of the first approach. The third approach is a direct study of the occasion and purpose of the writing of the Epistle, based upon assumptions developed from the first two approaches. These three approaches differ from all other available studies of the particular Epistle under consideration.

III. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

A comprehensive interpretation of the First Epistle of John would contain a survey of its interpretation through the centuries of Christian history. Such a survey lies beyond the scope of this study. The method of interpretation upon which the inductive interpretations were built was the historico-grammatical method, which considers the words and phrases in their natural, literal sense and in their context in history. No other basis for interpretation is considered.

Nor was this study intended to be an exhaustive commentary on the contents of the Epistle. Many words and phrases, both difficult and elementary in meaning, were left undiscussed. The study endeavored to scan the heart of the Epistle. It is not, therefore, a verse by verse examination of the data. Many perplexing problems were dealt

with superficially, if at all, as considered not to be pertinent to the major meaning of the Epistle.

IV. ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY

Several assumptions must be made in a study of this type. The inspiration of the Epistle and its right to a position in the corpus of Christian Scripture was not questioned. Nor were the genuineness, authenticity, and integrity of the Epistle doubted. There appeared to be no legitimate reason to question the traditional views relative to these considerations.

The right of private judgment in the interpretation of the Scriptures was assumed. With reference to the text, no exhaustive study of the manuscript evidence was felt necessary. The most recent Nestle Text (1953) was considered to be as near the original autograph as necessary.

V. STATEMENT OF SOURCES

The primary source for all three approaches was the Epistle itself. The Novum Testamentum Graece, edited by Eberhard Nestle, was used for study in the original Bible language. The American Standard Version of the Bible provided facility for thinking through the material in the mother tongue.

Commentaries provided principles of interpretation as well as suggestions for procedure. Observations and conclusions were drawn independently of them, and later weighed against them for justification and, in certain cases, clarity of phraseology. Those which were especially helpful were Westcott's volume on The Epistles of

St. John and Fellowship in the Life Eternal by Findlay.

The inductive analysis largely followed the method devised by Daniel Fuller and set forth in his Inductive Method of Bible Study. The exhaustive Concordance to the Greek New Testament by Moulton and Geden was invaluable in connection with the word-study approach. The historical study of false teaching was collated from a number of sources, but Jonas' study of The Gnostic Religion and the Introduction in The Johannine Epistles by Dodd were particularly useful.

VI. PROCEDURE OF THE STUDY

Three distinct approaches to John's First Epistle were made. These made possible the consideration of the material from three different viewpoints. Each of these approaches was based upon an inductive procedure.

Chapter II consists of an inductive analysis of the Epistle. The procedure is explained as a logical reconstruction of the material, beginning with the complete thought units of the Epistle. Equal units were related according to particular laws of relationship. The larger units were in turn related, extending finally to the several largest equal units, which form the major segments of the Epistle. The results of this exhaustive analysis are presented in outline form.

Chapter III consists of an inductive word-study of the Epistle. The Epistle is approached in terms of the actual Greek words, principally the nouns and verbs, of which it is constructed. Each word was considered in context, and the more important words were isolated. The results of this consideration are presented by a brief survey of

the meaning and usages of the crucial words arranged in logical groups.

Chapter IV consists of a topico-inductive study of the false teachings which the author of the Epistle endeavored to counteract. This approach assumed the occasion of the Epistle to be the withdrawal of certain members of the church who sought to take others with them. It assumed the purpose of the Epistle to be a reaffirmation of the believer's fellowship and a fortification of his faith in the face of the false teaching. An investigation of the false teaching was made from within the Epistle itself and in comparison to historical statements. The implications of the predominantly positive teachings of the Epistle for opposing false teaching were considered. The results of this study are recorded in experimental form.

Each of the three studies approached the material inductively, or with reference to particulars. The endeavor was to determine the general meaning of the whole from a thorough study of the particulars. A brief summary appears at the conclusion of each study, setting forth the major findings of that particular approach. The concluding chapter brings together the insights provided by each of the three approaches to the Epistle.

CHAPTER II

AN INDUCTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE EPISTLE

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In order to make a useful study of a biblical book, it is necessary at the outset to determine the structure of the book as a means of understanding the purpose in the mind of the writer and the meaning which he intended. An exhaustive analysis of John's Epistle was developed, based upon an intense inductive study of the material. This brought to light the central thrust of the Epistle, and suggested further approaches to an understanding of the author's message.

Following an explanation of the method employed, this chapter considers the analysis of the Epistle. Brief observations upon the purpose and meaning of the Epistle conclude the chapter.

I. METHOD OF ANALYSIS

The method used in the interpretation of the First Epistle of John was the inductive method. Induction is the "act or process of reasoning from a part to a whole, from particulars to generals, or from the individual to the universal."¹ Applied to the study of the Bible, induction begins with the particulars of a book, its words, and proceeds to the generals, the concepts conveyed by the author by

¹Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, p. 427.

the sequence in which the words are cast.

The procedure begins with the laying out of every word of the book to be studied, with no regard for any editorial additions, such as verse and paragraph divisions, or even punctuation. These smallest particulars are then grouped, by means of syntactical considerations, into thought units, or grammatically complete sentences. These thought units form the basic particulars with which one works to determine the structure of the Bible book.¹

Beginning with the thought units of a particular book, certain definite relationships are sought, and the thought units are related according to laws of proportion. Any two equal, consecutive thoughts combine to form a larger thought unit, which in turn is related to the thought unit to which it is equal. Occasionally, more than two thought units are clearly equal, and all combine to form a single larger unit. In this way, larger and larger relationships are discovered, the largest of which become the major divisions of the book.

The procedure may be illustrated by applying it to a passage from John's Gospel, found in chapter three and verses twenty-nine and thirty. The first particulars which confront the reader are:

he that hath the bride is the bridegroom but the
friend of the bridegroom that standeth and heareth
him rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's
voice this my joy therefore is made full he must
increase but I must decrease

¹Daniel P. Fuller, The Inductive Method of Bible Study, pp. 1:8,9.

Here are forty particulars, made up of twenty-eight different verbal symbols. They can be coalesced into five thought units as follows:

- a. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom.
- b. But the friend of the bridegroom that standeth and heareth him rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice.
- c. This my joy is therefore made full.
- d. He must increase.
- e. But I must decrease.

These five thought units, each a grammatically complete sentence, form the particulars of the inductive procedure. The next step is to relate them, following certain well-defined patterns of relationship. At the outset, it is observed that a is equal to b, and that b reverses the thought which a has expressed. That is, although the bridegroom is the one with reason to be happy, his friend is not by contrast unhappy, but is happy as well, by reason of the bridegroom's joyous voice. In a similar way, d and e are seen to be equal, with e reversing the thought of d. The connective particle "but" indicates this reversal of thought.

Analyzing the units further, it is discovered that d-e serves to explain and substantiate c, and therefore that c is equal to d-e. There are now two larger units, a-b and c-d-e. It is further noticed that a-b states symbolically a principle which is given a practical application in c-d-e. Therefore, these two larger units are also equal. A glance at the context discloses that John the Baptist is explaining to his disciples why he is not jealous, but rather is happy, that Jesus is having greater success than he himself is having.

Having thus arrived at the relationships involved in the

passage, the constituent elements may be set forth in outline form.¹

1¹ John sets forth a principle by means of an example, a,b.

2¹ The bridegroom is the one with a reason for joy, a.

2² But the friend has joy because of the bridegroom's rejoicing, b.

1² John applies the principle to his situation with Jesus, c-e.

2¹ John declares that his own joy is complete, c.

2² John explains that his joy arises from Jesus' ascendancy, d,e.

3¹ Jesus must assume greater importance, because of who he is, d.

3² He who introduces Jesus must assume less importance, e.²

It is to be observed that the major headings of the outline do not represent arbitrary generalizations imposed upon the portion by the subjective bias of the interpreter. Rather, each larger heading represents the fruit of a rather laborious consideration of the particulars. It is this method of inductive analysis which was applied to the 188 thought units of the First Epistle of John.³

II. METHOD OF OUTLINING

In order to understand the analysis of the Epistle, the mechanics of the outlining procedure must be explained. First, the use of numbers and of superscript numerals is essential to

¹In the actual process of developing these relationships, each thought unit is described under an arc, and larger arcs are used to relate equal units. Certain symbols are enclosed within the arcs which denote the particular relationships expressed.

²An explanation of this particular method of outlining appears in the following division of the chapter.

³For many of the principles involved in this method, the author is greatly indebted to the work by Daniel P. Fuller, entitled The Inductive Method of Bible Study.

the interpretation of the analysis. For purposes of illustration, an apocryphal book containing five thought units has been constructed and outlined:

1¹ Man is a sinner and liable to punishment, 1:1-6.

2¹ Man is a creature involved in sin, 1:1-4.

3¹ Man has been born into a sinful race, 1:1,2.

3² Man has committed sinful acts, 1:3,4.

2² Man is a creature under God's punishment, 1:5,6.

1² Jesus Christ died to release sinners from punishment, 2:1-6.

2¹ The fact of Jesus' death is that it was by crucifixion, 2:1,2.

2² The purpose of Jesus' death was to pardon sinners, 2:3-6.

Now the method of numerical outlining can be clearly explained.

The number "1" is always representative of the largest sections of the book. The superscript numeral tells which of the main sections it is, for example, 1¹ is the first main section and 1² is the second main section. The number "2" represents a subheading under the number "1," the number "3" under the number "2," and so forth.

There are certain laws which govern the subheadings. They must be equal in function as thought units. For example, 3¹ is equal to 3² above, since both posit a fact regarding the sin of man. In addition, 3¹ and 3² must exhaust the material contained in the subheading "2." In the above example, 2¹ includes verses 1-4 of chapter 1. Together, 3¹ and 3² also include these verses. This follows in the case of each set of subheadings in the outline.

In most cases, two subheadings (rather than three or more) will combine to form a larger unit. Exceptions occur where there appears a transitional unit between two major units, or when three

(or more) units are clearly equal, such as where several statements are made with reference to a single thing.¹

In the construction of the analysis, complete sentences are used throughout, since each division denotes at least one complete thought unit. Two subhead sentences under a given heading are generally parallel in structure, since the thought patterns represented are equal.

III. BASIC OUTLINE

There are almost as many different outlines of John's First Epistle as there are commentators and expositors. Brooke notes that "no analysis of the epistle has been generally accepted," and suggests that the attempt to analyze it should perhaps be abandoned.² The Epistle defies the highly logical type of analysis such as that to which Paul's writings, for example, submit.

What appears, however, to be the unrelated reiterations of a few broad themes is actually a well-developed structure. Barnett suggests that John alternates between the ethical idea of obedience and the theological concept of Christ, arguing for the inseparable nature of belief and righteousness.³

On the basis of the author's analysis, it was felt that the main body of the epistle included three cycles of truth. Each cycle

¹For this numerical outlining procedure, the author is indebted to Dr. E. E. Cochrane of Seattle Pacific College, Seattle, Washington.

²A. E. Brooke, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles, p. xxxii.

³Albert E. Barnett, The New Testament, p. 251.

contains two major sections. The first section is ethical, containing a part on righteousness and a part on love. The second section is theological, and speaks to the content of Christian belief.¹ These three, righteousness, love, and belief, are the key to the structure of the Epistle. In the third and last cycle the three themes are brought together and their interrelationship is shown.

Before considering the complete inductive analysis, it would be well to point out exactly where the study is going. The basic outline is analogous to the traveler's map. It is not the job of the cartographer to include all the geographic particulars on his map. He includes only those general elements which will adequately guide the traveler through the particulars. It is well to remember, however, that it is the particulars themselves which give rise to the generals.

The basic outline, therefore, includes only those general thought units sufficient to guide the reader through the mass of particulars. It presupposes knowledge of the particulars and is, in fact, built up from them. Since it is merely an outline, and not an analysis, sentence units will not be used. Throughout the thesis, as in this outline, the versification is that of the American Standard Version of the Bible.

¹A comparison of the basic outline with those of Theodor Haring and Robert Law, as presented by Brooke in his Commentary (pp. xxxiv-xxxviii), shows a fairly high incidence of correspondence with regard to the major sections.

The First Epistle of John

- 1¹ Introduction and statement of purpose, 1:1-4.
- 1² The Christian message of right and wrong, 1:5-5:12.
 - 2¹ The principles of the Christian message--general statement, 1:5-2:2.
 - 2² The content of the Christian message--specific statement, 2:3-5:12.
 - 3¹ The Christian standard of behavior and belief--Cycle I, 2:3-2:27.
 - 4¹ The direction of the believer's ethical behavior, 2:3-17.
 - 5¹ Ethical behavior--the keeping of God's commands, 2:3-5.
 - 5² Ethical behavior--the proper direction of behavior, 2:6-17.
 - 6¹ Behavior in regard to progression in righteousness--positive, 2:6-11.
 - 6² Behavior in regard to the direction of love--negative, 2:12-17.
 - 4² The essentiality of the believer's true faith, 2:18-27.
 - 3² The Christian standard of behavior and belief--Cycle II, 2:28-4:6.
 - 4¹ The practice of the believer's ethical behavior, 2:28-3:24.
 - 5¹ Behavior in regard to the practice of righteousness--negative, 2:28-3:10a.
 - 5² Transition between the practices of righteousness and love, 3:10b.
 - 5³ Behavior in regard to the practice of love--positive, 3:11-3:24.
 - 4² The believer's true faith in opposition to false witness, 4:1-6.
 - 3³ The Christian standard of behavior and belief--Cycle III, 4:7-5:12.
 - 4¹ Love for God: the foundation for brotherly love and righteous obedience, 4:7-5:3.

- 5¹ Love for God: basis of brotherly love, 4:7-4:19.
- 5² Love for God: basis of obedience to His commands, 4:20-5:3.
- 4² True faith: the foundation of a victorious life in God,
5:4-12.
- 1³ Conclusion and additional statement of purpose, 5:13-21.

IV. INDUCTIVE ANALYSIS

The way has now been prepared for the introduction of the exhaustive analysis of the first Epistle of John. In this analysis, subheadings are only carried out to ten places (i.e., 10¹, 10²), although in the actual analysis of the Epistle they went as far as sixteen places. In other words, some subheads denominated "10" will represent several units of thought in the original inductive analysis. These subheads will be noted by use of an asterisk (*).

