

JOHN'S HISTORICISTIC
EPISTLES

by

Rev. Prof. Dr. Francis Nigel Lee

Dept. of Systematic Theology
Queensland Presbyterian Theological
College
Brisbane, Australia, 2000 A.D.

(extracted from a longer work)

John's Historicistic Epistles

Published by:



Lamp Trimmers

At midnight there was a cry...Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps.
(Matthew 25: 6,7)

Book Publishing Division of



3032 Park North Drive
El Paso, TX 79904
TEL/FAX: 1-888-238-9590

© Copyright September 2000

CHRIST PROPITIATES THE SINS OF THE WHOLE WORLD

First John 1:1 to 2:3

"If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ the righteous. And He is the Propitiation for our sins -- and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole World."⁵⁴⁹⁸

In this wonderful *Epistle*, John the Apostle wrote to Christians about the glory of the Lord Jesus. That is to be seen in the great scope and results of His atonement on the cross.

The date of this writing, is uncertain. It was probably inscripturated around or after A.D. 66.

First. John draws attention to the essential divinity of the Saviour. The Lord, he maintained, was "**from** the beginning"⁵⁴⁹⁹ -- yes, even "**in** the beginning" (as the Apostle had written also in his *Gospel*).⁵⁵⁰⁰ Therefore, He Himself was, and is, and ever shall be -- even from **before** the beginning.

Christ the Lord was, is, and always shall be also "the Word of Life."⁵⁵⁰¹ He was "with God" -- the living God -- from all eternity.⁵⁶⁰² Consequently, the Lord or Word Himself was; is; and ever shall be -- even very God of very God. For "the Word was God."⁵⁵⁰³

He Who always was "with the Father"⁵⁵⁰⁴ -- namely He Who was and is and always shall be the Father's co-eternal "Son"⁵⁵⁰⁵ -- was and is and always shall be able to bring 'human everlasting life' down to Earth and give it to His image man. He is able to do so, precisely because He Himself had always been **The Life** -- from all eternity⁵⁵⁰⁶ -- and always shall be.

As Calvin comments: "He speaks of the eternal deity of Christ; and also of the incomparable grace which He brought with Him when He was revealed to the World; and of all His benefits in general." Thus *The Theme* in his commentary titled *The First Epistle of John*.

On the very first verse of that epistle, Calvin further comments: "What we proclaim to you about the Word of Life, has been from the beginning -- and was openly shown to us.... The words 'that which was from the beginning' -- undoubtedly refer to Christ's **divinity**."

"For God was **not** manifested in the **flesh** from the **beginning**. But He Who always was Life and the eternal Word of God, appeared [later] in the fullness of time as man....

"He Who truly proved Himself to be the Son of God in the flesh, and was acknowledged to be the Son of God, was always God's invisible Word.... He does **not** refer here to the **beginning** of the **World** but goes **much further back**."

Second. John insists that the Lord had manifested Himself to humans as that eternal Life -- precisely so that those humans could in turn tell others about Him. "For **The** Life was manifested; and we have seen Him; and we bear witness and show to you that eternal Life Who was with the Father and Who was manifested to us."⁵⁵⁰⁷

Third. John insisted that the Lord had manifested Himself to the Apostles precisely in the **man** Christ Jesus. For "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father --- full of grace and truth."⁵⁵⁰⁸

Consequently, John hastened to draw his addressees' attention to the essential humanity of the Saviour as well. "He Who **was** from the beginning; Whom we have heard; Whom we have seen with our eyes; Whom we have looked upon, and our hands have handled -- concerning the Word of Life -- Him Whom we have seen and heard, we declare to you."⁵⁵⁰⁹

Fourth. The reason why the Apostle John was telling his addressees about the divinity and the humanity of the Lord Jesus, was so "that you too may have fellowship with us"⁵⁵⁰⁹ -- and so "that your joy may be full."⁵⁵¹⁰ Indeed, may the same be true also of all modern Christians!

Fifth. This fullness of joy could be obtained completely, by repenting of one's sins and believing on the Lord Jesus⁵⁵¹¹ as "the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the World."⁵⁵¹² For "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (which is the breaking of His Ten Commandments).⁵⁵¹³

No sin of a true believer was or is too vile to have been washed away on Calvary and forgiven by the Father. For "the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses true believers from all sin -- both the sins of their past, as well as all their present and future sins.

In addition, however, because that once-shed blood of Jesus shall never lose its power -- it even now **keeps on cleansing** true believers from all sin (alias the ongoing transgression of God's most holy Law).⁵⁵¹⁴ For "if any man

sin" or if anybody commits a sin -- we [Christians] have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous [Lawkeeper]; and He is the Propitiation [or the complete atoning Sacrifice] for our sins."⁵⁵¹⁵

Let it always be remembered what Jesus said when He died on the cross. As the only sin-bearer for the sins of His children, He then cried out: "It is finished!"⁵⁵¹⁶

Last. The Apostle assured His addressees that Jesus died not only for the sins of the Apostles and for the sins of those who believed in Him through the word of the Apostles. For Jesus died for the sins of **all** who believe in Him. Indeed, He died even for the sins of all who not yet believe in Him but who will yet repent and believe in Him.

Accordingly, "He is the Propitiation for our sins -- and not for ours only, but also for the sins of **the whole World**."⁵⁵¹⁷ For Jesus the eternal Son of God was no mere Son of **Judah** -- no mere tribal Saviour of the Jews alone. To the contrary. He was indeed the Second Adam alias the Son of **man** and the Saviour of the World⁵⁵¹⁸ -- the Saviour of all Nations everywhere.⁵⁵¹⁹ Indeed, the very ends of the Earth would yet turn to Him.⁵⁵²⁰

Jesus died for a **vast** multitude.⁵⁵²¹ Indeed, even if He had intended to redeem every single human being who ever lived and who ever shall live -- He would not have suffered any more than He did. Thus, the shedding of His most precious blood⁵⁵²² was certainly sufficient to save the entire human race.

But still more glorious. The shedding of His blood was and is not just sufficient. It is also **efficient**. Indeed, it effectively saves not just many of the Jewish Nation⁵⁵²³ but also many of the whole World⁵⁵¹⁷ -- namely that vast multitude from every Nation⁵⁵²⁴ for whom Christ died.

So, "if **any** man sin -- we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."⁵⁵¹⁵ For, as He Himself has said, "**all** that the Father gives Me, **shall** come to Me; and him who comes to me, I shall no way cast out."⁵⁵²⁵

So Jesus Christ is indeed "the propitiation...for the sins of the whole World."⁵⁴⁹⁸ This means, as the *Geneva Bible* comments, that Christ is the reconciliation "of them who have embraced the Gospel by faith in all ages, degrees, and places. For there is no salvation without Christ."

Calvin adds in his comment: "The expiation made by Christ extends to all who by faith embrace the Gospel.... John's purpose was only to make the blessing common to the

whole Church. Therefore, under the word 'all' [in the phrase 'for the sins of **all** the World' or 'the **whole** World'], he does not include the reprobate but refers to all who would believe and those who were scattered through various regions of the Earth. For, as is meet, the grace of Christ really is made clear -- when it is declared to be the only salvation of the World."

O Christian -- may we too, like the Apostle, show our glorious God-man Jesus Christ to all who would see and listen! Let us assure all who would hear that He indeed saves all who will confess Him -- saves them from their sins! For "He is the Propitiation for our sins -- and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole World."

Let us then go and tell the whole World about our all-cleansing Saviour! So on, then, Christian soldiers! Onward, to victory!

5498. I Jn. 2:1f. 5499. I Jn. 1:1. 5500. Jn. 1:1. 5501. Jn.
1:1f.
5502. Jn. 1:1 & 17:5,24. 5503. Jn. 1:1f. 5504. I Jn. 1:2-6. 5505.
I Jn. 1:3. 5506. Jn. 1:4 *cf.* 3:16 & 17:2f. 5507. I Jn. 1:2. 5508.
Jn. 1:14. 5509. I Jn. 1:1-3. 5510. I Jn. 1:4. 5511. Jn. 3:16,26.
5512. Jn. 1:29. 5513. I Jn. 1:9.
5514. I Jn. 1:7 *cf.* 3:4. 5515. I Jn. 2:1f. 5516. Jn. 19:30 *cf.* II
Cor. 5:21.
5517. I Jn. 2:2. 5518. Jn. 4:42. 5519. Mt. 28:19. 5520. Ps. 2:8 &
22:27f. 5521. Rev. 7:9,14. 5522. I Pet. 1:18f. 5523. Jn. 10:16.
5524. Jn. 7:35 *cf.* n. 5521. 5525. Jn. 6:37.

