

An Expository Study of 1 John
Part 3 (of 10 parts):

An Exposition of I John 2:7-17

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Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining. The one who says he is in the light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If any one loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever (1 John 2:7-17).

According to his stated purpose in 5:13, John wrote this epistle so that his readers "may know that you have eternal life." The epistle provides a series of tests that promote personal assurance of God's truth and salvation and enable believers to detect and reject the false teachings assailing them.

John began with offering assurance through the test of fellowship grounded in the nature and revelation of God. This fellowship is grounded in the nature of God as light (1:5), is hindered by the presence and practice of sin (1:6-10), and is made possible by the redemptive work of Christ (2:1-2). In 2:3-17 John set forth a series of signs assuring that true fellowship with God is being maintained. In 2:3-6 he indicated two closely related signs, the sign of obedience (vv. 3-5a) and the sign of the conscious imitation of the example of Christ (vv. 5b-6). Now in 2:7-17 John developed two further signs, both in different ways revolving around the practice of Christian love.

Assurance of Fellowship from the Sign of Love

In 2:7-11 John developed the thought that assurance that fellowship with God is being maintained can be drawn from the practice of brother-love. In verses 7-8 he characterized this crucial command to love one's brother, and then in verses 9-11 he applied this sign to representative individuals.

THE CHARACTERIZATION OF THE COMMANDMENT OF LOVE

John began with a term of direct address, "Beloved" (Ἀγαπητοί), the first of six occurrences of this affectionate address in this epistle (2:7; 3:2; 21; 4:1, 7, 11).¹ It expresses John's own deep love for his readers, whom he accepted as in the circle of Christian love. They were the objects of God's love as well as his own. In writing to them John was motivated by a deep, persistent love that desires the welfare of the readers.

An old commandment (v. 7). When John declared, "I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment," he did not stop to indicate the contents of this command. Having spoken about "His commandments" in verses 3-4, the singular now implied that some specific command is in view. The obligation in verse 6 to imitate the example of Christ may be in view, but the context suggests that John had in view the commandment to love, elaborated in verses 9-11. Plummer observes, "Practically it makes little matter which answer we give, for at bottom these are one and the same. They are different aspects of *walking in the light*."²

¹ The reading "Brethren" in the KJV follows the Textus Receptus, the reading in K, L, and most minuscules. See Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, *The Greek New Testament according to the Majority Text* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982); Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 709.

² Alfred Plummer, *The Epistles of S. John*, in *The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* (reprint, Cambridge: University Press, 1938), p. 92.

In stressing this love-commandment John insisted that it was "not ... a new commandment" (οὐκ ἐντολὴν καινὴν), something new in kind or quality. He denied any implication that he was formulating some further obligation not inherent in the original apostolic proclamation. This negation is confirmed by the positive fact that he was referring to "an old commandment which you have had from the beginning." It is "old" (παλαιά) in the sense of being of long duration, old as contrasted to recent. It is a commandment "which you have had" (ἣν εἶχετε) as a continuing possession through the years, in fact, "from the beginning" (ἀπ' ἀρχῆς). The beginning here cannot refer back to the beginning of the human race, nor yet to the command's proclamation in the Old Testament Law (Lev. 19:18), but correctly relates to the church in its earliest stage. Most natural is the view that John was thinking of the initiation of his readers into the experience of love when they first heard and accepted the gospel preached to them.

John's statement, "the old commandment is the word which you have heard,"³ explicitly connects this old commandment with their past Christian experience. "The old commandment" (ἡ ἐντολὴ ἡ παλαιά, "the commandment, the old one"), is an emphatic reference to the commandment under discussion. It is identified with "the word" (ὁ λόγος), the apostolic message as first proclaimed to them, which embodied this commandment of love. "You have heard" (ἠκούσατε), in the aorist rather than the perfect, points back to the time when they first heard the message. Their experience confirms that this was not something new and extraneous to their Christian faith.

A new commandment (v. 8). The statement, "On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you" (πάλιν ἐντολὴν καινὴν γράφω ὑμῖν), recognizes that, looked at in another way, this commandment of love is indeed new. The opening adverb (πάλιν) does not introduce a new subject but continues the matter of this love-command looked at in a new and different way. It is not a recent innovation, yet it is qualitatively new as experienced in Christ. This double feature assures those who oppose any innovation in connection with their faith and satisfies those who yearn for something fresh and invigorating.

