

SPECIAL STUDIES

W. CARL KETCHERSIDE

- Walking in the Light
- Receive Him Not

WALKING IN THE LIGHT

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:7).

No discussion of fellowship can ignore this statement. It is apparent that the fellowship mentioned is conditioned upon "walking in the light" and doing so to the extent that God is in the light. But what is the light? What is darkness? What is it to "walk in the light?" An objective analysis of this passage and a proper answer to these questions produces a real surprise to partisan defenders who have merely accepted a traditional explanation without study or investigation.

It is not our present intention to outline at length the background of this epistle. That belongs more appropriately to our forthcoming discussion of 2 John 10, 11. It will suffice now to say that, at the time of this writing, the last survivor of the apostles was living in Ephesus. Here he came into direct contact with the sect of the Gnostics who had infiltrated and disturbed every congregation in the Greek world. These factionalists pretended to special insights and claimed to have knowledge of the mystical and elemental structure of the universe. They took their title from *gnosis*, knowledge. They were the "knowing ones," those on the inside, as opposed to the uninitiated.

Although there were various schools of gnostic thought, all were basically agreed upon the idea underlying their synthetic philosophy, that all matter is essentially evil. On this basis they concluded that God could not have personally created the world because he could have no contact with or relationship to evil. By the same token they concluded that Jesus was either a phantom, or that he was born of Joseph and Mary and elevated to Sonship with God at his baptism by John. Under the leadership of Cerinthus and other advocates of that day, this philosophy wormed its way into every congregation in Asia Minor. Wherever it went it destroyed the faith of many in the fact that Jesus had come in the flesh.

SPECIAL STUDIES

Prevalent in the theory was the idea that there could be no possible union between the human and the divine. The former was material and, therefore, evil; and the possibility of fellowship between them was regarded as absurd and ridiculous. God was so far above the universe which had been created by a demi-urge, one of a series of emanations which had gone out from the divine essence, that he was wholly unconcerned about anything on earth and completely without interest in mankind. There could be no bridging of the chasm between deity and humanity, and from this stemmed two conclusions. Jesus was not deity manifested in a body of flesh and there was no such thing as a stage of fellowship between God and man.

John counters this theory with his gospel record. This will account for the difference between it and the "synoptics." This term is applied to Matthew, Mark and Luke, because their contents can be charted in parallel columns and synchronized. A synopsis can be made which will be true of all three. The gospel according to John does not lend itself to such treatment. It was written for a distinctive purpose and to meet a wholly different need. The first two epistles of John were written for a distinctive purpose and to meet a wholly different need. The first two epistles of John were written for the same purpose. Both specifically deal with the treatment to be accorded those who "deny that Jesus is the Christ" (1 John 2:22), that is, "that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh" (2 John 7).

An analysis of 1 John in the light of its background and the circumstances which called it forth, is one of the most rewarding experiences which can come to the dedicated Bible student. John begins by affirming that eternal life, which was with God from the beginning, was manifested and made visible unto men, and that he was one of the selected witnesses who beheld that life embodied in a person, and could testify to it. "We have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life." Since eternal life was with the Father from the beginning, and was not merely extension of time, but possessed the quality of personality, the pre-existence of the "Word of life" was thus asserted.

Nature of the Testimony

The fact that prior to the manifestation, the Word was in a different state, does not argue against existence. It serves only to demonstrate that the incarnation revealed to human eyes what previously had been hidden from them. Once accepted, this would deal a death blow to

WALKING IN THE LIGHT

elemental gnosticism. But there was a group of gnostics called the Docetics, from *dokeo*, to appear, to seem. These alleged that Jesus possessed no reality, that he was immaterial, and a phantom (or phantasy). For their benefit the apostle shows that the Word not only became flesh, but was actually subject to examination by the senses.

He argues against the possibility of the witnesses being deceived or deluded upon the basis of their intimate personal association with the embodied Word. From the standpoint of time, proximity and conscious interest, they had ample opportunity to examine the validity of his claims. They were with him long enough and were associated with him closely enough that they could not be misled. Their own careers and very lives were staked upon his veracity. They had left all and followed after him.

Their examination was audible, visual and manual. "We have heard, we have seen with our eyes, we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life." The best proof is visual, and this is stressed. Not only did they see Jesus with their eyes, but they "looked upon" him. This has to do with studied investigation or prolonged scrutiny. Theirs was no mere passing glance. They did not simply *look at* Jesus as he passed by, but they *looked upon* him. The apostles were qualified witnesses. Their testimony met all of the requirements essential to proving a point of fact.

