

An Expository Study of 1 John
Part 2 (of 10 parts):

An Exposition of I John 1:5—2:6

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And this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked (1 John 1:5-2:6).

Following the weighty and difficult opening paragraph (1:1-4), John launched into his discussion. It is exceedingly difficult to present a logical analysis of the body of the epistle (1:5-5:12). Attempts to analyze its contents are like attempts to analyze the face of the sky: "There is contrast, and yet there is harmony; variety and yet order; fixedness, and yet ceaseless change; a monotony which soothes without wearying us, because the frequent repetitions come to

us as things that are both new and old."¹

Attempts to produce a logical analysis of its contents have yielded widely varying results.² John's method was not that of syllogistic logic but of categorical affirmation. His thought moved in cycles rather than straight lines. It seems best to seek to trace the flow and aim of John's thought in the light of his purpose stated in 5:13: "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life."³ John presented tests of a vital Christianity, which would promote the assurance of personal salvation in the lives of his readers and would enable them to detect and reject false teachers.

John began by discussing the test of fellowship with God (1:5-2:17). Grounded in the nature of God as light (1:5), this test "is largely directed against the Gnostic doctrine that to the man of enlightenment all conduct is morally indifferent."⁴ In 1:6-10 he showed how sin hinders fellowship and he provided the corrective; in 2:1-2 he set forth the divine provision for maintaining fellowship, and in 2:3-17 he presented signs of fellowship maintained.

The Basis for Christian Fellowship

John moved into a discussion of the first test without a break: "And this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you" (v. 5). "And" (καί),⁵ as well as his reference to the apostolic message, connects this test with the reality of the Incarnation (1:1-3) as the ground for true fellowship. The words "this is the message" (ἔστιν αὕτη ἡ ἀγγελία, lit. "and the message is this") point to its abiding reality and prepare for the coming statement of its sum and substance. Have heard from Him" (ἀκηκόαμεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ) again declares the abiding impact of the message heard from the incarnate Son of God (1:3). Unlike the speculative claims of the Gnostics, this is the true and abiding message received directly from God Himself.

¹ Alfred Plummer, *The Epistles of S. John*, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (reprint, Cambridge: University Press, 1938), pp. 42-43.

² See I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), 12:22-27, for a number of these outlines.

³ So Raymond E. Gingrich, *An Outline and Analysis of the First Epistle of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1943). See this writer's outline in *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3: *The Non-Pauline Epistles and Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), pp. 208-10.

⁴ Plummer, *The Epistles of S. John*, p. 77.

⁵ This is omitted in the NEB, NIV, and RSV.

"And announce to you" again underlines the apostolic commission to make that message known to others. The verb "announce" (ἀναγγέλλομεν), or "declare" (NIV), differs slightly from the verb rendered "proclaim" in verses 2-3. While no vital distinction between these two compound forms is involved, the former term (ἀπαγγέλλομεν) conveys the thought of proclaiming and making known a message, the term here (ἀναγγέλλομεν) suggests proclaiming again, or diffusing knowledge of the message.

The content of this message is stated both positively and negatively: "that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." The statement "God is light" is one of three assertions concerning the nature of God from the pen of John: "God is spirit" (John 4:24); "God is light" (1 John 1:5); "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16). While other biblical writers tell about the attributes and activities of God, John alone in these statements tells what He is.

"God is light" (ὁ θεὸς φῶς ἐστίν) is a metaphorical statement of His very nature. "God," with the definite article, is the subject; "light," without the article, is the predicate nominative; the two terms cannot be interchanged. The predicate noun is qualitative, describing God as possessing the qualities of light. Obviously it is not to be taken in a literal sense. Whatever other qualities this metaphorical designation may include, it clearly involves the intellectual and moral—enlightenment and holiness. Just as light reveals and purifies, so by His very nature God illuminates and purifies those who come to Him. His nature determines the conditions for fellowship with Him.