The words "which is true in Him and in you" (ὃ ἐστὶν ἀληθὲς ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν) verify this newness. The neuter pronoun "which" (ὃ) cannot relate directly to "commandment" (ἐντολὴν), which is a feminine noun, but points to the newness involved. This newness "is true," that is, it exists as a factual reality, "in Him and in you." In

³ The recurrence of the words from the beginning" in the KJV follows the Textus Receptus; older texts omit the words. For the textual evidence see Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 26th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, n.d.).

the incarnate Christ this newness manifested itself in His life and teaching, and supremely in His vicarious death. And through the indwelling Holy Spirit this newness is also true in the experience of God's people (Rom. 5:5; 2 Cor. 5:17). John's use of "in you," rather than "in us,"⁴ "commends the readers for conduct that is truly characterized by this new command to love one another."⁵ But Plummer notes that his repeated use of "in" (ἐν) implies that "it is true in the case of Christ in a different sense from that in which it is true in the case of Christians."⁶

The explanatory comment, "because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining," relates not to Christ but to the readers, "because there is no sense in which the darkness is passing away in Christ. Such a departure of darkness can only be true in redeemed men."⁷ For John "the darkness" (ἡ σκοτία), as already indicated in 1:5, is not merely the impersonal absence of light; it is a figurative reference to the realm of moral darkness which stands in antithesis to all that is "the light" as characteristic of God and all that relates to Him. These two moral realms stand in active conflict with each other and cannot be rightly intermingled. As Smalley notes, this "contrast between good (as light) and evil (as darkness) is characteristic of John."⁸

The present tense verb "is passing away" (παράγεται) denotes the action in progress;⁹ the impact of the light on the darkness is already apparent. The darkness is not yet totally gone, nor is its passing away wholly a matter of the future, to be accomplished at Christ's return. The process of removing the darkness has already been initiated by this renewing love, but the process will only be fully consummated when Christ, the Redeemer, personally returns to earth to banish the darkness.

The verb "is passing away" (παράγεται) may be either middle or passive in form. If passive, the meaning is, "is caused to pass away." It is generally taken as the middle voice, thus stressing the part that the light plays in the action of the darkness passing away. The

⁴ The reading in us" (ἐν ἡμῖν) is found in a few manuscripts. For the textual evidence, see *ibid.*

⁵ Simon J. Kistemaker, "Exposition of the Epistle of James and the Epistles of John," in *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), p. 261.

⁶ Plummer, *The Epistles of S. John*, p. 93.

⁷ Donald W. Burdick, *The Letters of John the Apostle* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), p. 143.

⁸ Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 51 (Waco, TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1984), p. 58.

⁹ The rendering "is past" (KJV) is inaccurate.

darkness is being expelled by the power of the light.

The passing of the darkness is explained by the fact that "the true light is already shining" (τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινὸν ἤδη φαίνει, literally, "the light, the true, already is shining"). The construction emphasizes the presence of the true or genuine light in contrast to the spurious "light" the false teachers offered. Any professed "gospel" that distorts or counterfeits the true apostolic teaching only prolongs the operation of the darkness.

THE APPLICATION OF THE COMMANDMENT OF LOVE

In verses 9-11 John presented three hypothetical individuals to test the presence of this enlightening love. He used articular present tense participles to delineate the claim or conduct of each.

The one hating (v. 9). The individual pictured in this verse displays a conflict between his claim and his conduct. Two present tense participles under the government of one article portray two distinct characteristics. "The one who says he is in the light" (ὁ λέγων ἐν τῷ φωτὶ εἶναι) declares that the light is the sphere of his life and being; he claims to have fellowship with God who is Light (1:5). "And" (καὶ) introduces a further feature: "and hates his brother" (καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ μισῶν, literally, "and the brother of him hating"). The word order stresses the flagrant contradiction between his claim and his conduct. "His brother," placed next to his claim to be in the light, denotes a fellow Christian with whom he should have a close relationship. In keeping with John's characteristic usage (3:14-15; 5:1), the term "brother" denotes not merely a fellow human being but a Christian brother. This does not mean he is at liberty to hate a non-Christian; the brother-relationship is the key to the test being applied. If he fails to show love within the family circle, he cannot be expected to show love in broader relationships. The present participle "hating" denotes his characteristic attitude, not merely a flash of anger or ill will. As the opposite of Christian love, such hatred cannot be viewed merely as a matter of indifference or deliberate disregard of the brother in his need. A feeling of ill-will or active malice toward the object of hatred is involved. For John there was no neutral ground between love and hate (cf. 3:14-15).

