

## CHAPTER V

*TO WALK IN THE LIGHT IS TO SHARE  
GOD'S ATTITUDE TOWARD OUR BROTHERS IN CHRIST*

(The Second Test . . . The First Time)

I John 2:7-17

A. *The Text*

"Beloved, no new commandment write I unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning: the old commandment is the word which ye heard. (8) Again, a new commandment write I unto you, which thing is true in him and in you; because the darkness is passing away, and the true light already shineth. (9) He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother, is in the darkness even until now. (10) He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is no occasion of stumbling in him. (11) But he that hateth his brother is in the darkness, and walketh in the darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because the darkness hath blinded his eyes. (12) I write unto you, my little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. (13) I write unto you, fathers, because ye know him who is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the evil one. I have written unto you, little children, because ye know the Father. (14) I have written unto you, fathers, because ye know him who is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the evil one. (15) Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (16) For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. (17) And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."

B. *Try to Discover*

1. The relationship between spiritual darkness and hatred.
2. The relationship between light and love.

3. How a commandment can be both new and old.
4. How our relationship to our brothers in Christ indicates our relationship to God.
5. How the proper direction of love is essential to life.
6. Why one cannot love God and the world at once.

### C. *Paraphrase*

"Beloved!" 'no new commandment am I writing unto you; but an old commandment which ye have been holding from the beginning; The old commandment is the word which ye have heard. (8) Again a new commandment am I writing unto you, which thing is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the real light already is shining. (9) He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brothers is in the darkness until even now! (10) He that loveth his brother is abiding in the light, and cause of stumbling in him is there none! (11) Whereas he that hateth his brother in the darkness dwelleth and in the darkness walketh; and knoweth not whither he is drifting, because the darkness hath blinded his eyes. (12) I write unto you, dear children, Because your sins have been forgiven you for the sake of his name: (13) I write unto you, fathers, Because ye understand him who was from the beginning: I write unto you, young men, Because ye have overcome the wicked one. I have written unto you, little children, Because ye understand the Father: (14) I have written unto you, fathers, Because ye understand him who was from the beginning: I have written you, young men, Because ye are strong and the word of God within you abideth and ye have overcome the wicked one. (15) Be not loving the world Nor yet the things that are in the world: If anyone be loving the world The love of the Father is not in him. (16) Because all that is in the world—The coveting of the flesh, The coveting of the eyes, And the vain grandeur of life—Is not of the Father, but is of the world; (17) And the world passeth away and the coveting thereof, But he that doeth the will of God endureth unto times age-abiding."

### D. *Comments and Translation*

1. The new commandment is old . . . v. 7
- (7) "Beloved, I am writing no new kind of commandment to you but an ancient commandment which you were having from the beginning: the ancient commandment is the word which you heard."

John's language reveals his motive in writing. He addresses his readers as "Beloved." I John is written as a test and a warning. It contains much criticism and harsh language concerning the gnostics; those who were denying the faith. But John had learned the lesson many present day preachers and teachers have not learned. While he detested the false teaching, he loved those being misled by it. While his denunciation of error is pointed and at times scathing and blunt, there is no, "You're wrong and you're lost and I'm glad!"

The commandment which this loving apostle is about to pen is not new. His readers have heard it from the very first. It stands written in the law of Moses. Jesus made it part of the "eternal triangle," upon which hang all the law and the prophets and the psalms. (Matt. 22:34-ff) Love of God, love of man and love of self are the entire burden of everything God requires of His children.

The command, or at least the human necessity which calls it forth, is as old as life itself. Jesus taught that His act of love was the message of the Old Testament. (Luke 24:44-ff) He also taught that love of fellowman is second only in importance to love of God. (Matt. 22:39) We know also from Him that upon this "eternal triangle" hang all the law and the prophets and the psalms, which take their meaning from Him. (Matt. 22:40) In the preceding verses John has said that the perfection of this love is reached when men obey God's commandments. Now he will spell it out. The commandment, which is both old and new, is that we love!

## 2. The paradox of love . . . v. 8

(8) "Paradoxically, I am writing to you a new kind of commandment, which is real in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the genuine light already is shining."