DARKNESS IS PAST; YOU BELIEVERS OVERCAME THE EVIL ONE

First John 2:3-29

"I have written to you, young men.... You are strong; and the Word of God keeps on abiding in you; and you have overcome the wicked one."⁵⁵²⁶

It had just been stated with confidence that the blood of Christ is sufficient to take away the sins of the whole World.⁵⁵²⁷ So next, the Apostle John went on to explain -- how believers could have victory over all their troubles in this present World, here and now.

First. We are told to "keep His Commandments" if we really desire "to know Him."⁵⁵²⁸ For "he who says 'I know Him' but does not keep His Commandments -- is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whosoever keeps His Word -- in him is the love of God truly perfected."⁵⁵²⁹

We are to be "perfected" or progressively sanctified throughout this life until (after our death) we acquire complete sinlessness. This is why we are to keep the Commandments of Christ or the Ten Commandments of the Decalogue⁵⁵³⁰ especially after we have been justified by God's grace alone.⁵⁵³¹

As Calvin comments: "They by no means know God who do not keep His Com-mandments." Here the Apostle John "does not mean that those who wholly satisfy the Law keep His Commandments (for no such instance can be found in the World) -- but those who **strive**, according to the capacity of human infirmity, to form their life in obedience to God.... Christ now -- only prescribes under the Gospel, the same rule of life as God had done under the Law. This is certainly most true."

Also the *Geneva Bible* makes a similar assessment. For here it comments: "'Love your neighbour as yourself' is the old Commandment taught in the Law."

Second. It is precisely by their keeping of God's Commandments that all Christians are to gain the ascendancy over the World. The man Christ Jesus kept the Commandments of God. As the Light of the World,⁵⁵³² He overcame the powers of darkness which could not comprehend or extinguish Him.⁵⁵³³ Similarly, if by God's grace we Christians too will try to keep the Commandments -- we also will more and more shine forth like lights in dark places⁵⁵³⁴ and thus ourselves ultimately overcome the darkness.⁵⁵³⁵

This is why John wrote: "Again, a new Commandment I write to you. This thing is true in Him and in you -- because **the darkness is past** and **now the true Light keeps on shining.**"⁵⁵³⁶ For Christ the Sun of righteousness had not only now come into the World at His incarnation. Perhaps even more remarkably -- thereafter He had arisen from the dead with healing in His wings.

On that basis, we ourselves, as regenerated children of God, are to rise from the death of sin. For how **could** this once-dismal World ever be the same again -- after **Christ** the Sun of righteousness had risen from the dead? For at that event, the darkness of the World is **past**.

As Calvin comments: "As soon as Christ shines we have the full brightness of understanding. Not that every believer is as wise from the first day as he ought to be.... **Daily progress** is necessary. Every man's faith has its **dawn** before it gets to **noonday**. But since God keeps on with the same teaching in which He bids us **advance**, the knowledge of the Gospel is justly said to be the true light -- where Christ, the Sun of righteousness, **keeps on shining.**"

Third. When Christians keep God's Commandments, they become strong Christians and overcome the World and even the Devil. "I am writing to you, young men, because...**you have overcome the wicked one....** I have written to you, young men, because: **you are strong**; and the Word of God keeps on abiding in you; and **you have overcome the wicked one.**"⁵⁵³⁷

Notice that the **victory** is not only repeatedly emphasized here, but also that it is spoken of as being in the **past** tense. It is **not** just that we **shall** overcome the Devil **only** when he is ultimately cast into the lake of fire.⁵⁵³⁸ It is rather that we **have** overcome him -- by keeping God's Commandments on the basis of the already-finished atonement of Christ.

As Calvin comments, John here "says that they who were **still** engaged in fighting -- **had** conquered.... We are conquerors **before** we encounter the enemy. For our Head, Christ, **has** overcome the whole World for us -- once and for **all.**"

Fourth. We Christians would accordingly be foolish indeed to love the worldly things with which the defeated Devil amuses his human slaves. For the World of **worldliness** has been in the slow process of passing away -- ever since our Lord Christ's victory at Calvary where He overcame the World.⁵⁵³⁹

This does not, of course, mean that we should not love the ('un-worldly' and **God-created**) **World-as-such**. For God

so loved the World, that He gave His Only-begotten Son"⁵⁵⁴⁰ as "the Saviour of the World"⁵⁵⁴¹ to die "for our sins -- and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole World."⁵⁵⁴² And if God so loved the World -- **we too** should so love it!

What we **are** to detest, however, are the worldly desires of **sinful** human nature⁵⁵⁴³ -- as opposed to the legitimate desires of God-fearing and regenerate human nature **as such**.⁵⁵⁴⁴ The latter, of course, abides for ever.⁵⁵⁴⁵ Indeed, it will -- like our God--created World-as-such⁵⁵⁴⁶ -- never be destroyed.⁵⁵⁴⁷ Yet the **sinful** fashion of our **present** World, will perish.⁵⁵⁴⁸

This is why John wrote: "**Do not love 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. For all that is in the World -- the **lust** of the **flesh**, and the lust of the **eyes** and the **pride** of life -- is not of the Father but is of the World. And the World passes away, and its **lust**. But he who keeps on doing the will of God, **keeps on abiding for ever**."⁵⁵⁴⁸

What we are **not** to love, then, is the **sinful** 'World.' As the *Geneva Bible* comments, this means the World "as it is **adversary** to God."

Similarly, also Calvin comments: "By 'the World' -- understand whatever concerns the present life, when it is **separated** from God's Kingdom and the **hope** of eternal life! ... I have already said that this refers to an irreligious way of life, which has nothing in common with God's Kingdom." Indeed, God's Kingdom is being manifested here and now where Christ is being obeyed -- in this very World of ours and of God's, which God so loved.

Fifth. Inasmuch as God's children will outlast the passing away of all worldliness, they will also outlast and overcome all antichristian elements in this World. For "antichrist" is not an all-powerful person yet to come. To the contrary, it is merely an evil **influence** -- working through **many** persons.

Indeed, "antichrist" -- viz. the influence or the "spirit of antichrist" -- was at work **even in John's own day**. For, as the Apostle **then** wrote: "Even **now** there are many antichrists."⁵⁵⁴⁹ Consequently, there is no such a person as "**The** Antichrist."

For "antichrist" is not a modern and still less a yet-future entity. Far from being a personal international dictator wrongly expected soon to crush Christ's Church -- and also far from being even just the "worldly World" only at the very **end** of man's history -- "antichrist" is merely

the 'spirit' of the already-defeated Devil, during the **first**-century A.D. (and also during every subsequently century right down till today).

Now during that first century A.D., the Satanic spirit was at work in those many ancient people who then feebly opposed the victorious onslaught of Christianity -- while the People of God were (and still are) proceeding to overcome the World. Indeed, that spirit of antichrist **could** appear **only** in "the **last** time"⁵⁵⁴⁹ -- namely "the last days" in which Christ Himself had appeared.

For antichrist's only claim to fame was and is to be "anti-**Christ**" or 'opposed to **Christ**[-ianity]' -- so that Jesus Christ would obviously first have to appear at His incarnation, before being able to be opposed by "**anti-Christ**." This is why the prophecies of the Older Testament and Jesus Himself had forecast that "antichrist" would come only **after** the incarnation.⁵⁵⁵⁰

Nor is "antichrist" a **specific** person. There is only one Christ -- the truly-anointed One -- viz. the personal Jesus. Yet "even now" during that first century A.D., wrote John, "there are **many** antichrists. Thereby we know that it **is** the last time" -- which started with Christ's incarnation and resurrection in the same generation as the 70 A.D. destruction of Jerusalem.⁵⁵⁵¹

The Apostle John added about those antichrists: "They went out **from** us" (meaning either from us Apostles, or from us Christians). The apostate Apostle Judas went out from among the Apostles, in much the same way as the apostate Pope would later go forth from among the other Bishops. Other apostates like Simon the Sorcerer went forth from among the Christians -- in a similar manner to the way in which the Christ-hating first-century Judaists went out from among the Older Testament's People of God as the true spiritual ancestor of the Newer Testament's Christian Church.

Indeed, the true religion of the Older Testament then continued and even now yet continues only among the Hebrew Christians and the Gentile Christians in the Christian Church. For the latter alone is the one and only true heir to the true religion of the Older Testament.

Now it was this true religion of the Older Testament from which even the first-century A.D. judaistic antichrists departed. Said the Hebrew-Christian John: "They were **not of** us. For if they **had** been **of** us, they would no doubt have **continued with** us."

That is, they would have continued to remain together with all the Hebrew Christians like John. They would then not have been broken off -- but rather have remained on, and in, the Older Testament's olive-tree which grew into the Newer Testament's Church.⁵⁵⁵³ "But they went out, so that they might be manifest⁵⁵⁵⁴ that **all** of them were **not of** us."⁵⁵⁵⁵

Indeed, this was true not only of the apostate Judaists who had now been broken off of the Older Testament's olive-tree. It was true also of apostate Hebrew Church Members like Judas, as well as apostate Gentile Church Members like Simon the Sorcerer -- who had subsequently repudiated Christianity.

