

E. *Questions for Review*

1. What are the two alternatives concerning John's reference in v. 13 to "the Spirit He has given us?"
2. What is the essential testimony of the Spirit?
3. To what does John appeal in v. 14 as the basis of his claim that Jesus is God's Son and the Saviour of the world?
4. What are the tests by which phenomena of the past are established as historical?
5. How does the resurrection prove the claim of Jesus to be the Son of God and Saviour of the world?
6. Does the resurrection, as recorded in the New Testament, meet the tests of historicity? Explain your answer.
7. Can you suggest other events in the life of Jesus which may be put to the same test?
8. What is meant by "the area where the experience of God and the experience of man merge?" (See comments on I John 4:7-9)
9. The love which we share with God was first brought to light by _____
10. In what way is the love of God said to be the object of the Christian's faith?
11. Is John here discussing the means by which we come to salvation? Explain your answer.
12. Can the "steps to salvation" contradict the evidences that we are indeed in a saving relationship to God? Explain.

CHAPTER XIV

RIGHTEOUSNESS — DEMONSTRATION OF LOVE

I John 4:17—5:3

A. *The Text*

"Herein is love made perfect with us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgement; because as he is even so are we in this world. (18) There is no fear in love: but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath punishment; and he that feareth is not made perfect in love. (19) We love, because he first loved us. (20) If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for that loveth not his brother whom

he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen. (21) And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also. (5:1) Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God and whosoever loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. (2) Hereby we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and do his commandments. (3) For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous."

B. *Try to Discover*

1. What is the relationship of obedience to righteousness?
2. What is the relationship of righteousness to love?
3. Why do Christians love their brothers in Christ?
4. Who is my brother in Christ?
5. How may I know that I am fulfilling the commandment to love my brother?

C. *Paraphrase*

"Herein hath love with us been made perfect, In order that boldness we might have in the day of judgment, In that just as He is We also are in this world. (18) Fear existeth not in love, But perfect casteth fear outside; Because fear hath correction: He that feareth hath not been made perfect in love. (19) We love, because he first loved us: (20) If one should say I love God and should be hating his brother, false is he: For he that doth not love his brother whom he hath seen God whom he hath not seen he cannot love! (21) And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also. (5:1) Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ Of God hath been born: And whosoever loveth him that begat Loveth him that hath been begotten of him. (2) Hereby perceive we that we love the children of God As soon as God we love And his commandments we are doing. (3) For this is the love of God That his commandments we are keeping, And his commandments are not burdensome;"

D. *Comments*

1. Preliminary Remarks

Righteousness is obedience to God's commands. Love is commanded.

When we love we are obeying God and therefore are doing righteousness. Righteousness, in this sense, is seen as a manifestation of love.

2. Translation and comments

a. The perfection of love . . . v.17-18

(17) "In this love is being perfected with us, in order that we may have confidence in the day of judgement; because just as that one, we are also in this world. (18) Fear is not in love, but perfect love is casting out fear, because fear is having punishment. The one fearing is not being perfected in love."

Just as God's love for us reaches its intended end when we keep His commandments and love our brothers (see on 2:5), so our love is perfected when we no longer fear the judgement. The basis of boldness in the judgement is that we have lived as Jesus lived, by loving as Jesus loved.

No one has so lived who does not love his brother. To such a one the fear of judgement is well-founded!

Some have seen in the preaching of love a softening or watering down of the sternness of the Gospel. Not so! The reason we *must* obey the command to love is "it is appointed to men once to die, and after this cometh judgement." (Hebrews 9:27)

It is possible to counterfeit obedience to every other commandment of God; to deceive others and even ourselves. The only *sure* confidence in facing judgment comes in the unmistakable experience of sacrificing my life that others may live. When we love in "deed and truth" rather than "in word . . . with the tongue," we may indeed "assure our hearts before Him." (I John 3:18-19)

The Hebrew writer informs us, ". . . He also Himself in like manner partook of the same (flesh and blood), that through death He might . . . deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." (Hebrews 2:14-15) In other words, the Word became flesh in order to die; and he died to free us from the fear of death. When we keep the commandments of God in His name, that divine demonstration of love reaches its end perfection. So also, our love, when it is perfected, (ie. when it reaches its intended end) frees us from the fear of the judgement. We have the confidence which comes from knowing that we have lived as That One lived who overcame death and was seated at the right hand of God.

We shall never have the confidence which comes from being "as good" as He, but we may have confidence which comes from knowing our lives were motivated by the same life giving love.

b. The motive of love . . . v.19

(19) "We are loving, because He first loved us."

The hymn writer has said.