The test reveals that this individual "is in the darkness until now." His conduct nullifies his claim, and he is still in the realm of "the darkness" (cf. 1:5-6); he has never left it "until now." Though "the true light is already shining" (2:8), he has never had the transforming experience of passing from the darkness into the light. Kistemaker suggests that John's "until now" "tactfully leaves the

door open so that they may repent and come to the light."¹⁰

The one loving (v. 10). The individual now portrayed, "the one who loves his brother" (ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ), is the opposite of the one in verse 9. There is no neutral ground between the two. No reference is made to his claim to love. It is assumed he gives testimony to his faith as appropriate, but his practice speaks for itself without any loud profession. The present participle denotes that his love is no occasional, sporadic matter, but a continual, habitual practice. This term for "love" (ἀγαπάω) denotes "not so much a manifestation of the emotions as it is a manifestation of the will."¹¹ It is an intelligent and purposeful love that seeks to promote the highest good for the one loved, even at the expense of self. Such a love is only the result of the love of God having been poured out within believers' hearts through the indwelling Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5).

A believer's practice of such love reveals that he "abides in the light" (ἐν τῷ φωτὶ μένει), that he lives in or is at home in the sphere of "the light," the sphere associated with the presence and power of God. The word order underlines the sphere of his abode. His practice of love reveals that he has joined the brotherhood of "the light."

"And" (καὶ) introduces a further fact concerning him: "and there is no cause for stumbling in him" (καὶ σκάνδαλον ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν). This negative advantage is understood in various ways. Since the pronoun αὐτῷ may be either neuter or masculine, the statement may be rendered, "and in it there is no cause for stumbling" (RSV),¹² that is, the light in which he lives and moves offers nothing that causes stumbling. This makes good sense, understanding that "the light," unlike "the darkness," has no adverse or destructive impact on the one living in it. Smalley insists that the neuter "it" "fits the context, and is supported both by the content of verse 11 and by the parallel thought expressed in John 11:9 ('a man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light')."¹³ But it is generally accepted that the pronoun is personal, since in these verses John's thought is centered on the individual rather than on the light, "and cause of stumbling in him is there none!"¹⁴

¹⁰ Kistemaker, "Exposition of the Epistle of James and the Epistles of John," p. 263.

¹¹ J Dwight Pentecost, *The Joy of Fellowship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), p. 43.

¹² *Revised Standard Version* (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Co., 1962).

¹³ Smalley, *1, 2, 3, John*, p. 62. Smalley further remarks, 'John does not teach the doctrine of sinless perfection, such as might be favored by the translation in him there is no cause for stumbling.'

¹⁴ Joseph Bryant Rotherham, *The Emphasized New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1959).

The intended force of the noun here rendered "cause of stumbling" (*σκάνδαλον*) is not wholly clear. Since in classical Greek the term denoted the trigger stick that released a deadly trap, hence a dangerous entrapment, Lenski insisted that "when this word is used metaphorically it means bringing spiritual death."¹⁵ But in view of its use in Septuagint Greek, the term also came to refer to a stumbling block. This seems to be the import of the term here—something that causes stumbling or gives offence.

Views differ over who is made to stumble. Does he cause others to stumble, or is the stumbling block in his own way? In favor of the former is the fact that in the New Testament the term usually denotes an offence to others (Matt. 16:23; 18:7; Rom. 14:13; 16:17; 1 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 5:11; Rev. 2:14). Thus Wilder comments, "Such a one is not the occasion of any offense to others as are the troublemakers who spread confusion in the church."¹⁶ And Vine remarks, "Love is the best safeguard against the woes pronounced by our Lord upon those who cause others to stumble."¹⁷ Others, however, point to the parallel with verse 11 as favoring the second view. Plummer notes there is nothing in verse 11 that "suggests the notion that the brother-hater leads others astray: it is his own dark condition that is contemplated." Plummer also points to "the very close parallel in John xi. 9, 10," and cites Psalm 119:165; "Great peace have they which love Thy law: and nothing shall offend them"; i.e., there is no stumbling-block before them."¹⁸ The second view seems preferable here, yet Smalley remarks, "Perhaps, in typically Johannine style, both meanings are involved in this passage."¹⁹

The one hating (v. 11). The third individual pictured is again the very opposite of the preceding. While parallel to verse 9, this verse now emphasizes the blinding impact of hate.