Characteristically the apostle added a negative to his positive assertion: "and in Him there is no darkness at all" (καὶ σκοτία ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδεμία, lit. "and darkness in Him not is, not one bit"). The double negative stresses the total absence of any darkness in Him. For John "darkness" is not merely the absence of light; it has a moral quality, standing in direct antithesis to all that characterizes God as "light." For pagans in John's day, familiar with the Greek and Roman mythologies, that was a startling assertion. As Findlay notes,

They had gods that could cheat and lie, gods licentious and unchaste, gods spiteful and malignant towards men, quarrelsome and abusive toward each other. They had been accustomed to think of the God-head as a mixed nature, like their own, only on a larger scale—good and evil, kind and cruel, pure and wanton, made of darkness and light.⁶

⁶ George G. Findlay, *Fellowship in the Life Eternal* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.), p. 96.

Whenever men create their own gods, they create them in their own image. The Gnostics in practice tried to mix the two realms of light and darkness or held that since they had been enlightened the darkness did not impinge on them. For John "light" and "darkness" represent two separate and distinct moral realms in opposition to each other. God and His kingdom constitute the first realm; Satan and his followers the second.

The Hindrances to Fellowship

John next dealt with three hindrances to fellowship in view of God's nature (1:6-10). Cures are pointed out for the first two, but none is stated for the third hindrance.

THE DENIAL OF THE SERIOUSNESS OF SIN

The claim (1:6a). "If we say" (ἐὰν εἴπωμεν) introduces a hypothetical claim;⁷ it does not assert that the claim has actually been advanced, but it does leave open the possibility. The claims indicated in verses 6, 8, and 10 seem clearly to represent views advanced by the false teachers. John's "we" is inclusive, embracing himself and his readers, as well as the false teachers.

The words "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness" present the religious profession, marked by a clear contradiction between the claim and the conduct maintained. "That we have fellowship with Him" (ὅτι κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ' αὐτοῦ) indicates a claim that we have continuing fellowship with God who is light (1:5). It is a claim to be "united with God by a living bond of common sympathy, interest, purpose, and love."⁸ Over against this high claim stands a contradictory course of conduct, "and yet walk in the darkness" (καὶ ἐν τῷ σκότει περιπατῶμεν, lit. "and in the darkness may be walking"). "The darkness," placed emphatically forward, marks the contrasted sphere of conduct. "Walk" is a common figure of speech to denote moral conduct. The compound verb denotes the whole round of daily activities, including thought and deed. The tense denotes the continued action.

The condemnation (1:6b). John unhesitatingly pronounced a twofold condemnation on this contradiction: "we lie and do not practice the truth." His positive assessment, "we lie" (ψεῦδομεθα), sug-

⁷ "The Third Class: Undetermined, but with Prospect of Determination. This condition states the condition as a matter of doubt, but with some expectation of realization" (A. T. Robertson and W. Hersey Davis, *A New Short Grammar of the Greek Testament* [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1935], p. 353).

⁸ J. M. Gibbon, *Eternal Life: Notes of Expository Sermons on the Epistles of S. John* (London: Richard D. Dickinson. 1890). n. 11.

gests they were claiming a known falsehood. It is not an innocent mistake but a conscious lie. Whenever there is a clear conflict between an individual's verbal claim and his habitual conduct, it is always his conduct that shows what he is.

The negative assertion "we . . . do not practice the truth," means they fail to embody God's revealed truth in their daily conduct and character. As Stott observes, "Religion without morality is an illusion."⁹

The corrective (1:7). "But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light" reveals that the corrective lies in altered conduct, in a daily walk consistent with God's character as "the light." The standard and pattern of the walk is not left to believers to determine but is determined by His nature, "as He Himself is in the light." The expression marks the contrast between God who is "in the light" as the natural sphere of His being, and those seeking fellowship with Him who must persistently endeavor to walk "in the light." God is eternal and abiding; believers are temporal, moving through time and space.

The result of such a walk is twofold. Horizontally, "we have fellowship with one another." While some understand the phrase "with one another" ($\mu\epsilon\tau\prime\ \acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\acute{\eta}\lambda\omega\nu$) to denote the resultant fellowship between God and man,¹⁰ it is more natural to understand the reciprocal pronoun as indicating fellow believers. The pronoun is used seven times in I and 2 John and in each of the other occurrences it clearly expresses a human relationship.¹¹ It is the result of believers' mutual walk in the light, and is "a gauge and a sign of the divine fellowship."¹² He who consistently has trouble maintaining fellowship with others walking in the light should examine his own claim of fellowship with God.