"I love Him because He first loved me,
and died on the cross of Calvary!"

If we omit one word, "Him," as the object of love in this poem, we shall have captured John's inspired thought concerning the motive of Christian love. We do not love *just* Him, as John will soon show. The presence of love in our lives as His children is because He loved us first. Otherwise, we would have continued to prostitute our love on the things of the world and have perished as the consequence. (See on 2:15-17)

Again John echoes Paul at the heart of Christian life. "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they that live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who for their sakes died and rose again. Wherefore, we henceforth know no man after the flesh." (II Cor. 5:14-16,

Because it has burst upon us that God loves all men, regardless of their station, we no longer recognize the artificial distinctions imposed by men upon men. Because He loved us and bought us with His life, we are constrained to also "lay down our lives for the brethren." (I John 3:16, The love of Christ thus becomes the motivating force of love in our own lives.

c. The object of love . . . v.20

(20) "If any one should say, I love God, and should hate his brother, he is a liar; for the one who goes on not loving his brother whom he has seen, does not have power to be loving God whom he has not seen."

The claim of love for God in the life of one who does not love his brother is a fraudulent claim. It is simply unreal.

Such unreal love offered to the real God is as useless as the real sacrifices offered to unreal gods. No one has the ability to love God without demonstrating that love in love of his brother. To attempt to do so it to ". . . love in word" and "with the tongue." (I John 3:18)

d. Love demonstrates righteousness . . . v.21

(21) "And this is the commandment we are having from Him, that the one loving God also love his brother."

In attempting to maintain the perspective of the overall evidence of life presented in I John, it is a good idea to re-read I John 2:3-11 in connection with this verse.

In both passages there is a definite relationship between righteousness, considered as keeping God's commandments, and love which is the first of those commandments. In short, no one can lay claim to righteousness who does not love his brother. The moral obligation to "walk as He walked," Who kept the commandments perfectly, comes into its sharpest focus in love. Without love, all other righteousness is "as filthy rags."

e. Who is my brother? . . . 5:1

(1) "Everyone believing that Jesus is the Christ has been begotten from God, and everyone loving the One Who begat loves the one having been begotten from Him."

The tests of life and fellowship presented by John are intended to be subjective. They are to tell the individual personally whether he himself is in fellowship with God and thereby possesses life eternal. In I John 5:1, we find the single exception. Here is the objective test by which we may know whether someone else is a child of God and so our brother. Since love of our brother is essential to our own life, this test is necessary.

The test is the same as was presented in 4:1 as the standard by which to "prove the spirits whether they are of God." There the evidence was the confession of Jesus Christ as having come in the flesh. Here the same evidence is concerned with the belief which is the content of that confession. Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ has been begotten of God, and is, therefore, my brother as we share a common Father.

In the rather involved discussion below concerning the begetting and birth of God's children, we must hold fast to John's chief concern in this verse. He has just reminded us that we are commanded to love our brothers. The necessity is thus placed upon him to answer the very pertinent question, "who is my brother?" The answer to this question forms the *only legitimate test of fellowship* for the Christian.

The main emphasis of the verse is focused on the verb *gegennetai*, from *gemmao*. It is not an easy word to translate. *Gemmao* is used by John for the first time in John 1:12, where the American Standard Version

renders it "*born*," with the footnote, "*or begotten*." The problem of the translator is to know which of these meanings to write down. It doesn't take a Ph.D. in zoology to recognize there is a difference between being begotten and being born.

Is John saying here that everyone who believes has been *born* from God or has been *begotten*? If *born* is intended, then being a child of God depends entirely on belief. If *begotten* is John's intention here, then belief marks only the beginning of the process by which one becomes a child of God.

The problem of translation is complicated further by the diversity of renderings of *gennaō* in the accepted English versions. Limiting ourselves to only two passages, both from John's writings, we are confronted with no fewer than four different English words used to translate this single Greek word.

The King James Version has "*born*" in both John 3:3, 5 and I John 5:1. However, in I John 5:1, when the word appears the second time, the King James Version has "*begotten*." Here are two different meanings attributed to the same word in the same verse!

The American Standard Version (1901) was "*born*" in John 3 and "*begotten*" in I John 5:1.

The Revised Standard Version has "*born*" in John 3 but begs the issue by paraphrasing I John 5:1 with "*is a child*."

Phillips follows the example of the Revised Standard by using "*born*" in John 3 and "*one of God's family*" in I John 5:1.

The New English Bible repeats the rendering of the Revised Standard Version.

Turning to the commentaries helps a little, but not much. Barnes notes the distinction between "*born*" and "*begotten*" and indicates a preference for the latter.