"The one who hates his brother" resumes the thought in verse 9, but now reference to his spiritual pretensions is dropped and the results of hatred in his life are stressed. The first two statements, "is in the darkness and walks in the darkness" (*ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ ἐστὶν καὶ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ περιπατεῖ*), with their present tenses declare that "the

¹⁵ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1962), p. 415.

¹⁶ Amos N. Wilder and Paul W. Hoon, "The First, Second, and Third Epistles of John," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick, 12 vols. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), 12:234.

¹⁷ W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, 3 vols. (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1940), 3:129.

¹⁸ Plummer, *The Epistles of S. John*, pp. 95-96.

¹⁹ Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, p. 62.

darkness" remains his sphere of existence and daily round of activities. His character and conduct are characterized by darkness.

Further, such a life means that he "does not know where he is going" (οὐκ οἶδεν ποῦ ὑπάγει), has no true perception concerning the direction and destiny of his life. The verb "is going" (ὑπάγει, "to go or lead under") implies that he is unaware of what he is moving toward and will be controlled by. "Because the darkness has blinded his eyes" simply records the blinding impact of hatred in the human heart. "So hate destroys any windows for light from God."²⁰ Those who employ the tactics of hatred inevitably end up under the domination of darkness. John's statement is metaphorical, but it is based on observed physical realities. Fish in Echo River in Mammoth Cave in Kentucky, living in perpetual darkness, have eye sockets but their eyes are undeveloped. The darkness has effectively blinded them. The verb rendered "has blinded" (ἐτύφλωσεν) is an effective aorist; it simply records the result without calling attention to the time duration involved. Persistence in hatred and sin inevitably leads to moral and spiritual blindness.

Assurance of Fellowship from the Sign of Separation

Three tests (2:3-11) have been presented whereby the readers may be assured of having true fellowship with God. Verses 12-14 now seem to be a disruption of that theme as John directly addresses his readers in two triads. In two sets of carefully structured statements he expresses his confidence in his readers that they are genuine believers who possess a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. But in thus emphatically assuring his readers, he shows "that what is true of the orthodox Christian was not true of the false claimants around John's church."²¹ John's expression of personal assurance concerning his readers in verses 12-14 provides the basis for his appeal for separation from the world as a further ground for assurance (vv. 15-17).

THE ASSURANCE CONCERNING THE READERS

John expressed his assurance concerning his readers in two sets of triads, each marked by three designations of those addressed. Each expression of affirmation consists of three elements: (1) the assertion "I write" (or "wrote") "to you," (2) a noun of direct address, and (3) an affirmation introduced by "because" (ὅτι). Careful structure is obvious. The first triad (vv. 12-13b). The three designations for those be-

²⁰ Glenn W. Barker, "1 John," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 12:317.

²¹ Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, p. 67.

ing addressed have evoked much discussion. That mere physical age distinctions are not intended seems clear, as is evident from the fact that John used "little children" (τεκνία) elsewhere to include all his readers (2:1, 28; 3:18; 5:21). The words "little children" convey the author's expression of endearment but also suggest "their need of instruction and their state of dependence upon God and upon teachers such as himself."²²

Views differ as to how many groups are in view. Some suggest three distinct groups as representing "three stages of spiritual growth."²³ But this is questionable in view of the inclusive usage of "little children" as well as the unusual order, "little children," "fathers," "young men." Those who hold to three groups tend to reverse the order in their discussions. A second view is that John first addressed all his readers and then subdivided them into "fathers" and "young men." Houlden suggested that these two terms were formal designations of church officials, "the elders" and "the deacons."²⁴ More probable is the view that the readers are now divided "by the length of their Christian experience."²⁵ A third view holds that all the readers are included each time, the designation being true of the experience ascribed to them.²⁶ It is difficult to decide between the last two views. This author inclines to the second view, yet he recognizes the force of Plummer's remarks.