A Christian's walk in the light also produces a vertical result: "and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." One's walk in the light does not produce the cleansing; it only makes him persistently conscious of his continual need for cleansing. The cleansing

⁹ J. R. W. Stott, *The Epistles of John*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), p. 74.

¹⁰ Zane C. Hodges, "1 John," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, 2 vols. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, SP Publications, 1983, 1985), 2:885; J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Joy of Fellowship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), p. 24.

¹¹ I John 1:7; 3:11,23; 4:7,11,12; 2 John 5.

¹² Bonsirven, quoted in Donald W. Burdick, *The Letters of John the Apostle: An In-Depth Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), p. 123.

agent is "the blood of Jesus"¹³ His Son." This double identification of the One whose blood cleanses indicates His unique nature. "Jesus" points to His life and death here on earth as a real man, while "His Son" underlines the fact of His deity as the incarnate Son of God. This assertion of His dual nature repudiates the Gnostic denials of the reality of the Incarnation.

"Cleanses us from all sin" declares the impact of His blood as continuous and comprehensive. The present tense verb "cleanses" (καθαρίζει, "keeps on cleansing") presents its competence to do what nothing else can, while the phrase "from all sin" (ἀπὸ πάσης ἁμαρτίας) points to every act of sin that may occur while believers walk in the light. "One who lives in the light knows his own frailty and is continually availing himself of the purifying power of Christ's sacrificial death."¹⁴ This is progressive sanctification.

THE DENIAL OF HUMAN SINFULNESS

The claim (1:8a). The clause "If we say that we have no sin" sets forth another claim that hinders fellowship. The claim, again hypothetically stated, is a denial of the sinfulness of human nature. The expression "have no sin" (ἁμαρτίαν οὐκ ἔχομεν), peculiar to John in the New Testament, may mean denial of guilt of an act of sin (cf. John 19:11); but in view of 1 John 1:10 the expression seems intended as a denial of the principle, or inherent nature, of sin. It expresses the claim of the false teachers that they have advanced to a stage beyond human sinfulness. It might be the claim of one denying that human nature is sinful. Near the beginning of the present century a certain professor in a liberal theological school maintained the goodness of human nature and that what some insisted on calling his "sinful nature" was simply the survival of his past animal ancestry which man had not yet outgrown! More probably the claim in verse 8a refers to those who acknowledged that they once had a sinful nature but that by a deeper personal experience this ugly root had been completely eradicated in their lives. Years ago this writer noted an advocate of this view who quoted this verse this way: "If we say that we have [had] no sin, we deceive ourselves." By this he meant that the old sinful nature has been eradicated. This view relegates sin to the limbo of mistakes, frailties, pardonable errors of human limitation—anything but "sin." Barker well notes, "Whatever the

¹³ The reading "Jesus Christ" in the Authorized Version is based on the Textus Receptus. Most modern editors omit "Christ" here. For the textual evidence see Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Biblestiftung, 1981); Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, *The Greek New Testament according to the Majority Text* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

¹⁴ Plummer, *The Epistles of S. John*, p. 82.

shape of the argument, and regardless of whether it is an affirmation from the ancient world or a modern restatement, it remains true that whenever the principle of sin is denied as an on-going reality, there follows a denial of responsibility for individual action."¹⁵

The condemnation (1:8b). Again John's condemnation is stated both positively and negatively. Positively, "we are deceiving ourselves" (ἐαυτοὺς πλανῶμεν, "ourselves we lead astray"¹⁶). The reflexive pronoun stresses that this is man's own doing. The verb implies serious departure from the truth. In Matthew 24:5 Jesus used the term of the coming false teachers; in Revelation it depicts the work of Satan, the arch deceiver (12:9; 13:14; 20:3, 8, 10). Such self-deception is possible only through a willful rejection of the evidence concerning one's inner nature as a fallen human being.

The negative result is that "the truth is not in us." Self-deception involves refusal to allow "the truth" a place in one's inner being. "The truth" (ἡ ἀλήθεια) denotes "that specific body of truth, both moral and soteriological, that God has revealed to His people."¹⁷ As a person commits himself to Christ that truth becomes his inner possession.