- 1¹ John opens his epistle with an introductory statement of purpose:
He writes for the benefit both of the reader and of
himself, 1:1-1:4.
- 2¹ John writes in order that his readers might have fellowship with
God and Jesus, 1:1-3.
- 3¹ The declaration of the manifested life is made that the reader
might have fellowship, 1:1-3a.
- 3² This declared fellowship is with God and Jesus, 1:3b.
- 2² John writes in order that his own joy might be full, 1:4.
- 1² John includes in his epistle the heart of the Christian message of
right and wrong, that the child of God might know how to
behave and to believe, 1:5-5:12.
- 2¹ John declares the principles of the Christian message of right
and wrong, 1:5-2:2.
- 3¹ John declares the substance of the message, 1:5a.
- 3² The substance of the message is the moral contrast between
right and wrong, 1:5b-2:2.

4¹ God is light, and is not darkness, 1:5b,5c.

5¹ John states positively that God is light, 1:5b.

5² John states negatively that God excludes darkness, 1:5c.

4² The believer is to be in light, not in darkness, 1:6-2:2.

5¹ John states the principle of contrast between a true and a false profession of walking in light, 1:6,7.

6¹ We lie if we walk in darkness and say that we have fellowship, 1:6.

6² But we truly have fellowship if we walk in the light, 1:7.

7¹ We have fellowship if we walk in light, 1:7a.

7² We have cleansing of Jesus' blood if we walk in light, 1:7b.

5² John illustrates the contrast between true and false in terms of the question of sin, 1:8-2:2.

6¹ There is a right and a wrong way to deal with sin, 1:8,9.

7¹ The wrong way to deal with sin is to say falsely that we don't have sin, 1:8.

8¹ We are deceitful if we say we have no sin, 1:8a.

8² We fall short of truth if we say we have no sin, 1:8b.

7² The right way to deal with sin is to confess it and have God forgive us of it, 1:9.

6² There is a false and a true way to handle the commission of sin, 1:10-2:2.

7¹ It is false to say we have never committed sin, 1:10.

8¹ We call God a liar if we say we have not sinned, 1:10a.

8² We exclude God's word from us if we say we have not sinned, 1:10b.

7² It is true that we need no longer sin and that a provision is made if we do sin, 2:1,2.

8¹ There is the possibility that the readers will not sin, 2:1a.

- 8² There is a provision made by Jesus in case one should sin, 2:1b,2.
- 9¹ Jesus is the advocate for one who sins, 2:1b.
- 9² Jesus is the propitiation for all sins, 2:2.
- 2² John declares the content of the Christian message of right and wrong in terms of behavior and belief, 2:3-5:12.
- 3¹ John sets forth the Christian standard of behavior and belief--Cycle I, 2:3-2:27.
- 4¹ The believer's behavior is directed into righteousness and love as he obeys God's commands, 2:3-17.
- 5¹ Generally, ethical behavior rests on keeping God's commands, 2:3-5.
- 6¹ Our knowledge of God and relationship to Him depend upon keeping His commands, 2:3-5a.
- 7¹ Keeping God's commands assures us that we have known God, 2:3.
- 7² Keeping God's commands is the prerequisite for His abiding in us, 2:4,5a.
- 8¹ Falsehood abides in the one who fails to keep God's commands, 2:4.
- 9¹ He is a liar who claims to know God and breaks His commands, 2:4a.
- 9² The truth is not in one who claims to know God and breaks His commands, 2:4b.
- 8² But God's love abides in the one who keeps His commands, 2:5a.
- 6² Therefore we know that we are related to God, 2:5b.
- 5² Specifically, ethical behavior is characterized by progression in righteousness and a proper direction of love, 2:6-17.
- 6¹ John commands positively in regard to progression in righteousness, 2:6-11.
- 7¹ One who is related to God should walk in a Godly fashion, 2:6.
- 7² The precept to walk in a Godly fashion is both an old and a new command, 2:7-11.

- 8¹ John writes a command which is old, since it has been heard from the beginning, 2:7.
- 9¹ John directs an old command to his readers, 2:7a,7b.
- 10¹ No new command is being written, 2:7a.
- 10² An old command is being written, 2:7b.
- 9² The directed command has been heard from the beginning, 2:7c.
- 8² John writes a command which is new, since it is now fulfilled in his readers, 2:8-11.
- 9¹ John shows the hopeful fulfilling of the new command, 2:8.
- 9² John shows the sorry plight of one who hates and the happy condition of one who loves, 2:9-11.
- 10¹ One who hates is in darkness, no matter what he professes, 2:9.
- *10² The contrast is shown between one who loves and one who hates, 2:10,11.
- 6² John commands negatively in regard to the direction of love, 2:12-17.
- 7¹ John states a confidence regarding the spiritual stature of his readers, 2:12-14.
- 8¹ John reassures his readers of their standing in a present tense statement, 2:12-13b.
- 9¹ John writes to the children whose sins are forgiven, 2:12.
- 9² John writes to the fathers because they know Jesus, 2:13a.
- 9³ John writes to the young men because they have overcome the evil one, 2:13b.
- 8² John reassures his readers of their standing in a past tense statement, 2:13c,14.
- 9¹ John wrote to the children because they know the father, 2:13c.
- 9² John wrote to the fathers because they know Jesus, 2:14a.

- 9³ John wrote to the young men because of their strength, 2:14b.
- 7² John declares that the direction of his readers' love should not be toward the world, 2:15-17.
- 8¹ One should not love the world, since he cannot love both God and the world, 2:15,16.
- 9¹ The readers are told not to love the world, 2:15a.
- 9² The readers are told that they cannot love both God and the world, 2:15b,16.
- 10¹ The father's love cannot abide in one who loves the world, 2:15b.
- 10² That which is of the world is not of the father, 2:16.
- 8² The follower of God, not the follower of the world, will abide, 2:17.
- 9¹ The world and its lusts will pass away, 2:17a.
- 9² The one who does God's will will not pass away, 2:17b.
- 4² True belief is essential to a relationship with God, 2:18-27.
- 5¹ Following falsehood concerning Christ excludes one from abiding in Christ, 2:18-27b.
- 6¹ The truth of Christ brings those related to God together and excludes others, 2:18-25.
- 7¹ It is the last hour, since antichrists have proved that they do not belong with us, 2:18,19.
- 8¹ We know it is the last hour because of the rising of antichrists, 2:18.
- 9¹ The appearance of antichrists affirms that it is the last hour, 2:18a,18b.
- 10¹ The statement is made that it is the last hour, 2:18a.
- 10² The statement is confirmed by the rising of antichrists, 2:18b.
- 9² Therefore, we know it is the last hour, 2:18c.

8² The rising of antichrists is explained in that certain people have proved that they did not belong with us, 2:19.

9¹ Certain people did not belong with us, 2:19a,19b.

10¹ Certain people went away from us, 2:19a.

10² But these people did not belong with us, 2:19b.

9² That certain people did not belong with us was proved by their leaving from us, 2:19c,19d.

10¹ Certain people would have stayed with us had they belonged with us, 2:19c.

10² But they manifested that they did not belong with us when they went away, 2:19d.

7² But God does belong with us, as a result of the truth with regard to Christ, 2:20-25.

8¹ The readers have knowledge and ability to discern truth, 2:20,21.

9¹ The readers have knowledge through anointing, 2:20.

10¹ The readers have an anointing from the holy one, 2:20a.

10² The readers therefore know all things, 2:20b.

9² The writer is writing because of the knowledge which his readers have, 2:21.

8² The readers have God's abiding as a result of a proper response to the truth of Jesus, 2:22-25.

9¹ Those in whom God abides are those who confess, not those who deny, Jesus, 2:22,23.

*10¹ One who denies that Jesus is Christ is a liar, and therefore cannot possess the father, 2:22,23a.

10² One who confesses that Jesus is Christ possesses the father, 2:23b.

9² Those in whom God abides are those who receive the word which they have heard, 2:24,25.

10¹ The readers are to let what they have heard abide in them, 2:24a.

- *10² The promise of life and abiding is given if they receive what they have heard, 2:24b,25.
- 6² John warns against false teachers, reassuring his readers of their ability to discern, 2:26-27b.
- 7¹ John writes concerning false teachers, 2:26.
- 7² But John writes that his readers do not really need warning because of their anointing, 2:27a,27b.
- 8¹ The anointing abides in the readers, 2:27a.
- 8² They need not therefore to be taught, 2:27b.
- 5² Therefore, those who are following the truth are abiding in Him, 2:27c.
- 3² John sets forth the Christian standard of behavior and belief—Cycle II, 2:28-4:6.
- 4¹ The believer's behavior centers in the practice of righteousness and love, 2:28-3:24.
- 5¹ John writes negatively in regard to the practice of righteousness, 2:28-3:10a.
- 6¹ The readers should care for their relationship to God in view of His coming, 2:28.
- 6² The readers can know their relationship to God by their practice of righteousness, 2:29-3:10a.
- 7¹ John explains that God's children can be known by their righteousness, 2:29-3:9.
- 8¹ The sign of relationship to God is righteousness, 2:29.
- 8² Righteousness is seen in the contrast of those related to God with those unrelated to God, 3:1-9.
- 9¹ John shows the positive and negative righteousness of one related to God, 3:1-6a.
- *10¹ One who is related to God purifies himself, 3:1-3.
- *10² One who is related to God cannot sin, 3:4-6a.
- 9² John shows the danger of being led astray by one who is unrelated to God, 3:6b-9.

*10¹ The reader should not allow himself to be led astray by one who sins, 3:6b,7a.

*10² The reason given is that one who is God's does not sin, 3:7b-9.

7² John declares that the children of God and of the devil are known, 3:10a.

5² John states transitionally that he who falls short of righteousness and he who does not love are of the same stripe, 3:10b.

5³ John writes positively in regard to the practice of love, 3:11-3:24.

6¹ John exhorts his readers to love each other in a tangible way, 3:11-18.

7¹ In general terms, Christians should love each other, 3:11.

7² In particular terms, love should be materially expressed in view of the world's hatred, 3:12-18.

8¹ Because we have life, the world hates us, although we love each other, 3:12-15.

9¹ The world's hatred of us is a sign that we have life, 3:12,13.

*10¹ Cain is an example of an evil person maliciously hating a righteous person, 3:12.

10² Therefore, a righteous person should not marvel at the world's hatred of him, 3:13.

9² Our love for each other is a sign of our life, 3:14,15.

10¹ The test of having passed from death to life is love for our brothers, 3:14a.

*10² One who refuses to love has not passed from death to life, 3:14b,15.

8² Therefore our love should be expressed by a sharing of our lives in a material way, 3:16-18.

9¹ Love is expressed by laying down our lives for brothers, 3:16.

10¹ Love is seen in God's act of laying down His life, 3:16a.

- 10² Therefore, we should lay down our lives for our brothers, 3:16b.
- 9² Love is expressed in material aid to a needy neighbor, 3:17,18.
- 10¹ Lack of love is apparent in refusal to help a needy neighbor, 3:17.
- 10² Therefore, we ought to love in a material way, 3:18.
- 6² John's exhortation is based on the knowledge of the readers that they are Christians, 3:19-24.
- 7¹ We are certain of our relationship to God by our objective knowledge of His truth and greatness, 3:19,20.
- 8¹ We know we are of the truth, 3:19a.
- 8² We assure our hearts before God, since God is greater than our hearts, 3:19b,20.
- 7² We are certain of our relationship to God by the subjective witness of our hearts and of His Spirit, 3:21-24.
- 8¹ We have boldness before God when our hearts witness that we keep His commands, 3:21-23.
- 9¹ Negatively, we have boldness before God if our hearts don't condemn us, 3:21.
- 9² Positively, we have boldness before God if we obey his commands to believe and love, 3:22,23.
- 10¹ We receive what we ask if we keep God's commands, 3:22.
- 10² The content of God's command is to believe and love, 3:23.
- 8² We know God abides when the Spirit witnesses that we keep His commands, 3:24.
- 9¹ The condition of God's abiding is keeping of His commands, 3:24a,24b.
- 10¹ One abides in God if he obeys God's commands, 3:24a.

10² God abides in the man who obeys His commands,
3:24b.

9² The proof of God's abiding is the witness of His
Spirit, 3:24c.

4² The believer's belief is true as opposed to the witness of
false spirits, 4:1-6.

5¹ The readers are to distinguish false from true spirits,
4:1.

6¹ The readers are not to believe every spirit, 4:1a.

6² Rather, they are to distinguish the spirits, since
they are false spirits, 4:1b.

5² The readers know the distinction between true and false
spirits, 4:2-6.

6¹ The readers know the Spirit of God in distinction to
false spirits, 4:2,3.

7¹ The readers can recognize God's Spirit, 4:2a.

7² The readers know the different confessions of God's
Spirit and antichrists, 4:2b,3.

8¹ The Spirit who confesses that Jesus came in the
flesh is from God, 4:2b.

8² The spirit who denies Jesus is antichrist, and
comes not from God, 4:3.

9¹ The spirit who does not confess Jesus does not
belong to God, 4:3a.

9² This spirit is antichrist, who is present, 4:3b.

6² The readers know God in distinction to the errors of
the world, 4:4-6.

7¹ The readers belong to God and have overcome the world,
4:4.

8¹ The readers belong to God, 4:4a.

8² Therefore, the readers have overcome the world, 4:4b.

7² Further, they know the contrast between truth and
error, 4:5,6.

- 8¹ The world hears those who belong to the world, but God's people hear those who belong to God, 4:5-6c.
- 9¹ Certain ones belong to the world and are heard by the world, 4:5.
- *10¹ Certain ones speak to the world to which they belong, 4:5a,5b.
- 10² Certain ones are listened to by the world, 4:5c.
- 9² We belong to God and are heard by God's people, 4:6a-6c.
- 10¹ We belong to God, 4:6a.
- *10² We are heard by God's people rather than by those who do not belong to Him, 4:6b,6c.
- 8² In this way we recognize the truth of God and the error of the world, 4:6d.
- 3³ John sets forth the Christian standard of behavior and belief—Cycle III, 4:7-5:12.
- 4¹ Love for God issues in brotherly love and righteous obedience, 4:7-5:3.
- 5¹ One's love for God issues in love for one's brother, 4:7-19.
- 6¹ John shows specifically that we should love in view of our experience of God's love, 4:7-18.
- 7¹ John explains in various ways why we should love, 4:7-12.
- 8¹ We should love, since our knowledge of God includes love, 4:7-8a.
- 9¹ John exhorts his readers to love each other, 4:7a.
- 9² John explains that love and the knowledge of God go together, 4:7b-8a.
- 10¹ Our love for others comes from God, 4:7b.
- *10² Whether we love or not depends upon our knowledge of God, 4:7c,8a.
- 8² We should love, since God loved us and is seen in us by our love, 4:8b-12.
- 9¹ We should love, since God loved us, 4:8b-11.

