

## **Synthetic Bible Studies**

Containing an outline study of every book of the Bible  
with suggestions for Sermons, Addresses and  
Bible Expositions

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### **LESSON TWENTY-THREE**

#### **I JOHN**

The first Epistle of John is addressed to no particular church or individual, but it is the thought of some that the apostle had in mind a cycle of churches like perhaps the seven churches of Asia (Revelation 1). It is quite likely that the Christians to whom he wrote were mostly of Gentile rather than Jewish origin, as judged by the few references to the Old Testament, and also by such allusions as that in 5:21.

It is thought, too, that the Epistle was written later than the Gospel by the same author, as gathered from the circumstances that all acquaintance with its facts is presupposed, and also because the words of CHRIST are cited as if known.

The occasion and object of its writing seem to have been furnished by the presence of false teachers, as we may judge from many passages, of which 2:18-26, and 4:1-6, are examples.

And indeed, as a matter of fact, we learn from the writers of church history that at a very early period there were three classes of heretics as they were called:

- (1). The Ebionites, who denied the deity of CHRIST;
- (2). The Docetists, who denied His humanity;
- (3). The Cerinthians, who denied the union of the two natures, human and divine, prior to His baptism.

## Theme of the Epistle

This is stated very clearly to be "**Fellowship with God**" in 1:3, 4, and the idea is presented to us not in a constant progression of thought, but after the manner of the law of recurrence, which we have come to recognize so clearly in other instances. Perhaps it might be said rather, that the apostle gives us three distinct cycles of thought, not very difficult to perceive and which form in their combination a very beautiful picture of truth, and a very impressive and cumulative application of the main line of instruction.

For example:

- GOD is light (1:5), hence fellowship with GOD depends on our walking in the light. Again,
- GOD is righteous (2:29), hence fellowship with GOD depends on our doing righteousness. And finally,
- GOD is love (4:7, 8), hence fellowship with GOD depends on our possessing and manifesting love.

### I. Introduction, 1:1-4

In the introduction to this Epistle three thoughts are set before us concerning the apostleship of John, which may be thus expressed:

The proofs of apostleship, viz: to have seen and heard CHRIST (v. 1).  
The character of the apostleship, viz: the declaration of CHRIST (v. 3).  
The object of the apostleship, viz: fellowship in CHRIST (vv. 3, 4).

- what peculiar expressions in the opening chapter of John's Gospel are recalled by the first verse?
- what bearing has this upon the statement that the Gospel was first written?
- against which of the heresies, previously mentioned, do these words seem directed?

### II. First Cycle of Thought, 1:5-2:28

What is the first message that John declares to them (1:5)?

- if "**God is light**," how is fellowship to be maintained with Him (vv. 6, 7)?
- if fellowship is only to be maintained by walking in the light, how may we walk in the light?

- (1). By perceiving and confessing sin in the faith of JESUS CHRIST (1:8-2:2).
- (2). By keeping GOD's commandments, (2:3-8).
- (3). Especially the commandment of love to the brethren (vv. 9-11).
- (4). This keeping of GOD's commandments is incompatible with the love of the world (vv. 15-17).
- (5). It is also incompatible with fellowship of false teachers (vv. 18-28).

Notice carefully how this last section corroborates the previous remarks concerning the nature of the heresies in John's time. Notice the peculiar title ascribed to CHRIST in verse 20.

- how does this verse and also verse 27 harmonize with such passages as John 15:6, and Acts 2:32, 33?

- what then is the unction believers have received from CHRIST?

### III. Second Cycle of Thought, 2:29-4:6

The second cycle centers around the thought that "**God is righteous**" (2:29), hence fellowship with GOD depends on doing righteousness.

It is interesting to observe that in the working out of the proposition that fellowship with GOD is to be maintained by doing righteousness, the apostle speaks of three distinct things:

(1). The motive for doing righteousness, viz: the hope we have through our sonship to GOD (3:1-10).

