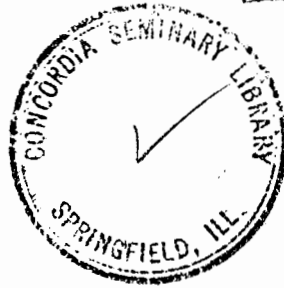


Bible Study

V.F.
Vertical File
Bible-Study

**Bible Study Material
For Gamma Delta
and Similar Student Groups**



LIGHT, LIFE, and LOVE

A series of ten Bible discussion units based on the First Epistle General of John, with special application to Christian faith and life on campus.

Key Verse: "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him." I John 4:9.

**Coordinated with the Parish Activities Theme
"Compelling Love"**

RUDOLPH F. NORDEN
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THE TEN TOPICS

I John

No Theories — Only Observed Facts, 1:1-4.

Walk in the Sun!, 1:5-2:6.

True Love Has an Object, 2:7-17.

The Greatest Lie Ever Told, 2:18-24.

Let the Family Resemblance Show!, 2:25-3:10.

The Love That Compels our Love, 3:11-18.

Putting Religion on Trial, 3:19-4:6.

Love is a Badge, 4:7-21.

Believing the Record, 5:1-12.

How to Pray for an Erring Brother, 5:13-21.

FOREWORD

About the Author

The undisputed author of this epistle is John, the "apostle of love" and writer of other New Testament scriptures: The Fourth Gospel, Revelation, II and III John. When he was called by Jesus to be a disciple he, together with his brother James, was a Galilean fisherman. In his writings John has a passion for anonymity. When we read the Gospels and the Book of Acts, however, we gain a good impression of his character. Tradition adds footnotes to the life of this great disciple. Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus, according to the church historian Eusebius, attested in 196 A.D. that John "who lay on the bosom of the Lord rests in Ephesus." Irenaeus, another church father, adds that John lived up to the time of Trajan, who was Roman emperor from 98 to 117 A.D. Irenaeus, incidentally, was a pupil of Polycarp, and Polycarp had known John personally.

John and James are referred to as the sons of Zebedee. A sobriquet applied to them, in view of their capacity for indignation, was "Boanerges," or "the sons of thunder." While John extolled the love of God in Christ and urged counter-love, he was capable of deprecating unbelief and wickedness in strongest terms, as your study of this epistle will show.

What is this love which John underscores? It is not a sentimental, wishy-washy emotion. Writes Warren A. Quanbeck in *Introduction to the New Testament*: "Love was for him no weak, sugary concoction, but the strong, courageous, patient, and selfless attitude revealed in Jesus of Nazareth." Because God's love in Christ was so very real, John can conceive of only one possible response: Love and loyalty to Jesus Christ. To John the theme of love is very compelling. As with alternate beats of the same heart, he witnesses to divine love revealed in the Savior and condemns all who spurn it.

Occasion for the Letter

What was the occasion for writing this epistle? It is evident that the readers, whether they resided in Asia Minor or elsewhere, were exposed to philosophical "isms" then current and popular. We find in the epistle, to say the least, overtones of such heresies as gnosticism, docetism, libertinism, antinomianism, and ultra-spiritualism. These heresies undermined the central articles of the Christian faith, specifically, the doctrines of the incarnation of the Son of God and of the atonement. In reply, John dwells on the identity of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, truly come in the flesh. The exhortations to brotherly love are in every instance tied to the believer's love to God who first loved us in Christ.

The Outline

Professor Quanbeck calls attention to the "spiral structure" of this epistle. The three major parts of the letter he considers not so much as water-tight compartments but as three levels of discussion showing that God is light, God is life, and God is love. The impression is given "of three quiet walks around the subject, each at a different level."

The following outline suggested by Dr. Quanbeck will serve our purpose well:

- I. 1:1-4 Prologue: Jesus Christ, the Word of life, reveals eternal life.
- II. 1:5-2:24 God is Light. Do we walk in the Light?
 - A. 1:5-2:6 The test of living: walk in the light as He is in the light.
 - B. 2:7-17 The test of loving: love the brethren.
 - C. 2:18-24 The test of believing: trust in Jesus as the Son of God.
- III. 2:25-4:6 God is Life. Are we His children?
 - A. 2:25-3:10 The test of living: do righteousness. Let the family resemblance show.
 - B. 3:11-18 The test of loving: love one another.
 - C. 3:19-4:6 The test of believing: confess Jesus as the Christ come in the flesh.
- IV. 4:7-5:21 God is Love: do we abide in love? Here the tests fuse.
 - A. Love is the mark of the children of Him who is love.
 - B. Faith is the source of love.
 - C. Intercessory love is the fruit of faith.

Section I: Prologue

Text to be Studied:

I John 1:1-4.

Topic No. 1:

NO THEORIES — ONLY OBSERVED FACTS!

“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you.”
— I John 1:3.

Digest of Contents

The author does not call himself by name. However, he identifies himself as a witness of the events forming the basis of the Good News. He is not only a close associate of Jesus Christ, the Word of Life, but also His apostle, with the duty to declare (or proclaim, according to the Revised Standard Version) the message of eternal life in Christ. He is, of course, the Apostle John, who in the Fourth Gospel refers to himself, again by indirect identification, as the disciple “whom Jesus loved,” John 13:23. Note that in the next two epistles John calls himself “the elder,” while in Revelation he plainly introduces himself as “His servant John.”

The true and indisputable Incarnation of the Son of God, which runs as a golden thread through the entire epistle, is already woven into the Prologue. He who not only has the life but is the life was made manifest in human flesh. This Son of God assumed a human nature, and as such was heard, seen, and touched. The eye-witnesses ear-witnesses, and hand-witnesses of this manifestation were the apostles, particularly those of the inner circle who also saw Him transfigured on the holy mount, namely Peter, James, and John. These men of first-hand observation and experience were commissioned to publish the glad tidings of salvation. They did not repeat hearsay but reported events of which they had personal sense perception.

Some have referred to this epistle as a homily, probably because of its informality and simplicity. A homily is an oral presentation. We do better to think of it as a letter that was written to a group of congregations, probably in Asia Minor. Observe John's expression: “And these things write we . . .” The Prologue closes with statements on the twofold purpose for writing this letter, namely to extend Christian fellowship to the readers and to make their joy complete.

Examining the Text

Note: In the interest of personal, first-hand Bible study, have only the open Bible before you as you react to these guiding questions.

1. Compare I John 1:1 with 1:1 of the Gospel of John. What word is used in both opening statements? Does it re-echo Genesis 1:1?
2. Are “seen” and “look upon” mere repetitions? Does the second add to the meaning of the first? Which term conveys the thought of steady, reflective gazing, or, as Phillips renders it, “to observe closely”?
3. Some of John's contemporaries, who sought to blend Greek philosophy with the Christian Gospel, found the idea of a fleshly Christ abhorrent. Show from the text that John taught the true incarnation of the Son of God. Can you “handle” someone who is only a spirit?
4. What has John to say on the divine nature of Jesus Christ? Of His divine name? His divine attributes? His divine work? His divine honor and glory?

5. A favorite word frequently occurring in John's writings is "life." How would you explain the life here ascribed to the Son of God? John 8:58.
6. The expression "we have seen" correlates with "was manifested." Christ was revealed, and eye-witnesses received the revelation. In what other ways did Christ manifest Himself? Luke 24:27, John 2:11, John 20:16, John 20:27, Hebrews 1:2. After looking up these passages, say how Christ is revealed to us today.
7. Aside from his writings, in what ways did John bear witness? Acts 3:1, Acts 4:13.
8. Note that John uses the plural, "we," "our". Is this the impersonal "editorial we"? Does he function here as a spokesman for all the apostles?
9. What is there in the text to suggest that John's readers were on the borderline — and some, perhaps, outside of — the brotherhood of faith? Read verse 3 carefully. Which is the superior fellowship for which we should strive?
10. Jesus had promised that the Holy Spirit would bring His words back to the disciples' remembrance. What in verse 4 is almost an exact quote from the words of Jesus? John 15:11.