The corrective (1:9). The corrective for such self-deception is stated without a connective particle. The hypothetical form, "If we confess our sins" (ἐὰν ὁμολογῶμεν τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἡμῶν), implies that believers must be willing to meet the stipulated condition. More is involved than a general acknowledgment of one's sinfulness; it is the confession of sinful deeds to God. To "confess" means literally "to say the same thing, to agree with." A believer must frankly be willing to say the same thing about his sins (the sins he is conscious of having committed) that God says about them. Christians must acknowledge their sins for what they are, rather than using some flowery designation that conceals their true character. The present tense calls for such confession as their standing practice. The confession should be as wide as the actual guilt.

The assertion "He is faithful and righteous" assures God's response whenever a believer's sins have been confessed. God is "faithful" (πιστός) to fulfill His promises of mercy to the penitent sinner; He is also "righteous" (δίκαιος) in the way He deals with the confessing sinner. The two terms indicate that in dealing with a Chris-

¹⁵ Glenn W. Barker, "1 John," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 12: 311.

¹⁶ Robert Young, *The Holy Bible Consisting of the Old and New Covenants Translated according to the Letter and Idioms of the Original Languages* (London: Pickering & Inglis, n.d.).

¹⁷ Burdick, *The Letters of John the Apostle*, p. 125.

tian.'s sins God is true to His word and acts consistently with His holy nature. His attributes of mercy and justice find their perfect reconciliation in the cross of Christ (cf. 2:1-2).

When a Christian confesses his sins, God deals with the double result of those sins. The clause to forgive us our sins" (ἵνα ἀφῆ ἡμῖν τὰς ἁμαρτίας) points to a result in regard to the guilt of sin. Sins not only break fellowship with God but they also leave a person guilty and subject to punishment. But when a person confesses sins to God, He graciously acts to "forgive" (ἀφῆ, lit. "send away, dismiss") them as a definite act. God removes the guilt and restores the fellowship.

The clause "and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" states God's further act of cleansing or purifying believers from the pollution of their sins. Sins make believers spiritually dirty as well as guilty before God. Unrighteousness" (ἀδικίας) means that sin is a failure to measure up, to the standard of righteousness. The cleansing agent is not confession but the blood of Christ (1:7). Confession makes possible its application to unrighteousness as a definite act. "All unrighteousness" underlines that the cleansing is total.

THE DENIAL OF THE PRACTICE OF SIN

The claim (1:10a). "If we say that we have not sinned" (ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι οὐχ ἡμαρτήκαμεν) is a blatant denial of any sinful acts in one's conduct. In contrast to the denial of a sinful nature in verse 8, this is a denial of sinfulness in deed. If John was setting forth the claim of the false teachers as professed Christians, then their claim can be taken to mean "since conversion." Bennett insists that "this interpretation is required by verse 8 and the general context."¹⁸ But the statement is not so limited. As Burdick points out, "The perfect tense verb refers to the past and with the negative it includes all of past time up to the last minute. It claims that one is now in the state of never having committed sin. It is therefore a denial that one has ever sinned."¹⁹ Such an individual might acknowledge the reality of sinful human conduct but claim that he himself had never committed such evil deeds.

The condemnation (1:10b). John announced a double verdict on such a blatant claim. Positively, "we make Him a liar" (ψεύστην ποιοῦμεν αὐτόν, lit. "a liar we make Him").²⁰ Such a person brazenly stamps God's testimony that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23) as a deliberate lie. The present tense

¹⁸ W. H. Bennett, *The General Epistles*, The Century Bible: A Modern Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, n.d.), p. 293.

¹⁹ Burdick, *The Letters of John the Apostle*, p. 128.

²⁰ Young, *The Holy Bible Consisting of the Old and New Covenants*.

characterizes God as being "a liar" (cf. the words of Jesus in John 8:44.) This impugns God's character and the whole program of redemption.

The negative fact is that "His word is not in us." God's Word as "the truth in the concrete form of the Scriptures, the inspired utterances of God's mind,"²¹ has found no place in his inner life and being. He has rejected the most elemental application of God's Word on his own heart and conscience.

Unlike the two previous false claims, for the third John offered no remedy. For such willful rebellion against God and His Word there is no remedy. Unless that rebellion is consciously terminated, no possibility of acceptance and fellowship with God is possible.