- *10¹ God's love for us is seen by a consideration of His nature and action in sending Jesus, 4:8b-10.
- 10² That we should love God is known by a consideration of God's love for us, 4:11.
- 9² God, unseen by human eye, is seen in the life of one who loves, 4:12.
- 10¹ God Himself is never seen by a man, 4:12a.
- 10² God is seen in the man who loves, 4:12b.
- 7² John explains the means by which we have come to know God's love, 4:13-18.
- 8¹ We have experienced a relationship to God through His Spirit, 4:13.
- 8² We have experienced God's love through the sending of His Son for us, 4:14-18.
- 9¹ We have experienced the fact of God's sending His Son to us, 4:14,15.
- 10¹ The writer makes it clear that God has sent His Son as a Savior, 4:14.
- *10² Confession of Jesus as God's Son yields mutual abiding, 4:15.
- 9² We have experienced the fact of God's love working in us, 4:16-18.
- 10¹ John states the fact of God's love within us, 4:16a.
- *10² John declares the nature of God's love within us, 4:16b-18.
- 6² John shows generally that we do love because of our experience of God's love, 4:19.
- 5² One's love for God issues in observance of His commands, particularly in regard to love for God's children, 4:20-5:3.
- 6¹ One who loves God must love others, as God has given command, 4:20,21.
- 7¹ One who hates his brother cannot love God, 4:20.

- 8¹ He is a liar who claims to love God while hating his brother, 4:20a.
- 8² He cannot love an unseen God who hates the brother whom he sees, 4:20b.
- 7² But one who loves God must love his brother, for so God has commanded, 4:21.
- 6² A believer is one who clearly loves the children of God in response to God's commands, 5:1-3.
- 7¹ One who is a believer loves God's children, 5:1.
- 8¹ One who believes in Jesus has been begotten by God, 5:1a.
- 8² Further, he also loves the others who have been begotten by God, 5:1b.
- 7² We can discern our love for God's children by our obedience to God's commands, 5:2,3.
- 8¹ We know we love God's children by our response to God's commands, 5:2.
- 8² The reason we know is that love is shown in a response to God's commands, 5:3.
- 9¹ Love for God is shown by keeping His commands, 5:3a.
- 9² Further, God's commands are not burdensome, 5:3b.
- 4² Faith is the foundation of a victorious life in God, 5:4-12.
- 5¹ It is God's begetting through our faith in Jesus that makes our overcoming possible, 5:4,5.
- 6¹ One who is begotten of God overcomes the world, 5:4a.
- 6² Faith in Jesus makes it possible to overcome the world, 5:4b,5.
- 7¹ Generally, it is faith which overcomes the world, 5:4b.
- 7² Specifically, it is faith in Jesus which overcomes the world, 5:5.
- 5² It is the reception of the Son through the witness of God that gives life, 5:6-12.
- 6¹ One has life who receives God's witness to His Son, 5:6-11.

- 7¹ God's three-fold witness to Jesus goes beyond man's ordinary requirements, 5:6-9.
- 8¹ Three witnesses agree in their witness to Jesus, 5:6-8.
- 9¹ Three witnesses offer witness to Jesus, 5:6-8a.
- *10¹ The three witnesses are explained as the Spirit, the water, and the blood, 5:6,7.
- 10² The three witnesses are a fact, 5:8a.
- 9² The three witnesses are in agreement, 5:8b.
- 8² God's witness to His Son therefore supercedes man's ordinary requirements, 5:9.
- 9¹ God's witness is greater than man's requirements, 5:9a. (cf. 2 Corinthians 13:1).
- 9² God's witness is in regard to His Son, 5:9b.
- 7² Parenthetically, a contrast is shown between belief in and denial of Jesus, 5:10.
- 8¹ One who believes in Jesus has God's witness in himself, 5:10a.
- 8² One who refuses to believe God's witness makes God a liar, 5:10b.
- 7³ God's witness to Jesus brings life to us, 5:11.
- 6² One has life who receives God's Son, 5:12.
- 7¹ He has life who possesses God's Son, 5:12a.
- 7² He does not have life who has not God's Son, 5:12b.
- 1³ John closes his epistle with a concluding statement of purpose: He writes that the believers might have assurance of their life in God, 5:13-5:21.
- 2¹ John writes generally of the assurance of life which the believer should have, 5:13.
- 2² John writes specifically of the confidences which the believer has, 5:14-21.
- 3¹ The believer has confidence in God's bestowals, 5:14-17.
- 4¹ Our confidence in God is that we receive our requests, 5:14,15.

- 5¹ The confidence we have is that if we ask, He hears, 5:14.
- 5² The confidence we have is that if He hears, we have, 5:15.
- 4² For example, we receive life for a sinning brother if we ask of God, 5:16,17.
- 5¹ John states that God will give life to a brother who commits non-mortal sin if we ask Him to, 5:16a,16b.
- 6¹ One should ask God for the brother whom he sees commit sin, 5:16a.
- 6² God will give life to those who commit non-mortal sin, 5:16b.
- 5² John emphasizes that he is speaking of non-mortal sin, 5:16c-17.
- 6¹ Sin can be mortal, for which John offers no instruction, 5:16c,16d.
- 7¹ There exists sin which is mortal, 5:16c.
- 7² One should not necessarily pray for such sin, 5:16d.
- 6² But not all sin is necessarily mortal, 5:17.
- 7¹ All unrighteousness is properly called sin, 5:17a.
- 7² But sin exists which is not mortal, 5:17b.
- 3² The believer has confidence in his behavior and belief, 5:18-21.
- 4¹ We know that we live above the claims of sin, 5:18.
- 5¹ We know that one who is begotten of God does not commit sin, 5:18a.
- 5² For one who is begotten of God is protected from the evil one, 5:18b,18c.
- 6¹ The Son, peculiarly begotten by God, keeps the one begotten by God, 5:18b.
- 6² The evil one doesn't touch him who is begotten by God, 5:18c.
- 4² We know that we are related to God while the world lies in the evil one, 5:19.
- 4³ We know that only the truth which came in Jesus can give life, 5:20,21.

5¹ Positively, we know that Jesus is the truth who gives us life, 5:20.

5² Negatively, the readers are to guard against that which is false, 5:21.

V. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

A great number of observations could be made with reference to the content of the Epistle and its various divisions. These are reserved for the later chapters. Only general observations are necessary at this point. From a study of the analysis, three significant observations emerge, which provide direction for the remainder of this study, and become the basis for the following chapters.

1. John utilizes words in a very creative fashion. Employing a vocabulary of only a few over two hundred words (of which over seventy are used only once and some thirty-four only twice), John nevertheless provides his reader with a great deal of variety and depth of thought. Repeated use of synonymous words and phrases is evident, as are a number of striking contrasts. Imperative verbs are few in number. The prevailing mood is descriptive, placing the burden for conformity upon the reader's comprehension rather than upon the author's command.

2. One of the predominant purposes of the Epistle is that the reader might measure his own Christian life against the certain principles of conduct and faith set forth in the Epistle. John writes in order that they might have fellowship with God (1:3). This suggests a possible coldness on the part of his readers, or a falling short of the vital Christian fellowship. He is concerned that they

examine their own lives against the dynamic Christian ethic, although he is careful not to prejudge their condition or imply disbelief of their Christian profession.

3. The other predominant purpose is closely related to the first. The readers are to test others, who apparently are seeking to lead them astray. John writes in order that they might know that they are in contact with life and truth (5:13). Implicit in the Epistle is an argument against the postulates of what is termed Gnostic teachings. The clear indication of this is the repeated reference to what the Christians "know," in contradistinction to the supposedly superior gnosis of the heretical teachers.

VI. SUMMARY

This chapter has presented in exhaustive form an analysis of the First Epistle of John. The method of interpretation and of presentation has been clarified, and the actual analysis given. From this initial approach to the Epistle has come, first, a detailed understanding of the message which the Apostle desired his readers to receive and, second, guidance for the approaches used in the following chapters.

CHAPTER III

INSIGHTS OF THE GREEK VOCABULARY OF THE EPISTLE

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It is a common error to fail to see the forest for the trees. On the other hand, one can become so well acquainted with the forest that he no longer notices that it is made up of individual trees. The reader can become so familiar with the overall truth, or supposed truth, of his Bible that he skims rapidly through its contents, failing to notice the structural units which form the vehicle for the truth. He gazes comfortably at the ocean, never pausing to observe the individual swells of which it is made.

An inductive approach to the Epistle was made in terms of coming to grips with the words which the author employed, using the original Bible language. Such a study does not suppose a wooden literalism as the basic hermeneutic, nor does it require a dictation theory as the means of inspiration. Rather, it seeks to discover the author's original intent by an investigation of the words which he used and of the ways in which he used them.

It was observed in the previous chapter that John employed words in a very creative fashion. If it is true that "the subject matter of a passage largely determines its phraseology,"¹ an analysis of the phraseology provides insight into the subject matter and meaning of a literary effort.

¹Oswald T. Allis, The Five Books of Moses, p. 41.

I. BASIS OF WORD SELECTION

There are over two hundred words employed by the author of the Epistle. While this is a remarkably small vocabulary for a work of its scope, it is too extensive to be considered exhaustively and in detail. The attempt of this study was to distill the essence of the message by reference to the crucial words and to the literary techniques in the use of words. It was necessary to choose discriminately the words which bore the major burden of communication.

The importance of a word is not determined primarily by the number of times it is used, but largely by its function within the thought unit. This is easily illustrated. A newspaper reporter might submit an article beginning with the statement that "a big man saw a big brown dog chase a white rabbit up a big green tree."

Analyzing the sentence, the first observation is that the article "a" occurs four times, the adjective "big" occurs three times, and there are references to three different colors. None of these words, however, is crucial to the message. The real meaning involves the fact that "man saw," and the explanation of what he saw was "dog chase rabbit up tree." The journalist would convey the central meaning of his message, in headline form, in just that manner, i.e., "Man sees dog chase rabbit up tree."

From this, it is clear that verbs and nouns ordinarily have the greatest functional value in conveying the meaning of a thought unit. While they need the environment provided by descriptive and directive words, they are the "work-horses" of communication. The approach to an understanding of the Epistle through its words,

therefore, is largely concerned with the verbs and nouns employed. This chapter considers the Epistle's key words, endeavoring to determine their meaning by the way in which they are used by the author.

II. METHOD OF PROCEDURE

As the foundation for this approach, every word used in the Epistle was isolated, and a listing made of each time it occurred.¹ This made possible a contextual study of each word in all of its occurrences. Study of a given word was restricted to the Epistle itself, with no comparisons being made to its use in other New Testament literature. Out of this study of the vocabulary came additional insight into the central purpose of the Epistle.

The results of the study of the vocabulary are organized in a way which endeavors to point up the thrust of John's message. They are not considered in alphabetical order, nor is there any verse by verse arrangement. Organization of the remainder of this chapter is based simply on the relative importance of the words to be included, according to logical groupings. Two criteria determined the selection of key words. First, the number of times which a word is used has a certain value in determining its importance. Second, the essential service which each word gives in conveying the main message helps to determine its importance.

¹For this phase of the work, Moulton and Geden's Concordance to the Greek New Testament provided a great deal of help.

III. VOCABULARY STUDY

The clearest insights into the purposes of the Epistle are provided by John's use of the word χαρά. This word occurs thirteen times. Twelve of these uses occur within the introduction and first Cycle of the Epistle, with the last one in the conclusion.¹ At the outset, John explained that his personal reason for writing was that "our (i.e., his) joy may be made full (1:4)."² Here alone the verb is plural, which is probably an editorial technique, although it could possibly have wider reference to an apostolic group.

In every other case, "I WRITE"³ occurs in the first person singular, and is followed by the dative ὑμῖν, "unto you." After six occurrences in the present tense, there is an abrupt change to the aorist, which occurs in the last six usages. There is no obvious reason for this, and probably no essential distinction is intended, except in the conclusion, where a summary purpose of the Epistle is included. It is possible that John at first viewed his letter as it was in the process of transcription, and then changed tenses as he contemplated the letter as ideally complete.⁴

¹For references to various sections of the Epistle, the reader is referred to the Basic Outline in Chapter II.

²Phrases quoted from the Epistle are taken from the American Standard Version of the Bible. Since all quotations appear in the First Epistle of John, chapter and verse references are given alone.

³Each word under consideration is written in Greek at its first appearance. Subsequently, it appears in English, following the American Standard Version translation, and is capitalized to indicate that the particular Greek word stands behind it.

⁴Brooke Foss Westcott, The Epistles of St. John, p. 58.

There are two categories of reasons for John's writing. There is, first, the purpose he intended to accomplish by the letter, and, second, the nature of the recipients of the letter. As to purpose, it seems to be twofold. First, John declared, "I WRITE unto you that ye may not sin (2:1)." To help them accomplish this, positively he reiterated an old commandment (2:7,8), and negatively he WRITES "concerning them that would lead you astray (2:26)." Second, his purpose is to give assurance and security to his readers; I WROTE unto you that ye may know that ye have eternal life (5:13)."¹

John felt free to write as he did because of the nature of his readers. They were apparently questioning the assurance of their faith, and were perhaps growing cold in their Christian lives, as witnessed by John's purposes in writing. But John appealed to them on the basis of their position and past victories.²

Therefore, John states, "I WRITE unto you because:"

- a. your sins are forgiven, 2:12.
- b. you know the truth, 2:21.
- c. God's word abides in you, 2:14.
- d. you know him who is from the beginning, 2:13,14.
- e. you know the Father, 2:13.
- f. you are strong, 2:14.
- g. you have overcome the evil one, 2:13,14.

John made it clear that he was addressing Christians, for he WROTE on the basis of their experience with God and their forgiveness. He reminded them as well of their strength and victory.

John's relationship with the recipients of the Epistle is

¹The discussion of the two verbs of intellection, γινώσκω and οἶδα, is reserved for consideration in Chapter V.

²A. E. Brooke, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles, p. xxix.

clarified by the vocatives which he used. He addressed them seven times as τέκνια, six times as ἀγαπητοί, twice each as παιδιά, νεανίσκοι, and πατέρες, and once as ἀδελφοί.