Text-Related Topics for Discussion

- A. Did John have a "ghost-writer"? Some have questioned whether the author of this epistle is the same John who wrote the Fourth Gospel. They call our attention to differences, for example, that in the First Epistle Jesus Christ is called the Paraclete (2:1, translated "advocate"), while in the Gospel this title is given to the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-26, translated "comforter"). To convince yourself of the Johannine authorship of both writings, compare the following passages:

First Epistle	Gospel
1:1-2	with 1:1-2
2:8	with 13:14
3:8	with 8:44
3:16	with 15:13
4:6	with 8:45
4:14	with 1:14
5:20	with 17:3

- B. How valid is John's testimony? Brand Blanshard, professor of philosophy at Yale, writes of the currently popular analytic philosophy: "The trunk from which all its leaves and branches have sprouted is logical positivism or empiricism." Is this new? Consider David Hume's dictum of 200 years ago: "If we take in hand any volume, of divinity or metaphysics for instance, let us ask: . . . Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion." Can John's testimony be accepted on these terms? How does John refer to sense perception to establish his message? Is our faith dependent on the scientific method of determining facts by observation and experimentation? John 20:29, Hebrews 11:1.
- C. Students as Christ's witnesses: A scientist may say, "I know what I am talking about, because my data came from laboratory observation." One housewife may say to another, "I recommend this product because I have personally used it and found it good." Is it proper for a Christian student to declare, "I know from my own experience what Christ means to me and what He can mean to you"?
- D. How do we communicate the Gospel? In our time much study is devoted to ways of effective communication — how to "get through," how best to convey our message and project the desired image. John also sought to communicate ("declare," "write"). How can we reach the various "publics" of the world community with the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

- E. **Two-way communication on campus:** "Foreign mission work" does not only mean that Christians from here go over there. Christian students from there can (and should) do effective witnessing over here. In **I Met Christ on the Campus**, a message distributed by the American Tract Society, Nate Krupp, who was a prominent Purdue student during the mid-fifties, relates how a Christian Jew from Lebanon introduced him to Jesus. How can Christian students from overseas speak for Christ while in this country?
- F. **Light and darkness:** God has caused the light of His Word to shine clearly. Jesus: "In secret have I said nothing." Paul: "This thing was not done in a corner." John: "The life was manifested." Why is it that many do not see the light? John 1:4-5, John 3:18-21, I Corinthians 2:14.
- G. **With whom may we have Christian fellowship?** Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a pastor executed by the Nazi regime in Germany, wrote in his book **Life Together**: "Where Christ bids me to maintain fellowship for the sake of love, I will maintain it. Where his truth enjoins me to dissolve a fellowship for love's sake, there will I dissolve it, despite all the protests of my human love." Does love—love for the offending person as well as love for the truth—require us to withdraw our Christian fellowship from others? Matthew 18:15-17, Romans 16:17, II Thessalonians 3:6.
- H. **Fellowship with the Father without Christ?** Is it possible to have God as our Father apart from faith in His Son Jesus Christ? John 5:23. Should you belong to a religious organization in which Christ's name is suppressed? Join a fraternity or sorority sponsoring religious ceremonies in which a non-descript "Father" or Greek gods and goddesses are invoked?
- I. **Does your Christianity make you joyful?** A campus pastor wrote: "Our students who attended a regional retreat of Gamma Delta returned in high spirits. They had literally learned the Biblical injunction to 'rejoice in the Lord.' The two and three-hour long discussion periods on the basics of the Christian faith produced this effect." What, in your opinion, will inject more joy into the spiritual program of your group?
- J. **More on Christian joy.** A recent **Saturday Evening Post** writer cited the lack of joy in America. He says that Americans seek much pleasure but find little joy. He found the greeting of a Greek fruit peddler ("Xairete", rejoice!) very refreshing. Explain, on the basis of verse 4, what reason Christian students have for being joyful.

Section II: God is LIGHT. Do we walk in the Light?

I John 1:5 - 2:24

Text to be Studied in this Unit:

I John 1:5 - 2:6

Topic No. 2:

WALK IN THE SUN!

"If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another."

—I John 1:7.

Digest of Contents

The meaning of these verses can well be grasped if we pretend that a dialogue took place between John and some "wise guy" from among the Gnostic philosophers of that day. The contrasts indicated in the text make such a dialectic conversation very plausible.

Disputer: "John, what is your main thesis? What message are you trying to get across?" **John:** "My message is that God is light. He is altogether good and holy. An important moral truth follows from this, namely: It is inconsistent to profess faith in the God of light and to live in the darkness of sin. It is like telling the truth with one's mouth and telling lies in one's deeds. Such an inconsistency cancels one's fellowship with God." (Vv. 5-7a).

Disputer: "If that were true, how could Christians have fellowship with God? Christians, too, are sinners, according to your teaching. Does not the 'darkness' of their sinning cut them off from the God of 'light'?" **John:** "Christians have the assurance that sins they commit despite their best efforts at holiness are all cleansed by the blood of Christ and forgiven of God." (V.7b).

Disputer: "This discussion is altogether academic and irrelevant, as far as I am concerned. I am not a sinner. I don't steal, use profanity, get drunk . . ." **John:** "Hold it there, young man. You are indulging yourself in self-delusion. Sin is very real, and the way to deal with it is not to deny it, hide it, or sweep it under a rug, but to confess it and receive forgiveness for it for Christ's sake. Sin is there, and you can't deny it. God, who cannot lie, affirms its reality." (Vv.8-10).

Disputer: "I still don't get it. You say, on the one hand: 'Avoid sin.' Then you say: 'All people, even Christians, are sinners.' Does that mean that everybody is excluded from fellowship with God and is lost?" **John:** "Not at all. Jesus Christ took away our sin. He came between us and God. As our advocate, or attorney, He pleads our case before God. The basis of His plea is one God can accept as valid, for Jesus Christ shed His blood to make restitution for our and the whole world's sin. Through faith in Christ we have saving fellowship with God." (Vv. 1-2).

Disputer: "If salvation is as simple as all that, why do you harp on obeying God's commandments? If we are saved by faith rather than by keeping the commandments, why bother? Why not drop all these moral 'do's' and 'don't's'?" **John:** "To know and love God involves obedience. Can children claim to be on intimate terms with their parents when they flout their wishes? Obedience to God's commandments, after the example of Jesus, is the test of discipleship. It is the outward mark of the saving faith and of our inclusion in God's fellowship." (Vv.3-6).

Examining the Text

1. In what words does John say that God is altogether holy?
2. What meaning has this for all who want to live in fellowship with God?
3. What does John say of those who deny sin? See also Psalm 32:15 and Proverbs 28:13.
4. What is the right way of reckoning with the reality of sin?
5. Aside from our own conviction on this score, what further reason is there for owning up to our sins? Cite other Bible statements in which God affirms man's sin.
6. Verses 1b-2 of Chapter 2 re-echo the truth already stated in 1:7. Why must this Gospel truth always be kept in focus when discussing sin?
7. Did Christ atone also for original sin? Prove it with a passage in this section.
8. Why it is inconsistent to speak of knowing God and then to ignore His commandments?
9. Granted that salvation is by faith in Christ's atoning merits, why are we to keep God's commandments still? What reason for doing good works is given in Matthew 25:31-40?
10. May we say that Christ, aside from being our Savior, is also the **example** of the kind of life we should lead? Philippians 2:5 and I Peter 2:21.