At this point, let us note some important remarks on the Apostle John's "anti-christs." Comments Calvin: "**Already** various sects had arisen.... The Apostle not only **arms believers** lest they should waver, but turns it all to another end. He tells them that **the last time** had **already** come, and therefore exhorts them to greater vigilance -- as if he had said 'When various errors crop up, you must **be aroused not overwhelmed**....

"**We today** must similarly bestir ourselves.... Under the **Papacy**, there is nothing more well-known and common, than the '**future**' [?!] coming of **Antichrist**. And yet they [the Papists] are so dull that they do not see that **his** tyranny **is** exercised over **them!** Indeed, entirely the same thing happens to them -- as to **the Jews**.... The **Papists** have **imagined** an **Antichrist** who **is** to harass the Church for three and a half years. All the marks by which the Spirit of God has pointed out Antichrist, **appear clearly** in the **Pope.**"

Sixth. Dr. Luther (in the Weimer edition of his *Works* 53:549) believed that "the Pope and the Turk, are no doubt the true Antichrist" -- in the **broader** sense of that word. Against such -- "Daniel (11:36), Christ [Matthew 24:24-26], Paul [Second Thessalonians 2:4f], **John** [**First John 2:18**] and other Apostles [cf. James 4:1-5 & Jude 4-11] have warned."

First John 2:22 declares: "Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He who denies the Father and the Son, is antichrist." Very significantly, there is no **Fatherhood** of God in the Moslems' Allah -- and Islam denies also that Jesus Christ is the **Son** of God. As Luther comments on this verse: "What [the Judaistic] Ebion began, Mohammed continued. Thus, all the throngs of heretics...rise up against Christ.... But to John, they are all liars."

In his *Lectures on First John* (2:18 & 4:3), Luther stated that "the true antichrist...opposes the whole Christ; and he is the head of all, as the papacy is.... Justification through Christ gradually came to be regarded as worthless, and the antichrist appeared. Now he is sitting in the holy place (cf. 2 Thess. 2:4).... No one has filled the ranks of the antichrist so craftily and so astutely as the pope has done....

"The kingdom of the pope...grew gradually, until the pope exalted himself above the Kingdom of Christ.... In that [papal] place, one finds the unadulterated kingdom of antichrist.... 'He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god,' as II Thess. 2:4 says.... The antichrist himself is already present in the world!"

Seventh. In Calvin's 1551 *Commentary on the First Epistle of John* (2:18-23) -- on the first century A.D.'s Apostle John's words "even now many antichrists have arisen" -- the genius of Geneva comments that "already [in John's own time] various sects had arisen.... Many ages...have passed away since John's death.... He fixed no date, and did not dupe the men of his age with an empty hope; nor did he mean to curtail the future course of the Church and the many successions of years during which the Church has lasted in the World.... Believers had been taught and warned from the beginning about the future scattering of the Church; both so that they might keep themselves carefully in the faith they professed, and also instruct future generations to beware....

"Under the Papacy there is nothing more well-known and common, that the [yet] future coming of Antichrist. And yet they [the Papists] are so dull that they do not see that his tyranny is exercised over them! Indeed, entirely the same thing happens to them, as to the Jews.... The Papists have imagined an Antichrist who is to harass the Church for three and a half years. [But] all the marks by which the Spirit of God has pointed out Antichrist -- appear clearly in the Pope.... Those who think that he would be just one man, are dreaming!

"For Paul, referring to a future falling away, plainly shows that it would be a body or a kingdom (Second Thessalonians 2:3). He first foretells a falling away that would spread throughout the whole Church, as a sort of universal evil. Then he makes the head of this apostasy the adversary of Christ, who would sit in God's Temple and claim...divine honours.

"Unless we deliberately want to err, let us learn to know Antichrist from Paul's description! I have already explained that passage [see Calvin's *Commentary on Second*

Thessalonians 2:3f]. It is enough now to touch on it by the way....

"But how does that passage agree with **John's** words, when he says that there were **already** many antichrists? I reply that John only meant that certain sects had already arisen, which were **fore-runners** of a [then-]**future** scattering. For Cerinthus, Basilides, Marcion, Valentinus, Ebion[ites], **Arius** and the rest -- were members of that kingdom which the devil **afterwards** raised up against Christ.... 'This is antichrist'.... He puts all who try to overthrow Christ -- among that wicked band.... It follows that **Turks [or Moslems], Jews [alias Judaists], and suchlike** -- have a mere **idol in place of God**" -- a **unitarian idol** in place of **the Triune God 'Elohiym** of both **the Older and the Newer Testament of the infallible Word of the Father-Son-Spirit!**

Eighth. Here the spirit of antichrist, then, is in the first place the spirit of Christ-repudiating Judaism and the Christ-maligning Gentile apostasy. This refers here especially to that of the **first** century A.D. or **anno Domini** -- '**after the Lord**' (viz. Jesus) commenced the years of His earthly reign.

The spirit of antichrist does (of course) include also the anti-christ-ian spirit of **heathen Rome**, as well as the anti-christ-ian spirit of **heathen Greek philosophical Gnosticism** which opposed the Christian Church. And it also applies to the anti-christ-ian spirit of the modern Papacy, Spiritism, Islam, Communism and Socialism etc.

All of these in varying degrees denied or deny God's Trinity and the Deity of Christ⁵⁵⁵⁶ or the exclusive Messiahship of Jesus⁵⁵⁵⁷ or the incarnation of the Son of God.⁵⁵⁵⁸ For "who is a liar, but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? **He is antichrist -- that denies the Father and the Son.** Whomsoever denies the Son, the same has not the Father."⁵⁵⁵⁹

Rightly comments the *Geneva Bible* that this Johannine Antichrist occupies a place **in the Church** (cf. **the Romish Papacy**). Furthermore: it "diminishes either nature of Christ; or confounds them; or denies Christ **alone** saves by His **only** sacrifice" painfully completed on Calvary (as too does the so-called painless sacrifice alleged to occur ongoingly in the **Romish Mass**). Certainly many of the Patristic Fathers saw this as an **intra-ecclesiastical** apostasy from the truth; many of the Mediaeval Scholars saw this as **the Pope of Rome**; and **all** authentic Protestants have always made that identification.⁵⁵⁵⁹

Ninth. The Johannine Antichrist was regarded as

"apostasy" by Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Augustine, Primasius, Gregory the Great, and Haymo. The Johannine Antichrist was regarded preeminently as the "Papacy" by Robert Greathead, Joachim, P.J. d'Olivi, Ubertino of Casale, Eberhard of Salzburg, the Waldensians, Michael of Cesena, John of Rupeccissa, John Milicz, John Wycliffe, John Purvey, Water Brute, John Huss, and Savonarola.

This is the position also of every Protestant Reformer and every single authentic post-reformational Protestant without exception. Thus for example: Luther, Melancthon, Osiander, Amsdorff, Funck, Virgil Solis, Nigrinus, Chytraeus, Oecolampadius, Bullinger, Ridley, Latimer, Cranmer, Bale, Jewel, Calvin, Knox, Napier, Brightman, Pareus, Downham, James I, Mede, More, all the divines of the Westminster Assembly, Tillinghast, Sherwin, Jurieu, Cocceius, Fleming, Sir Isaac Newton, Lowth, Bishop Thomas Newton, Fletcher, Bengel, Petri, Willison, Brown, and Fairbairn etc.

Rev. Prof. Dr. Hengstenberg comments that First John "expressly states, in ch. 2:18, that the Antichrist is an 'ideal' person to be realized in a multitude of individuals, compare [I John 2] v. 22; 4:3; II John ver. 7... The New Testament elsewhere also knows nothing of a personal antichrist." For the Antichrist is preeminently not just one particular pope -- it is the whole series of popes alias the Papacy as such.

Last. Christianity, however, would overcome the unfaithful spirit of Antichrist. For the several true Members of the Christian Church all have the Holy Spirit and thus jointly understand all things necessary for magnifying the Saviour.⁵⁵⁶⁰

"You have an unction [or an anointing] from the Holy One; and you know **all** things."⁵⁵⁶¹ For "these things I have written to you concerning **them** who seduce you"⁵⁵⁵² -- namely especially the first-century-A.D. antichrists, that would lead you first-century-A.D. Christians astray from Christ.

"But the anointing which you have received from Him, **abides in you**; and you do not need that any **man** teach you! But as the same anointing teaches you about **all** things; and is truth; and is no lie -- even as it has taught you, **you shall keep on abiding in Him**.

"And now, little children, **keep on abiding in Him** -- so that, when He shall appear, we may have **confidence**, and not be ashamed before Him... Because **greater** is He [the Holy Spirit] Who is in you, than he [the spirit of antichrist] that is in the World."⁵⁵⁶³

By faith in the Lord Jesus, Christians have risen above all the demonic spirits of antichrist. "You are from God, little children -- **and have overcome them.**"⁵⁵⁶³

O Christian -- let us too have **confidence** in the abiding power of the Holy Spirit indwelling the Christian Church even today! Let us experience that spiritual power to overcome all of our present-day antichrists (such as Islam, the Papacy, Socialism, and Humanism). For even all of these modern antichrists are predestined to fade into the darkness of the past.