Paradoxically, the commandment which is old is also new. It is old in that it is the beginning of the old covenant. It is new in that it is the perfection of the new covenant.

To appreciate what John is saying about the newness of this commandment, attention must be given to the word which is translated "new." It is a synonym, and, as with most synonyms, its meaning stands out most sharply in contrast. The word is *kainos*. Its synonym is *neos*. Both are translated "new" in our English versions. *Kainos* (used here) means new in reference to quality while *neos* means new in reference to time.

This year's automobile is new in reference to time. This is expressed in the Greek by *neos*. When the automobile replaced the horse, it was revolutionary newness; a completely new kind or quality of transportation. This newness of kind is the meaning of *kainos* (new) in this verse.

John, by his use of *kainos* (new), indicates that love, as a way of life, is revolutionary. It is old, in that it was commanded long ago, but it is new in Jesus and in those who walk as He walked because it has never been seen in practice before. The Jews, who had love as a commandment, spoke of the Samaritans as dogs, and considered the Gentiles as unfit for social intercourse. The Christian, whose life is controlled by love, knows "no man after the flesh." (II Cor. 5:16)

It is the light in which we walk that reveals love as the essential stuff of life. Therefore, whoever loves as He loved walks in the light as He is in the light. It is the light of God in Christ as Calvary which made love known. Whoever would order his life in the light of the cross must do so by loving.

### 3. The light focused in love . . . v. 9-11

(9) "The one claiming to be in the light and hating his brother is still in darkness. (10) The one loving his brother is remaining in the light, and in him is no cause of stumbling. (11) However, the one hating his brother is in darkness and is walking in the darkness and is not knowing where he is going, because the darkness blinded his eyes."

The light of God reaches its sharpest focus in the Christian's love for his brother in Christ. It is true that Jesus commanded us to love our enemies, but is equally true that the reason we love an enemy is in order that he may become our brother! Hence, the end perfection of both God's love for the world and our love for our enemies is reached, when we love as a brother, him who was previously our enemy.

This truth is revealed by God's light in Jesus, and he, who does not love one who becomes a child of God, is himself not a child of God, but is still in darkness. B. F. Wescott has said this very succinctly, "A man is either walking in the light of love or the darkness of hatred." This is the application of John's second test by which we know we are in fellowship with God and have eternal life.

Love is the result of walking in the light. Consequently, the presence of love is evidence that one is so walking.

In such a person's life there is no occasion of stumbling. The root idea of the word *skandalon*, here translated "occasion of stumbling,"

is two-fold. It can refer to either a stumbling block or a snare trap. In either case it is made effective by darkness.

There is some question in this passage as to whether John means that darkness causes one to stumble, or that one in darkness has in his life that which causes others to stumble. A good case can be made for either interpretation.

Consider first that darkness causes one to stumble: What could be more true? Who is not familiar with the pathetic sight of a blind man tapping his way along the curb with his red-tipped cane to avoid stumbling. A blind man lives in perpetual darkness.

So also does the one who is spiritually blind live in darkness and in danger of stumbling. That over which such a person most frequently stumbles is human relations! Hence the absence of love is evidence of walking in darkness.

Paul's entreaty in Romans 14 that we do nothing whereby we cause one another to stumble, and other such passages, may be quoted to support the alternative interpretation of I John 2:10. He who walks in the light of God's truth has as his first concern the spiritual welfare of others. Such a person does not have in his life that over which his brother may stumble.

Actually, *both* the danger of stumbling, and of being the occasion by which others stumble are in the life of one who walks in darkness, ignorant of or ignoring the truth of life revealed in Christ. No matter how sound his "doctrine," nor how accurate his theological speculations, the person who does not love his brother is blinded by darkness and has no idea where he is going. (Cf. II Cor. 4:4) Those who live as Christ, who love as He loved, have, according to I John 2:5, already reached the boarders of Canaan!

#### 4. A parenthetical aside . . . v. 12-14

(12) "I am writing to you, dear children, because you are forgiven sins through His name. (13) I am writing to you, fathers, because you have come to know from experience the one who was from the beginning. I am writing you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. (14) I wrote to you, little children, because you have come to know the Father. I wrote to you, fathers, because you have come to know from experience the one who was from the beginning. I wrote to you, young men, because you are strong and the word of God is remaining in you and you have overcome the evil one."