Their experience with the manifested Word made possible a fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. Eternal life became incarnate with them. "This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life" (1 John 5:11, 12). When the Word of life became embodied, that Word was designated the Son of God. When eternal life dwells in us we are also called sons of God. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (3:1).

The declaration of what the apostolic witnesses had seen and heard was to make possible the extension of the divine-human fellowship unto their hearers, and thus provide for them fulness of joy. The essence of the message which had been conveyed unto them by God and which they, in turn, conveyed to others, was summed up in the words, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." Since the declaration was to assure fellowship of the human with the divine, and since it consisted of the statement that God is light in the absolute, it is obvious that

nothing can be of greater importance than identification of the light. Fellowship is conditioned upon walking in that light.

Fellowship is not by word but by walk. It is not the testimony of the lips but of the life. The word "walk" means more than merely making progress in a given direction, or placing each foot alternately before the other. It involves experience and sharing of thought and life. "And Enoch walked with God, and he was not (found); for God took him" (Gen. 5:24). "Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God" (Gen. 6:9). Inasmuch as God is light, to say that one is in fellowship with God, while walking in darkness, is to lie and do not the truth. Darkness is the opposite to light.

Identifying the Light

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

What is the light? In this context the light is what God is, for God is light. The word "light" is used as a symbol for various qualities or things in the inspired scriptures. Sometimes it is used for divine revelation, and the unrevealed is darkness. Sometimes it is used for reverence of the living God, and idolatry is darkness. More frequently it is used for knowledge and ignorance is darkness. Only by studying the frame of reference in which the term is employed can one be certain of its meaning.

In this connection, we can eliminate from consideration anything which it is not possible for man to possess in the same degree as God, that is, in an absolute or perfect degree. "God is light and in him is no darkness at all . . . If we walk in the light *as he is in the light.*" This immediately excludes knowledge of God's will from consideration. It is obvious that none of us can have the same degree of mental perception as God. The finite mind cannot embrace the scope of the infinite. To walk in the light cannot mean either to perfectly understand God's will or to perfectly do it. This would require something we do not have in the flesh.

Fortunately, we can determine from this brief epistle what light is, as John uses the word. *Light is love.* It is not, however, affection, sentiment or passion. This love of which John speaks is *agape*, the love which God had for us which prompted him to send Jesus to die for us. It is that active and energetic good will which stops at nothing to achieve

WALKING IN THE LIGHT

passive. It is apprehended in its demonstration which is always out-reaching and outgoing. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because the good of the beloved object. It must be expressed. It can never be he laid down his life for us" (3:16). It is this in which we must walk.

Light is love and since the opposite of light is darkness, the darkness must be hate. Once this is grasped every sentence in the epistle falls into place like the pieces of a jig-saw puzzle and a beautiful picture results. Let us proceed with the proof of our assertion. To abide in the light is to love the brethren. "He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him" (2:10). If this is correct, hatred for the brethren will be darkness. "He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother is in darkness even until now" (2:9). This last is the equivalent of saying, "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie" (1:6). "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar" (4:20).

It may be urged that the completing phrase of verse 6 is "do not the truth." This is correct for if we walk in darkness "we lie and do not the truth." But it is by brotherly love that we know we are of the truth. "And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him" (3:19). To the Greeks, truth was the reality which was at the basis of all appearance. It was the ideal which was behind every semblance. It was the genuine. John is saying that those who are "in the truth" are obligated to walk according to it, and the reality behind God's whole purpose is love. If we say that we share in the diivne nature (have fellowship with God), and walk in darkness (hate our brethren), we lie and do not the truth (miss the reality underlying the whole Christian structure).

Personification of Love

On what premise can we conclude that John introduces the theme of love in conjunction with his affirmation that the Word of life was personalized? The answer is simply that it was the love of God which made eternal life manifest unto us. Because he loved us thus, we ought also to love one another. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him" (4:9). "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (3: 16). "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (4: 11).

SPECIAL STUDIES

The Son of God was "God manifest in the flesh, reconciling the world unto himself." But that which was manifested was the Word of life which was with God in the beginning, and which was also God. But that light which was manifested was eternal life (1:2). It was this Word of life personalized which constituted the basis of the apostolic message. "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you." Eternal life is not extension of time but expression of love! Read the following carefully. "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light" (1:5). "For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another" (3:11). "This is the message . . . God is light." "This is the message . . . that we should love." There are not two messages. There is simply *the message*. It defines the nature of God and outlines the expression of that nature in those who are his sons.