They too, just like their predecessors, shall ultimately fail in their futile opposition to the ever-increasing light of Christianity still being spread futher and further abroad throughout an ever-increasing number of lands and Nations. For Christian fathers and young men and children have **overcome** the wicked one. They keep on doing this. And they and we too must and shall keep on continuing to do so.

So on, then, Christian soldiers! Onward, to victory!

-
5526. I Jn. 2:14. 5527. Cf. our study for Nov. 24. 5528. I Jn. 2:3.
5529. I Jn. 2:3-7. 5530. Cf. I Jn. 2:7-9; 3:15,12,4,22.
5531. Gal. 3:13-24; Rom. 3:28,31. 5532. Jn. 8:12. 5533. Jn. 1:5,9.
5534. Phil. 2:15. 5535. Rom. 13:11f; Jn. 8:12. 5536. I Jn. 2:8.
5537. I Jn. 3:13f. 5538. Rev. 19:20. 5539. Jn. 16:33; 19:30.
5540. Jn. 3:16. 5541. Jn. 4:42. 5542. I Jn. 2:2. 5543. Gal.
5:16f & Col. 2:20.
5544. I Tim. 4:1-5; I Cor. ch. 8 & 10:23-31; Tit. 1:15; Heb. 13:4.
5545. I Jn. 3:2; Rev. 22:2. 5546. Gen. 1:31; Eph. 3:21; Rev. chs. 21 & 22.
5547. I Jn. 2:15-17. 5548. I Cor. 7:31; II Pet. 3:10-13.
5549. I Jn. 2:18 cf. too vv. 19 & 22; 4:1-6, esp. v. 3; Mt. 24:5,11; Acts 5:29-
39 and esp.
vv. 35-37. See E.W. Hengstenberg's *The Revelation of St. John*, Mack,
Cherry Hill N.J., 1972 rep., II pp. 87 & 203f.
5550. Dan. 7:27; 2:40-44,35; 9:25-27; 11:30f & 12:1f & n. 5551.
5551. I Jn. 2:18 cf. Mt. 23:37 to 24:1-3,5,11,15,28.
5552. Mt. 15:1-9; Rom. 2:28f; 6:16; Rev. 2:9 & 3:9. 5553. Rom.
11:15,17,19f.
5554. I Jn. 2:19. 5555. I Jn. 2:18-22, esp. v. 19's *hoti ouk eisin pantes*
ex heemoon.
5556. Jn. 1:1-5; 8:37-39, esp. v. 58; 10:30-39; chs. 14-16; cf. I Jn. 1:1f;
2:20-27; 3:20,24; 4:1-4,13-15; 5:5-8 cf. Mt. 28:19; I Jn. 5:12,20f.
5557. Jn. 5:43-48; 7:40-52. 5558. Mt. 26:63-66; I Jn. 4:2f; II Jn. 7.
5559. I Jn. 2:22f. 5560. Jn. 14:16f,26; 15:26f; 16:7-15. 5561. I Jn.
2:20 cf. n. 5560. 5562. I Jn. 2:26. 5563. I Jn. 2:27f cf. 4:4.
-

SON OF GOD MANIFESTED TO DESTROY THE WORKS OF THE DEVIL

First John 3

"Whosoever keeps on committing sin, is of the Devil. For the Devil keeps on sinning from the beginning. For this purpose, the Son of God was manifested -- so that He might destroy the works of the Devil."⁵⁵⁶⁴

In this third chapter of his epistle, the Apostle John describes the need to live a holy Christian life. He does so, in order to stress the utter necessity of Christians gaining the victory right here on Earth -- and now.

First. We are told that we must constantly keep on purifying ourselves. This must be done, because Christ the Son of man is pure -- and because His Father has already adopted us as His sons of God, in order that we may become like the Son of man.

There is to be continual **progress** in our sanctification, down through the future. For the future will ultimately result in the glorious appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ at His final coming.

At that time, we shall be "like Him" -- as regards His human nature. Inasmuch as He is pure (both now and when He comes again) -- we too are to keep on purifying ourselves (both now and later) so as to be ready to meet Him.⁵⁵⁶⁵

"Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us -- that we should be called the sons of God! ... Beloved, now we are the sons of God. And it does not yet appear what we shall be.

"But we know that, when He (**the** Son of man Jesus Christ) shall [again] appear, we **shall be like Him**. For we shall see Him as He is. And every man that has this hope in Him, keeps on purifying Himself even as He is pure."⁵⁵⁶⁶

Second. It is precisely by continuing to keep the Law of God or the Ten Commandments (through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit) that we are to keep on purifying ourselves. "Whosoever keeps on committing sin, also keeps on transgressing the Law. For sin is the transgression of the Law....

"Little children, let nobody deceive you! He that keeps on doing righteousness, is **righteous** -- even as **He is righteous**.... Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And why did he slay him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's **righteous**....

"Whosoever keeps on hating his brother, is a murderer. And you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in **him**.... And whatsoever we ask, we receive from Him -- **because we continue to keep His Commandments** and keep on doing those things that are pleasing in His sight.... And **he who continues to keep His Commandments** -- keeps on dwelling in Him; and He [viz. God through His Holy Spirit Who indwells believers] keeps on dwelling in him."⁵⁵⁶⁷

Comments Calvin: "Iniquity or transgression of the Law cannot be overlooked so easily.... He simply wants to teach us that sin comes from contempt of God, and that by sinning the righteousness of the Law is violated.... The perverse life of those who indulge themselves in the licence of sinning, is hateful to God and is unendurable to Him -- because it is against His Law....

"Believers," however, "want to submit to God.... They abhor their own vices even in individual offences, and they also compose their life so far as they can to the obedience of the Law."

Third. We are able to purify ourselves and to try to keep God's Commandments precisely because Christ the Son of man lived a pure life. He kept all those Commandments for us; He died for our breach of those Commandments; and He graciously **imputes** His own human Commandment-keeping to us - - **as if His Own** Commandment-keeping were in fact **our** very own Commandment-keeping.

"You know that He was manifested to take away our sins. And in Him, is no sin.... Hereby we perceive the love of God -- because He laid down His life for us.... Whosoever **keeps on** committing sin, is of the Devil. For the Devil keeps on sinning from the beginning. For this purpose, the Son of God was manifested -- so that He might destroy the works of the Devil."⁵⁵⁶⁸

Declares the Apostle John, no doubt here referring principally to Jesus: "He Who keeps on doing righteousness, is righteous.... The Son of God was manifested -- so that He might destroy the works of the Devil."⁵⁵⁶⁸

Comments Calvin: "The Apostle here teaches that newness of life is shown by good works.... He denies that any[one] belongs to Christ, save he who is righteous and shows himself so by his actions. He now banishes all the others to the fellowship of the Devil, and puts them under his government -- so that we may know that there is no middle course, but that Satan exercises his tyranny where Christ's righteousness is not supreme."

Fifth. The true believers have already died to their old evil nature, and they have already been brought back to spiritual life by the implantation of the divine seed of the new nature.⁵⁵⁷⁰ Accordingly, they should love one another -- even as Jesus loved them.

For "we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.... For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should keep on loving one another.... We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. Yet whosoever has worldly goods, and sees his brother having need, but shuts up his inward compassion from him -- how does the love of God dwell in **him**?

"My little children, let us not love in word neither in tongue [alone]; but [also] in deed and in truth! ... And this is His Commandment -- that we should believe in the Name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another -- as He gave us a command."⁵⁵⁷⁸

Finally. Such Christian dedication and love will bear fruit. For the true believers will progressively receive the absolute conviction that they are on the winning team. They will become more and more convinced that in spite of all opposition, Christianity is undefeatable in its constant expansion in this World of ours -- here and now.

For "hereby we know that He keeps on abiding in us -- by the Spirit Which He has given us."⁵⁵⁷⁹ And that Spirit shall continue to abide with us for ever.⁵⁵⁸⁰

Indeed, "hereby we know that we are of the truth -- and shall keep on assuring our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us -- then we have confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive from Him -- because **we keep His Commandments**, and **continue to do** those things that are pleasing in His sight."⁵⁵⁸¹

Now, comments Calvin, "when he [John] says 'because we keep His Commandments' -- the Apostle 'is only teaching that godliness and the sincere worship of God cannot be separated from faith.... Here, he does not commend love alone, as before -- but joins it to faith as a companion and handmaid.... Where fear and reverence for God do not reign, God will not hear us.... He does not separate faith from love -- but demands of us that both, as it were mutually, should embrace one another."