The most characteristic word, τέκνιον, is a diminutive of τέκνον, the usual word for "child." It expresses closeness of relationship, such as the kinship between disciple and teacher.¹ This word seems to include all the readers, who, in one passage, are distinguished as FATHERS, YOUNG MEN, and CHILDREN (2:13,14). CHILDREN is a comprehensive word signifying all the readers, who are addressed as elder and younger.² This is probably due to John's apostolic office, causing him to look upon all Christians, of whatever age, as his children. Hayes suggests that John was so old himself that all in the church seemed like children to him.³ The other characteristic expression, BELOVED, is clearly indicative of a closeness of relationship, as is the single use of BROTHERS (3:13).

One of John's largest concerns regarded the attitudes and behavior of his readers. This was figuratively portrayed by the verb περιπατέω. A contrast appears between the one who WALKS "in the darkness (1:6;2:11)" and the one who WALKS "in the light (1:7)." One who claims a relationship with God is under obligation to "WALK even as he WALKED (2:6)." The word is obviously used metaphorically, and refers to the conduct or behavior of the believer.

¹Marvin R. Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament, p. 334.

²George G. Findlay, Fellowship in the Life Eternal, p. 179.

³D. A. Hayes, John and His Writings, p. 162.

Vincent felt that WALK referred to the "habitual course" of a man's life.¹

The outworkings of the believers walk are clearly set forth. Three groups of words suggest three realms of behavior and attitude. The realm of love is seen in words centering in ἀγαπάω. The realm of righteousness is set forth in words clustering around ἐντολή, while πιστεύω heads the realm of faith.

If any one concept can be said to dominate the Epistle, that concept is love. The noun ἀγάπη occurs more times in this short Epistle than in any other New Testament book.² The verb ἀγαπάω is used more times than any other single verb in the Epistle. And this is in spite of the fact that neither word occurs in the "belief" passages in any of the three Cycles, nor do they occur in the introductory and concluding passages.

An analysis of ἀγαπάω discovers that it is an interest directed primarily toward one's brother (2:10; 3:10,14; 4:20,21; 5:1), obviously a reference to other Christians, the "children of God (5:2)." This is strengthened by the suggestion that "we should LOVE one another (3:11,23; 4:7,11,12)." By contrast, the believer is not to direct this interest toward the world (2:15). Further, this is an active interest, since LOVE is not to be fulfilled "in word (or) with the tongue, but in deed and truth (3:18)."

This interest is not only horizontal, but also vertical, since God has it for men (4:10,11) and the believer has it for God

¹Vincent, op. cit., p. 314.

²Hayes, op. cit., p. 173.

(4:10,19,20,21;5:1,2). The horizontal and vertical elements of interest are mutually inclusive, in the life of the believer, since love for one's brother and love for God condition each other (4:20,21; 5:1,2).

To love, then, involves "aggressively seeking the good of others."¹ It is an expression of character, determined volitionally, and not generated by emotion.² The presence or absence of this aggressive interest toward God and toward one's brother is a sign of having been begotten by God (4:7) and of knowing God (4:7,8).

Further clarification of the nature of love is given by reference to ἀγάπη, the noun. In general, its meaning follows that of the verb.³ God is the source of LOVE (4:7) because "God is LOVE (4:8,16)." God embodies LOVE; his nature is the nature of LOVE. God gives LOVE meaning by his benevolence (3:1;4:9,10) to believers and his sacrifice (3:16) for men. The LOVE which a man exhibits is not his own, but merely the LOVE of God in him (4:12,16), and that LOVE is capable of growth (2:5;4:12,17,18). A man's participation in LOVE is manifested by actively doing good to his needy neighbor (3:17), by obedience to God's commands (5:3), and by the absence of any contrary interests, such as LOVE toward the world (2:15).

LOVE, then, is active, bears the marks of sacrifice, and finds its ultimate ground in God. In man's case, it made possible

¹Carl F. H. Henry, Christian Personal Ethics, p. 231.

²Westcott, op. cit., p. 133.

³Joseph Henry Thayer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 4.

his relationship to God, and is to be returned to God as well as being manifested toward his brother.

In this connection, ἀδελφός should be examined. One usage refers to the natural relationship of Cain and Abel (3:12). In every other case, the relationship refers to believers, as is evidenced by John's addressing his readers in one instance as BROTHERS (3:13). The believer should be willing to lay down his life for his BROTHER (3:16), which is, in context, an attitude synonymous with LOVE. His concern should be for his brother, whether he is seen to be in need (3:17) or overtaken in a sin (5:16).

The dividing line of Christianity is drawn by the believer's attitude toward his brother. Either a man knows God and loves his BROTHER (2:10;3:14;4:21) or he is a stranger from God and hates his BROTHER (2:9,11,15;3:10;4:20). There is no neutral position. Thus the BROTHER is important as a measure of a man's life in God.

One of the great contrasts of the Epistle is thus introduced. There is the attitude of ἀγαπάω, which has been analyzed, and there is the opposite attitude of μισέω. These two attitudes are mutually exclusive. The man who HATES is said to be "in darkness (2:9,11)" and to "walk in darkness (2:11)." He is a murderer (3:15), and any profession of love toward God makes him a liar (4:20).

As LOVE is a benevolent interest in another, HATE is a destructive interest in another. To have HATE is totally opposite to having LOVE; it is to be morally bankrupt. Further, a man must either HATE or LOVE, for, as Vincent put it, "the heart will not be empty, and he who has no love must have hate."¹

¹Vincent, op. cit., p. 332.

In the realm of righteousness, ποιέω describes much of the believer's obligation. Among the things which the believer is required to do are:

- a. the truth, 1:6.
- b. the will of God, 2:17.
- c. righteousness, 2:29;3:7.
- d. things pleasing to God, 3:22.
- e. God's commandments, 5:2.

Again a contrast is shown between those who are DOING these things and those who, instead, are not DOING righteousness (3:10), but are DOING sin (3:4,8) and unlawfulness (3:4).

Crucial to the concept of righteousness is the ἐντολή, which is the embodiment of God's will. Specifically, there is an old/new COMMANDMENT (2:7,8), there is the COMMANDMENT to believe in Jesus (3:23), and the COMMANDMENT to love one another (3:23;4:21).

The plural use of COMMANDMENT has reference largely to the attitude of the believer. Primarily, it is his duty to "keep his COMMANDMENTS (2:3,4;3:22,24;5:3)." What this involves is clarified by the statement that the COMMANDMENTS are to be done (5:2). That is, they are to be kept by an active observance, or doing, of them. The assurance follows that God's COMMANDMENTS are not burdensome (5:3).

The injunctions to keep the COMMANDMENTS is enriched by the use of the verb τηρέω. Five times, as noted above, the believer is exhorted to KEEP his commandments. The verb appears in two other places. It is said that love is perfected in one who KEEPS God's word (2:5), and it is noted that one who is born of God is secure, for the Son KEEPS him (5:18). The word of God and the commandments of God are in large measure synonymous. But when one keeps another, it is usually with a protective jealousy and concern. Thus, the

believer's attitude toward God's commandments is not only to observe them, but to do so scrupulously and jealously. Righteousness involves an ardent concern for an obedience to God's prescribed rules for life.

In the realm of faith, the leading verb is πιστεύω. The object of faith is most often Jesus. One may BELIEVE in the Son of God (5:10) and in the "name of the Son (3:23;5:13.)" It is necessary to BELIEVE that Jesus is both the Christ (5:1) and the Son of God (5:5). BELIEVING is also the response given to God's love for us (4:16) as he manifested it to us in Christ.

Faith, however, should be discriminating. One should be careful not to BELIEVE promiscuously every spirit which clamors for faith (4:1), since many false spirits are abroad in the world. It is even possible to reject faith, and to refuse to BELIEVE the witness of God concerning Christ. To do so is to call God a liar (5:10). To BELIEVE, then, is to put confidence in, or to affirm the truth of, the divine facts to which God has witnessed in the event of the incarnation of Christ.

Faith is used in connection with another concept of the Epistle. The single occurrence of the noun πίστις comes in conjunction with another noun, νίκη (5:4), which appears only here in the whole New Testament. The verb form is νικάω, translated "to OVERCOME." The ability to OVERCOME is based upon faith, and OVERCOMING is accomplished in three areas. Certain ones had OVERCOME the evil one (2:13,14), the believers had OVERCOME false teachers (4:4), and they had also OVERCOME the world (5:4,5). The orientation of OVERCOMING is primarily doctrinal. It is the OVERCOMING of false teaching more

than of false practice. This is concluded, first, from the source of the victory, which is faith, or true belief. It is also apparent from the nature of those defeated. The "evil one" is doctrinally and/or ethically ambiguous, as is "the world." But "false teachers" implies doctrinal aberrations. It is possible, of course, that ethical situations were included, but, if so, they were grounded upon doctrinal truth.

The Epistle has its foundation firmly in Christian theism. References abound to all three persons of the trinity. Their relationship and functions are clearly set forth. Although the supposed "trinitarian text (5:7 in the Authorized Version)" is clearly spurious, and doesn't appear even in the margin of the American Standard Version, there is obvious allusion elsewhere to each of the three persons of the trinity.

The most frequently used noun in the Epistle is θεός, which occurs some sixty-two times. It is of interest to note the increasing frequency of its use within the Epistle. It appears once in Chapter One, thrice in Chapter Two, ten times in Chapter Three, twenty-nine times in Chapter Four, and nineteen times in Chapter Five. With reference to the inductive analysis, beside a single appearance in the introduction and six in the conclusion, GOD is used three times in Cycle I, eighteen times in Cycle II, and thirty-three times in Cycle III.

GOD occurs most often in the genitive case, and frequently uses the preposition ἐκ. That GOD generally refers to the Father appears from the constructs "Son of GOD (3:8;4:15;5:5,10,12,13,20)" and the "Spirit of GOD (4:2)." Believers are said to be "children

of GOD (3:1,2,10;5:2)." This is by virtue of their having been "begotten OF GOD (3:9;4:7;5:1,4,18)." This is also the background of the statements that he, you, or we are "OF GOD (3:10;4:1,2,3,4,6;5:19)."

Something of GOD'S beneficence is disclosed in such passages as "Love is OF GOD (4:7)." His acts and attributes are included in terms of the "love of GOD (2:5;3:17;4:9;5:3)," the "word of GOD (2:14)," the "will of GOD (2:17)," and the "witness of GOD (5:9)."

The nominative use of GOD explains what God is and what he has done. The two great affirmations of God's nature in this Epistle are "GOD is light (1:5)" and "GOD is love (4:8,16)." John also declared that GOD and Jesus are one and the same (5:20) and that "GOD is greater" than the believer's condemning heart (3:20). With regard to his acts toward men, GOD has loved men (4:11,16), and sent his love (4:9), by which he has given men life (5:11). The result is that GOD abides in men (4:12,15,16). Of all this which he has done, GOD has witnessed (5:10) to man.

GOD can be the object of man's knowledge (4:6,7,8), and should be the object of man's love (4:10,20,21;5:2). But he cannot be the object of man's physical sight (4:12). Man is responsible for believing in GOD (5:10) and, having done so, may abide in GOD (4:15,16).

Of all the persons of the trinity, it is the Son who appears most frequently in the Epistle. In every instance, of which there are twenty-nine, the υἱος is related to God the Father. He is said to be the "SON of God (3:8;4:15;5:5,10,13,20)," or reference is made

to "the Father and his SON (1:3,7;3:23;4:9,10;5:9,11,20)." Several references equate Father and SON (2:22,23,24;4:14). Further, the SON is identified with Jesus the Christ (1:3;3:23;5:20).

John especially stressed this identity of the SON with the man Jesus, who is the anointed Χριστός. It must be affirmed that Jesus is the CHRIST (2:22;5:1) and the Son of God (5:5). The name Jesus is conjoined to the title CHRIST in every chapter of the Epistle (1:3;2:1;3:23;4:2,15;5:6,20). Confession of or denial of Jesus as the CHRIST is made the watershed between the true Spirit of God and false spirits (4:2,3).

The πνεῦμα of God is recognized by his confession of Jesus, as just observed. The believer has the ability to discern between him and erroneous SPIRITS (4:6). Believers, therefore, are exhorted to "prove the SPIRITS (4:1)" to see whether or not they come from God. The true SPIRIT of God bears witness to the work of Christ (5:6,8) and assures the believers of their relationship to God (3:24;4:13).

The final concept related to GOD is that of πατήρ. It is the FATHER who sent the Son (4:14), and they two had been eternally together (1:2). The FATHER is such not only to his eternal Son, but also to those who have received his love (3:1). The believer, therefore, can know the FATHER (2:13), can have fellowship with him as with the Son (1:3), and can abide in both FATHER and Son (2:24). When one denies the Son, he can make no claim to possession of the FATHER, for to deny one is to deny both (2:22,23).

The relationship existing between the believer and the God-head has been observed in connection with the study of Θεός. Two

verbs were noticed incidentally there, and are examined now, as bearing meaningfully upon the relationship. The logically prior, although less crucial, word is γεννάω, while the vital word of relationship is μένω.

Every reference states plainly that γεννάω is the work of God. God is described as "him that BEGAT (5:1)." Even Jesus is described in his earthly relationship to God as "the BEGOTTEN (5:18)." With exception of these two occurrences, which are aorist, BEGET appears uniformly in the perfect tense, which indicates that one has been born by God and remains God's child.¹ He is always spoken of as having been "BEGOTTEN of God."

The nature of the one BEGOTTEN is set forth by the verb, and falls into the threefold pattern of the believer's life. In the realm of righteousness, he does righteousness (2:29) and does not commit sin (3:9;5:18). In the realm of love, he loves (4:7;5:1), and in the realm of faith, he believes that Jesus is the Christ (5:1) and overcomes the world (5:4).

The verb μένω is crucial to the understanding of the believer's relationship to God. It appears nearly as many times as ἀγαπάω, and is equally vital to the message. It might be said that ABIDING is the passive relationship in the atmosphere of which LOVING is the active relationship. It is a sustaining, continual relationship, defined by Findlay as "existence in God perpetuated...union made restful and secure."²

¹Westcott, op. cit., p. 107.

²Findlay, op. cit., p. 147.

The primary concept of ABIDE depicts the mutual relationship between God and the believer, wherein "God ABIDES in him and he ABIDES in God (4:13,15,16)." Those elements which are expected to ABIDE in the believer include the word of God (2:14), the love of God (3:17), and the anointing of God (2:27). The believer is to ABIDE in the light (2:10) and in love (4:16), as well as to ABIDE in God (2:27,28; 4:16), including both Father and Son (2:24).

