

CHAPTER II

THIS IS THE MESSAGE

I John 1:5

A. *The Text*

"And this is the message which we have heard from him and announce unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."

B. *Try to Discover*

1. Why does John change from the neuter "what" of the prologue to the masculine "him?"
2. What does John mean by "light?"
3. What does John mean by "darkness?"
4. What are the practical implications of this verse for the Christian life?

C. *Paraphrase*

"And this is the message which we have heard from him, and are reporting unto you, That God is light, And in him is no darkness at all."

D. *Translation and Comments*

Verse 5 . . . "And the message which we have heard from Him and are declaring to you is this, that God is light and darkness is absolutely not in Him at all."

1. *The summary of the Gospel*

In the fifth verse, John states in capsule the ministry of the incarnate life. All that John has seen, all that he has heard, all that he has learned from the tangible nature of the "Divine Experiment" is included. John conceives of the whole earthly life of Jesus as a message received and which he in turn must deliver. His form of expression here is reminiscent of Jesus' own statement ". . . the things which I heard from Him (the Father), these speak I unto the world." (John 8:26)

2. *It is This Which John Declares*

The Apostle's entire thesis is dependent upon the fact that his gospel

is not his own. As with Paul, so with John, he neither “. . . received it from man, nor was I (he) taught it, but it came to me (him) through revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Gal. 1:12) The philosophy of the gnostics was borrowed from the human reasonings of Graeco-Roman philosophers and oriental mystics. John’s message was given him directly by the divine revelation of the incarnation.

3. God is Light

The Old Testament writers were familiar with the metaphor used here: “God is Light.” One of the earliest manifestations of God to Israel was as light in the Shikina Glory which led them out of Egypt. (Ex. 13:21-22) By day it appeared as a pillar of cloud. By night it appeared as a pillar of fire. In either case it was divine *light* given to guide God’s people from captivity to freedom, from the ignorance of God’s will to revealing of the covenant.

The psalmist sang, “The Lord is my *light* and my salvation; whom then shall I fear . . .” (Ps. 27:1)

Isaiah wrote of the Messiah as “a covenant of the people, for a *light* of the Gentiles.” (Isaiah 42:6) Again Isaiah prophesied, “I will give thee for a *light* to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.” (Isa. 49:6) In a burst of prophetic illumination, this same prophet penned these words, “Arise, shine, for thy *light* is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.” (Isa. 60:1)

The pagans also were familiar with the term *light* applied to deity. The Zoroastrianism of Persia, father of the Oriental mystery cults, taught that the whole universe was the scene of a struggle between light and darkness. In this struggle, a man must choose which side he will be on. The issue of one’s choice was his eternal destiny.

The Greek and Roman mysteries also thought of light and darkness in a way similar to the Persians. They believed there were two ways. One was the way of darkness, and one the way of light. The way of darkness ended in death, while the way of light ended in life. The Greeks particularly identified light with deity.

The Dead Sea Scrolls from the community of Qumron contain the statement “The origin of truth lies in the fountain of light.”

In the historical setting of I John, the idea that God is light was particularly relevant. It grew out of the background from which the Gospel came, and was already acceptable to that school of religious thought at which it was aimed.

When John says, “God is light,” he does not disagree with the

gnostics whose philosophy was borrowed from these various sources. Rather he says that the affirmative *proof* that "God is light" is to be found in the incarnation which they were denying. Therefore, the evidence as to which side of this light-darkness, life-death struggle a man is on is determined by his personal relationship to Jesus as the incarnate light.

This is precisely John's own statement in the fourth Gospel, "And this is the judgment, that light is come into the world, and men have loved darkness rather than light, for their works were evil." (John 3:19)

The tests of life which John gives us in this epistle are three: 1) our attitude toward our own sin, 2) our attitude toward others in the fellowship, and 3) our attitude toward the incarnation itself.

These tests are an appeal to the nature of God revealed in Christ. To say "God is light" brings up immediately the idea of morality. If God is light, He is absolute purity and holiness. As this purity and holiness shines into our lives, it reveals that we are not pure and holy. To have fellowship with Him, we must be willing to accept this truth about ourselves in order that He may correct it.

The light of God in Jesus probes into the depths of our souls. Beneath the veneer of social propriety it reveals a vicious selfishness which corrupts and destroys. No amount of excuse making or philosophic sophistication can alter the fact that, when Jesus was "tempted in all points like as we are tempted, yet was without sin" (Heb. 4:15) His sinlessness condemned everyone who has ever yielded to temptation. The Gnostic denial of the personal guilt of sin is thus put to route by the fact that God Himself met and overcame temptation as a human being. John will say shortly, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

The second test that John will give by which we may know we have eternal life is the test of love. This also answers to the nature of God revealed in Jesus.