B. F. Wescott prefers "*born*" in commenting on John 3. However, his interpretation includes the whole process of regeneration.

Turning to Abbott-Smith's Greek lexicon, we learn that *gennaō* is to be translated "*beget*" when referring to a *father's* contribution to new life. In reference to a *mother*, the same word means "*to bring forth*."

Considered passively, from the standpoint of the child, it may be accurately rendered either "*born*" or "*begotten*." However, even the lexicons seems rather arbitrary in their translations of this word when it refers to the means by which one *becomes* a child of God!

In our concern for the distinction between the *begetting* of God in the progeneration of spiritual life and the *act of birth* (re-birth), we are seeking to determine the point at which the individual is actually brought into the family of God as a brother.

From a purely linguistic view point, the preferred translation of *gennaō* in its perfect passive form, (as in I John 1:5), is *has been begotten*, rather than *has been born*. However, John is not concerned with linguistics, but with the test by which one may know who his brother is. It would be tragic indeed to mislead some sincere seeker after salvation with a false rendering of so vital a word. How *does* one become a child of God?

Obviously, the fundamental answer to this question is faith. In John 1:12, where the writer presents the idea of re-generation for the first time, he says it is accomplished when one *receives* the Incarnate Word.

This receiving is accomplished according to the terms set forth in the following verse. To translate again, without regard for theology, one who receives the Word is, "the one begotten, not from bloods, nor from fleshly will nor of a man's will, but from God." (John 1:13)

But, *how* is one begotten from the will of God. The question is as old as Nicodemus.

In John 3:3 Jesus confronted Nicodemus with the necessity of being born (or begotten) from above. When Nicodemus asked "how," Jesus answered ". . . if one is not born (or begotten) from water and spirit, he does not have the power to enter into the kingdom of God." Here we are at the nub of the matter.

Obviously a *begetting* without subsequent birth is tragically futile. On the other hand, *birth* without begetting is impossible.

Perhaps the need for this entire discussion would have never arisen had the church not lost sight of the true nature of Christian baptism. Some have become so repelled at the sacerdotal doctrine of salvation by works that they have swung to the opposite extreme and said all that is necessary to become a child of God is to believe; that nothing else is involved in receiving Jesus.

That to which they are reacting is the sacramental holy water concept which treats baptism as a rite, a sacrament by which one is ushered into the family of God as if by magic, even in the absence of belief. (This is especially apparent in the practice of "infant baptism")

The matter of Divine Sonship, with which John is concerned in I

John, and entrance into the kingdom of God, which Jesus is concerned in John 3, are much too vital to be settled on the basis of prejudice for or against "baptismal regeneration."

Perhaps we can come to some conclusions concerning John's meaning in his use of this term *gennaō* by beginning with that upon which all are agreed. No one denies that John sets forth belief as absolutely necessary to regeneration. In John 1:12, it is those who "believe on His name" who are given the power to become the sons of God. In I John 5:1, it is "whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ."

Secondly, we need to understand that baptism is not a religious "work," so far as the candidate is concerned. Baptism is not something he *does*; it is something done *to him*. He submits to it in the Name of Christ; he *receives* it. To say that baptism saves us, as indeed Peter does say (I Peter 3:21), is not to say we are saved by works. Peter's own comment on the matter is that we are saved ". . . through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." (I Peter 3:21)

The grammar of John 3:5 will not allow a separation of water from spirit. In that verse, *hudates* (water) and *pneumatōs* (spirit) are inseparably joined by the co-ordinating conjunction *kai* (and). Whatever Jesus says of the spirit in this verse, He also says of the water, and *vice versa*. This verse is vital, for it is Jesus' own answer to our dilemma.

How can a man become a child of God? He must be begotten from above. How can this be? He must be born from (both) water and spirit. If we let "spirit" answer to faith, and "water" to the outward act of immersion, we have our answer. Faith is always obedient. John deals with obedience conclusively in the verses immediately following. Faith and love always submit, in full surrender, to be united with the life of the risen Lord. This is done for the first time in baptism (Cf. Rom. 6:3-ff). From that point on, obedient faith becomes the hallmark of sonship for the child of God. Both *belief* and *obedience* constitute faith. They are two sides of the same coin where *Christian* faith is concerned.

In none of the references we have cited from John is the inspired author concerned with baptism *per se*. His concern is for the entire process of regeneration. *Birth* begins with *begetting*. *Begetting* issues in *birth*. When one has experienced the regeneration which takes its source in God, he is a child of God. The physical act involved is immersion in and resurrection from water.