Some of the attitudes and activities which characterize the one who is ABIDING in God are listed:

- a. to walk as he walked, 2:6.
- b. to love the brothers, 2:10;4:12.
- c. to do God's will, 2:17.
- d. to refuse to sin, 3:6.
- e. to keep the commandments, 3:24.
- f. to confess Jesus as God's Son, 4:15.

There is assurance available to the believer that he truly is ABIDING in God. Such assurance is given to him by the Spirit of God (3:24; 4:13).

Out of the believer's relationship with God accrue certain benefits and blessings. A rather large group of words, centering in εχω, set forth these elements to which the believer is heir.

An analysis of εχω shows a number of things which various persons can HAVE, should HAVE, or don't HAVE. In one case, the unregenerate is depicted as one who does not HAVE the Father (2:23). The liar claims that he does not HAVE sin (1:8), and the murderer truly does not HAVE life (3:15). One other negative statement declares that a believer does not HAVE need that one should teach him (2:27).

Among the positive possessions of the believer is his

relationship to God. He HAS the Father (2:23;5:12) and the Son (5:12), the latter of which is an advocate (παράκλητος) with the former in the event of sin (2:1). This relationship is also described as "HAVING fellowship" with God (1:3,6,7).

The more impersonal possessions of the believer, stemming from the personal possession of relationship to God, include HAVING eternal life (3:15;5:13) and an anointing (2:20). These factors yield boldness in judgment (2:28;4:17;5:14) which gives rise to HAVING hope (3:3).

Probably the most significant possession of the believer is ζωή. This includes every other factor, both personal and impersonal. The construct "to HAVE LIFE" is stronger than the simple verb ζάω.¹ Brooke notes that John was quite fond of this usage of HAVE with a substantive to intensify the meaning of a verb.²

Something of the meaning of LIFE can be discovered from an analysis of its usages. The "word of LIFE (1:1)," or the embodiment of the quality of LIFE, was with God and was manifested to men (1:2). Further, promise was made to man that he could possess this quality of LIFE (2:25). In fulfillment of the promise, LIFE was given by God in Jesus (5:11), and is conditioned upon possession of Jesus (5:12). John's LIFE is, then, more than a physical entity, but a quality of LIFE belonging peculiarly to God, and given to those who believe in Jesus.

There is a distinct contrast noted between ζωή and θάνατος,

¹Vincent, op. cit., p. 259.

²Brooke, op. cit., p. 8.

and passing into LIFE involves passing out of DEATH (3:14).

This is another of the great contrasts of the Epistle. LIFE and DEATH are mutually exclusive. One who is in DEATH has no LIFE, and cannot have LIFE without leaving DEATH completely. The only clear definition equates abiding in DEATH with failure to love, or hating (3:14). Thus, the contrast between LIFE and DEATH is equivalent to that between love and hate.

The other possession of the believer is κοινωνία. This noun appears only four times in the Epistle, all within the first seven verses, but it is crucial to the understanding of John's message and embodies one of the two great explicit statements of purpose. In three of the occurrences, the phrase is HAVING FELLOWSHIP, giving the more intense meaning than the simple verb form.

FELLOWSHIP is from a compound of two Greek words which means "common mind." Originally referring to persons who are partners, holding property in common, it suggests a relationship of mutual sharing and participation in a common interest.¹ The FELLOWSHIP is distinctly a relationship to God, although it has overtones of FELLOWSHIP among those having FELLOWSHIP with God.² It is felt that John's statement that his readers "may have FELLOWSHIP with us (1:3)" is intentionally ambiguous and means both the FELLOWSHIP of the reader with the writer, and FELLOWSHIP between the reader and God, along with the writer.

The key, perhaps, to the believer's possessions is the

¹C. H. Dodd, The Johannine Epistles, p. 6.

²Thayer, op. cit., p. 352.

foundation of his spiritual heritage, the good news from God. This is variously expressed in several terms which are now considered.

Crucial to the message from God is the concept of Λόγος. The WORD, first, is expressive of something delivered from God. It may refer to a single command (2:7) or to all of God's commandments taken as a whole (2:5). It is a vital concept, for one can have the "WORD of God abide" in him (1:10;2:14). The WORD is complex, bearing the implication of the whole life and work of Jesus, for it is the WORD of the life which was manifested (1:1) which is declared. It is the message as a whole, not personal,¹ but bound up intrinsically with the person of Jesus Christ.

Another term expressive of the message of God to men is the verb μαρτυρέω. Twice it was the author who WITNESSED (1:2;4:14). Both times it was with regard to Jesus, and both times it was on the basis of what has been seen and experienced by the author. In the other cases, it is either God who has WITNESSED (5:9,10) or the Spirit of God (5:7,8). In every case, it concerns the Son. The noun form, μαρτυρία, occurs three times, all in verse 5:9, and compares the WITNESS of God with that of man, declaring that God's WITNESS is greater.

A related concept to the message of which John wrote is the idea of ἀλήθεια. The most striking observation is that TRUTH is not abstract or speculative, but motivational, and something not simply to be apprehended (2:21), but also to be done (1:6).

¹Westcott, op. cit., p. 7; Findlay, op. cit., p. 83; Charles Gore, The Epistles of St. John, p. 58; But cf. William Alexander, The Epistles of St. John, p. 82.

The idea of TRUTH provides orientation for the message. All else is error (2:21) and excludes God; TRUTH is organically related to the nature of God, man, and the universe, and all else is unreal. To be related to God is to be "of the TRUTH (3:19)." One who is not related to God is one in whom "TRUTH is not (1:8; 2:4)." The Spirit of God is the Spirit of TRUTH (4:6; 5:7). The believer's love is not to be expressed verbally, but practiced in TRUTH, that is, in reality (3:18).

Arrayed against the message of truth, against the believer and his privileges, and against even God, are the forces of error and evil. John was positive in his Epistle, but he was positively negative in a great deal of his teaching, contrasting right and wrong, good and bad, and true and false. A study of the words suggesting evil and opposition to God proves helpful to a full comprehension of the message of the Epistle.

The forces of evil which influence the believer are categorized into two groups. There are forces external to the believer, exerting pressure upon him from without. These forces center in the concept of κόσμος. There are also influences within the believer which threaten defeat. These influences are comprehended under the concept of ἁμαρτία.

A study of the noun κόσμος yields the observation that it may have one of several different meanings in a given context. Four different concepts emerge, each of which is developed more fully in content.

The first meaning of WORLD is the human race, for whose sins Christ is the propitiation (2:2), and thus for whom Christ was sent

to be the saviour (4:14). Similar to this, yet distinct, is the idea of the WORLD as the sphere of human life. This sphere of human life is inhabited by false prophets (4:1) and by the spirit of antichrist (4:3). It is also into this sphere, however, that God sent his Son (4:9), and in which believers conduct themselves after the pattern of God's Son (4:17).

The WORLD can also refer to that group of men who are outside the influence of God, and are therefore ungodly. This group refuses to recognize the children of God (3:1), but naturally feels hatred toward them (3:13). This group is indwelt by the spirit of antichrist (4:4) and is said to lie in the evil one (5:19). Because of their common interest, the members of this group speak to each other and listen to one another (4:5).

Finally, WORLD can refer to earthly, material concerns. This WORLD is not to be valued by believers (2:15), for it opposes the love of God as the primary value of life (2:15,16). This system should be devaluated in comparison to God, for it is temporary and passing (2:17). Faith is the eternal orientation which looks above and beyond these concerns with their inferior values (5:4,5).

Robertson believes that, in John's mind, this connotation of WORLD was epitomized by the Roman Empire, thus constituting a very real temptation and threat, confronting believers in their everyday lives.¹

In summary, WORLD has basically four meanings. It may refer to the human race as an organic whole, or to the ungodly segment of

¹Archibald Thomas Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, VI, 214.

that race which is in opposition to God. It can mean the sphere of human life, or the material standard of values held by those who are wholly devoted to this sphere. In the latter of each brace of concepts, which appear more frequently, the WORLD is pictured as immoral and adversative to Christian faith and practice.

Behind this immoral WORLD is a directive power and other, lesser, evil influences. The personage of evil is referred to both as διάβολος and as ὁ πονηρός, or "the evil one." The noun DEVIL is used only four times, within a passage of three verses (3:8-10). It is the DEVIL who sins from the very first (3:8); therefore, one who sins is of the DEVIL (3:8) and a child of the DEVIL (3:10). But the Son of God had as his purpose the destruction of "the works of DEVIL (3:8)."

The more distributed designation for this creature of evil is an adjective used substantively. In one case, EVIL distinguishes the works of Cain from those of his brother (3:12), clearly portraying the idea of moral distastefulness. In all other cases, the word refers to "the EVIL one," the personification of iniquity. Cain derived his nature from the EVIL one (3:12), and the world of ungodly men lies in him (5:19). But he cannot touch believers (5:18), and they can therefore overcome him (2:13,14).

Another evil force or influence which John describes is the ἀντίχριστος. The personal nature of this concept is vague. It is primarily the "spirit of ANTICHRIST" with which John was concerned. It was rumored that the ANTICHRIST was to come, but many false teachers partaking of the nature of ANTICHRIST were already abroad (2:18). Such a teacher is recognized by his denial of Jesus, and,

ultimately, of the Father as well (2:22). Such a non-confessor of Jesus is of the essence of ANTICHRIST (4:3).

This title is suggestively constructed. It is the preposition ἀντί joined to the title Χριστός. Depending on the case of its noun, ἀντί can mean either "against" or "instead of." In this case, both meanings are applicable. The false teacher can be described as "one who, assuming the guise of Christ, opposes Christ."¹

Lowest in the hierarchy of evil personages is the false teacher, or psuedo-believer. Called a ψεύστης, a "LIAR," he is not the ordinary worldly man, but one who masquerades as a Christian. John plainly stated that a LIAR is one who makes profession of Christianity, yet who fails to keep God's commandments (2:4), fails to love his brother (4:20), and denies that Jesus is the Christ (2:22). Here again is the emphasis upon the three essential realms of Christian morality: righteousness, love, and faith.

The dangerous influences warring against the believer are not alone these outside powers, but also the fact of sin within him. A study of the verb ἁμαρτάνω and its noun, ἁμαρτία, discloses the nature of this internal danger.

The clearest picture of SIN is defined by the noun form. First, "SIN is unlawfulness (3:4)" and "unrighteousness is SIN (5:17)." The origin of SIN is in the devil (3:8), and no man can truthfully say that he has no SIN (1:8). In short, it is universal rebellion toward and alienation from God.

The problem of SIN has been dealt with by the Son, who was

¹Westcott, op. cit., p. 70.

manifested to take away SINS (3:5), being himself the propitiation for SINS (2:2;4:10). Forgiveness for SINS is given through Jesus' name (1:9;2:12), and His blood cleanses men from all SIN (1:7). The condition for forgiveness and cleansing is confession of SINS (1:9). Thereafter, having been begotten by God, it is possible that one will no longer SIN (3:9).

A distinction is made between SIN which is "unto death" and SIN which is "not unto death (5:16)." This very likely refers to the difference between an act of SIN done in the context of LIFE and one done in the context of a determined life pattern of DEATH. The particular act derives its nature from the context out of which it springs.

The verb form assumes the definition of SIN as a factor or state of alienation from God for which God has made provision in Christ. It is said that "the devil SINNED from the beginning (3:8)." One who SINS has neither known nor seen God (3:6). The verb "to SIN" is perhaps best translated "to commit SIN."¹

The emphasis is repeated that it is in error to deny that one has SINNED (1:10). The believer is enjoined not to SIN (2:1), although provision is made in case he should SIN (2:1). John declared that one who is begotten of God and abides in him does not SIN (3:6,9;5:18). In this, he is speaking in terms of the character and habit of the believer, the ideal reality of the life in God, rather than in an absolute sense.²

¹Thayer, op. cit., p. 30.

²Vincent, op. cit., p. 348.

The most abstract concept with which John dealt was the idea of φῶς. The source of LIGHT is God, for "God is LIGHT (1:5)." God is also "in the LIGHT (1:7)," which LIGHT is being made known to man (2:8). It is possible for man to walk "in the LIGHT as God is in the LIGHT (1:7)." In other words, man can conduct himself according to the eternal principles which are bound up in the nature of God.

Another radical contrast is depicted by σκοτία, which is the absence of LIGHT. The nature of God totally excludes DARKNESS (1:5). The "DARKNESS is passing away" as a result of the shining of the true LIGHT (2:8). The contrast between the two abstract concepts is compared with the contrast between love and hatred. To abide in the LIGHT involves love (2:10) and excludes hatred (2:9). The one who hates is tragically involved in DARKNESS (2:9,11).

In these passages, LIGHT is attributed absolutely to God, and derivatively to believers. The nature of LIGHT is explained by Westcott as signifying the noblest manifestation in whichever region of being it is applied. "Physically, light embodies the idea of splendor; intellectually, of truth; and morally, of holiness."¹

Another word which gives added dimension to the Epistle is the noun ἀρχή. It is always used in conjunction with the preposition ἀπὸ, giving the phrase ἀπὸ ἀρχῆς. This phrase is used both absolutely and relatively. The manifested life of which John writes is FROM the BEGINNING of eternity (1:1), thus giving a trans-temporal orientation to the message of the Epistle. The believers knew in experience this eternal person who was FROM the BEGINNING (2:13,14).

¹Westcott, op. cit., p. 16.

The phrase, in the relative sense, is used of men and of the devil. Of the devil, it is said that he "sins FROM the BEGINNING (3:8)," that is, from the start of "his career as the devil."¹ Of men, reference is made to the inception of their Christian experience. They are reminded of the message they had heard FROM the BEGINNING (3:11), and of an old command which they had FROM the BEGINNING (2:7). They are enjoined to let that message which they had FROM the BEGINNING abide in them (2:24).

One final word which John employed creatively is the verb ὁμολογέω. This is a compound of two words meaning "the same" and "to say." Confession is, therefore, to say the same thing about something that someone else says.² It is, in short, to agree with another.

To John, to CONFESS is always in reference to God. One agrees with God in certain pronouncements. These are of two natures. The first is the fact that if one CONFESSES his sins, God will bestow forgiveness (1:9). The second has to do with Jesus, and might well be translated "profess" rather than "CONFESS." One who CONFESSES the Son has a claim on the Father (2:23). One in contact with the truth will CONFESS that Jesus is the Son of God (4:15) and that he has come in the flesh (4:2,3).

IV. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

This approach to the Greek vocabulary of the Epistle, comprising

¹Robertson, op. cit., VI, 223.