Text-Related Topics for Discussion

- A. **Walking in broad daylight:** What reason is given in John 3:20 (Gospel) for men shunning the light? Why are nefarious deeds often done at night with the wearing of masks? Why are "crooking slips" kept secret? Why do gossipers add: "But don't say that I told you!"? Do secret organizations have something to hide? How is a Christian to walk, according to John's instruction? What is the blessed result of so walking?
- B. **How real is sin?** A professor teaching at a University of Chicago-related seminary writes: "Man is as barbaric as he ever was, the only difference between twentieth century man and his predecessors being the suppression and restraint of civilization. At the time of war this restraint is removed, and he emerges with his demonic genius. . . . We may call this human quality 'sin' or the result of 'the fall of man.' Whatever its appellation, we must honestly realize that this 'sin' is no mere taint or speck on an angelic soul. It is a quality that permeates man's very being."
- Man's inhumanity to man has social aspects and is thus readily recognized as wrong-doing. What about his failures in relation to God? What does the First Commandment say about these? How does man's disobedience of commandments of the First Table affect his disobedience of those of the Second Table?
- C. **The error of denying sin:** Mary Baker Eddy, founder of the Church of Christ, Scientist, wrote in *Science and Health*: "Life, God, omnipotent Good, deny death, evil, sin, disease." Has she turned John's affirmation upside down?
- D. **Is every person a sinner?** It is claimed that the Virgin Mary was conceived and born without sin. True? Discuss other efforts to discredit the reality and relevance of the truth of every one's sin.
- E. **If we say we have no original sin:** Emil Brunner, a prominent Swiss theologian, differs sharply with his colleague Karl Barth on original sin. Brunner says, "We are all connected together by hidden roots, like the runners of a strawberry patch, all of whose plants have developed from the one parent stock." How does the denial of original sin affect the doctrine and use of infant baptism?
- F. **If we say we have no actual sins:** Describe what sins are "documented" in current novels and plays you have read and viewed. (Like Joyce's *Ulysses*, O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night*). What sins are identified? What is the outcome as far as the sinners are concerned?
- G. **The value of confessing:** It has been pointed out that there is psychiatric value in confessing one's sins to a father-confessor. What is the reason given in verse 8 for confessing? What is the result?
- H. **Antinomianism (anti against + nomos law)** holds that the moral law of God does not apply to Christians who are under grace. During an antinomistic controversy in the early Lutheran Church it was stated: "The Law does not teach good works. Evangelical preachers are to preach the Gospel only and no Law." (See Articles V and VI in the *Formula of Concord*). Review briefly what John teaches about the applicability of the commandments to Christians.
- I. **More on the "third use" of the Law:** In the booklet *Moral Theology and the Criminal Law* Dr. Wilber E. Katz, Professor of Law at the University of Chicago, summarizes a point from the *Formula of Concord* as follows: "In the regenerate, regeneration and renewal are not complete but only begun. 'The Old Adam' still adheres in the understanding, the will, and all the powers of man, and needs the threat and punishment of the Law." From what point of view does John teach the "third use" of the Law in verse 4?
- J. **Too much "blood" theology?** When people calling themselves Christians become ethically-minded they usually want to play down atonement by the blood of Christ. The Gnostics of John's day were of this disposition. Are there such religious groups today? Can we ever play down the "blood" atonement?

Text to be Studied:

I John 2:7-17

Topic No. 3:

TRUE LOVE HAS AN OBJECT

“He that loveth his brother abideth in the light.”

—I John 2:10.

Digest of Contents

Love cannot be practiced in a vacuum or in the abstract. Loving mankind in the aggregate is a vague emotion. Loving individual people: Your brother, sister, father, mother, neighbor, and roommate makes your affection concrete. We don't love principles; we love persons, with all their flesh-and-blood failings, foibles, and freckles.

“Loving the neighbor” is not a new commandment. The Old Testament had already taught it. John is merely giving a new emphasis to an Old Testament commandment because of the new era now begun. The promised Christ having come in the flesh, we live in the light of fulfillment—in the light of clear revelation. The former darkness has passed away.

However, no one can claim enlightenment if he lingers on in the former darknesses. Living in the light entails loving the brother. All assertions of one's spiritual illumination are for naught if hatred for a given person continues. Here is a real test: If we don't love the brother we are in darkness still, tripping, stumbling, and losing all sense of direction.

From love for the brother the Apostle John proceeds to love for the heavenly Father, the latter love being the source of the former. He addresses the serried ranks of his readers, grouped before him as pupils before a teacher. In the immediate forefront are the children, who know the Father and have the assurance of forgiveness. Behind them are the young men, who have many accomplishments to their credit despite their youth. Beyond the median group are the fathers, the veterans of the faith, who have known God's love from the beginning. “Continue in God's love” is the message to all.

When the heart is fixed on the heavenly Father it is kept from forming attachment to the world. Love for God and love for the world cannot have co-existence in the same heart, as also Jesus said: “Ye cannot love God and mammon.” The world caters to base instincts, to “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” What folly, to be a materialist and hedonist! The world with its contents is transient. Only God abides forever. Consequently, those who believe in Him, serve Him, and do His will likewise abide forever.

Examining the Text

1. In what terms does Jesus state the new commandment, according to John (Gospel) 15:12? What is the difference between it and the old commandment, Leviticus 19:18b?
2. What reason is cited by John for living according to the new commandment?
3. How does a person, though claiming to be enlightened, show that he is still in darkness? How does he show that he is in the light?
4. What three age-groups are addressed in the verses following?
5. What is John's message to the first group, according to verses 12 and 13c?
6. What special credit is given the second group, according to verses 13b and 14b?
7. For what reason does he write to the third group, according to verses 13a and 14a?
8. What, would you say, is the common message to all?
9. What is the alternative to loving God? Is it an alternative? Can man, having no God, love nothing? See also Matthew 6:24.
10. Why is it supreme sin and supreme folly to love the world and its contents? Give two answers.

Text-Related Topics for Discussion

- A. **Who is my brother?** There are people who contribute for missions in Africa out of "love" for Negroes' souls but refuse to sit next to a Negro person in a bus. What is wrong with this kind of "love"?
- B. **Brother or brother-in-law?** Dr. James G. Manz, a Chicago pastor, stated in a discussion on interracial marriages: "The Negro wants to be my brother; not my brother-in-law." How do we as Christians treat someone of another race as a brother? Relate the discussion as much as possible to human relations problems on campus instead of to irregularities "down South" or "up North." Start where you are.
- C. **Brotherly love and brotherly forgiveness:** "Christian teaching tells us to be forgiving to others if they understand they have trespassed." This was said, believe it or not, by Nikita Khrushchev at a civic dinner in San Francisco, 1959. Is he right? Matthew 18:15-17, Luke 17:3, Colossians 3:13.
- D. **A word study,** for those who know elementary Greek: What words are used in the New Testament for love? A good reference work is Bishop Anders Nygren's *Eros and Agape*, a study of the New Testament understanding of Christian love.
- E. **John a psychologist?** "The most experienced psychologist or observer of human nature knows infinitely less of the human heart than the simplest Christian who lives beneath the Cross of Jesus," writes Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Why should you consider John qualified to probe into the human heart and judge what true love is?
- F. **The world as seen by youth:** In *The Catcher in the Rye* J. D. Salinger tells the story of 16-year-old Holden Caulfield who, after flunking out of school, spent 48 hours in New York City. If you have read the book, mention some of the sordid sights the youth saw. What commentary is provided on the values of his elders who created this kind of world?
- G. **What is secularism?** Secularism has become a cancerous growth in the society of the Western world. Discuss: Secularism and education, secularism and government, secularism in economic and social issues. A good book to read is *The Christian Faith and Secularism*, J. Richard Spann, Abingdon-Cokesbury Press.
- H. **What is hedonism?** Should pleasure be one's main goal in life? Does it make a difference what kind of pleasure one seeks? What sort of hedonism haunts the average American campus?
- I. **What is materialism?** To what extent do considerations of financial gain prompt students to go to college? Is it wrong, *per se*, to want to earn a good salary some day? Does it matter for what purposes a good income is used? Do you agree with what Richard R. Caemmerer writes, "The excessively vocational concern of modern education and the secularization of culture has left men without clear calls to deeper insights of the meaning of life"? (*The Church in the World*, Page 63).
- J. **The world in the church:** How does the "world" get into the church? Through bingo? Through applying business method in church administration? Through loss of Christian motivation? Through forgetting what the church is for? What must the church do to return to its "first love"? Revelation 2:4.