When John uses the word "love" he is not referring to a soft sentimentalism. Love is the self-giving which faced the rugged reality of the cross in order to give life to the lost. This test, like the first, takes its meaning from the message, "God is light."

The life giving qualities of light are perhaps best illustrated by the light of the sun as it brings life to the earth. Ultimately all physical life is produced and sustained by the light of the sun. The fundamental truth of botany is that all animate life on earth is traceable to photo-

synthesis. This is the process by which green plants transform the nutrients from the soil into food in the presence of sunlight. Light gives *physical* life by the process of photosynthesis.

Love, rather than photosynthesis, is the process by which God, as light, gives spiritual life. As we test ourselves by the light of the Gospel, we find that those who love give themselves as God gives, *in order to sustain life*. John will say later, "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer . . ." Just as darkness is the absence of light, so hate is the absence of love. Just as plant life cannot survive the absence of light, so the life of man cannot survive the absence of love. If we do not share this life giving love, we do not have eternal life.

The third test which John will give by which we are to determine our possession of eternal life is belief. So far as John is concerned, belief is the acceptance of the historic incarnation as the medium through which light reveals itself.

Here again, we must remember that the test grows out of the nature of God as light. God is all knowledge, and the source of all knowledge. To have eternal life we must accept truth as revealed by God Who is light. The revelation was made in Jesus as Christ.

If God is indeed light, then no intellectual ignorance can darken His all-embracing knowledge of truth. God is the source of *all* truth, not just that which we have blindly termed "religious truth."

There is an area of truth which man has been able to discover within himself. It is referred to by the term "humanities." This truth is expressed in literature, history and the branches of learning concerned with human thought and relations. If God is light, He is the ultimate source of *this* truth. The light "lights every man coming into the world." (John 1:9) The psalmist wrote, "O Lord thou hast searched me and known me . . . such knowledge is too high, I cannot attain unto it." (Ps. 139:1-ff) God knows what is in man. (John 2:24-25)

There is a second area of truth which man discovers by observing and experimenting with his environment. This area of truth is called science. Since God is light, He is also the ultimate source of *this* truth. Man spends billions to learn a small part of the scientific knowledge possessed by the Architect of the universe. "He telleth the number of the stars; He calleth them all by their names." (Ps. 147:4)

There is an area of truth which man will never discover within himself, and which he will never discover by exploring his time-space environment. We can only know it as it is revealed by God. The hu-

manist may tell what man is as a "social animal." The scientist may discover where man is by studying the circumstances of man's physical existence. Neither will ever discover *why* man is or where he is going!

The inspired scriptures, with their account of the "scheme of redemption," record God's revelation of spiritual reality in Jesus Christ. The Old Testament, like a rheostat, gradually increased the available light as it prepared the spiritual eyes of men, blinded by ignorance, for the full brilliance of God's self-revelation in the Christ. The New Testament records the time when the sunburst of God's very express image, the effulgence of His glory stood before us. (Cf. Hebrews 1:1-4)

To deny the incarnation of Christ is therefore to deny the ultimate truth of the entire universe. Divine revelation alone gives meaning to human and scientific truth. To deny revelation is to live in darkness and have only warped concepts of reality.

For this reason, John gives us *belief* in the Incarnate Word as the final test of eternal life. "We know that the Son of God is come . . . and hath given us understanding, that we know Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ." (I John 5:20)

E. Questions for Review

1. What is the basis of John's argument in I John?
2. What statement by John summarizes the entire ministry of Jesus, including both His doings and teachings?
3. What was the Shaking of the Kingdom? (Read Exodus 24:17, 40:34 and I Kings 8:11)
4. What did the oriental mystery cults teach about light and darkness?
5. What did the Greek and Roman religions teach about light and darkness?
6. What do the Dead Sea Scrolls teach about the origin of truth?
7. When John says "God is light," does He agree or disagree with the pagan religions of the day? Explain.
8. What three "tests of life" constitute the frame work of I John?
9. What does the light of God reveal about personal sin?

10. What is love in John's writings? What does love give and why?
11. How does John know God is light?
12. How does the truth revealed by Jesus differ from truth in other areas of investigation? How is it similar?
13. What gives meaning to truth discovered by man in the areas of science and the humanities?

CHAPTER III

IF WE WALK IN THE LIGHT

I John 1:6-7

A. The Text

"If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth; 7) but if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin."

B. *Try to Discover*

1. How is it possible for sinful men to "walk in the light as He is in the light?"
2. Why does John say "... we are not doing the truth," instead of saying "... we are not telling the truth?"
3. Why does John change from "... have fellowship with Him . . ." in verse 6 to "... have fellowship one with another . . ." in verse 7?

C. *Paraphrase*

"If we say We have fellowship with Him and in darkness are walking we are dealing falsely and not doing the truth; 7) whereas if in the light we are walking, as he is in the light we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son is cleansing us from all sin."