There is, however, something to be said for the view that all S. John's readers are addressed in all three cases, the Christian life of all having analogies with youth, manhood, and age; with the innocence of childhood, the strength of prime, and the experience of full maturity.²⁷

John addressed his readers as "little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake" (v. 12). The diminutive "little children" (τεκνία), like the cognate verb (τίκτω, "to be born"), suggests the closeness of the birth relationship. As those who have been born of God, the stated reason for writing, "because your sins are

²² I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), p. 138.

²³ Quinton J. Everest, *Messages from 1 John* (South Bend, IN: Your Worship Hour, 1982), p. 55.

²⁴ J. L. Houlden, *A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles*, Harper's New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), pp. 70-71.

²⁵ Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950), p. 57.

²⁶ So Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, p. 138; James Montgomery Boice, *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), pp. 72-73; Zane C. Hodges, "1 John," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, 2 vols. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, SP Publications 1983, 1985), 2:890.

²⁷ Plummer, *The Epistles of S. John*, p. 98.

forgiven you" (ὅτι ἀφέωνται ἑμῶν αἱ ἁμαρτίαι), is true of every child of God. The perfect tense (ἀφέωνται) denotes the past experience of sins forgiven, leading to the present state of being forgiven. Without this assurance there can be no effective Christian life and service.

"For His name's sake" (διὰ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ) emphasizes the true basis for the assurance of sins forgiven. "His name," as White observes, "is but shorthand for the whole character and work of Christ, the incarnate Son."²⁸ "God forgives sin not because of any merit in the sinner, but because of the infinite merit of the Saviour."²⁹ His dear children are to beware of being led astray from God's provision by the new theories of the false teachers.

The words "I am writing to you, fathers" (v. 13a) address those among John's readers who are older in the faith and are characterized by spiritual maturity. "Fathers" (πατέρες) naturally implies some authority and leadership as characteristic of those mature in their faith. Van Gorder suggests that the term implies that they were "believers in Christ who themselves had grown in grace and had begotten children in the gospel (1 Cor. 4:15)."³⁰ John felt assured about them "because you know Him who has been from the beginning" (ὅτι ἐγνώκατε τὸν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς). "Know" (ἐγνώκατε, perfect tense) suggests a past knowledge that remains and grows, a knowledge centering in a Person characterized by His permanency, "Him who has been from the beginning." Taken alone, this designation might denote God the Father as the immutable "I am."³¹ But Plummer notes that John "never speaks of the First Person of the Godhead under any designation but 'God' or 'the Father.'"³² The reference to "the Father" in verse 13c favors the view that John here means Jesus Christ, "who has been from the beginning." White notes that the designation "would have no particular significance here as a title for God, whereas the incarnation of the Logos, who was from the beginning, is the crux of the faith John writes to defend."³³ The expres-

²⁸ R. E. O. White, *Open Letter to Evangelicals: A Devotional and Homiletic Commentary on the First Epistle of John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans' Publishing Co., 1964), p. 60.

²⁹ George Williams, *The Student's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, Analytical, Synoptical, and Synthetical* (London: Oliphants, 1949), p. 1012.

³⁰ Paul R. Van Corder, *In the Family, Lessons from First John* (Grand Rapids: Radio Bible Class, 1978), p. 74.

³¹ Sc John R. W. Stott, *The Epistles of John*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), p. 97; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles of John* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1970), p. 58.

³² Plummer, *The Epistles of S. John*, p. 99.

³³ White, *Open Letter to Evangelicals*, p. 59.

sion echoes 1:1 and 2:7; it could refer to eternity past, the Incarnation as the beginning of God's redemptive work in His Son (cf. 1:1), or possibly to the beginning of the Christian church (2:7). The second view seems most probable here. In writing to the "fathers" John drew assurance from his realization that their years of pondering the gospel message and their experiences with the incarnate Christ had stabilized them so that they would not be misled by the novel Christologies of the Gnostics.