Text to be Studied:
I John 2:18-24

Topic No. 4:

THE GREATEST LIE EVER TOLD

"Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?"
—I John 2:22.

Digest of Contents

Phillips renders the above verse as follows: "And what, I ask you, is the crowning Lie? Surely the denial that Jesus is God's Anointed, His Christ." Who are the ones who tell this master lie? They might be the Judaizers, who deny that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah and God's Son. They might also be teachers of a more philosophical bend of mind, namely individuals trying to fuse Greek philosophy with Christian doctrine.

A man of that time, representing a three-way blend of Judaism, Christianity, and Gnosticism, was Cerinthus. He held that Jesus was a true man born of Joseph and Mary. At his baptism, so Cerinthus garbled the account, the Christ came on Jesus to give Him divine wisdom to reveal the Father, and divine power to do miracles. Since the idea of suffering and dying seemed to Cerinthus to be incompatible with divinity, he held that the divine Christ withdrew from Jesus prior to His passion. This heresy, if it was current in John's time, is certainly condemned here. To deny the deity of Jesus is to cut the lifeline of Christianity.

What is John's trend of thought in this section? The Apostle takes note of the signs of the last time. St. Paul had foretold the coming of the Antichrist in II Thessalonians 2:3ff. He said the last day would not come until that man of sin, the son of perdition, had been unmasked. John supports this teaching, adding that the last times would also be marked by the coming of "many antichrists." These antichrists, while claiming Christian connections, were not of the apostolic tradition. They were of a different spirit, "not of us," as John states. How did they make public their divisive spirit? By their very act of seceding from apostolic Christendom.

John assumes spiritual insight on the part of his readers. Because the Holy Spirit had led these first-century Christians into all truth they could tell the difference between true and false doctrine. They could spot immediately the "crowning Lie" of the antichrists who deny the deity and Messiahship of Jesus. They could also discern that the denial of the Son amounts to a denial of the Father, since Christ and the Father are one, John 10:30. The closing exhortation is: Hold on to what you learned from the beginning, when pure Christianity was taught you. Then you continue in fellowship with the Father and the Son.

Examining the Text

Note: Please read the indicated section and state whether the following statements are true or false.

1. False teachers who oppose the Gospel of Jesus Christ remind us of the last times.
2. John and Paul taught the coming of the Antichrist.
3. Aside from the Antichrist, there are numerous antichrists.
4. Religious spokesmen can so disguise their identity that we cannot tell whether they are true Christians or not.
5. Christians, even if well indoctrinated, cannot tell the difference between religious truth and error.
6. The Holy Spirit led the apostles as well as their followers into all truth.
7. A person can deny the divine Sonship of Jesus and still be regarded as a truthful teacher of the Christian religion.
8. The fact that Jesus healed and helped mankind is of greater importance than the belief that He is true God.
9. People who do not know of Jesus Christ still have God as their Father.
10. What children once learned of Christ as their Lord and Savior they should retain throughout life.

Text-Related Topics for Discussion

- A. **The iron curtain in Christian theology:** Dr. Paul Tillich writes: "Jesus of Nazareth is the medium of the final revelation because he sacrifices himself completely to Jesus as the Christ. He not only sacrifices his life, as many martyrs and many ordinary people have done, but he also sacrifices everything in him and of him which could bring people to him as an 'overwhelming personality' instead of bringing them to that in him which is greater than he and they. This is the meaning of the symbol 'Son of God.'"
- Would you consider this a clear statement on the divine Sonship of Jesus Christ? Do you think John says it better?
- B. **Can a dead Jesus be the Son of God?** Rudolf Bultmann, whose concern is to "de-mythologize" the New Testament accounts, wrote in a recent book that he is "convinced" that the corpse of Jesus did "not come back to life and rise from the tomb." Do you think this position is in accord with John's testimony? With St. Paul's in Romans 1:4 ("His Son Jesus Christ . . . declared to be the Son of God with power . . . by the resurrection from the dead.")?
- C. **Lapses from the catholic faith:** The Redbook magazine article "Beliefs of our Future Ministers," purporting to reflect the thinking of students at "eight leading theological schools," claims that only 44% of those interviewed accepted the virgin birth of Jesus. Review what the Bible as well as the three general creeds teach of Jesus Christ the God-Man and His virgin birth.
- D. **Greater and lesser lies:** The Bible at times records the falsehoods men have spoken. Which of the following lies, in your judgment, affect the Christian faith most vitally?
- _____ Christ will not return to consummate the world order, II Peter 3:4.
 - _____ The disciples stole the body of Jesus, Matthew 28:13.
 - _____ There is no God, Psalm 14:1.
 - _____ Jesus is not the Christ, I John 2:22.
 - _____ Man is not a sinner, I John 1:8.
 - _____ There are no angels, Acts 23:8.
- E. **"He just looked like a man":** When John speaks of Christ's blood (I John 1:7) and of His coming in the flesh (4:2), he asserts His true human nature. To say that Jesus Christ had only what seemed like human nature is a heresy known as
- _____ Dogmatism
 - _____ Docetism
 - _____ Donatism
 - _____ Dynamism
- F. **Denial by silence and suppression:** Read Hymn No. 346 in *The Lutheran Hymnal* and let it suggest how Christ is often denied. Let it also suggest how Christians on campus should confess Him as Savior and Son of God.
- G. **On Having both the Father and the Son:** Here are two table prayers, the first copied from the official literature of Sigma Chi Fraternity and the second from *The Student Prayerbook* (Association Press). Say which is truly a Christian prayer. Why? Must Christ's name be always expressly mentioned in our prayers?
- (1) "Our Father, we thank Thee for Thy many blessings. Keep us from harm. May The White Cross guide us and teach us to be true to each other, ourselves, and Thee. Amen."
 - (2) "Gracious God, may the food which we are about to receive strengthen our bodies and may Thy Holy Spirit strengthen and refresh our souls, through Jesus Christ. Amen."
- H. **Knowing the criterion:** Before Christians can distinguish between truth and error they must know what God's Word teaches. How did the believers in Berea satisfy themselves that the truth had been preached to them? Acts 17:11.
- I. **Can the Christian laity be trusted?** It is sometimes claimed that theological problems and Biblical issues (for example, the fact that the King James Version contains faulty translations) should be withheld from lay people "because they wouldn't understand." Do you think John takes this position? (See Vv. 20-21).
- J. **How Christian students keep the faith:** "You therefore must keep in your hearts that which you heard at the beginning; if what you heard then still dwells in you, you will yourselves dwell in the Son and also in the Father." (*The New English Bible* on verse 24). It is enough merely to "keep" what was learned in confirmation instruction? How do we grow in knowledge and faith?

Section III: God is LIFE. Are we His children?

I John 2:25 - 4:6

Text to be Studied in this Unit:

I John 2:25-3:10

Topic No. 5:

LET THE FAMILY RESEMBLANCE SHOW!

"If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him." —I John 2:29.

Digest of Contents

It is again necessary to distinguish carefully here between the Christian's involuntary sinning (in haste, by the weakness of his flesh) and the practice of sinning wilfully, carelessly, boastfully, and habitually. If this distinction is not observed, either of two things will result: 1. Christians are put under the tension of thinking that sins of weakness prove they are not God's children at all, or 2. They will be led to think that absolute moral perfection is an attainable state. Some have fallen into the error (and pride) of perfectionism, believing that through many spiritual exercises they have reached the point of utter sinlessness. Bear in mind, then: When John says a truly regenerate person does not sin he means carnal-minded, unrepentant sinning which hinders growth in sanctification.

Picking up the thread of this discourse, we note John's emphasis again on the indwelling Spirit as the Christian's best teacher. The Spirit keeps us in the truth and in right relationship to Christ. Should Christ put in His sudden appearance on earth again, we can confidently stand in His presence.