The word "except" as it is employed by Jesus in John 3:5 is too

narrow for some today. To John it is trust in and obedience to the divine revelation which marked a person as a child of God. No one else is to be considered a brother in Christ.

Just as Divine Sonship depends upon divine regeneration, so divine brotherhood depends upon Divine Fatherhood. One's relationship to a child of God is determined by mutual parentage. No one becomes a brother in Christ by "blood, or of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

When a person is one's brother by right of common Fatherhood, one has no choice but to love him, just as one loves the common Father. Today's divisions in Christianity can only be divinely healed on this basis. Love is not of party, but of persons. Christian unity can only be had by every Christian recognizing every other Christian as a brother, and loving him for the Father's sake. It cannot, however, be fostered by considering those to be Christian brothers who have not been begotten from God through obedient faith!

f. Hereby we know we love . . . v.2-3

(2) "In this we are knowing that we are loving the children of God, when we are loving God and doing His commandments. (3) For this is the love of God, that we shall keep His commandments; and His commandments are not distressing."

The urgent necessity of loving our brother fairly glows in this passage! In 4:21, John re-emphasizes the vital necessity of loving our brother. In 5:1, he sets forth the test by which we may recognize our brother. Now he will tell us how we know we are keeping this commandment.

Divine love is not recognized in God's children by *feeling* but by *obedience*. There are those who are children of God whose personalities clash with our own. It is absurd to think we will ever come to the place where we "feel good" toward them. Is this proof that we do not love them? Are such feelings contrary to the love which we must have for our brothers in Christ? John does not say so.

We *are* commanded to love *every* one who is a child of God. When we remember what love is, this is not as impossible as it might at first seem.

It is from the example of Jesus that we learn the true nature of such love. He gave His life not only for His friends, but for His enemies. He prayed between clenched teeth for those who drove the spikes in His hands and feet. When other men would have kicked and cursed, He voluntarily lay down to be nailed on the cross for those who accused

Him falsely, who spit in His face, and who scoffed at His claim to be God's Son.

If we love as He loved we will also lay down our lives willingly for those who treat us ill. Shortly, John will instruct us to pray for those Christians whom we see sinning. There is no greater sin than the failure of our brothers to lay down their lives for us, but we are to pray for the one who does this sin as well as other sins!

We know we love our brothers when we keep God's commandments. If the habit of our life is to respond with instant obedience to any command of His, we will love those we cannot like before considering our feelings toward them. (See on 2:17 for the difference between *phileo* (like) and *agape* (love).)

Perhaps we should note here a favorite theme of the popular psychologist, Dr. George Crane. Dr. Crane is fond of saying that if we act like we love someone long enough and sincerely enough, we will learn to actually love them. In John's language, we would paraphrase, "if we *love* someone long enough and sincerely enough, we may even get to *like* them!"

This, indeed, is the love of God! That the keeping of His commandments is not distressing to us. There is no other way to prove our love to anyone than to do that which is for his benefit. If we love God, we will do that by which His purpose is moved forward in man. This immediately necessitates the keeping of His command to love one another. God's purpose in man is only accomplished when men are united in Christ by the bond of love.

John does not say that the keeping of God's commands is easy. It is a cross, not a cushion, to which we are called! The idea is that the commandments of God do not seem unreasonable to one who loves Him.

Jesus expresses the same idea when He says, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," and then immediately invites; "take my yoke upon you and learn of me . . . for my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

E. *Questions for Review*

1. How is righteousness said to be a demonstration of love?
2. What is the intended end of our love for our brothers?
3. Does one who loves his brother fear death? Explain.

4. Is the preaching of love "soft pedaling" the Gospel? Explain.
5. What is the one command of God which cannot be counterfeited?
6. What is the difference between these two statements:
 (a) "I love Him because He first loved me."
 (b) "I love because He first loved me?"
7. How may I know who is my Christian brother?
8. What is the difference between being begotten and being born, in terms of entrance into the family of God?
9. Explain how "regeneration" covers both of these ideas.
10. Explain why the teaching that baptism is essential to salvation is not the same as teaching salvation by works.
11. Faith is always _____.
12. Divine love in God's children is not recognized by feeling but by _____.
13. If we learn to love our brothers, and practice this love, we may even learn to _____.
14. Explain how God's commandments are not distressing to one who loves Him.

CHAPTER XV

FAITH—THE POWER OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

I John 5:4-12

A. *The Text*

"For whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith. (5) And who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? (6) This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ, not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. (7) And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth. (8) For there are three who bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and the three agree in one. (9) If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for the witness of God is this, that he hath borne witness concerning His Son. (10) He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in him: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he hath not believed