The "young men" (*νεανίσκοι*) next addressed (v. 13b), characterized as younger in faith as well as age, are commended "because you have overcome the evil one" (*ὅτι νενικήκατε τὸν πονηρὸν*). John recognized that they had overcome, not temptation, but the Tempter, "the evil one." This is one of the biblical terms for the devil and depicts his nature as vicious, injurious, and destructive. It describes him as utterly bad. While admittedly the devil uses men as his agents in his conflict with believers, the devil, aided by his cohorts, is their real and persistent enemy (cf. Eph. 6:10-12). The perfect tense "have overcome" (*νενικήκατε*) does not mean that the battle is already over but rather, having encountered the enemy, they now stand as assured of victory. As Alford aptly remarks, "Whatever conflict remains for them afterwards, is with a baffled and conquered enemy."³⁴ Knowing that in Christ the devil is a defeated foe (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), they have in faith resisted the devil and put him to flight (1 Pet. 5:9; James 4:7). Such a position of victory must be maintained daily with a firm faith in Christ and resolute striving against the devil and his temptations.

The second triad (vv. 13c-14). While echoing the former triad, this triad is marked by two changes. Instead of the present tense, "I write" (*γράφω*), each assertion now uses the aorist tense (*ἔγραψα*).³⁵ The reason for the change is not obvious and various suggestions have been advanced. Candlish conjectured that as an old man John suddenly realized that he might be gone when his readers received the letter, so he changed to the aorist to urge them to receive this letter as his full and final testimony to them.³⁶ Another suggestion is that the present tense refers to this letter, while the aorist looks back to

³⁴ Henry Alford, *The New Testament for English Readers* (Chicago: Moody Press, reprint, n.d.), p. 1707.

³⁵ Following the Textus Receptus, the KJV in v. 13c reads "I write," but has "I have written" in v. 14. For the textual evidence see Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 26th ed. Perhaps the change was made to bring together the sequence fathers, young men, little children in v. 13.

³⁶ Robert S. Candlish, *The First Epistle of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, reprint of 1869 ed.), pp. 129-30.

the Gospel of John.³⁷ Another view is that John was interrupted after writing the first triad, and on resuming his writing he picked up the train of thought with the use of the aorist.³⁸ Most plausible is the explanation by Burdick:

The reason for repeating the triplet was to place particular emphasis on the author's confidence in the genuineness of his readers' salvation experience. And in order to avoid the monotony of mere repetition, John used the epistolary aorist in the second triplet instead of the present tense.³⁹

As a common Greek idiom, the epistolary aorist in thought places the writer at the time the readers receive his letter.

Another change is the use of "children" (παῖδιά) instead of the former "little children" (τεκνία). The diminutive "children" is also a term of endearment. As a term of address it occurs elsewhere in the New Testament only in 1 John 2:18 and John 21:5. With this term John again addressed all his readers. The change was probably made to avoid monotony, yet some difference in the meaning of the two terms may be present. In the words of Barker, "If a difference in emphasis is intended, the use of τεκνία emphasizes more the relationship, the dependence or weakness of the infant, while παῖδιά stresses the immaturity (subordination) of the child, the need to be under instruction or direction."⁴⁰ John thus suggested that the readers were his spiritual children who were under his acknowledged leadership.

The assurance expressed in 1 John 2:12 John now rephrased, "because you know the Father" (ὅτι ἐγνώκατε τὸν πατέρα), for as Lenski notes, "Only those know the Father whose sins have been remitted for the sake of Christ's name."⁴¹ The perfect tense verb (ἐγνώκατε) indicates an abiding, intimate knowledge of "the Father." The world has professed to know God under various guises,⁴² but the readers know God personally as members of His family, living under His love and care. They came to know Him through their acceptance of Jesus Christ as the one who has revealed the Father (Luke 10:22). This knowledge of the Father is effected through the work of the

³⁷ Alexander Ross, *The Epistles of James and John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954), pp. 162-63.

³⁸ Robert Law, *The Tests of Life* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909), p. 309.

³⁹ Burdick, *The Letters of John the Apostle*, p. 175.

⁴⁰ Barker, "1 John," p. 320

⁴¹ Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude*, p. 421.

⁴² See White, *Open Letter to Evangelicals*, p. 58, for a suggestive list of designations for God.

indwelling Holy Spirit (Gal. 4:6).

In again addressing the "fathers," John left his statement of assurance unchanged (1 John 2:14a). His assurance concerning their mature knowledge only needed reemphasis. As mature believers they could not afford to relax their spiritual growth.