²Thayer, op. cit., p. 446.

an investigation of the key words in logical sequence, has brought to light a number of observations. Primary among them is the fact that John used a good deal of striking contrast. Christian faith is depicted as totally in opposition to unbelief. There is no neutrality between them, nor is there overlapping of one by the other. Many pairs of words show this contrast, but there are three crucial pairs which picture the vivid reality of the contrast.

The first of these is the conflict between love and hate. The believer loves both God and his brother, and hate has no part in his life. Hate, rather, is a sure sign of unbelief. The second major contrast is between life and death. One who believes has passed from death to life, and possesses eternal life, which is a realm totally excluding death. The two spheres are mutually exclusive. The third major contrast is between light and darkness. One either walks, as does God, in light, or else he is in darkness. There is no hazy middle territory.

The three great positive factors, love, life, and light, if not synonymous, are at least vitally involved. One who does not love neither has life nor walks in the light. But one who walks in the light has life and does love. The three go together. It is impossible to possess one apart from the other two. They are three ways of expressing participation in the one realm of Christian faith.

Another observation stemming from this study is that a correspondence is shown with the major sections discovered in the inductive analysis. John's major concerns were found to center in righteousness, love, and faith. In the vocabulary study, as well, emphasis upon these three realms has repeatedly been seen. For

example, believers are to WALK properly in these realms. Those whom God had BEGOTTEN had the nature to function in proper relationship to these spheres of attitude and practice. One was declared a LIAR if he failed to live up to his profession in any of these three spheres.

A final observation is that this Epistle, as short as it is, runs the gamut of Christian experience, and includes a complete biography of Christian life. It deals with salvation from the viewpoints of both God and the believer, with the conduct and belief of the Christian and the threat of adversaries, and with the eternal hope and fearlessness with which the believer faces judgment. A much more comprehensive view of this spiritual biography would appear in a study which included all the relatively unimportant words which were not directly studied in this effort.

CHAPTER IV

THE CONFLICT IN THE EPISTLE WITH FALSE TEACHING

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Some literature is written solely for the purpose of self-expression. Other literature is produced for its aesthetic value, and still other for more practical considerations. The Scriptures reflect all three purposes. They do feature the expression of both the human author and the inspiring Creator. And, especially in certain portions, they have superb aesthetic value. But the primary worth of the Scriptures is found in their practical value. They were written for a reason, as a means to an end and not as an end in themselves.

An approach was made to the Epistle on the assumption that John had just such a practical end in view. It has been observed that he wrote to reaffirm fellowship with his readers (1:3) and to fortify their faith (5:13). The need for reaffirmation and fortification apparently stemmed from the fact that there were those who sought to lead them astray (2:26). These leaders astray, elsewhere termed false teachers, constituted an immanent danger to the church. They no doubt contributed to the lack of assurance of the readers, and perhaps stood by to take advantage of the weaknesses which they had implanted.

I. BASIS OF CONSIDERATION

In the introductory portion of Chapter II, the inductive

method of approach was defined as a process of reasoning from the particular to the general. The opposite process, that of deduction, is defined as the process of "reasoning from the general to the particular, or from the universal to the individual."¹

In terms of Bible interpretation, the inductive procedure begins with the particulars and proceeds to the general meaning of a passage. By contrast, the deductive procedure begins with the assumption of the general meaning of the passage and then proceeds to a study of the passage, collecting evidence to support that assumption.²

In the strictest sense, the present study is deductive rather than inductive, since it approaches the material with a bias and proceeds to an investigation of the material with a view to the exploitation of that bias. In a looser sense, however, the study is inductive within a presupposed sphere, and might most accurately be termed a "topico-inductive" study.

To be strictly deductive, the approach would assume a particular variety of false teaching to be exposed by the Epistle, and the endeavor would be made to bolster this assumption by an appeal to the material. In the present topico-inductive study, the assumption involves only that false teaching was in existence, a fact which was candidly expressed by John. The approach considers the particulars of the Epistle inductively, in order to give content to the false teachings and to understand just what was involved in the situation

¹Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, p. 215.

²Daniel P. Fuller, The Inductive Method of Bible Study, p. I-1.

to which John wrote.

Several assumptions must underlie a study of this nature, and appear to be valid assumptions. The first is that John was not writing to any abstract or possible future situation, but rather was facing a very present and very real threat. The negative statements occurring throughout the Epistle are not merely added for the sake of contrast, but point to actual situations. Dodd suggested that the Epistle was intended for a group of churches in a particular region, since the situation appears to be local, and since a certain intimacy between reader and writer seems in evidence.¹ Further, the writer appears to have the specific teachings of a particular group in view.²

The practical usefulness of the Epistle is not thereby curtailed, however, for the principles are of general application, and the overall relevance is "not local, but moral."³ The wisdom of John is shown in that he turned what might have been of merely local interest into truth of universal import. A direct refutation of heresy would have given the work only antiquarian interest, but by presenting what is substantially the common belief of the church, John gave "universal, catholic significance" to the Epistle.⁴

Another assumption is that, while there is direct reference

¹C. H. Dodd, The Johamine Epistles, p. xxi.

²A. E. Brooke, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johamine Epistles, p. xliiv.

³Brooke Foss Westcott, The Epistles of St. John, p. xxxiii.

⁴Dodd, op. cit., p. xlii.

to false teaching in a few scattered phrases, the whole Epistle presupposes false teaching, and is directed against it. The positive teaching, as well as the negative teaching, implies a false teaching threatening to corrupt the true message of Christianity. Westcott, who was not certain of the actuality of a particular situation, stated nevertheless that the "underlying thought of the action of false teachers...is everywhere present" in the Epistle.¹

An additional assumption is that John, in this Epistle, has given the clearest picture of any in the New Testament of the false teaching with which a part, at least, of the early church was faced. If the traditional view is true, that John wrote at the very end of the first Christian century, the incipient false teaching alluded to in earlier New Testament writings would have become more concretely formulated. Further, the assumption of this study is that John wrote with this false teaching specifically, not incidentally, in view.

In spite of the foregoing assumptions, it is clear that John wrote with a positive purpose in view. The Epistle is not primarily polemic, but fundamentally a letter for edification.² The erroneous teachings are constantly in view, but they in no way detract from the vital ethical and doctrinal instruction for practical Christian living which is contained within the Epistle.

This study considers the nature of the false teachers and of

¹Westcott, op. cit., p. xlii.

²Archibald Thomas Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, p. 200.

the false teaching with which John was faced. The content is derived inductively from the Epistle itself and then compared to the forms of error with which the early church was faced from the standpoint of non-canonical history. Following this investigation is a consideration of John's positive teachings with their implications for countering the erroneous views. A certain dependence upon the earlier approaches to the Epistle is tacitly assumed.

II. THE NATURE OF THE FALSE TEACHING

There is very little direct reference in the Epistle with regard to the actual false teachers, but what there is provides a measure of insight into their character. John pointedly called them antichrists (2:18) on the basis of their denial that Jesus was the Christ (2:22).

That these false teachers were actual individuals is clearly understood by the fact that they had gone away from the fellowship of the church (2:19). Further, their true nature was manifested in the fact of their withdrawal, and their lack of essential unity with the church was clarified, in spite of their previous affiliation. Perhaps, as Dodd suggested, it was this declaration on the part of the false teachers, and their act of withdrawal, that occasioned the writing of the Epistle.¹

These false teachers were not content merely to leave, but tried to draw some of the true Christians with them, thus leading them astray (2:26). Their boldness is apparent by the fact that,

¹Dodd, op. cit., p. 98.

rather than slipping out in shame, they sought to take others with them. John pictured the false leaders from two aspects, according to Westcott. Spiritually, they were antichrists, while, outwardly, they were leaders astray of others.¹

Another of John's designations for this group was "false prophets (4:1)." The exhortation to believers is that they should carefully test the teaching of all who claim or evidence inspiration, since there is the possibility of false as well as of true inspiration (4:6). The test suggested is the confession of Jesus' having come in the flesh (4:3). Worthy of observation is John's appellation of "prophet" for these false ones, since prophecy was a recognized function in the early church. It is possible to assume, with Dodd, that these false teachers had been influential members of the church, and had perhaps held positions of leadership.² This would help to explain the seriousness of the situation, since the church members would have strong questions aroused by the defection of some of their leaders.

Another source of doubt might come to the Christians in the fact that the false teachers apparently enjoyed a certain amount of success in the propagation of their doctrines. They had a hearing in the world (4:5), possibly a wider hearing than that which the Christians themselves could claim.

As sparse as the direct references to the existence of these false teachers are, the seriousness of the situation confronting

¹Westcott, op. cit., p. 79.

²Dodd, op. cit., p. xix.

the church is clearly revealed. This truth is augmented by the absolute quality of the distinction which John has drawn between truth and error. In the face of the success which might seem to vindicate the false teachings, John stated categorically that his own words were from God, reassuring his readers that their obedience was to the truth, if they received his message.

Claims of the False Teachers. In relative abundance, compared to the direct statements, are allusions to claims which seem to have been common among the false teachers. These claims fall into the two categories of doctrine and ethics, and provide the first clue to the content of the false teaching.

The doctrinal claims are three in number, and are stated in the form of denials. The first denial is of the fact that Jesus is the Christ (2:22). This is not a denial of Jesus, nor is it a denial of the Christ, but simply a refusal to recognize the identification of the two as one person. It was, in other words, a dualistic view. It was a denial of the human nature of Christ and of the divine nature of Jesus by separating Jesus Christ into two persons, one human and the other divine. The second denial, that of the confession that Jesus is the Son of God (5:6), seems to imply the same claim.

The third denial is of the fact that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (4:2,3). This claim apparently recognized the identity of the one person Jesus Christ, but refused to hold to his participation in a real and actual material world.

The ethical claims came from the same source. It is not two, but one group of false teachers of which John wrote. Equally as

dangerous as their doctrinal errors were their ethical aberrations. These claims were made by precept, but, as John showed, denied by example and by failure to understand the full significance of the claims. Alexander has shown that one who claims what these teachers claimed has "contracted a moral debt of far-reaching significance." He must compare his conduct with the reality-in-life of Jesus Christ.¹

Six claims are made, four of which are of a general ethical nature, and two of which are more specifically in the realm of love. John was not afflicted with any superior attitude of piety, for in three of the claims the form is: if we claim this particular virtue, we err (1:6,8,10).

First is the claim to fellowship with God while one is actually walking in darkness (1:6). Involved in this claim was a false independence between spiritual communion and moral conduct.² Second is the claim that one has no sin (1:8). In this claim is the inference that, regardless of whether or not actual acts of sin have occurred, the life is wholly free from the power of sin.³ The third claim, similar to the second, is the claim that one has not committed sin (1:10). This is a refusal to face the personal fact of accountability. "One may deny sin in general," said Findlay, but "will admit practically that he has sinned and is in the sight of God a condemned man."⁴ Refusal to do this is the height of impenitence.

¹William Alexander, The Epistles of St. John, p. 118.

²Brooke, op. cit., p. 13.

³Ibid., p. 17.

⁴George G. Findlay, Fellowship in the Life Eternal, p. 107.

These first three claims are coordinate, and are presented in the order of their seriousness.¹ The claim to fellowship without walking in the light is merely an outright lie (1:6). The unqualified claim to absolute freedom from sin is actually self-deception, and worse than an overt untruth. The claim to exemption from having sinned is denial of what God has said about one and is tantamount to calling God a liar (1:10).

Another claim is that of knowing God (2:4). Such a claim is proved legitimate by obedience to God's ethical requirements, and the one who fails to meet this standard qualifies for designation as a liar. "The teaching of the God whom he claims to know is very different from the views expressed in his claim."²

The last two claims deal with the realm of love. One may claim to walk in the light, but hatred of his brother voids his claim (2:9). Even more serious is the claim to love God made while one hates a fellow-man (4:20).

Love, to John, is the summation of Christian ethics and of Christian belief as well. Ethics involves righteousness, which is fulfilled in love, and which is grounded in proper faith. Love is the final test of religious claims. "Love furnishes...the practical guarantee of religious truth."³

A final hint as to the claims of the false teachers is included in the use of the Greek word παῖς. There is the inference that these

¹The Interpreter's Bible, XII, 223.

²Brooke, op. cit., p. 32.

³Findlay, op. cit., p. 328.

teachers were presumptuous enough to believe that they were above the ordinary standards of the law. They questioned the application of the general principles in their own particular cases.¹

In regard to faith, they believed that their claim to know God was compatible with their denial of the full truth concerning Jesus Christ. But John countered by saying that everyone who denies Jesus is not of the truth (2:21); neither can he have the Father (2:23) nor is he from God (4:3). There is no possibility of any exception. No one is exempt from the absolute standard that denial of Jesus Christ forfeits all claims to knowledge of the truth or of God.

In the realm of ethics, the claims involved profession of a knowledge of God in spite of obvious ethical malefactions. John's contrary claim was that everyone who sinned, without exception, had neither seen God nor known him (3:6). The same absolute declaration is stated negatively in 3:10. Further, everyone who sins is out of harmony with cosmic law (3:4). Again, no individual is exempt from the general principle.

In the more specific area of ethics, the realm of love, these claimants to the life of God felt that to despise others was perfectly compatible with their claims. John countered this spurious idea with a syllogistic argument (3:15). Everyone who hates is a murderer by motive, and it is inconceivable that any murderer could have life in himself. The conclusion, already stated, is that one who does not love his brother could not possibly be from God (3:10).

¹Westcott, op. cit., p. 100.

John has alluded to Christian doctrinal and ethical absolutes. The false teachers had claimed to have been absolved from responsibility to these necessities, but the lie is given to their claim. There are no exceptions to God's precepts in God's moral government.

Historical Comparison of False Teachers. Church history declares that there were a number of heresies and false teachings in the early church. Their various characteristics are fairly well defined in extra-canonical sources. It is the purpose of this part of the study, having arrived at a preliminary understanding of the false teaching to which John was speaking, to identify and classify it as much as possible by a comparison with the historic forms of heresy.

The problem of every interpreter who seeks a historical grounding for heresies alluded to in this and other Epistles has been clarified by Dodd. There is a submersion of church history toward the end of the first Christian century. When the history emerges again, in the middle of the second century, it appears with various systems of false teaching.¹ The term "Gnosticism" serves as a collective heading for these varied sectarian doctrines.² Although John's Epistle seems familiar with certain tenets of this philosophy, it cannot be said with any certainty that Gnosticism as such had or had not developed by the time of the Epistle's writing.³

¹Dodd, op. cit., p. xviii.

²Hans Jonas, The Gnostic Religion, p. 32.