The Provision for Maintaining Fellowship

In 1 John 2:1-2, John set forth the heart of the gospel message. God's provision in Christ Jesus enables sinful men to be forgiven and have fellowship with Him. John indicated his ardent desire for his beloved readers (2:1a), recognized the awful possibility that believers may sin (2:1b), and set forth the adequate provision in Christ (2:1c-2).

THE ARDENT DESIRE FOR THE READERS

The apostle's deep pastoral concern now prompted him to address his readers directly as "my little children" (τεκνία μου). The diminutive does not imply immaturity on the part of the readers but is rather an expression of endearment on John's part. The term occurs seven times in 1 John; setting aside Galatians 4:19 where the reading is uncertain, it occurs elsewhere in the New Testament only in John 13:33. John heard this expression of tender affection from the lips of Jesus, and now in his old age it was a favorite term with him. His fatherly heart went out to his spiritual children as he sought to aid them and warn them against sin and the false teachers.

John wrote, "I am writing these things to you that you may not sin." This marks his ardent pastoral desire for his people. "These things" apparently looks back to 1:5-10, which portrays the tragic effects of sin. "That you may not sin" (ἵνα μὴ ἁμαρτήτε) does not imply that his readers were living in sin; the aorist tense indicates that they must not condone even a single act of sin. John wanted them to realize that "sin is so heinous in the sight of God that it may not be indulged in even once."²²

²¹ W. E. Vine, *The Epistles of John: Light, Love, Light* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), p. 17.

²² Gingrich, *An Outline and Analysis of the First Epistle of John*, p. 55.

THE AWFUL POSSIBILITY OF COMMITTING A SIN

"And if anyone sins" (καὶ ἐάν τις ἁμάρτη) recognizes the awful possibility of sin. The conjunction "and" (καὶ) implies that John also wanted to make them aware of this sad fact. He was fully aware of human frailty and the seductive power of sin and Satan. Because the conjunction joins two antithetical clauses the NIV rendering "but" seems better here. The aorist tense again implies an act of sin into which the believer may be carried away contrary to the true tenor of his life. Such a fall into sin does not destroy his membership in the family of God but it disrupts fellowship between the Father and His child. God's holiness demands that it must be dealt with.

THE AMPLE PROVISION FOR MAINTAINING FELLOWSHIP

Having fallen into some sin, the believer is not left to his own poor efforts to effect restoration. God has made effective provision in Christ.

The personal Advocate (2:1c). In writing "we have an Advocate" instead of the expected "he has an Advocate," John made clear his own need for this Advocate. The present tense, "we have," portrays Jesus Christ as continually maintaining His activity as "Advocate" (παράκλητον) on the believer's behalf. The term, often transliterated into the English as "Paraclete," is a compound term meaning "one who is summoned to the side of another" to help, comfort, encourage, counsel, or intercede for, as the need may be. In the fourth Gospel "Paraclete" occurs four times in Jesus' Upper Room Discourse (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7), always of the Holy Spirit.²³ Only here is the term used directly of Jesus Himself, though in John 14:16 Jesus implies His own identity as Paraclete by referring to the Holy Spirit as "another Counselor" (NIV).

John presented Jesus as an Advocate with the Father," ever in a face-to-face relationship with the Father, pleading on behalf of believers (Rom. 8:34). "The Father" recalls believers' status before Him as errant sons. If "Advocate" is taken in a strictly legal sense, Christ is viewed as acting as the believers' "defense attorney"²⁴ to counter the charges made against them by Satan, "the accuser" of the saints (Rev. 12:10). In extrabiblical Greek the technical meaning of "lawyer" or "attorney" is rare; it generally has the meaning of one

²³ In each of these four occurrences *The Amplified Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965) amplifies the word in this way "Comforter (Counselor, Helper, Intercessor, Advocate, Strengtheners and Standby)."

²⁴ Pentecost, *The Joy of Fellowship*, pp. 34-35; Gordon H. Clark, *First John: A Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing- Co., n.d.), pp. 42-43.

who appears in court as a friend speaking on another's behalf.²⁵ Then Christ is viewed as a believer's Friend who "comes before God the Judge to intercede for the believer who has committed an act of sin."²⁶

John identified this Advocate as "Jesus Christ the righteous." "Righteous" (δικαιον), used without the article, is descriptive of His character. "The efficacy of His ministry is guaranteed by the righteousness of His Person."²⁷ Being personally conformed to all the righteous demands of God's law, He pleads the believers' case in keeping with the requirements of a holy law.