O Christian, let us then **know** that God abides in the Christian for ever -- by virtue of His indwelling Holy Spirit! Let us boldly and believingly ask Him not for all

we want but indeed for all we need! And that He will surely give us, if we continue to keep His Commandments!

Let us be **assured** that God is **greater** than our own unstable heart -- so that we can always have **confidence** toward Him! And may we **know** that we **have** already passed from death into life eternal -- even as we constantly **purify** ourselves, as we busily work until the sure and ultimate coming of the Lord!

So on, then, Christian soldiers! Onward, to victory!

5564. I Jn. 3:8. 5565. I Cor. 15:51-53,58; I Th. 5:23. 5566. I Jn.
3:1-3.
5567. I Jn. 3:4,7,12,15,22,24. 5568. I Jn. 3:5-8,16. 5569. Gen. 3:16;
Heb. 2:9-14. 5570. I Jn. 3:6,9 & cf. too I Pet. 1:4.
5571. I Jn. 1:8 cf. Jas. 3:1-2,8 & Rom. ch. 7 & Phil. ch. 3. 5572. Mt.
5:43-48; I Jn. 2:1. 5573. Rom. 7:20,22; Gal. 5:16-22f; Eph. 4:24f; Col.
3:10f.
5574. Rom. 7:14,18-21-25; Gal. 5:16-21; Eph. 4:22,25f; Col. 3:5-8.
5575. Rom. 6:2-4; Gal. 2:20. 5576. I Cor. 9:27; Phil. 3:12f.
5577. Cf. nn. 5565f & 5571. 5578. I Jn. 3:8-10,14-18,23. 5579. I Jn.
3:24.
5580. Jn. 14:16 cf. I Jn. 2:20,27. 5581. I Jn. 3:19-22.

FATHER SENT HIS SON TO BECOME THE SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD

First John 4

"Every spirit that keeps on confessing that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh -- is of God. But every spirit that does not keep on confessing that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh -- is not of God. And this is that spirit of antichrist -- of which you have heard that it would come, and is even now already in the World. You are of God, little children, and have overcome them. Because greater is He Who is in you, than he that is in the World.... And we have seen and do keep on testifying -- that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the World."⁵⁵⁸²

John explained the great confidence with which true believers should live in the World -- even when they are surrounded by much sin and many opponents.

Next, he went on to tell them that they could also fearlessly and lovingly expect to triumph over all antichristian influences. For they had **already** done so -- in principle.

First. The Christians of John's day (and, of course, modern Christians too) -- were to be on their guard against all antichristian influences. They were to test the views of all would-be religious leaders, in the light of the doctrines of the Apostles. For they were to make very sure that each of those would-be religious leaders were not among the many false-prophets that would certainly arise. Indeed, the mark of such false-prophets -- inspired by the antichristian spirit -- is their adamant refusal to proclaim or even to listen to the true message of Christianity.

"Beloved," enjoins John on behalf of all of the Apostles, "do not believe every spirit! But test the spirits -- whether they are from God! Because many false-prophets have gone out into the World.... We are from God. He who knows God, listens to us. He who is not from God, does not listen to us. Hereby we know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error."⁵⁵⁸³

Second, John describes the central teachings of Christianity -- which all of the various antichristian false-prophets reject. These central teachings are the firm revelations: of God's Trinity; of the Deity of the Lord Jesus; of the incarnation of the Son of God; and of the Messiahship of Jesus.⁵⁵⁸⁴

"Hereby you know the Spirit of God. Every spirit [including every human being] that keeps on confessing that

Jesus Christ has come in the flesh -- is of God. But every spirit [including every human being] that does not keep on confessing that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh - is not of God.

"Now this is that spirit of antichrist -- of which you have heard that it would come and is even now already in the World. You are of God, little children, and have overcome them" -- have overcome those who are under the influence of the spirit of antichrist. "Because greater is He Who is in you, than he that is in the World."⁵⁵⁸⁶

In First John 4:3-6, then that Apostle warns Christians against "**the spirit of the antichrist**.... We know the spirit of truth -- and the spirit of error!"

Comments Luther in his *Collected Works* (XVIII:1583): "I know, however, and am certain -- that our Lord Jesus Christ still lives and reigns. In that knowledge and with that comfort, I therefore defy and shall not fear even a thousand **popes**. 'For greater is He Who is in you -- than he that is in the world!' [I John 4:4]."

There, also Calvin comments: "Today, **Papists** boast with professorial superciliousness that all their inventions are the oracles of the Spirit. **Mohammed too asserts that he has drawn his dreams only from Heaven** [cf. Deuteronomy 13:15 & 18:10-22].... Hence, when **false spirits claim the Name of God** -- we must enquire from the Scriptures whether it is as they say.

"So long as we use godly care, with humility and modesty, the Spirit of discernment will be with us.... As a faithful Interpreter, He will expound what He Himself speaks in Scripture!"

Now we should **charitably cooperate** with **every** single spirit that is *bona fide*, and with all religious groups of people that uphold the abovementioned fundamental Christian beliefs -- even though they might not be of our own denomination or theological persuasion. But we should also **stoutly oppose** each and **every** spirit which attacks any of the above-mentioned fundamental Christian beliefs, even when such a spirit arises within our own denomination or intimate circle of friends or relatives. For all such anti-christian spirits have a thoroughly worldly message, so that worldlings just as eagerly listen to them as true Christians do not.

"They are worldly. Therefore they keep on speaking about the World; and worldlings keep on listening to them."

However, adds John on behalf of all the Apostles: "We are from God. He who knows God, listens to us. He who is not from God, does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth -- and the spirit of error."⁵⁵⁸⁷

Comments Calvin: "We have already said that the doctrine of the kingdom of the antichrist was notorious and well-known.... The Apostle now says that **all** who detract from Christ, are members of that kingdom.... The spirit of antichrist... 'is already' in the World.... It was already in the World, because it **performed** the mystery of its iniquity"⁵⁵⁸⁶ in denying one or more of the central teachings of the Christian Faith.

The Apostle "had spoken of one antichrist. Now he mentions many. But the plural refers to **false-prophets** -- who had **already** come forth before their head appeared.

"The Apostle's aim was to encourage believers to **resist** impostors bravely and undauntedly.... Although they have to fight, he says that they **had conquered** -- because they **would** be successful. It is as if he said that in the midst of the battle, they were already out of danger -- for they would be **victorious**....

"Whatever contests we may have against the flesh and worldliness, **certain victory** accompanies us. Indeed, hard and fierce struggles await us one after another. But as we fight by Christ's power and are armed with God's weapons in fighting and striving -- **we are victorious!**"⁵⁵⁸⁷ Thus Calvin.

Third. Christians were and are and always shall be **more** powerful -- than the antichristian spirits (whether diabolical or human). This is so, because the Holy Spirit Who indwells Christians, is always **greater** than each and all of the unholy spirits who either influence or indwell all of the antichristian false-prophets. Consequently, Christians -- indwelt by the Holy Spirit -- have, and do, and always shall, **overcome** all anti-christian false-prophets either influenced or indwelt by an unholy spirit or spirits alias demons.

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits whether they are from God. Because many false-prophets have gone out into the World.

"Hereby you know the Spirit of God. Every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is from God. And every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is not from God. And this is that spirit of antichrist."⁵⁵⁸⁸

So Christians are to try or to **test** the spirits alias all "them who boast that they have the Spirit to preach or prophesy" -- comments the *Geneva Bible*. It adds that a true 'prophet' untainted by an evil spirit will always confess Jesus Christ is "**very** God" -- and that He also "took **our** flesh" upon Himself. A 'prophet' who does **not** profess this about Jesus Christ, is either influenced or indwelt by the spirit of antichrist.

Such spirit of antichrist, comments the *Dordt Dutch Bible*, "conflicts with the truth of the Person and Office of Christ." Rev. Dr. Adam Clarke comments this includes "all opponents of Christ's incarnation -- and so too of His passion, death and Resurrection and the benefits to be derived from them" -- namely "in the persons of these false-prophets."

Now such spirits and such false-prophets were "even now already...in the World" -- namely at the time the Apostle John was writing this. Yet they all foreshadowed a constant **increase** -- even till the **Romish Papacy** would **deny the finality** of Jesus Christ's **incarnation**, with its own **false doctrine of the frequentative reenactment of the Romish Mass**.

Comments Dr. Calvin on the spirit of antichrist: "It was already in the World...because it performed the mystery of iniquity." To which the *Geneva Bible* adds: "He **began** to build the mystery of iniquity" -- which would later **culminate** in the Papal Mass.