The discussion turns to living a life of righteousness, after the example of our righteous heavenly Father. Being a child of God involves a wonderful privilege. God revealed utmost love when He gave us the title "sons of God." Of course, when we share in the honor of being related to God we share also in this dishonor: The world doesn't recognize us, as it also doesn't recognize God. On the more positive side, the honor of being "sons of God" should remind us that our status will be further enhanced when Christ comes again. Then we will not only see Him but also be like Him. This is more than an "other-worldly" hope; it is a hope that deeply influences life here and now. It prompts us to live pure lives.

The privilege of being God's children involves thus the responsibility of letting our family resemblance show through righteous living. A child of God cannot take an easy attitude toward sin — sin, which is defined as "the transgression of the law." Sin drives a wedge between God and man. Can a Christian give himself to the practice of sin when Christ came into the world to take it away? Can he do unrighteous works when God our Father is altogether righteous? There can be no exception to this principle: Because God is righteous, His children will seek to live righteously by obeying His commandments. If anyone sins wilfully and wantonly, he shows his family resemblance with the devil—the devil whom the Son of God came to destroy.

Examining the Text

Note: Please read the verses indicated above and underline what you consider to be the right answer.

1. John finds it necessary to warn against (open errorists, political rulers, religious seducers).
2. When our Lord comes again Christians will stand before Him in (fear, uncertainty, confidence).
3. The outward proof of regeneration is (doing righteousness, moral perfection, participation in church activities).
4. God revealed marvelous love when He (created the world, gave us a body, made us His children).
5. In heaven the believers will be (renewed, reformed, restored) in the image of God.
6. Sin is (moral weakness, transgression of God's moral law, disobedience of society's rules).

7. The Son of God came into this world to (take away our sin, set a good example, heal the sick).
8. A person who sins deliberately shows that he (is not a child of God, has emotional conflicts, is not a Lutheran).
9. A Christian who is truly born of God does not sin intentionally, lest he (be excommunicated from the congregation, set a bad example, offend against the love of God).
10. The children of God show that they are different from the children of the devil in that they (are confirmed, contribute to foreign missions, do righteousness).

Text-Related Topics for Discussion

- A. **Who is truly born of God?** You have heard of students who "find Christ" on the campus. To a student in England it meant "having the personal experience of Christ." To an American student it meant: "My desire for alcohol left, my profanity ceased, my compulsion for self-aggrandizement was gone." Discuss what regeneration, or conversion, means.
- B. **Who is a transformed person?** Discuss what it means: "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind," Romans 12:2. Is conformity always wrong? Romans 8:29.
- C. **The maximum or the minimum in Christian conduct?** Dr. Richard Luecke, the Lutheran campus pastor at Princeton University, has written: "In the Christian community the expected behavior is that which acknowledges Jesus Christ to be Lord in everything and which relates people as members of His body. The least of all practical question in such a community is 'what is permitted?' The question rather is 'what is expected?'" Discuss some "may we" questions ("May we neck", for example) in the light of the above.
- D. **A philosophy that makes Christ superfluous:** Prof. Randall Stewart of Vanderbilt University states: "If the natural man is good already, there is no point in talking about redemption, or salvation, or the need of a Savior, or Christ and the atonement, or any of these things." Show how John's words in Vv. 4-5 relate to the above comment.
- E. **The "post-Christian man":** It has been said that "he is not hostile to religion, or even concerned. He simply does not raise relevant questions at all, not even in church." What should be the church's message to the post-Christian man?
- F. **Confusing Christian obedience with "salvation by works."** A Presbyterian minister who serves as a hospital chaplain wrote in *Monday Morning* magazine: "To sum up the position of the Roman Catholic chaplains—though they agree to the fundamental alienation of man from God—their idea of salvation is not really different from the Jewish idea or teaching. The Jew puts his trust in obedience to the demands of the Torah; the Roman Catholic in the merit of the sacraments and obedience to the teachings of Mother Church. Both hold that man can earn his salvation. Salvation by works!" Why, according to John, should Christians live in righteousness? Is it to "become right with God?"
- G. **Some Lutherans are mixed up, too!** A writer in *Advance* magazine comments as follows on the results of the recent Lutheran Youth Research Survey: "The common opinion of three out of every four of the nearly 2,000 Lutheran youth who participated in this survey was: 'The way to be justified before God is to try sincerely to live a good life.'" How does one "get right" with God, according to John's teaching?
- H. **The false god Science:** John would have us show our family resemblance with the Father. Many in our scientific age worship at the shrine of Science. Science is not omnipotent. It has not cured all of man's physical ills, including the common cold ("Authoritative medical opinion supports the view that no substance or combination of substances available at present can be relied upon to prevent or cure colds," Dr. Waldemar Schweisheimer). Can Science cure man's spiritual ills?
- I. **The false god Automation:** A vocational counselor told the Dallas-Fort Worth chapter of the Lutheran Collegiate Association: "Guidance counselors are taking cognizance of the fact that automation is squashing individuality and are preparing the student to combat this." Granted, that automation can do much good for man, state how it should be handled so as not to become man's master.
- J. **God's incredible love:** Find a statement in the Lutheran liturgy which agrees with John's words, ". . . that we should be called the sons of God." See the Gospel of John, 1:12.

Text Under Consideration
I John 3:11-18.

Topic No. 6:

THE LOVE THAT COMPELS OUR LOVE

"By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." —I John 3:16.

Digest of Contents

The theme "God is Love" (and its corollary "love one another") occurs over and over in the epistle. It is always played against the contrasting background of hate, to show love's excellence. Referring to the world's first murder story (that of Cain slaying his brother Abel), John probes for motivation. Why did Cain kill Abel? Hatred, born of jealousy, is shown to be the motive: "Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous." Because the difference between goodness and evil is apparent today, the world still hates God's children. The society of evil-minded people does not like to be embarrassed, judged, and convicted by Christian love. It sets out to destroy the norm that exposes its failures. This should not surprise us.

Love of the brethren is an outward mark of the transition Christians have made from spiritual death to spiritual life. By the same token, hatred of the brethren is a sure sign that the bearer of it is still in spiritual death. Hatred is no small matter. It is really murder, a slaying with the heart, and whoever is guilty of it has no part in the present and future life under God.

What is ultimate love, as God revealed it to us? It is His Son Jesus Christ laying down His life for all people while they were yet sinners. It motivates, prompts, and empowers us to make self-sacrifices for our fellow men in distress. Such self-sacrifices bespeak Christian love in action. It is not showing love when those, who have the means of helping, only feel sorry, and perhaps do not even that. Sympathy is good, and words of counsel are good. But in actual need it is not enough to express love in words only. The real test of love is what one does, namely loving "in deed and in truth."

Examining the Text

1. What would be a three-word summary of this entire epistle? V. 11.
2. What is shown to be the reason of Cain slaying Abel? Review the account as told in Genesis 4.
3. What outward mark of true regeneration, or conversion, is cited in Verse 14? State the reverse of this truth.
4. How is hatred brought under the Fifth Commandment according to Verse 15?
5. What is the highest love that Christ expressed? How is this truth told in John (Gospel) 15:13 and Romans 5:8?
6. Quote what John has to say about Christ's love motivating our love. Compare with II Corinthians 5:14.
7. For what purpose is "this world's good" given us? What would you include in this asset, besides material goods?
8. Complete the sentence: "When there is no compassion, there is no....."
9. How does James (2:16) dramatize the practice of loving in word and with the tongue?
10. How does genuine love express itself?