##### a. Children . . . v. 12 & 14 (a)

It has been suggested that the repetition in these verses is perhaps

due to John's being interrupted as he wrote. There is no way to know this certainly, but to one who has done any writing it seems very plausible. In any event, John addresses three age groups in the church with a personal message for each, and in each case the message is in two sections.

The forgiveness of sin in the name of Christ is the common experience of all Christians. It is the overwhelming awareness of one who is a child in Christ, either by virtue of age or recent conversion. Indeed, forgiveness is many times the only blessing of which a new born babe in Christ is aware. But it is enough.

The companion awareness, accompanying that of forgiven sin, is Divine Sonship. To the new-fledged Christian, this, too, is an overpowering realization. The Almighty Creator and Sustainer of all is *my Father!* I'm a child of the King!

While the time ought never come when any Christian forgets the forgiveness of his sins or his sonship to God, these are the special blessings of those who are new in the faith.

b. Fathers . . . v. 13(a) & 14(b)

In contrast to the neophyte Christian and his blessings are those whose years with the Master are many and whose realized blessings are even more profound. John writes to the fathers because they have, through years of experience, come to a personal acquaintance with the eternal *logos!*

In Chapter one, John speaks of life as abstract and impersonal. Here, as in the prologue of the fourth gospel, he speaks of the eternal word, "The One Who was from the beginning."

Personal intimate knowledge of this One Who "sticketh closer than a brother," (Prov. 18:24) increases and deepens with the passage of years.

c. Young Men . . . v. 13(b) & 14(c)

In addressing the young adults, John is aware of their vigor and consecrated energy. He is also aware of the temptations that are strongest in early adulthood. His motive in addressing them with the tests of life is his awareness of their strength, the presence of the Word in their lives and their conquest of Satan, the "evil one."

It seems perhaps more appropriate to young adulthood than any other age that a Christian be able to conquer evil and resist youthful temptations (Cf. II Timothy 2:22) by the consciousness of the Word in his life. Paul's claim, "I can do all things through Him that strengtheneth me," (Phil. 4:13) seems particularly applicable to young men.

5. Incompatibility of love for the world and love of the Father . . .  
v. 15

(15) "Do not have the habit of loving the world nor the things in the world. If one should be loving the things of the world, the love of the Father is not in him:"

Love is essentially the giving of self. In the Greek language there are three synonyms, all of which are translated "love." They do not represent three "kinds of love," but three motives for self-giving.

The first, *eros*, is the giving of self for the sake of what one gets in return. The second, *phileo*, is the giving of self to that which is attractive, as to a person with whom we are personally, naturally compatible. In modern parlance, this word is more accurately represented with "like" than "love." The third, *agape*, is the love of the will. It gives self because it decides to do so, regardless of what it may or may not get in return and regardless of whether it is personally attracted to its object.

This third motive, *agape*, is the only one of the three that can be commanded. Indeed it is the only one that, in the Bible, *is* commanded! The other motives, *eros* and *phileo*, are only controlled by the willful direction of *agape*.

*Agape* is the word translated "love" in this present text. It is also the "love" of John 3:16 and of I Corinthians 13. It is the "love" of I John 4:8 which says "God is love."

Since God is love, and man is made in the image of God, man can not but love something.

Since love is essentially the giving of self, I give myself to that which I decide to love. It is impossible to give self to two opposing masters. Therefore, if I love the world, I cannot love the Father. This conclusion is supported by such statements as James! . . . "friendship with the world is enmity with God," (James 4:4) and Jesus' ". . . No man can serve two masters." (Matt. 6:24) Service is love in action.

John makes no claim that the "things of the world" are in and of themselves sinful. Indeed, Paul claims such is not the case. (Romans 14:14)

Human reason supports the sinlessness of the things of the world *per se*. As we look more closely at John's identification of them, it becomes apparent that they are important, and often even essential to life in this time and space set up of ours.