Continues the Apostle John, addressing true Christians: "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them [the antichristian spirits]. Because greater is He [the Holy Spirit] Who is in you, than he [meaning any of the unholy antichristian spirits] that is in the World."⁵⁵⁸⁸

Comments Calvin: "'Greater' -- i.e. stronger -- is He Who is in you, than he who is in the World... The Apostle tells us that we are strong -- not by our own power, but by God's. From this, he concludes that **we can no more be conquered -- than can God Himself**, Who has armed us with His Own power.... **Victory is certain!**"⁵⁵⁸⁸

Fourth, Christians (indwelt by the Holy Spirit) have in principle already overcome all the many antichristian spirits which either influence or indwell the World and the worldlings. So Christians have nothing to fear from the World's false-prophets. Indeed, the days of the latter are clearly numbered. The handwriting is clearly on the wall for them, in the face of the incessant **Christian advance** throughout the World -- albeit from only small beginnings, and sometimes indeed at a rather slow pace.

"Herein has our love been consummated -- so that we may have boldness in the Day of Judgment. Because as **He** is, so are **we** in this World. There is no fear in love. But consummate love **casts out** fear, because fear has torment. He who fears, has not been consummated in love."⁵⁵⁸⁹

Let us too be bold and fearless -- even today! Then, while yet here "in this World"⁵⁵⁸⁹ -- we will love the Lord, and love one another. Indeed, we should love even unbelievers (as God's creatures) -- while fervently desiring and working for their conversion according to the will of God.

Fifth. Proceeding from the last point, it is particularly by **love** that the Gospel message is to expand. "**Beloved**, let us **love** one another! For **love** is from God. And every one who **loves** -- has been born of God, and **knows** God. He who does not **love**, does not **know** God. For **God is love**. In this was the **love** of God manifested toward us, because God sent His only-begotten Son into the World so that we might live through Him.

"Herein is **love** -- not that we **loved** God, but that He **loved** us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. **Beloved**, if God so **loved** us -- we ought also to **love** one another....

"If we **love** one another, God dwells in us, and His **love** is consummated in us.... And we have known and believed the **love** that God has toward us. God is **love**. And he who keeps on dwelling in **love** -- keeps on dwelling in God, and God in him.... We **love** Him, because He first **loved** us.

"Herein has our **love** been consummated.... There is no fear in **love**, but consummate **love** casts our fear.... He who fears, has not been consummated in **love**. We **love** Him, because He first **loved** us.

"If a mans says 'I **love** God' but he hates his **brother** - - he is a liar! For he who does not **love** his brother whom he has seen -- how can he **love** God Whom he has not seen? And this Commandment we have from Him -- that he who **loves** God, **loves** his brother too. Whosoever believes that Jesus is the Christ -- has been born of God. And every one that **loves** Him Who begat, **loves** also him who has been begotten by Him. By this we know that we **love** the children of God, when we **love** God and keep His Commandments. For this is the **love** of God -- that we keep His Commandments."⁵⁵⁹⁰

With so much "**love**" to be evidenced -- here mentioned fully thirty-eight times in just fifteen verses⁵⁵⁹¹ -- how could Christianity, as the religion of love, **not** expand?⁵⁵⁹²

Yet it would expand precisely as Christians **obeyed the Decalogue**. For as Calvin here comments on the words of the Apostle John:

"To the **love** of God, he joins the observance of the **Law**. And justly.... Since therefore He is the Fountain of all righteousness and uprightness -- he who loves Him, must necessarily have his mind set to the obedience of **righteousness**.... From this passage we also infer what true observance of the Law is. For if we obey God by keeping His Commandments only from the constraint of fear, we are very far from true obedience. Therefore the first thing is to devote our hearts to God in willing reverence, and **then** to form our life to the rule of the Law."

It is "easy to keep the Law in that believers, sustained by forgiveness, do not get despondent when they fall short." Yet "only he keep the Law, who courageously resists worldliness."

Last. The Spirit of love⁵⁵⁹³ indwelling the believers⁵⁵⁹⁴ produces not only a love for one another, but also a confident desire that **even the hostile World** should repent and be saved. It was true in that first century -- and, to a much lesser extent, it is true even today -- that "the whole World lies in wickedness."⁵⁵⁹⁵ But it was and is **also** true that "we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the **Saviour of the World**."⁵⁵⁹⁶

Accordingly, "**whosoever** shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God -- God keeps on dwelling in him, and he in God."⁵⁵⁹⁷ Indeed, as already stated, the ultimate victory even in **this** World here and now -- belongs to the Christian Church and not to the anti-christian false-prophets (at least some of whom are convertible).⁵⁵⁹⁸

For the Christians have in principle already overcome the antichristian forces through the mighty power of the Holy Spirit Who indwells the believers. Indeed, His indwelling power is far greater than that of the unholy spirit of antichrist which indwells the false-prophets.⁵⁵⁸⁸

Moreover, Jesus was sent to save not only those who were **then** Christians. For "the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the **World**."⁵⁵⁹⁶ Even wicked **false-prophets** may repent. Indeed, even if antichrists like Saul of Tarsus⁵⁵⁹⁸ get converted and then truly confess that Jesus is the Son of God -- the Holy Spirit of God will keep on dwelling in them too.⁵⁵⁹⁸

For "**whosoever** shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God -- God dwells in him." Then, the Spirit of God Who

would have started to dwell in him -- will keep on dwelling in him, even for ever.

O Christian, great as the power of the spirit of antichrist is -- the almighty power of the indwelling Holy Spirit is **infinitely** greater! So may we -- impelled by that greater power of the **Holy** Spirit -- overcome the false-prophets of our own time who are imbued with the spirit of antichrist!

May we love the Lord; love one another; and love without fear! May we love even God's yet-unsaved human creatures! May we fervently desire the salvation of whomsoever shall confess that Christ is Lord! And may we confidently believe the precious promise that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the **World!**"

So on, then, Christian soldiers! Onward, to victory!

5582. I Jn. 4:2-4,14. 5583. I Jn. 4:1,6. 5584. I Jn. 4:2f.
5585. Cf. our study for Nov. 25, esp. at its nn. 5555-59. 5586. I Jn.
4:2-4.
5587. I Jn. 4:5f. 5588. I Jn. 4:1-4.
5589. I Jn. 4:17f. We translate *teteleiootai* "consummated"; and *teleia*
"consummate."
5590. I Jn. 4:7-12,16-21 & 5:1-3.
5591. Here we regard the twofold idea of "knowing" (in I Jn. 4:7f) as
equivalent to "loving" -- cf. Gen. 4:1 etc. However, even without this
additional twofold implicit reference to 'love' in "knowing" -- the
very word "love" is found fully **36** times in these 15 consecutive verses of I Jn.
4:7-12,16-21 & 5:1-3.
5592. Jn. 14:21-23; 15:10-17; 16:27-33. 5593. Rom. 5:5; Gal. 5:22.
5594. I Jn. 4:13. 5595. I Jn. 5:19. 5596. I Jn. 4:14. 5597. I Jn.
4:15.
5598. I Tim. 1:13-15; Acts 19:13-20; 22:4-10; 26:9-19; Jude 18-23.

THIS IS THE VICTORY -- THE REGENERATE OVERCOME THE
WORLD

First John 5

"Whosoever keeps trusting that Jesus is the Christ, has been born of God.... We know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His Commandments.... For whomsoever has been born of God, keeps on overcoming the World. And this is the victory that keeps on overcoming the World -- even our faith."⁵⁵⁹⁹

On this passage the great Protestant Reformer Martin Luther remarks in his *Works* (30:309): "The hypocritical **Turks** [alias the **Muslims**] have also lost Christ, because of their various thoughts. They have honoured Him as the greatest prophet next to Mohammed.... They retain the luxury and the [so-called] 'prophecies' of Mohammad and all his prophets.... But this 'faith' -- is the work of the devil."

John had just described the tremendous power of love -- to convert sinful men. Next, the 'Apostle of love' goes on to give fuller details of the nature of faith-in-Jesus and its blessed consequences.

First. John does not attempt to soften or to camouflage the **seriousness and the power of sin** in his own environment of the first century. And neither should we do so today.

"The whole World lies in wickedness," wrote John.⁵⁶⁰⁰ And this -- which excludes the tiny handful of Christians then on our Earth -- was a very accurate description of the World of the first century (as John too indicated also elsewhere).⁵⁶⁰¹

Indeed, some people then alive had been reprobated by God from all eternity -- and never **could** be saved. Such were they who died rebelling against the convicting work of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁶⁰² Once **that** sin had been committed, Christians were not to intercede that such an unforgivable transgression might be expunged postmortally. Yet until a person dies in his or her sins, it cannot be known for sure -- either by that person or by any other human being -- that such a sin has in fact been committed by him or her.

Explained John: "I do not say that he should pray for [forgiveness of] it." For "there **is** a sin **unto death**."⁵⁶⁰³ Hence, to die while committing that sin -- to die without either asking or receiving forgiveness of sin as such -- is lethal.

Second. All **other** sins, however, are **not** "unto death."⁵⁴⁰³ Thus, as regards **such** sins -- though always serious -- they were also all forgivable.