³Brooke, op. cit., pp. 29f.

The most that can safely be affirmed is that the "connection of the Epistle with Gnostic ideas is quite apparent."¹

During the beginning of the Christian period of world history, a movement was developing within pagan religions toward purer and more reasonable forms of religion. The devotees of this movement patronized the traditional religions beside seeking to develop new ones. Most of the contemporary cults and beliefs were rationalized to fit their own thought structures.²

This pattern of rationalization often occurred within the context of Christian belief. Some of the devotees of this respectable form of paganism had been associated with Christianity, and their true nature not known until they withdrew for some reason from the Christian ranks (cf. 2:19). The threat of false teachers was not so much a religion in competition with Christianity as it was a splinter group of erstwhile "Christians." In Westcott's words, "The antagonists... (were) not mere unbelievers, but those who, knowing Christianity, fashion(ed) it into a shape of their own."³

The purpose and method of the false teachers was to transform Christianity by raising its faith to a mystical philosophy. They endeavored to have knowledge supercede belief, love, holiness, and even redemption.⁴ Knowledge was the single key to union with God and all its ramifications. The "gulf of knowledge" divided these

¹Ibid., p. xliii.

²Dodd, op. cit., p. xvi.

³Westcott, op. cit., p. 143.

⁴Alexander, op. cit., p. 43.

Gnostics from the mass of the Christians of simple faith.¹

The basic assumptions of the false teachers all stemmed from a radical dualism between "God and the world, spirit and matter, soul and body, light and darkness, good and evil, and life and death."² From this the view was derived that the material world was evil, the realm of darkness, and the spiritual world was good, the realm of light. Man, being rational spirit, a separated segment of eternal reason, was a prisoner in the world of matter.³ He was fettered in a material body.⁴

But the main emphasis of the Gnostics was that man could be liberated by initiation into their cult, which was accompanied by esoteric experiences and revelations of God.⁵ The spark of divine substance within man, possessed ignorantly by him, could be awakened by gnosis, or knowledge.⁶ They laid claim to a superior knowledge of the hitherto unknown God, imparted only to the privileged few, and they despised the faith of the church and of the average believer.⁷ In reality, their knowledge of the unknown God turned out to be no more than the "knowledge of his unknowability."⁸

¹Jonas, op. cit., p. 206.

²Ibid., p. 31.

³Dodd, op. cit., p. xvii.

⁴Jonas, op. cit., p. 204.

⁵Dodd, loc. cit.

⁶Jonas, op. cit., p. 44.

⁷Charles Gore, The Epistles of St. John, p. 112.

⁸Jonas, op. cit., p. 288.

The practical outworkings of this psuedo-Christian philosophy were a self-centered stress upon enlightenment or illumination, an extreme individualism and exclusionism, and a superior disdain for the material world and for history.¹ John's words in 3:6 seem to imply that having seen God as well as having known him was a claim made by the false teachers to bolster the authority of their doctrines.² This was no doubt a claim to have seen God mystically, in attempted superiority to the apostolic claim to have seen the Son historically.

The actual application of these views to Christianity, from the standpoint of faith, resulted in several distinct ideas. The dualism and the consequent incompatibility of spirit and matter made the doctrine of the Incarnation "unthinkable."³

Three distinct attempts to explain the Incarnation are attributed to crude, early forms of Gnostic teaching. The first, predominantly Jewish explanation denied that Jesus was any more than a human being. This was termed Ebionism. The second attempt, on the contrary, denied any material reality to Jesus Christ, claiming that the life was an illusion. This was Docetism. The third attempt, proclaimed by the Cerinthians, admitted both the human reality of Jesus and the divine life of Christ, but denied that there was any integral connection between them. Westcott could find no reference to the first group in John's Epistle.

¹Dodd, loc. cit.

²Westcott, op. cit., p. 104.

³Gore, op. cit., p. 113.

He found general reference to the second group, but it was the Cerinthians against whom he felt the Epistle was more specifically written.¹

Docetism said that Jesus Christ was merely a phantom, and that his flesh was illusionary.² This explains John's insistence that true confession of Jesus involves his having come in the flesh (4:2,3). Additional opposition to this false idea was probably intended by the statement that the apostles had actually handled with their hands (1:1) the manifested life of the Son of God.

The opinion expressed by Cerinthus, a contemporary of John's, stated that Jesus was a human being upon whom the Christ spirit came at the time of baptism, but whom he left before the crucifixion.³ The cross, therefore, was a human tragedy in which Jesus was involved, but it had nothing to do with Incarnation or atonement.⁴ It was simply a helpless condition of Jesus' mission. He had no power to cancel the laws of the realm of darkness into which he penetrated as Christ.⁵

Against this dualistic parallel view, John wrote of the identification of Jesus and Christ, affirming that they are one and the same (2:22). This false view also seems to have given rise to the emphatic expression concerning the water and the blood (5:6).

¹Westcott, op. cit., p. xxciv.

²Findlay, op. cit., p. 382.

³Dodd, op. cit., p. 130.

⁴Findlay, op. cit., pp. 381f.

⁵Jonas, op. cit., pp. 127f.

This Jesus Christ is the one who came through (διὰ) the water and the blood. The Cerinthians said that Christ first came upon Jesus at the time of his baptism, signified by "water," and left prior to the time of his passion, signified by "blood." But the truth is that the one divine/human person Jesus Christ came through the water and also the blood, and was not only present in the water, but was distinctly in the blood as well. Westcott noted that this false dualistic view of Christ's person involved not only the Incarnation as a doctrine, but the whole meaning of his coming with all its accomplishments.¹ It was, in short, a total denial of Christian redemption.

John declared another of the false claims to be in error by telling the Christians that they had an anointing from God which taught them all that they needed to know (2:27). Further, they all had access to this knowledge (2:20). Knowledge of God was not limited to a few Gnostics, but granted to all true believers.

Hayes correctly observed that an illusionary Christ leads to an illusionary Christianity. If God had not experienced suffering and sacrifice, there would be no reason for a Christian to experience these things. An empty creed leads to an empty morality. Dualistic doctrine leads to dualistic antinomianism.²

The dualistic antagonism between good and evil as it pertained to spirit and matter resulted in a false view of ethics on the part of the false teachers. No sin inhered in their higher, spiritual

¹Westcott, op. cit., p. 183.

²D. A. Hayes, John and His Writings, p. 174.

natures, and no responsibility was involved in their sins of the flesh.¹ To the "spiritual" Gnostic, all is permitted, and his spirit cannot be sullied.² Some of them actually claimed to have become perfect, and they considered themselves above the inferior claims of the moral law to which the average "unenlightened" man was liable.³

The fact that they didn't recognize responsibility to ethical claims opened the door to immorality and unrighteousness, although there is no suggestion in the Epistle that the false teachers in John's time either practiced or condoned the grosser forms of unethical behavior.⁴ Many of the Gnostics were ascetics, and had admirable morals. But they drastically lacked a sense of love and social obligation. This was contrary to John's clear perception that Christian morality was fulfilled by obedience to the command to love.⁵ While legally obedient to much of the moral code of the Christians, the false teachers exhibited "contentiousness...arrogance, and contempt" for the Christians themselves. In their neglect of practical obligations to others and of Christian fellowship they denied the principle of Christian love. It was more than an error of the intellect; it was a false life attitude.⁶

For the Gnostics, love had no place in God. God was wholly

¹Earnest Findlay Scott, The Literature of the New Testament, p. 265.

²Jonas, op. cit., p. 46.

³The Interpreter's Bible, XII, 224.

⁴Brooke, op. cit., p. 48.

⁵Dodd, op. cit., p. xx.

⁶Ibid., pp. 36f.

other than matter. Man could know him intellectually, as wisdom or power, but man could never know him as love.¹ John totally demolished this view throughout the Epistle. He showed not only that God loves (4:10), but that God is love (4:8,16), and that man's highest obligation is love toward God (4:21;5:3) and for his fellowman (4:11,21).

In review, the false teachers expressed erroneous doctrinal views which led to questionable ethical practices, particularly the omission of love. Gore's contention is discovered to be correct, that "what men will become and do depends in the long run upon what they believe about God."²

This truth is verified by the identification of doctrinal and ethical error, both of which found their source in the same false teachers. It has been found to be true historically. Further proof is seen in that John denominated the perpetrators of both types of error as seducers, or those who lead others astray (2:27;3:7).³

If the false teachers to which John referred were not actually known as Gnostics in that precise period of history, they certainly were "on the track which led to later Gnostic heresies."⁴ It has been observed that Gnosticism in the early church, much like Neo-Orthodoxy at the present time, was a general term which had reference to any number of varying ideas. But all the forms of Gnosticism, whether Ebionite, Docetic, Cerinthian, or some other, held certain

¹The Interpreter's Bible, XII, 278.

²Gore, op. cit., p. 64.

³Findlay, op. cit., p. 63.

⁴Dodd, op. cit., p. xix.

views in common. Basically, they had a false view of Jesus, an antinomian view of conduct, and an exclusive view of themselves.

Against these common errors, John made three positive, practical emphases in his First Epistle. Against the false view of Christ, he proposed true belief in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. Against the antinomian view of conduct, John proposed the sphere of true Christian righteousness, and against the exclusive view of themselves, John set forth the unique Christian virtue of love.

Condemnation of the False Teachers. John had a good deal to say about the Gnostics, none of which was complimentary.¹ He viewed their errors from the standpoint of the absolute. Regardless of how close they might have been to Christian standards in practical areas, they were basically in total opposition to all for which Christianity stood.

There were those who held to erroneous beliefs, denying the full reality of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. John declared that they:

- a. are liars, 2:22.
- b. are antichrists, 2:22;4:3.
- c. seek to lead others astray, 2:26.
- d. make God a liar, 5:10.
- e. don't listen to Christians, 4:6.
- f. are not of God, 4:3,6.
- g. have not the father, 2:23.
- h. have not life, 5:12.

There were also those who refused to fulfill Christian ethics,

¹Due to its comprehensive nature, the term "Gnostic" is used in the remainder of this study to describe the false teachers.

failing to recognize the validity of God's commandments. John said that they:

- a. lie, and don't do the truth, 1:6.
- b. are of the devil, 3:8.
- c. deceive themselves, 1:8.
- d. make God a liar, 1:10.
- e. practice lawlessness, 3:4.
- f. are not of God, 3:10.
- g. have neither seen nor known God, 3:6.
- h. have neither God's word nor truth in themselves, 1:8,10.

There were those, finally, who fell short of the Christian virtue of love, and lived instead in exclusive contempt and hatred of others. John stated that they:

- a. are liars, 4:20.
- b. are murderers, 3:15.
- c. are in darkness, 2:11.
- d. have no love in themselves, 3:17.
- e. cannot love God, 4:20.
- f. are not of God, 3:10.
- g. have not known God, 3:14.
- h. have not life, but death, 3:14,15.

In summary, a comparison of the statements made in each realm discloses a definite similarity, and affirms once more that it is the same group of false teachers that is involved in both the doctrinal and the ethical errors. The only declaration, or denunciation, to appear in all three categories, and probably the most tragic of all, is the statement that these errorists are "not of God." They neither receive nor propagate truth, either doctrinally or ethically.

III. TRUE TEACHING TO COUNTER THE FALSE TEACHING

It has been observed that John was primarily interested in the positive and practical in this Epistle. Having investigated the nature of the Gnostic teaching, it is now possible to investigate the positive teaching which John gave, noticing where it definitely

reflects false teaching and endeavors to counter it in the lives of the believers.

The truth that there really is the purpose of countering false teaching is in no way diminished by the preponderance of positive exhortation, for "John's method is to confute error by the exposition of the truth realized in life."¹ His "vindication is made by positive exhibition of the truth more than by contradiction and counter-argument...He thrusts out error by confronting it with the reality that it denies."²

The chief concerns of the writer centered in the Christian life with its "ethical tests and endowments." An additional consideration was the radical conflict between the church and the world.³ This was necessary due to the subtle attraction of the false teachings. The problem is raised that a truly vital Christian group would not be in need of instruction against such heresy. Perhaps the solution to this problem is offered by Westcott, who observed that, by the late date of John's writing, many of the readers could have grown up as Christians, and a "Christianity of habit" was a possibility.⁴

The remainder of this section of the study is devoted to a study of John's positive teaching which points out that which clearly implies the false doctrinal and ethical teachings of the Gnostics. The believers were given assurance of their position and possessions

¹Westcott, op. cit., p. xxxix.

²Findlay, op. cit., p. 62.

³The Interpreter's Bible, XII, 214.

⁴Westcott, op. cit., p. xxvii.

before God, to counter the seductive claims of the false teachers.

The Gnostic leaders held false views of Christ, which John opposed with a number of ideas. This Christ, who was the manifested life, was eternally existent, even from the beginning (1:1), which excluded any view of his identification with a created aeon or emanation. The notion that he was a phantom was discounted by the fact that the apostles had seen, and heard, and even touched him (1:1,3).

There are three definite witnesses to the truth concerning Christ. They are the water, the blood, and God's Spirit (5:6,7). Westcott points out that the phrase "he that came" points clearly to historic fact, and determines that these three terms indicate historic events: the baptism, the crucifixion, and the continuing historical witness of the Spirit.¹ The testimony of these three historic witnesses, in the words of Findlay, "amount to the same thing." He also felt that all three of these evidences reflected John's own experience, since he had been present at the baptism as a disciple of John the Baptist, had been the only one of the twelve to witness the crucifixion, and had been present in the upper room at the initial coming of the Spirit of Truth.²

The Gnostics claimed inward union with God, and at the same time discredited Christ. John asserted that such a claim was not possible, since God's quality of life is found only through the Son (5:11). Against their insistence that Christ had no consort with matter, which was evil, John declared that there was no sin in

¹Ibid., pp. 181,183.

²Findlay, op. cit., p. 388.

(carefully using the human name) Jesus (3:5). Further, Christ's death afforded forgiveness and redemption (1:7;3:16), despite the Gnostic emphasis that Christ had nothing to do with the death, or apparent death, of Jesus.

Another feature of the Gnostic belief was their adherence to a "new," more advanced religious doctrine and experience. John reminded his readers that their own Christian doctrines were from the beginning (2:24), and were therefore valid in opposition to the errors which could not claim such authoritative antiquity.¹ John's command to them was old, tested and proved in practical experience, yet it was just as new and up-to-date as any Gnostic emphasis (2:7,8). Against the Gnostic offer to believers to "guide them into new depths,"² John declared that their anointing of the Spirit taught them all that they needed to know (2:27), and thus that there was no need of any fresh teaching.