The perfect propitiation (2:2). John wrote that Jesus "Himself is the propitiation for our sins." The pronoun "Himself" (αὐτὸς) underlines the personal identity of the Christians' Advocate with "the propitiation for our sins." "Is" (ἐστίν) indicates that His past atoning work as "the propitiation for our sins" has perpetual validity. The noun rendered "propitiation" (ἰλασμός), occurring elsewhere in the New Testament only in 1 John 4:10, denotes the means whereby sins are covered and remitted. Had John written that Jesus is the "Propitiator," half the truth would have been lost. Then His work would have been comparable to that of the high priest on the Day of Atonement when he sprinkled sacrificial blood on the, mercy seat to cover the sins of the people so that God could again deal with them in mercy. Unlike the Old Testament high priests, Jesus Christ is Himself "the atoning sacrifice" (NIV) in that He offered Himself as the sacrifice whereby the barrier which sin interposes between God and man is removed. Pagans might think of offering sacrifices to ,appease their offended gods as a means of regaining their favor, but Scripture presents God Himself as taking the initiative in sending His Son as the propitiation for sins (4:10); the cause of the estrangement between God and man lies with man, not God. In making "Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf" (2 Cor. 5:21) God achieved the true and lasting solution to the sin problem; the perfect sacrifice of the incarnate Christ enables God to "be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26).

The scope of the atoning sacrifice was "not for ours [i.e., our sins] only, but also for those of the whole world" (2:2b). The strong adversative "but" (ἀλλὰ) marks the contrasted sphere of "our" sins and those of "the whole world," the world of mankind. The expression

²⁵ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 623-24.

²⁶ Burdick, *The Letters of John the Apostle*, p. 130.

²⁷ Vine, *The Epistles of John*, p. 21.

offers no basis for universalism, but means that "no one is, by Divine predetermination, excluded from the scope of God's mercy; the efficacy of the propitiation, however, is made actual for those who believe."²⁸ It reminds believers that they are not the exclusive objects of God's redemptive concern. But God has decreed that to be saved each sinner must personally accept Christ as his Redeemer. "Men may—yea, and do—reject the propitiation when they reject the Propitiator—the Lord Jesus Christ."²⁹

The Signs of Fellowship Maintained

The opening "and" (καὶ) in 2:3 connects this paragraph (2:3-6) with the preceding discussion concerning fellowship. John presented two closely related signs that show that fellowship is being maintained.

THE SIGN OF OBEDIENCE

John fully believed in the reality of knowing God. He wrote, "And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments" (2:3). But in contradiction to the Gnostics, he maintained that no professed knowledge of God is valid if it does not have moral consequences. The phrase "by this" (ἐν τούτῳ) looks forward to the sign of obedience in the second half of the verse. John then spoke of "knowing" God as synonymous with having fellowship with Him. The statement "we know that we have come to know Him" (γινώσκουμεν ὅτι ἐγνώκαμεν αὐτόν) points to inner progressive knowledge or assurance that believers have entered into a state of knowing Him. Here John used this verb to denote knowledge gained by experience or instruction. "Him" may mean either the Father or the Son; in reality the believer knows both, since the Father has revealed Himself through His Son.

"If we keep His commandments" declares the ground for assurance. The conditional statement again recalls that this may not be true of some who loudly claim to know God. "Keep His commandments" (τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ τηρῶμεν, lit. "His commandments we may be keeping") demands a careful, watchful obedience to the commands of God, not one's own self-chosen practices. Such obedience must be the characteristic practice of the one who is in a state of knowing God. The one who has been brought into a saving relationship with

²⁸ W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words with Their Precise Meanings for English Readers* (reprint, Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1966), 3:225.

²⁹ Gingrich, *An Outline and Analysis of the First Epistle of John*. p. 60.

God finds within him a growing love for and desire to obey His commandments.