His assurance concerning the "young men" is now enlarged on in a triple statement (v. 14b). "You are strong" (ἰσχυροὶ ἐστε, literally, "strong you are") denotes the strength and vigor characteristic of youth. The adjective denotes power or ability and places "stress on the actual power that one possesses rather than on the mere principle of power."⁴³ As young believers, not necessarily young in age, they are marked by "the vitality, exuberance, and adventurousness of youth exhibited in their Christian living."⁴⁴ "And" (καὶ) connects their strength with the fact that "the Word of God abides in you." The source of their strength is not innate but has been imparted to them. "The Word of God" refers not to Christ but rather to the message of God as brought by Him and now embodied in the inspired Scriptures. Strength is imparted as God's Word "abides," is at home, in the mind and will and finds expression in daily conduct. King justly remarks, "All big Christians have been Bible Christians; all who have been greatly blessed to others have been themselves steeped in it."⁴⁵

"And" (καὶ) again connects the following with what has preceded: "and you have overcome the evil one" (καὶ νενικήκατε τὸν πονηρὸν). The Word indwelling them was the true source of their abiding victory over the devil. Satan cannot resist the power of God's Word, as illustrated in the temptation of Jesus (Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13).

THE APPEAL FOR SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD

Abruptly John now issued his appeal not to love the world (vv. 15-17). This is the negative demand on Christian love. John had insisted (vv. 9-11) that the Christian life must be characterized by love of the brethren; now he insisted on the complementary duty. As an appeal to the will, John's command implies that love can be misdirected. He first declared the uncompromising duty (v. 15a) and then indicated the reasons they must not love the world (vv. 15b-17). The statement of the command (v. 15a). The prohibition is given a double statement: "Do not love the world, nor the things in the

⁴³ Burdick, *The Letters of John the Apostle*, p. 176.

⁴⁴ Guy H. King, *The Fellowship: An Expository Study of 1 John* (reprint, Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1976), p. 44.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

world" (μη ἀγαπᾶτε τὸν κόσμον, "not be loving the world"). The form marks a standing prohibition and may imply that the readers were prone to do so but must stop this evil practice. But the prohibition may simply prohibit a practice without implying that it is actually being done. It is a danger against which they must constantly be on guard.

"The world" (κόσμος), now used six times in three verses, is a favorite term with John, having a variety of meanings. The term basically denotes order, arrangement (the opposite of chaos), and hence an orderly system. It could be used to denote the earth (John 21:25), or the world of mankind (John 3:16) in its various organizations and systems. But because of the fallen nature of the human race, the term predominantly has an ethical import, the human race in its alienation from and opposition to God. John here had in view the world of humanity in its rebellion against God and dominated by the evil one (1 John 5:19). John was calling not for monastic separation from the world but for an inner attitude of separation from the sinful world and its practices. As those loyal to God, his readers are to be on guard against a kindly feeling toward the world's evil, and are not to establish intimate relations of loyalty with it.

The added words, "nor the things in the world" (μηδὲ τὰ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ), particularize, prohibiting such a love relationship to any particular aspect or feature of this evil world. These "things" are not necessarily material objects, which in themselves are nonmoral and can quite innocently be desired and possessed, but they may become evil if they cause an attitude of alienation from God. From verse 16 it is clear that John had in view those elements or attitudes characterizing the world in its alienation from God.

The reasons for the command (vv. 15b-17). John pointed out that love for God and love for the world are by their very nature antagonistic to each other and cannot coexist in the human heart (v. 15b). Here is another of those opposites John often used (1:5, 6; 2:4).

"If any one loves the world" (ἐάν τις ἀγαπᾷ τὸν κόσμον) presents a hypothetical case for the readers to consider. The individual is anyone who persistently makes the world the object of his love. The inevitable result is, "the love of the Father is not in him." The expression, "the love of the Father" (ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ πατρὸς), used only here in the New Testament, is capable of three meanings. "It may refer to love that comes from the Father (ablative of source), it may refer to the Father's love for the person involved (subjective genitive), or it may speak of the person's love for the Father (objective genitive)."⁴⁶ As the opposite of love for the world, the last meaning seems clearly

⁴⁶ Burdick, *The Letters of John the Apostle*, p. 178.

intended. The tragic fact is that love for God "is not in him," is not a motivating power in his heart and life. The opening "For" (ὅτι) of verse 16 introduces a parenthetical verification of this fact.