Text-Related Topics for Discussion

- A. **Is there a substitute for natural love?** "The animal kingdom pushed credulity too far. A few years ago an experiment testing the effect of blankets and other mechanical mother-substitutes on monkeys shattered many traditional views of mother love. Now the baby monkeys which had cuddled terrycloth substitutes some years ago have grown up to be bad mothers." (*The Christian Century*). Has this anything to say about the natural love of human mothers? Isaiah 49:15.
- B. **A substitute for Christian love?** Discuss, on the basis of the text, the source of Christian love. What difference does love make in the home? In the discharge of one's vocation? Should a doctor, nurse, social worker, teacher, and the like be satisfied with merely "doing a job"? Galatians 5:13.
- C. **The green-eyed monster:** How does jealousy affect one's relationship to the neighbor? What does it do to the person himself? How can this form of hatred be conquered? Use resources of the text.
- D. **The hindrance called prejudice:** Progress in human relations work is often hindered by a residue of past training and false attitudes called prejudice. What is John's message to a person who persists in hateful prejudices?
- E. **The delusion of the "word-fact":** Some individuals confuse words with facts. Talking about something (and passing resolutions about it) is made a substitute for action. How do Christian missions and charities sometimes suffer because of the "word-fact" delusion?
- F. **Students as stewards:** What is the Christian's attitude to "this world's good" received from God? What non-material good have we also received? What are we to do with these endowments? I Peter 4:10.
- G. **Compelling love:** How does Christ's love influence Christians as to their activities in the following areas: Campus evangelism, relation to overseas students, efforts in behalf of campus chest?
- H. **Charity by proxy:** May we delegate the ministry of love to others (experts, professionals, agencies), who do it in our stead? Should we be personally involved? What is the loss to both giver and receiver when the exercise of love become impersonal? Acts 20:35.
- I. **Secondary motivation:** Some citizens give for charity "because the government would get it anyway" as income taxes. What is the Christian's motivation for giving help to the needy? Matthew 25.
- J. **Bingo for brotherhood?** Games of chance are sometimes condoned because the proceeds allegedly go for "sweet charity." Can we leave the love of God out of an effort intended to help the poor? What is John's "theology" of brotherly love?

Text Under Consideration

I John 3:19-4:6.

Topic No. 7:

PUTTING RELIGION ON TRIAL

"Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God."
—I John 4:2.

Digest of Contents

Having suggested a practical test of the love we affirm, John bids us now to examine our faith. Are we of the truth? Do we have the right faith? John interposes a timely warning against settling the question on the basis of inner feelings and emotions. The heart can at times deceive us. It may also condemn us contrary to God's truth. That is why we should not be too subjective in our religion. We do better to seek the objective ground on which our faith rests. Of course, when our heart stays in line with the truth God has revealed, there is no problem. Nothing then shakes our confidence. Then we can also pray confidently, knowing that the prayer channel is open, for we are praying in total obedience to His will.

This confidence we can have only if our faith is of the right kind, namely trust in Jesus Christ. The right faith is believing "on the name of His Son Jesus Christ." This faith the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, works in us through the Gospel.

Of course, other spirits will also try to work "faith" in us. What should be our attitude to their preaching? The test we apply to our own faith we ought to apply also to the religion of the "many false prophets go out into the world." At first blush it may seem difficult to discern the spirits and determine "which is which." The way to find out is to make them submit to a test. We should make them tell how they stand toward Jesus Christ. If they don't confess faith in Jesus Christ they reveal themselves as agents of the antichrist. On the other hand, "every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God." This is the truth the Holy Spirit witnesses in man.

There is a constant battle going on between Christ and antichrist for possession of the human heart. To this battle there is an outcome. The fact that we stand on God's side is proof positive of Christ's victory over the world and its antichrist. In the presence of Christ all hearts are revealed. They who are of the "spirit of error" refuse to hear the Word, preferring the message of the world. They who are of the "spirit of truth" hear the Word of God and, of course, are heard of God when they pray.

Examining the Text

1. In what words does John say that personal feelings are not always a safe guide for faith?
2. Our personal feelings may at times conflict with the Word of God. Which should be given the pre-eminence?
3. Confidence comes when the heart is rooted in God's Word. What effect has this on our praying?
4. Faith must have an object. Who is the object of the Christian's faith?
5. Who works faith in us and keeps Christ in our hearts?
6. Instead of giving blind faith to every prophet who comes along we are to them. Matthew 7:20.
7. What is the touchstone by which a prophet declares himself as true or false?
8. Man himself does not gain the victory over the world. Whose victory is it? What is the visible outcome of this victory?
9. Why do worldly-minded prophets always gain a good following among worldlings?
10. How do those of the "spirit of truth" distinguish themselves from those of the "spirit of error"?

Text-Related Topics for Discussion

- A. **Testing your faith:** "Unexamined faith is not worth having," states D. Elton Trueblood in his book *Philosophy of Religion*. Does college life, with its courses in science and other subjects, test your faith? Is this good or bad? Explain your answer.
- B. **The perils of subjective religion:** Faith is in a sense subjective, for you say: "I believe . . ." If you believe only your own thoughts and rely on your own feelings you are in trouble, for your religion is too subjective. How is this deficiency to be overcome? What is your opinion of "revival" religion? Is it based too much on emotion? Should there be emotion in religion?
- C. **Whom do you believe?** In the learning process it is not only a question of what you believe but also whom you believe? Is this true in spiritual things also? Whom are we to believe? Should faith relate you to a Person? Who is the Person?
- D. **Overcoming doubt:** Just about everyone among us wonders at times whether he is a Christian or not. Matters causing doubt about one's spiritual status may include: Problems as to the age of the earth, prayers seemingly unanswered, various Bible difficulties, the inability to get interested in church activities, and the like. What, according to John, is the important question to ask when probing one's personal Christianity? Should you ask: "What is my relationship to Jesus Christ?" If you are sure of that, will your other doubts dissolve?
- E. **The Holy Spirit and personal convictions:** In answer to the question "How Shall We Know the Truth?" Lily M. Gyldenvand quotes these words of Quenstedt, an early Lutheran theologian: "The ultimate reason by and through which we are led to believe with a divine and unshaken faith that God's Word is God's Word is the intrinsic power and efficacy of that Word itself, or the testimony and seal of the Holy Spirit, who speaks in and through Scripture, because of the bestowal of faith . . ." (*Beyond All Doubt*, Pp. 17-18). What program is here suggested for students who seek stronger personal convictions?
- F. **Testing other people's religion:** This becomes necessary, since many religionists make a pitch for our faith. What test questions should be asked? What are irrelevant questions?
- G. **Testing ecumenical Christian movements:** These movements, including those in the student world, seem to be satisfied if member bodies and individuals confess faith in Christ as "Lord and Savior." Is this a sufficient basis? Matthew 28:25.
- H. **"All truth is relative."** Some say there are no standards by which truth and error can be distinguished. Existentialists say a thing is true if it is true for you. Can this stand in the light of John's teaching here?
- I. **Does Communism have a "religion"?** Does it have a "prophet", a "bible", a creed, a way of life? How would you analyze its "religious" elements? Can the Christian church live under a Communistic regime, as Karl Barth seems to think?
- J. **He that is of God heareth God's Word:** Some people think they can be Christians without going to church to hear the Word of God. How does John dispose of this mistaken belief? What inevitable conclusion must be drawn from one's refusal to hear the Word? Discuss the church-going problem on your campus. Why do some students not go to church? What should be done about it?

Section IV: God is LOVE. Do we abide in Love?

I John 4:7 - 5:21

Text Under Consideration

I John 4:7-21

Topic No. 8:

LOVE IS A BADGE

"Everyone who loves is a child of God and knows God."

—I John 4:7 (New English Bible).

Digest of Contents

John makes plain that he is speaking of love from two distinct points of view. Let us keep that distinction carefully in mind, namely: 1) God's love to us, and 2) Our love to God. The one is cause, the other effect. God is the initiator, the prime mover. He began the quest of man. It is He who first loved us. This love He proved when He sent His only-begotten Son to be the propitiation (or expiation) for our sins. Then, as a further proof of love, He sent the Holy Spirit. The Spirit testifies of the fellowship existing between God and His children. He is the pledge of this relationship.

God's prior love produces effects in us. First, it prompts faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Redeemer of mankind. Where there is this faith there will also be love as a fruit of faith. This is our love to God. It becomes us to love, for we are born of Him. The Father loved us, and we as His children love Him. Love to God can never be divorced from love for one another, for the "brother." It is the height of inconsistency to profess love for the unseen God and then be loveless toward the brother whom we see.