And if it be true that light is love, it must follow that, if God is light, God is love. On this the record is positive. "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (4:16). "He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love" (4:8). To the serious student nothing else should be necessary to identify the light. When a writer says, "God is light," and in the very same connection twice explains what he means by saying, "God is love," it should require little intellectual ability to determine that in the context of that writer, *light is love!*

Perfection of Love

We come now to the chief intellectual hurdle and the greatest challenge to the scholarly mind. If light is love, does this not imply that we must possess love in the absolute, that is, in perfection? Whatever light is we must experience it, that is, walk in it to the same degree as it is manifested in God. "If we walk in the light as he is in the light." That this is absolute is proven by the statement that "God is light and in him is no darkness at all." If we walk in the light as he is in the light there can be none of the opposite effect in us.

We have already eliminated knowledge from consideration because all of us are ignorant in some degree, of the will of God. No one knows as much as God. To assume that light is knowledge of God's will and darkness is ignorance of it, is simply to make us liars. We would then have to read, "if we say that we have fellowship with him and are ignor-

WALKING IN THE LIGHT

ant of any part of the divine will, we lie and do not the truth. But if our knowledge is absolute and perfect, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." No sane reasoner would want to hinge his hope of being cleansed from sin upon knowing as much as God does.

But do we not face the same problem if we regard light as being love? Can we love as God? Can we walk in *this* light as God is in the light? I unhesitatingly affirm that we can. This was the very purpose of John's epistle. It was written to tell us why and how we must do so. The thing that disturbs many is that they regard love as something to be achieved rather than something to be experienced. But no one achieves light. It is a creation of God, a blessing to be bestowed and enjoyed. And that love which is equivalent to light is not something to be attained by human striving. It is a gift of God. It is a commitment unto us of the divine nature. "Love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God" (4: 7).

When the love of God was personalized in Jesus, God revealed the possibility of incarnating the divine nature. That nature had always existed but was never expressed before as it was in Christ. "In him the whole fulness of diety dwells bodily" (Col. 2:9). In him the world could see love manifested. The nature possessed by God could now be incorporate in man, for true love was now available. "A new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth" (2:8): The true love was now reality in flesh.

The love that God requires he supplies. It is a fruit of the Spirit. It is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us of God (Romans 5:5). It did not originate with man but with God. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us" (I John 4:10). "We love because he first loved us" (4:19). When God dwells in us his love is perfected in us (4:12). "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love: and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world" (4:16, 17). As he is, so are we—and in this world!

This does not minimize our responsibility. It does not mean the human factor is eliminated. The provision of love is God's part; the expression of it is ours. God never forces us to act contrary to our will. It is his will

SPECIAL STUDIES

to make love ours, it is ours to will love to others, and to be like him. This is proven by the fact that sometimes love is regarded as light which man cannot create, while at the same time man is commanded to walk in that light, that is, to exercise it in his own life. A man can love his brother or he can hate him. The manifestation of love is contingent upon the will of the individual, but one who is completely surrendered and committed to God will spontaneously and naturally walk in love. The secret is the surrender of the will absolutely to God so that the divine nature is incarnated in us as it was in Jesus. The Word must become flesh in us!

Loving Our Brothers

God is light. God is love. One who walks in love walks in light. One who dwells in God dwells in light. One who dwells in love dwells in God. God dwells in such a person, so he is in the light and the light is in him. "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (4:16). It is as we love our brothers that we walk in light and move out of darkness—the darkness of hate and animosity. Let us note the things affirmed of such love.

1. To love the brethren is to abide in the light (2:10). The word "abide" is not the word for a temporary dwelling. It is not used of transients who merely stay overnight. The light is the fixed residence of those who love the brethren. They do not merely pass through the light enroute from one area of darkness to another.

2. Love for the brethren is one of the two distinctive marks of sonship with God. Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (3:1). "In this the children of God are manifest and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother" (3:10).

3. Love for the brethren is a waymark to identify the area into which we have come as that of life. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (3:14). The expression used here has to do with crossing a frontier. It was used of those returning from an alien country to their native land. When one is able to love the brethren unreservedly, because they are brethren, and not upon other conditions, he can know that he has left the territory where death reigns. He no longer breathes the noxious fumes of hate, he is in a purer

WALKING IN THE LIGHT

atmosphere. He does not wade through the murky swamps of animosity. His feet are on solid ground.