"The lust of the flesh" (ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῆς σαρκὸς) denotes the desire or craving that has its origin in the flesh. The craving denoted by the term ἐπιθυμία may in itself be either good or bad. It is thrice used in the New Testament with a good meaning (Luke 22:15; Phil. 1:23; 1 Thess. 2:17), but predominantly it denotes an evil desire, properly rendered "lust." "Lust" here is collective, denoting the varied cravings of fallen human nature pursued in the interest of self in self-sufficient independence of God. The cravings God has placed in the human body in themselves are not sinful but readily become sinful when used for illegitimate ends.

Another aspect of "all that is in the world" (v. 16) John identified as "the lust of the eyes" (ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν), the cravings and lusts stimulated by what is seen. The preceding expression denotes those lusts that are stimulated by one's inner nature; now the reference is to those desires that are aroused by what enters through the eye-gate. The expression, "the lust of the eyes," occurring only here in the New Testament, may refer to the desire to acquire the things seen. If so, then the expression "points to man's covetous and acquisitive nature."⁴⁷ Or as Plummer notes, the lust may be "the desire of seeing unlawful sights for the sake of the sinful pleasure `to be derived from the sight; idle and prurient curiosity."⁴⁸ The expression may well include both aspects. Some things an individual observes he may crave to acquire, others he may desire to feast his eyes on without personally possessing. Under either view, "In a day of billboard advertising, movie and television screens, and eye-catching magazine spreads, this aspect of the world is predominant."⁴⁹

A further aspect of "all that is in the world" is "the boastful pride of life" (ἡ ἀλαζονεία τοῦ βίου). While the two preceding aspects are inward, relating to what one wants, this is outward, relating to what one has or professes to have. The term "the boastful pride," used only here and in James 4:16 in the New Testament, denotes ostentatious pride in things possessed. The noun is closely related to the word ἀλαζών, a "braggart," one who extolled his own virtues or possessions. The genitive "of life" (τοῦ βίου) is the same word rendered "the world's goods" in 3:17; it emphasizes the temporal and material aspects of human existence. Here the evil is ex-

⁴⁷ Hodges, "1 John," p. 891.

⁴⁸ Plummer, *The Epistles of S. John*, p. 103.

⁴⁹ Leo C. Cox, 1, 11, 111 John, in *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1966), 6:334.

pressed in an ostentatious display of means or achievements that imply the individual's cleverness and independence from God. Plummer notes that the first two elements may be the vices of a solitary; the third requires society."⁵⁰

These three aspects are indicative of "all [παν, "everything"] that is in the world," and as such "not from the Father, but . . . from the world," negatively and positively stressing the source. How appropriate for John to warn against loving such things.

The opening "and" of verse 17 adds another reason for not loving the world. "The world is passing away" declares its transitory nature, and this is true likewise of "its lusts" which can be so alluring. The present tense "is passing away" (παράγεται) points out the ongoing process of disintegration. By their very nature the world's lusts are self-destructive. "The ways of sin are strewn with the seeds of their own destruction."⁵¹ This process is now operative in the lives of those loving the world; but one day this world system of evil will be swept off the scene in cataclysmic judgment at Christ's return.

"But" (δὲ) points to a contrasting reality: "the one who does the will of God abides forever." This assurance is for "the one who does the will of God" (ὁ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ), who sets himself to be obedient to God's will rather than pursuing the fleeting lusts of the world. Houlden remarks, "The 'mystical' supernatural gift of God's love had certainly to be received (v. 15)—but the test of that was no mere spiritual 'feeling'; it was doing God's will, the keeping of his commands, in particular the command to love the brothers (v. 2f)."⁵²

John, like James, insisted that saving faith must be functional in daily life. It is this resolute obedience, imperfect though it may be, that brings the assurance of God's approval, assurance that the believer "abides forever" (μένει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα), literally, "abides into the age," the eternal age of God's kingdom. Born again he is already in the spiritual kingdom, and no essential change in his spiritual life is ahead for him. There may well be a break in the outer continuity of his life between death and resurrection, but his abiding spiritual union with the eternal Christ will remain unchanged.

⁵⁰ Plummer, *The Epistles of S. John*, p. 104.

⁵¹ Harvey J. S. Blaney, *I, II, III John*, Beacon Bible Commentary (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1967), 10:370.

⁵² Houlden, *A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles*, p. 75.

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