John's plea is not to condemn the things of the world, or to pretend that we do not need or ought not to use them. His entreaty is "Do not

have the habit of loving," (of giving yourself regardless of the consequences) to these things.

It is rather startling to realize that love, which is the very essence of life when directed properly, is also the cause of death when mis-directed!

6. Things of the world identified . . . they are not of the Father . . .  
v. 16

(16) "because everything in the world, the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the empty boastfulness of this temporal life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."

The things of the world fall into three categories; the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the empty boastfulness of this temporal life.

In the first two instances, the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes, our English versions read "lust." This is unfortunate. The word "lust," while it literally means merely a desire to gratify the senses and appetites, has fallen into bad usage. It has come to be associated, in modern parlance, almost exclusively with excessive and unrestrained sexual gratification.

The word, *epithumia*, which John uses and which I have translated "desires" does not denote that which is of itself wrong, nor is it particularly concerned with sex *per se*. Rather, the word describes all natural, God-given drives that are common to man.

"Desires," in this sense, includes sex, but it also includes the other normal appetites. When applied to the flesh, it includes the appetite for food, for sleep, for drink, —for those things generally called "the necessities of life."

There is nothing essentially wrong with any of these normal desires of the flesh. On the contrary, it is doubtful if one can remain physically healthy for long without them. *But* . . . John insists we must not have the habit, that is it must not be the course of our lives, to give ourselves regardless of the consequences to these desires of the flesh.

Many illustrations of such excessive concern with the desires of the flesh could be cited. The corruption of the English word "lust" is itself a case in point. It is the result of over-attention, by our English speaking society, to sex.

A similar illustration can be made of the deterioration of the Greek *eros*, which in classic times described the love of beauty and was used



in marriage ceremonies. The word now has come to such vulgar usage as to be unspeakable in mixed company in modern Greek.

The so-called New Morality of our day also illustrates the way in which non-Christian society gives itself to the desires of the flesh. And lest those who are older take this as an indictment of the "younger generation," we might also mention the motto of the "roaring Twenties," "Obey that impulse!"

When applied, as John applies it in verse 16, to "the desires of the eyes," the word *epithumia* shifts in emphasis from those appetites and drives associated with the physical body to the externals of which we are aware by the use of our perceptive senses. C. H. Dodd calls this "the tendency to be captivated by outward show." It would seem that we are confronted here with those things which usually answer to the name "culture."

Culture is many things to many people. To some it is the acquiring of polish and graciousness. One important facet of education, beyond the acquiring of knowledge, is the process of *becoming* which takes place while one is *learning*. This is good. If we can take His hasty manufacture of clothing for Adam and Eve as an indication, the desire for culture is a God-given instinct which makes our living together here a little more pleasant than it might otherwise be. (Gen. 3:21)

To others, culture may be the avoidance of those very things which seem so desirable to polite society. Who does not know some individual who spends a great deal of time convincing his fellows that he has not become a "dude" or a "sissy" or whatever else he may call those who have acquired the niceties of social grace?

In either case, the one as much as the other, it is possible to spend one's entire life in search of culture, of one form or another, for its own sake. This, John would have us not do. His plea again is that we "Do not have the habit of loving" (of giving ourselves to) these normal desires.

In the third instance, John changes his terminology in defining the things of the world. The final appeal is to not love or give self to the empty boastfulness of this temporal life.

The word which our English versions render "vainglory" or "pride" is *aladzonia*. Its literal meaning is derived from *aladzon*, meaning a purposeless wanderer or imposter and hence a boaster. One who pre-

tends to be that which he is not! One who loves, or gives himself to such emptiness has not the love of the Father.

It is not surprising to find Paul using a derivative of this same word to describe one who does not love with Christian love. Paul says that one without Christian love is become "sounding brass or a clanging symbol." The word rendered symbol in I Cor. 13:1 is *alaladzon*, a form of *aladzonia* which is used in I John 2:16. It was originally a Greek battle cry, shouted at the enemy to strike fear during a charge. It was a hollow boastful noise which meant absolutely *nothing!*

There are those who love, who give themselves to the nothingness, the boastful noise, of this world. Vance Packard's, *The Status Seekers* is an indictment of a people who all their lives claw and scratch after the baubles which will set them just one notch above their neighbors. It is the old cliché of "keeping up with the Joneses."