Yet so toxic was the influence of their sinful environment that John very solemnly warned his first-century Christian addressees: "Little children, you must guard yourselves from idols!"⁵⁶⁰⁴ This, however, suggests that it was indeed within their power to do so -- by the grace of God.

For all sin will be forgiven, **provided** it be repented of and expunged by God's grace through the sinner's faith in the cleansing blood of Christ **before** the time of that sinner's death.⁵⁶⁰⁵ John had already told his addressees that "the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, keeps on cleansing us from all sin."⁵⁶⁰⁶ And now he went on to assure Christians that they should certainly pray that one another's sins **should** be forgiven them.

For the same reason, previously also the Apostle James had advised his Christian addressees: "Confess your faults to one another, and pray for one another -- so that you may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.... Brethren, if any of you keeps erring from the truth, and someone converts him -- let him know that he who converts the sinner from his erroneous way, shall save a soul from death and shall cover a multitude of sins."⁵⁶⁰⁸

Third. Sin could and can be forgiven only through saving faith in the Triune God -- in Whose thrice-holy Name Christians are baptized.⁵⁶⁰⁹ For it is necessary to believe that the Spirit-anointed "Jesus is the Son of God" the Father.⁵⁶¹⁰

"This is He, even Jesus Christ, Who came by water and blood -- not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit Who keeps on bearing witness -- because the Spirit is the Truth. For there are three Who keep on bearing record in Heaven -- the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit -- and these three are one. And there are three Who keep on bearing witness on Earth -- the Spirit, and the water, and the blood -- and these three are at one."⁵⁶¹¹

Fourth. This Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, lives within all true Christians and gives them the absolute confidence that they shall indeed overcome all opposition -- even though "the whole World lies in wickedness."⁵⁶⁰⁰ For "it is the Spirit Who keeps on bearing witness -- because the Spirit is the Truth."

Now "if we receive the witness of men -- the witness of God is greater. For this is the witness of God, which He has testified about His Son." And "he who trusts in the Son of God, has the witness in himself."⁵⁶¹²

The World may indeed still be evil in practice. But the Christian knows for certain -- and is obliged to believe with great boldness -- that (at least from the human perspective) **all** men should be regarded as convertible.

This is so because "**whosoever** believes that Jesus is the Christ, has been born of God." For whosoever or "whatsoever has been born of God, overcomes the World. And this is the **victory** which has overcome the World: even our faith. Who is he that **overcomes** the World, but he who keeps on trusting that Jesus is the Son of God?"⁵⁶¹³

May all who read the above words indeed be among those "whosoever's" that "believe"! And may they all experience the workings of that powerful faith which overcomes the World!

For, as Calvin comments: "All who have been begotten by God, overcome the World.... He also expresses the **way** to overcome.... He places the **victory** over the whole World in **faith**...."

"The past tense is stronger than the present or the future. He [John] says, 'who-soever] **has** overcome the World' -- so that we might feel certain: as if the enemy had **already** been put to flight...."

"God does not arm us for only one day.... We are **already** partakers of **victory** -- as if we had **already** finished the war.... This confidence does not induce sluggishness.... They have **already** overcome, so that they may keep on fighting more spiritedly and **strenuously**.... This promise both arms us always with the **unconquerable** power of God -- and also, on the other hand, **annihilates** all the strength of men" who resist our advance in God's Name.

Fifth. **Love** is, of course, one of the greatest fruits of the Spirit in the life of the Christian.⁵⁶¹⁴ Now it is precisely the Christian's **keeping of the Ten Commandments** which manifests this genuine love. For the Ten Commandments require: that we love God; that we love the brethren; that we love all of God's creatures; and that we love our fellow-men as fallen (yet reparable) images of God.⁵⁶¹⁵

Now God lovingly begets Christians as His loving children.⁵⁶¹⁶ Hence, "every one that loves Him Who begat --

also loves him who has been begotten by Him. By this we know that we love the children of God -- when we love God and **keep His Commandments**.

"For this is the love of God [or this is the proof of our love toward God] -- that we keep His Commandments. And His Commandments are not grievous [or heavy]."⁵⁶¹⁷

The keeping of the Ten Commandments, comments the *Geneva Bible*, is "easy to the sons of God who are led by His Spirit. For they delight therein."⁵⁶¹⁷

On that, also Dr. Calvin comments that the keeping of the Decalogue "is sweeter than honey and more to be desired than gold.... It cheers hearts, converts to the Lord, and quickens."

In the nineteenth Psalm, "David shows how they are affected whom God regenerates by His **Spirit**.... 'God's Commandments are not grievous'.... It is through the power of the Spirit that it is not grievous or vexatious for us to obey God."⁵⁶¹⁷

Sixth. God's children believe in Jesus.⁵⁶⁷¹⁸ They strive to keep all His Commandments.⁵⁶¹⁹ They love other children of God.⁵⁶²⁰ They are strengthened by His Spirit.⁵⁶²¹ They victoriously overcome the World.⁵⁶²² They witness to all who will listen.⁵⁶²¹ They pray for the expansion of Christ's Kingdom.⁵⁶²⁴ Accordingly, they develop **great boldness** in the Christian Faith.

For "this is the **confidence** we have in Him -- that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us -- **whatsoever** we ask, we know that we get the petitions we desired from Him.

"If any man sees his brother keep on sinning [but] not unto death -- he shall ask, and he **shall** give him life.... And we **know** -- that we are from God.... And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, so that we may **know** Him Who is true. And we **are** in Him Who is true -- even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and Eternal Life."⁵⁶²⁵

Comments Calvin: "The godly **dare** to call on God -- **undauntedly**.... Paul says in Ephesians 3:12, that by faith we have access to God **with boldness**.... We know **with certainty** that God will be our Deliverer.... We do not rightly and faithfully call upon Him -- unless we are **completely convinced** that our prayers will not be in vain."

Last. Christians should know that every man regenerated by the Father also receives the divinely-given power to guard⁵⁶²⁶ himself from all attacks of the Devil and of all of the children of the Devil.⁵⁶²⁷ So much is this the case, that Satan cannot so much as touch the child of God, without the express permission of Jehovah.⁵⁶²⁸

For "we know that whosoever has been born of God, does not keep on sinning" the way he used to. "But he who has been begotten by God, keeps guarding himself -- so that the wicked one cannot continue to grasp onto him."⁵⁶²⁹

Comments Calvin: "Whoever has been born of God, keeps himself -- that is, holds himself within the fear of God and does not let himself so be led away as to extinguish all sense of godliness.... The children of God do not remain untouched by the wounds of Satan -- but [they do] ward off his blows.... We know that we fight, armed only with the weapons of God. Therefore, believers keep themselves from sin -- inasmuch as they are kept by God."

O Christian, may we then ever remember that our own faith in Christ is the **victory** which **overcomes** the **World** -- even when it might seem to us that the "whole World lies in wickedness!" May we remember that this faith is given to us by the Holy Spirit -- Who gives a **greater** and a more powerful witness to us, than the evil one gives to the whole World!

Therefore, may we always realize that we should have complete confidence in God -- knowing that whatsoever we ask believingly, He will give us! For whosoever keeps on trusting in Jesus, shall not continue sinning in the way he formerly did. To the contrary, he shall not remain in the grip of the Devil. Instead, he shall remain in the grip of the Lord -- kept by the power of God.

This is the victory that keeps on overcoming the World -- even our faith. So on, then, Christian soldiers! Onward, to victory!

5599. I Jn. 5:1-4. 5600. I Jn. 5:19. 5601. Rev. 2:9f,13,20,24, etc.
5602. Mt. 12:24-32 & Heb. 6:4-6. 5603. I Jn. 5:16f. 5604. I Jn. 5:21.
5605. Eccl. 11:3; Heb. 9:27; Jn. 5:16f. 5606. I Jn. 1:7 cf. vv. 8-10;
2:1f.
5607. I Jn. 5:16f. 5608. Jas. 5:16,19f. 5609. Mt. 28:19.
5610. I Jn. 5:5,10-13; Jn. chs. 14 to 16.
5611. I Jn. 5:6-8, *kai ho treis eis to hen eisin.* 5612. I Jn. 5:6,9f.
5613. I Jn. 5:1,4f. 5614. Rom. 5:5 & Gal. 5:22. 5615. Eph. 4:24 &
Col. 3:10. 5616. Jas. 1:17f. 5617. I Jn. 5:1-3. 5618. I Jn.
5:1,4f. 5619. I Jn. 5:2f. 5620. I Jn. 5:2. 5621. I Jn. 5:6-9.
5622. I Jn. 5:4f.
5623. I Jn. 5:15f cf. Jn. 20:23. 5624. I Jn. 5:14f. 5625. I Jn.

5:14-16,19f. 5626. Cf. Gen. 1:28; 2:15; 3:14,24; 4:7 & cf. n. 5627.
5627. I Jn. 3:10,12.
5628. Job 2:5-7 cf. Ps. 91:7-14 & Mt. 4:5f. 5629. I Jn. 5:18.