4. Love for the brethren is a criterion by which we can determine we are of the truth. It is useless to contend we are of the truth when we do not love our brethren. We can memorize the scriptures and be able to quote whole chapters but this does not demonstrate we are of the truth. "And hereby we know we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him" (3:19).

5. Love manifested toward brethren enables God to dwell in us, that is to be in fellowship with us. As we love, the divine love is perfected in us. We must love as God loved. His love was not conditioned upon our sinlessness, our perfection in knowledge, or our freedom from error. The love of God is different from all other forms of love. Love which is composed of sentiment, affection or emotion, is extended to those who are deemed worthy. The love of God creates the worth in itself. The first loves those who are precious; the others are precious because they are loved.

When we tolerate or endure those who disagree with us and love those who do not, we are no better than the despised and outcast publicans (Matt. 5:46). They loved those who reciprocated in kind. Theirs was the mutual sharing of misery. Our love is to be creative and outgoing. It expends itself because only in so doing can it live. In loving we see God in our own hearts. "No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another God dwells in us, and his love is perfected in us" (4:12).

6. When we are partners in Brotherly Love, Unlimited, we are freed from all torment or fear. This is not true of those who are restrained and restricted by a legalistic concept of the Way. All who seek to live by law, or love by law, will spend their time on earth "bound in shallows and in miseries." Who knows if he has learned all he could learn, done all he could do, or climbed as high as he could by exertion of his own power or ability? There will always be doubt and suspicion, fear and distrust, under such a system. God changed the world by turning love loose. When we do the same we lose all fear of men on earth and judgment after death. The secret to the carefree life is love unbounded. "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment . . . There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear; because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love" (4:17, 18). Notice that it is only perfect love that can cast out fear. Imperfect love is always frightened and fearful.

SPECIAL STUDIES

Hating Our Brothers

In the context love is a positive, active, energetic and energizing force. It is creative. But hate is negative. Because of its nature love must express itself in positive fashion, but hate need not necessarily do so. It can be simply lack of love. Man was made with the ability to love and thus to be like God, who is love. When he fails in this respect he does not cross the frontier. One must do something to leave where he is but he need not do anything to stay where he is. Not to love is to hate! This thesis would be incomplete if we showed the nature of love without studying the nature and results of hate.

1. Hatred for the brethren (that is, lack of love) leaves one in darkness. Regardless of how one may assert he is in the light, if he does not love, he lies. "He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now" (2:9). Darkness is simply absence of light. God did not create darkness. He created light.

2. Hatred of our brethren blinds us and makes true perception impossible. No man can ever grasp the import of God's revelation until he loves his brethren as God loves them. To assert that one sees the truth while hating his brothers is like a blind man claiming to view the beauties of nature. "But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because the darkness hath blinded his eyes" (2:11).

3. Lack of love for the brethren is proof of the fatherhood of Satan in our lives. The realm of hatred is presided over by "the prince of the power of the air." Those who operate in the area of hatred and animosity are on the devil's territory. It is useless to affirm we are sons of God if we do not love God's other sons. "In this the children of God are manifested and the children of the devil" (3:10).

4. Those who do not love the brethren are still in the domain of death. They dwell like lepers in putrid sepulchers, and like the evil spirits of old "abide in the tombs." It is by love that we cross the frontier from death unto life. He who has not learned to love has not learned to live (3:14).

5. One who hates his brother is a murderer. Under the regime of Christ, thought and intent may be taken for the act. Jesus pointed out that those in olden times said, "Thou shalt not kill" but now to be angry against a brother without cause, or to slander or falsely accuse him, might result in losing one's soul. One who hates lacks only the opportunity to do violence to a brother who is the object of his wrath and spite.

WALKING IN THE LIGHT

6. One who does not love does not know God. He may know about God and be able to catalogue the attributes of deity. But there is a difference in the ability to identify a person and in being identified with him. It is one thing to describe another; a wholly different thing to abide in Him. "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (I John 4:8).

The Fallacy of Orthodoxy

It cannot be denied that the average preacher of "The Church of Christ" regards the light of which John speaks as his own credal interpretation of the new covenant scriptures! To "walk in the light" is to live up to the traditional factional explanation of the party of which he is a member. To "walk in darkness" is to deviate in some particular, especially that of the special party emphasis, from the unwritten creed. There are some two dozen factions in the non-instrument segment of the disciple brotherhood. Each one thinks that it alone is in the light and all of the others are in darkness. Since "fellowship one with another" is conditioned upon "walking in the light," and since the light is the legalistic code of the faction, fellowship is regarded as ordained of God to be limited to fellow-partisans.