There are multiplied illustrations of such pretentious egoism. There is the man whose car is the very best model of the best make, no matter what he happens to be driving at the moment. And when he trades, no matter what he gets, *it* will then be the best model of the best make.

There are the young people whose energies are spent in the purposeless pursuit of a "hot rod Ford and a two dollar bill." You'll find them risking their lives and the lives of others in the desperate attempt to leave a strip of rubber on the road every time they drive away, or in the equally desperate attempt to get to the next stop light ahead of another purposeless vagabond.

There are those mothers whose children grow up undisciplined because they must hold an extra job. Not that their husbands are unable to provide the necessities, but because of their own insatiable craving for status symbols.

Christians are to have a more meaningful set of values. Right love, the love of the Father, is for people; not for appetites, desires, or things! John entreats us not to give ourselves to these empty pursuits. Those who live for the things of the world are not of the Father, but are of the world.

#### 7. Contrasting results of contrasting loves . . . v. 17

(17) "And the world is passing away and the desires of it; but the one doing the will of God is remaining into eternity."

The misdirection of love against which we are warned in this paragraph is the negative side of the same test which is presented in the

preceding verses. If we do love our brothers, we are of God. If we love the things of the world, we are not of God.

In verse 17, we are confronted with the contrasting results of these two opposing loves. One becomes more and more like that which he loves. If he loves the world, he takes on more and more the nature of the world. If he loves the Father, and expresses that love in love of his brothers, he becomes more and more like the Father.

The consequences are eternal. The world is passing away, and the things of it. The one who loves the world becomes temporal as the world is temporal, and so will also pass away. In contrast, the Father is eternal. The one who loves as He loves becomes more and more like Him, and so will remain into eternity.

One of the most pathetic utterances in modern language is that which says some Christian person has "passed away." This is very apt at the death of one who has loved the things of the world, but it is nothing short of dishonest at the funeral of one who has directed his love toward his brothers in Christ.

Christians do not pass away . . . the world passes away and those who love it!

#### E. *Questions for Review*

##### 1. I John 2:7-11

- a. To what commandment does John refer in vs. 7 & 8?
- b. How can this commandment be both new and old?
- c. What is the significance of "beloved" in v. 7?
- d. Explain why John here commands to love our brothers rather than our enemies. (Compare v. 5)
- e. What is the source of brotherhood?
- f. How is the absence of love proof that one is "walking in darkness?"
- g. What are the two possible interpretations of v. 10?
- h. Which of these two seems most likely to be John's real meaning? Support your answer.

##### 2. I John 2:12-14

- a. What is one possible explanation of John's repetition in these verses?
- b. Of what blessing is the new Christian likely to be most aware?

- c. What is the significance of John's writing to the older men of the church "because you know Him Who is from the beginning?"
  - d. Why does John address the young men, "Because ye are strong, and the Word of God abideth in you, and you have overcome the evil one?"
3. I John 2:15-17
- a. What is the meaning of "love" as John uses it here?
  - b. What is the basis of the conclusion, "Man cannot but love something?"
  - c. What three classifications does John use for the "things of the world?"
  - d. What is the meaning of the word for lust . . . vs. 16 & 17
  - e. What is the meaning of "the lusts of the flesh?"
  - f. What is the meaning of "the lusts of the eyes?"
  - g. What is the meaning of the "vainglory of life?"
  - h. If there is nothing essentially wrong with these things, why does John demand that we not love them?
  - i. What is the result of loving God?
  - j. What is the result of loving the things of the world?
  - k. How does the statement that a Christian has "passed away" reflect fuzzy thinking about the results of love?

## CHAPTER VI

### TO WALK IN THE LIGHT IS TO SHARE GOD'S ATTITUDE TOWARD JESUS

(The Third Test . . . The First Time)

I John 2:18-28

#### A. *The Text*

"Little children, it is the last hour: and as ye heard that anti-christ cometh, even now have there arisen many anti-Christ; whereby we know that it is the last hour, (19) They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they all are not of us. (20) And ye have an anointing from the Holy One, and ye