An additional Gnostic error was their relaxed view of required conduct, which made possible a tendency toward antinomianism. This was enhanced by their dualistic interpretation of the separation of flesh and spirit in man. While, for the most part, Gnostic morals were reasonably high, their teachings could easily have led to indulgence and immorality.

Against these ideas, John contended that a relationship to God involves conducting oneself after the pattern established by Christ (2:6). The Epistle is not merely against indulgence, noted

¹The Interpreter's Bible, XII, 217.

²Westcott, op. cit., p. 79.

Westcott, but positively for Christlikeness.¹ Righteousness is conditioned upon the practice of righteous deeds (3:7). Righteousness may be claimed on the basis of relationship with God, but it must be verified in acts.² Against the Gnostic indifference to moral sanctions, John required a keeping of God's word (2:5).

One of the most interesting speculations of the Gnostics was their belief that if the spirit of a man were pure, the behavior of the body was not important. They excused immoral behavior by attributing it to the evil resident in the flesh. John countered this with the logic that anyone truly related to Christ will seek to purify himself (3:3). Further, the believer should expect to live totally apart from sin (2:1;3:6). Here is a paradox, in that John refuted any claims to sinlessness, yet held it up as the standard for the believer's righteousness. He advanced sinlessness, but also assumed forgiveness.³ The implication is that the possibility of sinlessness is negated by a claim to have accomplished it.

John "summarized the whole of moral obedience by the law of love, which fulfills all the commandments."⁴ While the Gnostics were not necessarily immoral in actual practice, they fell far short of any semblance of love. The vital relationship between righteousness and love is a recurring theme in the Epistle, continually reminding the reader of their mutual involvement. This is made clear in such

¹Ibid., p. 42.

²The Interpreter's Bible, XII, 258.

³Ibid., XII, 226.

⁴Carl F. H. Henry, Christian Personal Ethics, p. 330.

passages as 4:21, in which God's commandment is declared to be love for one's brother. Failure to do righteousness and failure to love one's brother are equated in 3:10.

The Gnostic's disregard for the obligation to love was the natural outgrowth of his exclusive feeling for his own group. The Gnostics looked upon all others with a superior disdain, and counted themselves the "inner circle" of knowledge and relationship to God. John immediately opposed such a view with his initial expression of purpose that the Epistle was written to promote fellowship (1:3). This is directed more pointedly at Gnostic exclusivism in 1:7, where it is said that if one truly is in the light (as the Gnostics claimed), fellowship results.

John explicitly commanded that a true Christian fulfill the law of love (3:11 et al.), basing the command on God's loving nature. Against the Gnostic contention, this clearly implied that "a loveless or selfish (or exclusive) person shows conclusively that he does not know him (God)."¹ The believer's love is expressed in terms of laying down his life in a practical way for his needy neighbor (3:16, 17). Alexander correctly observed that high, abstract ideas impart dignity to truth, but are susceptible to idle speculation, to avoid which danger John turned from high phrases extolling love to very mundane considerations of how it should be practiced.²

The final blow to the exclusive party-spirit of the Gnostics was delivered in two distinct references to the work of God through

¹Gore, op. cit., p. 173.

²Alexander, op. cit., p. 191.

Christ in application to all the world. Christ is the propitiation for all the world's sins (2:2), sent by the Father as the Saviour of the whole world (4:14).

John used positive teaching with regard to the true nature of Jesus Christ to refute the Gnostic errors about him. He taught a positive righteousness to overthrow the antinomian danger inherent in Gnosticism, and the heart of his righteousness was the obligation to love which opposed the exclusive Gnostic spirit. His point was that Christianity is a life, not a philosophy, but that it is a life which is grounded in truth. "Resistance to intellectual error is as clear a duty as resistance to wickedness."¹

There is no distinction between doctrine and ethics. They are but two sides of the same coin, and error in either leads to error in the other. Dodd remarked that "nowhere is there less excuse for the reader to suppose that Christian theology can stand apart from Christian ethics, or Christian ethics apart from theology" than in this Epistle.²

The believers were no doubt overwhelmed by the claims of the Gnostics to knowledge of God and to special revelation of God. John reassured their faith by setting forth his own Christian claims in contradiction to the spurious claims of the false teachers.

A central Gnostic affirmation was esoteric union with God. But John countered that claim, in terms of the three realms of Christian belief and behavior, with the statements that everyone who

¹Gore, op. cit., p. 107.

²Dodd, op. cit., p. xxxii.

believes, everyone who is righteous, and everyone who loves is begotten of God (5:1;2:29;4:7). Thus John defied their claim by grounding the experience of relationship to God in the three areas in which the Gnostics were in error. He followed this up with the resultant truth that believers are the children of God (3:2) and that they abide in God (3:24), even as God abides in them (4:20), in opposition to the Gnostic claims of the same essential relationship.

One of the distinct claims of the heretics was that they were peculiarly the illuminated. But John declared that the Christian who loves is the truly illumined person (2:10). Against the Gnostic claim to have seen God in revelation or vision, John argued that no man has ever seen God (4:12), and that true knowledge of him is to be found elsewhere than in visions. And in contrast to their claim to have escaped the pollution of the flesh through their new teaching, John declared that it is believers who truly have overcome the world (5:5).

But perhaps the most obvious claim of the Gnostics was their profession to possess a superior gnosis, a higher knowledge than that to which the ordinary person had attained. A central part of John's Epistle deals with the substance of what the believer knows, the gnosis to which he is heir. The condition and content of the believer's knowledge is derived from a study of the verbs γινώσκω and οἶδα. It should be observed, with Brooke, that John's primary purpose in writing was not to fill in the deficiencies in his readers' knowledge, but to assure them of what they knew already.¹

¹Brooke, op. cit., p. 55.

Of the two words, γινώσκω is used more often, some twenty-five times. With two exceptions, it refers to knowledge possessed by the believer. The believer knows God (4:6-8), which is often expressed as knowing "him" (2:3,4,13,14;3:1,6). He knows God as the Father (2:13) and knows the Spirit of God (4:2,6). This is a personal knowledge of God, derived from actual experience, and is in direct opposition to the intellectual apprehension claimed by the Gnostics.

The believer also has knowledge of benefits which he possesses. He knows he is in God (2:5), and that he abides in him (3:24;4:13). He not only knows truth (5:20), but knows that he is of the truth (3:19). Likewise, he knows love (3:16;4:16) and knows that he himself loves (5:2). If he is aware of the issues at stake in the conflict with false teachers, he knows that it is a last hour (2:18).

Similarly, of the fifteen occurrences of οἶδα, all but one of them refers to the content of the believer's knowledge. Whereas γινώσκω was used more in terms of personal experience, οἶδα is used in reference to intellectual knowledge. Thus the believer knows truth (2:21). He knows that Jesus was manifested for sin (3:5) and that no murderer has life in him (3:15). He also knows, however, that he is in possession of life (5:13), having passed from death to life (3:14). He knows that God hears and answers his requests (5:15) and that he shall one day be like Jesus (3:2), who he knows is righteous (2:29).

There is a slight difference in the knowledge portrayed by the two verbs. The first, γινώσκω, is truth derived by acquisition,¹

¹Findlay, op. cit., p. 238.

or knowledge which is "gained by experience."¹ The other word, οἶδα, refers rather to a "clear and purely mental perception, in contrast to conjecture of derived-from-others knowledge."² It is intuitive knowledge of truth.³

A good summary of John's entire argument against false teaching is provided by the last four verses of the Epistle. There are three predications made concerning the believers' knowledge, and a final warning.

The believer knows, first, that true relationship to God precludes the habitual commission of sin (5:18), a fact which refutes the Gnostic antinomian tendencies. He also knows that he is of God, in absolute contradiction to all ungodly men (5:19), which refutes the Gnostic claim to exclusive enjoyment of God. Finally, he knows the ministry of God's Son (5:20), which refutes the false Gnostic view of Jesus. This knowledge, founded in true belief, true righteousness, and true love, is "the true God and eternal life (5:20)."

In conclusion, John warned his readers to shun any false idea of God, and to defend themselves against any erroneous doctrinal and ethical systems, or any "untrue and unreal objects of devotion."⁴

¹Westcott, op. cit., p. 46.

²Joseph Henry Thayer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 118.

³Findlay, loc. cit.

⁴The Interpreter's Bible, XII, 302.

IV. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The study of this chapter has approached John's First Epistle from the viewpoint of its conflict with false teaching. Following an investigation of direct reference to false teaching, a comparison was made with the historical forms of heresy. The positive teaching of the Epistle was investigated with a view to its implications for countering false teaching. Such an approach has verified earlier observations and brought to light additional truths concerning John's purposes.

The assumption that the Epistle reflected a conflict with false teaching was validated by a great deal of the material. The false teaching involved both doctrinal and ethical errors. Included were a false view of Jesus which John exposed and countered with positive doctrine, an antinomian view of righteousness, which John refuted by an appeal to the absolute quality of God's moral precepts, and an exclusivistic denial of love, which John opposed with a positive view of love as the fulfillment of Christian morality.

The Christian was discovered to be already in possession of the truth to which the false teachers made spurious claims. True illumination was based upon Christian morality rather than upon esoteric experience. True gnosis was the privilege of the believer who trusted in Christ rather than the property of one who claimed union with some Father of Reason or unknown God.

A final observation concerns the antagonism between the two realms or kingdoms of truth and error. God opposes the devil, the church opposes the world, and the believer encounters false teachers.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Before concluding the study, it is well to review what has been accomplished. This chapter includes a summary of the method and findings of each of the inductive studies of the First Epistle of John. The findings are brought together and presented in the form of concluding observations. The final conclusion in terms of a solution to the original problem closes the study.

I. SUMMARY

A study of the First Epistle of John was undertaken on the basis of three distinct inductive approaches to the material. Each of the three studies provided insights into the meaning and purpose of the Epistle. Each of the three approaches is briefly reviewed with a summary of its major insights.

1. The first approach was an inductive analysis of the Epistle as a whole. Beginning with the smallest thought units, relationships were sought according to principles of proportion. Larger and larger units were developed and related, and the larger emphasis of the Epistle emerged from the major segments.

It was observed on the basis of this study that John employed a small vocabulary, but so used it as to convey a vast depth of meaning. Synonyms and contrasts were abundant. John also set forth positive principles of Christian belief and conduct against which his

Christian readers were to measure their lives. The standards by which the believers were to test their own lives also provided the standards by which to test the false teachings of those who were threatening their Christian faith and life. It is implied that the false teachers made a claim to the possession of superior knowledge.

2. The second approach to the Epistle was a word-study, or vocabulary approach. The words which the study found to be crucial to the message of the Epistle were reported in logical sequence.

It was observed on the basis of this study that John employed a great deal of contrast, epitomized in the antitheses between love and hate, life and death, and light and darkness. The word groups pointed up three significant categories in which the Christian was to conduct himself. These were the three realms of righteousness, love, and belief. The entire range of Christian experience is explored in this Epistle, from the initial experience of redemption to the final hope of Christ's return, yet the primary reference is to the vitality of present Christian living.

3. The third approach to the Epistle was a topico-inductive study of the false teaching against which John wrote. Beginning with the premise that John had definite false leaders in mind, the content of their teaching was sought from the contents of the Epistle itself, with brief reference to non-canonical history.

This study yielded the observations that the false teaching was a real, not an imaginary threat, and that John exposed it both by direct teaching against it and by positive Christian instruction which vitiated its claims. The claims which the false teachers made to superior knowledge and standards of conduct were declared to be

spurious, and were shown to be distortions of the realities which the true Christians possessed. The realms of good and evil, or of God and the devil, were portrayed in radical antagonism and their opposing natures were clarified.

II. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The observations provided by each of the inductive approaches are closely related and, in some instances, are overlapping. The findings from each study are compared and collated, and are presented in the form of concluding observations. The products of the inductive method are inferences rather than conclusions, for they are tentative (although not uncertain) rather than absolute, and are subject to revision upon further examination of the material.

1. John used a minimum vocabulary, consisting of a few over two hundred words, of which most were quite simple. Yet an applied study of the Epistle finds its contents to be inexhaustibly profound. The meaning of the Epistle cannot be exhausted by any one approach to its contents.

2. John viewed things from the standpoint of the absolute. Total distinction was made between light and darkness, between love and hatred, and between life and death. Every man participates in one of the two realms. He is either born of God or he is of the devil.

3. John wrote to assure his readers that they belonged to the true kingdom of God, and to instruct them in remaining in that kingdom. He endeavored to show conclusively that those who made spurious claims to the possessions belonging to true believers were not only in error but were dangerous.

4. Underlying the entire Epistle is the controversy with false teaching. John disclosed its nature both directly and by the inferences of his positive teaching. Involved in the spurious "gospel" were both doctrinal and ethical error; superior claims were made to be above a provincial view of an Incarnate Christ, to be above the restraining legalism of an outmoded or inferior moral law, and to be unfettered by any sentimental concern for others.

5. The heart of the positive teaching of the Epistle was clearly discovered in each of the three approaches. It answers the claims of the false teachers in terms of three realms of Christian behavior and belief. The three crucial areas are (1) the correct view of and faith in a divine/human, Incarnate Jesus Christ, (2) an ideally sinless conformity to the divine standard of righteousness set forth in explicit commandments, and (3) obedience to that one greatest of all commandments which is at the heart of all others, the commandment to love. These three are the totality of Christian doctrine and ethics, and are applicable to all men in all times.

III. CONCLUSION

The problem giving rise to this study was initially defined as an attempt to understand the overall meaning of the First Epistle of John in terms of its relevance for today. That it has a contemporary significance was clearly discovered, in that it embodies principles of truth, centering in the realms of righteousness, love, and belief, which are applicable to every conceivable period of Christian history. God's eternal truth, sufficient for man's needs, is continually available to men through this Epistle.

The overall meaning of the Epistle was sought through the various inductive approaches to its study. That meaning was satisfactorily ascertained, finding the central thrust of the Epistle in the truth that John wrote to counteract a threat imposed upon the belief and conduct of a particular Christian group by false teachers who had withdrawn from the group. But the larger, overall message of the Epistle is positively oriented, in that John countered the false teaching by the assertion of positive Christian principles whose meaning is valid for any time and is applicable to any situation.

A specific area of further study in which interest was aroused by this study is an investigation of the imagery of light and darkness in the Scriptures.

A more general commendation for further study is the application of the first two of the three inductive approaches to other of the New Testament writings.

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