What is the effect of our loving God? Love rids us of fear, anxiety, and torments. Because fear is gone, we can pray to Him in boldness and confidence. What is more: On judgment day we can stand before Him in utter confidence. But, fear is so hard to overcome! Its continued presence bespeaks a weakness in our love. The more we increase in love, the more fear must decrease. Here is an analysis and a suggested therapeutic formula better than any yet given by the best psychiatrists: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear."

Love has the further effect of serving as an outward mark, a visible badge, of our right relationship to God. In stating the right order of cause (God's love to us) and effect (Our love to God), John writes: "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."

Examining the Text

1. What are said to be the fruits of being "born of God"? Why is it important to emphasize regeneration, or conversion? Can the fruits of faith ever precede faith itself?
2. How did God manifest His love toward us? Compare with John (Gospel) 3:16 and Romans 5:8.
3. For what purpose did God send His Son?
4. The love of God to us is an incentive. To what does it incite us?
5. It is not correct to say that man first sought God. Rather: God first sought man. How is this taught in the text?
6. How does John teach that faith in the Son of God is the source of our love?
7. Why may a Christian be calm and confident in the day of judgment? Could he be calm and confident if salvation depended on his own works?
8. The person who is fearful in the presence of God is evidently lacking in something. What is his lack, and how can it be overcome?
9. Describe in your own words what John teaches in verse 20.
10. How would you sum up the message John meant to convey in this part of his letter?

Text-Related Topics for Discussion

- A. **Word studies:** Use your Bible to explain the meaning of **propitiation** (also atonement, expiation, reconciliation). Some texts to consult: Romans 3:25, Romans 5:11, II Corinthians 5:19-21, I Peter 2:24. Consult Edward W. Wessling's **What's the Good Word?**
- B. **The "moral view" of the atonement:** It is said that Abelard (1079-1142) first taught it. It stresses "that the cross of Christ moves us to the kind of action that God would have us take." When John speaks of Christ as "the propitiation for our sins," does he infer a moral view of the atonement? Someone who knows Greek may explain here what the original term for propitiation ("hilasmos") means.
- C. **God takes the initiative in man's salvation:** "I would draw special attention to Abraham J. Hershel's book **God in Search of Man**. It is not within the Jewish tradition to speak of God in quest of man. In Judaism it is always man who seeks God. That God is in search of man is the Gospel." Dr. Jakob Jocz, a Christian Jew and professor of systematic theology at Wycliffe College, Toronto, discussing a Jewish writer. How does John emphasize that God first loved us? How does Christianity distinguish itself from Judaism in this respect?
- D. **Man does "grope" after God:** See Paul's words in Acts 17:27. Does modern man "feel after Him" in science? In art? In literature? In natural religions? In spiritism? Can man effect a "break-through" to God apart from the Christ of the Gospel?
- E. **First the tree, then the fruit:** Some express round appreciation of Christian love but show little concern for its source, Christian faith. What, according to John, is the Christian faith that produces love? What is the basic tenet of faith?
- F. **"Speaking the truth in love."** Does loving the brother mean that we must never correct him? When does love require us to tell him the plain facts of his error? Do parents truly love their children when they let them "get by" with misbehavior? Discuss the role of love in marriage and the home.
- G. **Christian love and the race question:** "Our thanks to Dr. R..... W....., head of the government department, for his authoritative and Christ-centered talk last Wednesday on integration in education." (Sunday bulletin, Lutheran chapel at Louisiana State University). What bearing has Christ's love on the matter of race relations?
- H. **Love is a two-way street:** *Ebony* magazine, which is read mostly by Negroes, in a recent editorial: "It would seem that in his fight for better treatment the Negro may have forgotten how to treat others; that in these emotionally tense times it is more popular, and safer, to hate thy neighbor than to love him." Discuss: Should underprivileged people and members of minority groups love those to whom they attribute their oppression?
- I. **Love and selfishness:** Senator Smith of Maine (a woman) said in a speech to teen-age girls on the question of equal rights: "Don't demand special privileges under the guise of equal rights—whether the issue be on the basis of race, creed, color, religion, or sex." What is the difference between "equal rights" and "special privileges"? How do individuals and groups trespass on love when they seek special privileges?
- J. **Overcoming fear:** Fear is not new. Jesus: "Men's hearts failing them for fear," Charlotte Elliott in a well-known hymn: "Fightings and fears within, without." What are the fears of people today? What do students fear? How is a Christian able to conquer fear?

Text Under Consideration

I John 5:1-12

Topic No. 9:

BELIEVING THE RECORD

"This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son."

—I John 5:11.

Digest of Contents

There are important truths God has revealed concerning Jesus. This record, or testimony, of God is on record in the Bible. The Holy Spirit caused John to record some of these truths here, namely that Jesus is the Christ, the promised Messiah, v. 1; that He is the Son of God, v.5; that life—eternal life—is in Him, v. 11.

The Triune God is involved in the giving of this testimony. Not only the Father testified (Matthew 3:17), not only the Son (Mark 14:61-62, John 14:6), but also "the Spirit beareth witness." The Spirit substantiates His witness through the means of grace: Word and sacraments. Water is certainly a reference to Holy Baptism, which Christ instituted. Blood, it would seem, is a reference to Holy Communion. Through the sacraments our faith in Christ is engendered and confirmed.

The testimony of God is not only an invitation to faith; it is the means whereby faith comes. Through the Word of God in the Gospel and the sacraments man is born again, made a believer-in-Christ and a child of God. Conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit and not of man himself. John does not say: Man hears the testimony of God, sees the evidence, and then comes to conviction. In secular life, it is true, this is often the order of events: First there is the evidence, then comes persuasion. In spiritual life, the evidence does not come **before** faith but **with** faith. The Holy Spirit brings man to faith in Christ and then he has "the witness in himself." One comes to Christian conviction not by factors that hopefully induce faith but **by faith itself**. Apart from faith itself there is no way anybody can come to religious convictions.

Faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, Son of God, and Giver of eternal life gives power. It gives power to love both the Father and the Son (5:1b) and the children of God (5:2). Moreover, faith has the power of overcoming the world (5:4-5), of resisting its temptations and rendering its claims on us null and void. The greatest blessing of faith is that it makes us partakers of Christ, who is the Life. Those who believe in Christ have eternal life—its first installment here and its full enjoyment in the hereafter.

Text Under Consideration

1. What is the meaning of being "born of God"? What is said of everyone who has experienced the new birth?
2. How would you describe a Christian's obedience of the will of God? Why does a child of God consider obedience a pleasant duty?
3. What further power does a Christian have by virtue of his faith, or spiritual rebirth? Describe the faith that has this power.
4. Through what means of grace does the Holy Spirit bear witness?
5. The more recent translations of the Bible omit v. 7 because the best manuscripts do not lend support to it. . . . State, on the basis of other Bible texts, how Father, Son, and Holy Ghost testify concerning the aforementioned truths about Jesus.
6. Explain how on earth the Holy Spirit testifies of Jesus Christ through the water and the blood.
7. State once again what the truth is that God has testified of His Son.
8. Who alone has the conviction, or witness of God, concerning Jesus, "in himself"?
9. What great gift does God bestow on us through Christ?
10. What does it mean to "have the Son"? What does it mean to have (present tense) eternal life? Do we have it already in this life? What is left for heaven?