In 2:4 this test of obedience is underlined by its very opposite. "The one who says" (ὁ λέγων) now replaces the hypothetical "if" construction. While essentially the same, the "if" construction stresses the hypothetical assertion made, while this construction pictures the individual personally advancing the indicated claim. Here two present tense participles under one article mark the sharp contradiction between claim and conduct, "saying . . . and not keeping" (ὁ λέγων . . . μὴ τηρῶν). His conduct invalidates his claim. For John the knowledge of God can never be merely speculative, or mental profession; it must be practical and experiential.

John's evaluation is twofold. Positively, such a person "is a liar," making a claim which deep within he knows is false; his character is bad. Negatively, "the truth is not in him" (ἐν τούτῳ ἡ ἀλήθεια οὐκ ἔστιν). God's revealed truth is not present in him.

By contrast, "whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected" (2:5a). These words speak of the glorious outcome of obedience. It is assumed that this individual has declared himself a believer, but the crucial concern is whether he is habitually keeping "His word." The designation is broader than "His commandments" (2:3). His concern is to be obedient in any matter that he knows to be God's will. As a result "In him the love of God has truly been perfected" (ἀληθῶς ἐν τούτῳ ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ τετελείωται). "Truly," placed emphatically forward, stresses the assured result "in this one." "The love of God" may be taken as an objective genitive, "man's love for God,"³⁰ or as a subjective genitive, "God's love."³¹ Both make good sense, but the latter here seems more probable. In support of the subjective sense, Kistemaker points to "the parallel in verses 4 and 5—'[God's] truth is not in him' (v. 4) and 'God's love is . . . in him' v. 5," as well as the fact that in "the epistle John explains the origin of love: 'love comes from God' (4:7)... . God is the source and giver of love."³² Then the meaning is that in the habitually obedient believer God's love "has been perfected"; it has attained its goal objectively in him. "An obedient believer has a

³⁰ Plummer, *The Epistles of S. John*, p. 91; Burdick, *The Letters of John the Apostle*, pp. 137-38; Stott, *The Epistles of John*, p. 91.

³¹ Hodges, "1 John," p. 888; Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950), p. 49; Barker, "1 John," pp. 315-16.

³² Simon J. Kistemaker, "Exposition of the Epistles of James and the Epistles of John," in *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), p. 257.

deep, full-orbed acquaintance with 'God's love.'"³³

THE SIGN OF IMITATION

"By this we know that we are in Him" (2:5b) may be taken with what precedes or follows. Views are divided, but it seems best, with most modern versions,³⁴ to take it with what follows. This agrees with the same expression in 2:3. The experiential knowledge gained from the test is that "we are in Him," meaning either the Father or the Son. The ambiguity may be intentional. Vine well remarks,

The condition of being "in Him" is not a matter of absorption into Deity, as Pantheism teaches, but of spiritual relationship and unity of life, which involves the removal of the alienation of man in his unregenerate state from God, and the enjoyment of fellowship with God and oneness with Him in His will and purpose.³⁵

The words "the one who says he abides in Him" (ὁ λέγων ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν) refer to the individual's testimony concerning his characteristic relationship with God. "In Him" apparently refers to the Father rather than the Son. "Abides" (μένειν), a characteristic Johannine term, portrays habitual fellowship with Him as an active relationship that endures. A believer's testimony involves moral obligation: "ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked." "Ought" (ὀφείλει), rather than "must" (δει), points to an abiding inner realization that "he who declares his position is morally bound to act [according] to the declaration which he has made."³⁶

"In the same manner as He walked" (καθὼς ἐκεῖνος περιεπάτησεν, lit. "even as that one walked") calls for careful conformity to the pattern left by Christ as He engaged in His daily activities here on earth. The completed example now stands before the believer, challenging him to be walking "in the same manner" (αὐτὸς), in exact conformity to the example before him. In thus insisting that there is an inseverable bond between the believer's professed relationship to Christ and his morally consistent conduct, John delivered a crucial blow against the Gnostics who tried to divorce their claimed spiritual enlightenment from their daily moral conduct.

³³ Hodges, "1 John," p. 888.

³⁴ This is the rendering in the ASV, Berkeley, NASB, NEB, RSV, and others, as shown by their use of a colon at the end of verse 5.

³⁵ Vine, *The Epistles of John*, p. 25.

³⁶ Plummer, *The Epistles of S. John*, p. 91.

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