(2). The test of doing righteousness, viz: love to the brethren (3:11-18).

(3). The reward of doing righteousness, viz: assurance of salvation (3:19-4:6).

Referring more at length to what I have called the "motive," notice particularly that our sonship to GOD includes likeness to CHRIST in His manifested glory (v. 2).

Notice, too, that the evidence of the sonship is in a sense bound up with this expectation of His coming, and the holiness of living it begets (v. 3).

Verses 3-8 practically continue the thought of CHRIST's holiness, and His work on the cross to make it possible in our experience.

Verse 9, has presented difficulty to some, but it may be stated as a contribution to its consideration that the phrase "**whosoever is born of God**," is taken by many to refer only to the new nature in the believer which does not sin. Others again interpret the word "commit" in the sense of practice (compare Galatians 5:21).

It is one thing to fall temporarily into sin as a consequence of sudden and strong temptation, and it is another thing to practice it, i. e., to live in the continual performance of known transgression. This no regenerated man does or can do.

The teaching of this verse should always be carefully balanced with that of 1:8, where the apostle, be it remembered, is speaking to the very same persons as in the present instance.

Referring to the "test" of doing righteousness, it may impress some as peculiar that brotherly love should be insisted on again as in the case of walking in the light. But it will be found to have an equally prominent place in the third cycle of thought, thus stamping this Epistle as peculiarly the Epistle of love.

It speaks much of GOD's love toward us and our love toward Him, but singularly, either side of that truth with John always runs into the corresponding one of love towards one another in CHRIST. What a large place this last holds in the mind of GOD and in the Christian life! Notice

what hinders the flow of this love as indicated by verse 12. How watchful we should be over envy!

Notice its importance as demonstrating our spiritual condition in verse 14.

Notice the deeply spiritual application of the sixth commandment in verse 15.

Notice the very practical way in which this love should be demonstrated in verses 16-18.

Referring to the "reward" of righteousness as consisting in the assurance of salvation, I would call attention to the number of times and the different relations in which that word "know" is employed by the apostle.

This is the "assurance" Epistle all the way through as well as the Epistle of love, and it is more than a simple coincidence that these two things should go together. See how much assurance of salvation depends upon our having a good conscience and a warm heart in CHRIST (vv. 19-21). See, too, how that this assurance of salvation carries with it a corresponding assurance in prayer (vv. 22-24). Some Christians are ever asking how they may be sure that their prayers are heard. Here is the simple answer: Live the life of obedience to GOD in the faith of His Son JESUS CHRIST and dismiss all misgivings.

See, again, that this is the evidence of the abiding life in CHRIST (v. 24), and that just in the measure in which we are pleasing our Heavenly Father as JESUS did, will we receive the witness of the HOLY SPIRIT to that fact as He did. Finally the Christian who thus lives obediently has his assurance increased in the testimony to his overcoming of temptation. He will not be carried away by false doctrines or deceived by any Antichrist (4:1-6).

#### **IV. Third Cycle of Thought, 4:7-5:21**

- what is the third characteristic of GOD which John reveals (4:7, 8)?
- if, then GOD is love, how is fellowship to be maintained with Him (same verses)?

In the working out of the thought thus suggested, that fellowship with GOD is to be maintained by experiencing and exercising love, let us notice:

- (1) how His love was particularly manifested toward us (vv. 9, 10);
- (2) how our love towards Him should be manifested (vv. 11, 12);
- (3) how such love implies fellowship (vv. 13-16);
- (4) how it affects our spiritual life, begetting assurance, (vv. 17, 18);
- (5) how its absence destroys fellowship (vv. 19-21);
- (6) how that the experience and exercise of love is only another aspect of walking in the light and doing righteousness (5:1-4);
- (7) that the basis, and in a sense, the source of this love, is faith in CHRIST (vv. 5-12);
- (8) how many things we may thus know (vv. 13, 15, 18, 19,20).

~ end of Lesson 23 ~