Text-Related Topics for Discussion

- A. **"This is the Life":** Consider how the Lutheran television program **This is the Life** interprets life. How does it portray Christian life, in contrast to worldly life? How is Christ "brought into the picture" as the source of eternal life?
- B. **"Practical Christianity":** Americans like their religion to be practical and utile in this world. If faith overcomes worldly problems, tensions, temptations, philosophies and focuses the mind on higher goals, would you say it makes for "practical" religion?
- C. **Materialism on campus?** Do some students attend college for materialistic reasons? Do they hope their diplomas and degrees will be "open sesame" to prestige, wealth, and financial security? If so, how can they "overcome the world" in this respect? What are life-goals worthy of a Christian?
- D. **Twice-born persons:** What do Christ and His apostles mean by the new birth? Can society be reformed without individuals being "born-again" persons? Can a degree of civil righteousness be achieved? T. S. Eliot believes that there can be no Christian community unless there is first a community of Christians. Do you agree?
- E. **Christianity and other religions:** Judaism teaches that Jesus is not the Christ, or Messiah. Unitarianism denies that Jesus is the Son of God. Humanism finds in Jesus a measure of inspiration for the "good life" here and now. React to these three claims. What has John to say about them?
- F. **Skepticism, perpetual doubt, tentative beliefs—or certainty?** John's emphasis on "knowing the truth" and "having the witness within ourselves" stands in bold contrast to the cult of skepticism, the "open mind," and continually changing opinions. Should our beliefs in and about Jesus Christ be tentative? Is it necessary to come to convictions and to commitment concerning Him?
- G. **How to become sure about Jesus Christ:** "You must accept Him—Jesus Christ, true God and true man, who died on the cross for the sins of the world for you! You believe, and then you know. You do not know, and then believe. His work is the most important factor. Our questions are answered by the Holy Spirit when we have Christ through faith." (Dr. James G. Manz in **How Can I Be Sure?**) . . . You believe, and then you know! How is this stated by John?
- H. **Putting reason ahead of faith:** "As long as a person is unconverted, no amount of reasoning will render the divine truth of revelation acceptable to him. . . . Philosophy can never lead to faith." (Dr. J. T. Mueller in **Christian Dogmatics**.) What do you think of the efforts of some modern theologians to make Christianity respectable to modern man by attaching it to philosophical systems? What way of "making disciples" did Christ ordain in Mark 16:15-16? Should we pay any attention at all to Christian apologetics?
- I. **Are the sacraments necessary?** Some religious groups (like the Quakers) believe that the Holy Spirit is active in man's heart apart from the means of grace. Consequently, "Quakers consider the Christian sacraments to be mere rituals, without any real significance." (Dr. F. E. Mayer, **The Religious Bodies of America**). Discuss this position in the light of I John 5:8, Titus 3:5, I Peter 3:21, and I Corinthians 10:16.
- J. **"Off the record"?** Some say they are not greatly concerned about the authenticity of the Bible as a record because their faith is "in Jesus Christ and not in a book." Is this a valid distinction? Would we know anything of God's testimony concerning Jesus Christ if the Bible did not tell us about it? Is the Bible just a record of God's acts for our salvation? Is it also the means through which faith comes? II Timothy 3:15-16.

Text Under Consideration

I John 5:13-21.

Topic No. 10:

HOW TO PRAY FOR AN ERRING BROTHER

"If a man sees his brother committing a sin which is not a deadly sin, he should pray to God for him, and He will grant him life."

—I John 5:16 (New English Bible).

Digest of Contents

Faith produces love, indeed love expressing itself in emotions, attitudes, speech, acts, and intercessory prayers. The last point is a new concept developed in this last movement of John's magnificent letter on Christian love.

Note the progress of thought! John reviews the reason for writing the message, namely that we may believe on the Son of God and thus know that we have eternal life through Him. With this faith goes assurance with respect to prayer. We know God will hear all proper prayers (i.e. prayers according to His will) and grant them. He will grant also a special kind of request, namely intercession for an erring brother.

John distinguishes between sins of weakness, which do not kill faith, and mortal sins which do. Indeed, every sin is a transgression of God's will. There is, however, a valid distinction to be made between the Christian's stumbling and the deliberate sinning of an unbeliever. These stumblers are to be the objects of our prayers. We pray that God would forgive them, because by faith they have full coverage for these faults and failings by the shed blood of Christ. It is different with deliberate sinners, whose transgressions are incompatible with faith. We do indeed pray for all men, even for enemies of the cross of Christ. But we do not intercede for them in the same way that we pray for erring brethren. We cannot ask in behalf of the former that God would dismiss the charges, because they are impenitent, faithless, and cannot receive God's forgiveness as long as they continue in their hardness of heart. It is different with erring Christians. They are penitent; they believe in Jesus Christ; they purpose to amend their sinful lives. For their forgiveness we should pray, and God will hear our prayer.

In the closing movement, which is a summation of previous instructions, John again paints with contrasting colors. He returns to his favorite dialectic of thesis and antithesis: We are of God, but the whole world lies in wickedness. Since we are of God, we know not only that the Son of God has come but also why He came, namely that we might believe in Him as the true Son of God and find eternal life in Him. As true God Jesus Christ stands in contrast to false messiahs and unreal gods, who are nothing else but idols. This is the final reminder of the patriarch of the first-century church: Stay away from idolatry!

Examining the Text

1. Why did John write this letter? State two reasons.
2. Find a previous passage in which John spoke of prayer.
3. What assurance do we have when we pray in accord with God's will?
4. What is the prayer instruction given here with regard to the sinning brother?
5. What particular kind of sin urges us to such intercession? How will God regard our request?
6. What does John mean by a "sin unto death"? Might it be one listed by St. Paul in Galatians 5:19-21?
7. What blanket statement does John make on sin in general?
8. Why should a "sin not unto death" urge our prayers in behalf of the sinner?
9. What is John's final testimony with respect to Jesus Christ?
10. Why does he speak of idols in this connection?

Text-Related Topics for Discussion

- A. **The case for prayer:** Summarize what John has said in this letter on the subject of prayer. Do students' private and group prayers meet these specifications? Should morning and evening prayers be said in your campus chapel? Would you attend?
- B. **Prayer distinctions:** Consider the case of a member of your group faltering in his sanctification and that of Russia's Khrushchev. Both are sinners. Should you pray for them? Pray for them in the same way? How would you pray for both?
- C. **The classification of sins:** Have someone in the group consult J. T. Mueller's *Christian Dogmatics* (Pp. 228-235) and say what the difference is between voluntary and involuntary, mortal and venial, and other kinds of sins. What caution is to be observed in using these categories?
- D. **In need of prayer?** Is a student, who is neglectful of the means of grace, in need of your prayers? What else can you do?
- E. **Devotional exercise:** Have the group compose a prayer in which proper concern is expressed for spiritual delinquencies of Lutheran students and bring these petitions before the throne of God.
- F. **The world in wickedness:** A former student now residing in New York City writes: "The souls without God come at you out of the night, and your life is a constant ministry and a constant potent testimony. Because the temptations are truly intensified and multiplied, your own faith becomes a tried thing, an ever present, moving reality." What can those who are "of God" do about the "world that lieth in wickedness"?
- G. **Memo to Screwtape:** The editor of a Gamma Delta chapter, in publicizing a forthcoming study retreat, used C. S. Lewis' famous literary device as follows: "Make sure they forget their Bibles. Next, remember to cut off the electricity so they can't show that filmstrip on Saturday night. And make sure their new vicar fouls up his sermon on Sunday." The purpose of so writing, of course, was (in John's words, v. 18) that the "wicked one" might not touch the members. What else should be done to make your student group devil-proof?
- H. **Personal Evangelism:** Imagine that you trying to evangelize someone who is not a Christian. How would you use the statements of v. 20 to state the case for Christianity?
- I. **Campus idols:** "Keep yourselves from idols" is John's closing statement. Are there any "idols" on campus? If in doubt, see *Gods of the Campus* by Robert Hamill or *Chad Walsh's Campus Gods on Trial*.
- J. **John's letter in the Biblical perspective:** "From the first page to the last page the Bible serves to bring man to a knowledge of his salvation. In Old Testament days God pointed out the way of salvation in words and in ceremonies. The killing of a spotless lamb revealed to men that a sacrifice for sin was necessary. In the New Testament Jesus was declared to be that Lamb of God which was to take away the sins of the world. To this day, in answer to the age-old question, 'What must I do to be saved?', the Bible gives the up-to-date answer, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.'" (Rev. Theodore Beiderwieden, Lutheran campus pastor for Fairleigh-Dickenson University). Having now finished with I John, would you say that the author testified to the above truths? Can you quote some of his significant statements on this score?

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