It would be a matter of compassion if only the ignorant and unlearned were victims of such philosophy, but it becomes tragic when it is realized that this type of exposition is advocated by editors and journalists who have a reputation in their parties. It is even advanced by college professors responsible for teaching the young. The situation would be regrettable if such teaching was given without intent to unduly influence others; it is even more so when it is done with the deliberate design of maintaining division in the family of God, and keeping apart those who should recognize each other as brethren. When the humbler saints indicate a desire to exhibit love for those on the other side of a partisan wall they are discouraged by misapplication of the statement, "If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another." Actually the revised factional version should read, "*If they* will walk in our light as we are in that light, we will have fellowship with them."

The apostle John wrote in a time of crisis to stimulate believers in the Word of life and to encourage fellowship in love. His letter is a majestic treatise on brotherly love, unsurpassed in the whole realm of literature. In spite of that, men under the guise of loyalty to Jesus single out a

passage and interpret it in such a manner as to make fellowship impossible and to render every claim of the epistle upon our better selves null and void.

I deny that the light in this instance is a written code. God is light but he is not a written code. Not a letter that John wrote was either life or light. If the third epistle was either one, the apostle deliberately withheld life or light from Gaius, for he declared, "I had many things to write, but I will not with pen and ink write to thee." If the second epistle was to be life or light, it was imperfect, for John wrote, "Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink." That the first letter was not intended to convey life is evident. "These things have I written unto you that believe on the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life" (5:13). Eternal life is not having a copy of the Bible, but having the Son of God. "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (5:12).

Where is the congregation of believers which will brazenly affirm that it is composed only of those who know as much about God's will and purpose as God himself? If the light in which we must walk to have fellowship, is knowledge of God's revelation, we must either be as perfect as God or we cannot be in fellowship. "If we walk in the light *as he is in the light*, we have fellowship one with another." "God is light and in him is no darkness at all." If darkness is ignorance we cannot be ignorant at all. We must know all there is to know, and be as wise as God, or else we walk in darkness. If we say we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness—if we are ignorant about anything—we lie and do not the truth.

The absurdity of this lies in the fact that we will have to immerse people in the morning and exclude them from our fellowship in the afternoon, for if they do not come to a perfect knowledge as soon as they are immersed they are walking in darkness. If the champions of orthodoxy say that we must allow them time to learn, then we ask how long can they walk in darkness and be accepted? How much of the Bible must one be able to grasp perfectly before he is walking in darkness? How much of it can he misunderstand and still walk in the light?

It is time to quit playing around with such puerile proponents of partisan positions. Where is the preacher who quotes this passage to debar saints and discourage fellowship among brethren, who will dare affirm that he is as wise as God and as good as God? If he dare not say that

WALKING IN THE LIGHT

he is, by his own admission he is not in the fellowship. Like Haman, he is hanged on the fatal gallows which he constructed to destroy others. I consider the traditional orthodox interpretation placed upon I John 1:7 as one of the most dangerous ever palmed off on unsuspecting men and women. It is subversive of the Spirit and a scandal to the church of God. It dooms the body to disintegration and can only damn us all to destruction.

Let us recapture the valid meaning of this warped and wrested passage and use it to promote fellowship, not pervert it. God is light. God is love. If we walk in the light we walk in God. If we walk in love we abide in God. If we love our brothers we abide in the light. You cannot separate light and love. Neither can you separate those who love one another. We quit living together when we quit loving each other. The road to togetherness is the path of love. "And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also" (I John 4:21). When we heed this command, and only then, can it be said, "As he is, so are we," and it can be added—"in this world."

RECEIVE HIM NOT

If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed:

For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 10, 11).

This is one of the "twisted scriptures." It has become the handle for every factional tool used to pry apart the living stones in the temple of God. It is the murderous knife employed to dismember the body of the Lord. It was written by the apostle of love to protect the flock of God from prowling wolves who sought to seduce them through denial of the foundational fact that Jesus has come in the flesh. It is now used to convert the sheep into snarling dogs, snapping at each other over every stray scrap of doctrine. It has substituted the law of the pack for the love of the flock.

No other passage so well illustrates the danger inherent in ignoring the context. That the leaders of thought in the "Church of Christ" should have been betrayed into adopting an interpretation which makes unity impossible and renders ridiculous their vaunted claim to respect for the authority of the word of God, is one of the amazing developments in the restoration movement of which we are heirs. Any use of the written word