A FULL REWARD -- AND FULLNESS OF JOY

Second John

"I rejoiced greatly that I found [some] of your children continuing to walk in the truth -- as we have received a Commandment from the Father.... Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper and ink. But I trust to come and speak to you from face to face -- so that our joy may [then] have become filled up."⁵⁶³⁰

Probably just after writing his *First Epistle* the Apostle John wrote also his *Second Epistle*. This would then mean that he would have written the latter either around or after A.D. 66.

First. It should be noted to whom John was here writing. His addressee was probably not an individual person nor even an individual Congregation, but rather a Church Presbytery alias a local circuit of Congregations (and every Congregation **within** that Presbytery). For he ("the Elder") addressed himself "unto the elect lady and her children."⁵⁶³¹ And he signed off his letter by indicating that "the children of your elect sister greet you."⁵⁶³²

This probably means that the Elder⁵⁶³³ or the Apostle John was writing on the authorisation of the Presbytery in which he himself was ministering. This would then suggest he was writing also on behalf of "the children"⁵⁶³² or the Congregations of that Presbytery too. For that Presbytery would then have been the "elect sister" of the "elect lady" to which he would thus have been writing.

That addressee "lady" would then seem to have been a different Presbytery of the Church or Bride of Christ. Indeed, "her children" would then seem to have been co-addressees: viz. the daughter Congregations of that Presbytery.

This would then suggest that the two Presbyteries were themselves united in synodical fellowship, even at the level of a General Assembly.⁵⁶³⁵ And indeed, we are well aware that this same Apostle John had played a leading role in the deliberations of the first General Assembly of Christ's Church -- which had met in Jerusalem several years earlier.⁵⁶³⁶

Thus it would seem that the Apostolic Church functioned harmoniously as one Church with many Congregations. They were all united together by Triune Baptism into the Name of the many Persons of the one God, and to His glory.⁵⁶³⁷

Second. John enjoined his addressees to hold fast to their confession. It was that of the incarnation of the Son of God. This presupposes their insistence on both the deity and the humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ, alias the One anointed and appointed by God the Spirit of the Father and of the Son.

"Grace be with you, mercy, and peace -- from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ the Son of the Father, in truth and love.... He who abides in the doctrine of Christ, has both the Father and the Son."⁵⁶³⁸ Indeed, as Christian people baptized in the Triune Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit -- they had been strengthened and confirmed to do this very thing.⁵⁶³⁹

Third. They were to reject all deceivers and antichrists who denied this Christian *Confession of Faith*. "For many deceivers have entered into the World -- who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist.... Whosoever keeps on transgressing and does not continue abiding in the doctrine of Christ -- does not have God."

Dr. Adam Clarke points out that the Early Gnostics denied the incarnation -- denied this fundamental Christian doctrine that the Word of God had indeed come to our Earth in human flesh. However, in a different sense, so too does Papal Roman Catholicism. For it believes with the popes that the incarnation has not been accomplished once and for all -- but constantly needs to keep on being re-effected and re-iterated by way of what Bible-believing Protestants regard as the abominable doctrine of transubstantiation in daily masses.

At Second John 2:7's mention of 'antichrist' -- Rev. Professor Dr. Albert Barnes refers to his notes at the cognate First John 2:18 and 4:3. There, he comments: "the word '**antichrist**' occurs in the Newer Testament only in these epistles of John. The proper meaning of '*anti*' in composition is: (1) **over-against**, as in *antitattein* [alias 'to range in battle over-against another']; (2) **contrary to**, as in *antilegein* [alias 'to contradict' or 'to gainsay']; (3) **reciprocity**, as in *antapodidoomi* [alias 'to recompense' or 'to repay']; (4) **substitution**, as in *antibasileus* [alias a 'viceroy' in the place of a king] or as in *anthupatos* [alias a 'proconsul' in the place of a consul]."

The latter is the deepest sense. Hence, 'the Antichrist' is the one who comes in the place of Christ, **claiming** to represent Him. This is seen *par excellence* in the Papacy, where in the long line of popes each pontiff is alleged to be 'the Vicar of Christ' alias His sole viceroy,

and claims to be His sole ultimate representative here on Earth.

Rev. Dr. Barnes then continues: "The world 'antichrist'...might denote any one who either was or claimed to be in the place of Christ.... A **vice-functionary**...would be the idea which the word would naturally suggest....

"John does **not** use the word in the sense which it **would** bear as denoting one who set up a rival claim...but in the sense of those who were 'opposed' to Him [Jesus Christ] by **denying essential doctrines in regard to His Person and Advent**.... John here refers not to an **individual** who should be known as 'antichrist' but to a **class** of persons" such as Judaists and Gnosticists as well as the Popes and their Papists.

Continues John: "He who continues abiding in the doctrine of Christ, has both the Father and the Son. If anybody comes to you and does not bring this doctrine -- do not receive him into your home! Neither bid him 'good-bye' [alias 'God be with ye']! For he who bids him 'good-bye' - - is partaker of his evil deeds."⁵⁶⁴⁰

This is not a recipe' for incivility! But it certainly means we should never allow various antichrists (such as incarnation-denying Judaists or Papists or Jehovah Witnesses etc.) to establish a beachhead in or from our home -- whence they could then proceed to infect also others in the neighbourhood.

Now Triune Baptism is the great Red Sea which has sundered God's true Israel forever from the Christ-haters in Egypt.⁵⁶⁴¹ And Triune Baptism is the great flood which has walled Christians off forever from the ungodly scoffers of the Lord⁵⁶⁴² outside of Jesus Christ as the Ark of the Covenant.⁵⁶⁴⁸

Consequently, an intelligent understanding of what it means for us and other Christians to have been baptized -- i.e., to live the way all baptized persons should live -- is to be the basis of Christian fellowship. Romans six and First Corinthians twelve. Truly, there can be no Christian fellowship which is **not** so grounded.

For what concord does Christ have with Belial; or what does he who believes have in common with an infidel?⁵⁶⁴⁴ What cooperation **can** there be between Christians and Anti-Christ-ians?⁵⁶⁴⁵

"And what agreement does the temple of God have with idols? For you are the temple of the living God! As God

has said: 'I will dwell in them, and walk in them. And I will be their God, and they shall be My People.'" ⁵⁶⁴⁶

"Little children, guard yourselves from idols!" ⁵⁶⁴⁷
"Therefore, 'Come out from among them and be separate!' -- says the Lord -- 'and do not touch the unclean thing! And I will receive you, and will be a Father to you; and you shall be My sons and daughters' -- says the Lord Almighty." ⁵⁶⁴⁸

Fourth. God's children were to overcome all opposition ⁵⁶⁴⁹ -- by **keeping His Commandments**, and by lovingly **continuing to walk in the truth.**" ⁵⁶⁴⁹ For John was writing apparently to a Presbytery of Christ's beloved Church which "I love in the truth -- and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth -- for the sake of the truth which keeps on dwelling in us.... 'Grace be with you, mercy, and peace...in truth and love!'" ⁵⁶⁵⁰

John was delighted that most of the Christian Congregations were "walking in truth, as we have received a Commandment from the Father." Consequently, he could further enjoin that particular Presbytery of Christ's Church to which he was then apparently writing:

"I rejoiced greatly that I found [some] of your children continuing to walk in the truth.... And now I beseech you lady, not as though I am writing to you a new commandment but one that which we had from the beginning -- that we [should] love one another.

"Now this is love, that we [should] **keep on walking according to His Com-mandments.** This is the Commandment that, as you have heard from the beginning, you should keep on walking in it." ⁵⁶⁵¹ May our Presbyteries and Congregations keep on doing the same -- also today!

Last. The Apostle John was fully confident that a **joyous future** belonged to the Church Militant. ⁵⁶⁴⁹ For, he claimed, Jesus Christ the Truth -- and His Holy Spirit -- "shall be with us for ever." ⁵⁶⁵²

Accordingly, John could write apparently to that Presbytery of Christ's Church: "I **rejoiced greatly** that I found [some] of your children continuing to walk in the truth." ⁵⁶⁵³ So he encouraged them confidently to see to it or to "look to yourselves...that we receive a full reward." ⁵⁶⁵⁴ Indeed, he expressed the sincere desire that he might soon be able to visit them, and to rejoice with them.

For, wrote John, "I trust to come to and speak to you from face to face -- so that our **joy may [then] have become filled up.**" ⁵⁶³⁰ Indeed, in his *Book of Revelation* he

certainly did "visit" the Church's Presbytery of Asia Minor -- at least in writing. And he then also strengthened all of her daughter Congregations -- to the glory of the risen Christ.⁵⁶⁵⁶

O Christian, may we too help organize Christ's Church Militant into thousands of Congregations grouped together into scores of regional Presbyteries marshalled into mighty armies of Synods or General Assemblies! May they then all march out into all the World, conquering and to conquer, under the banner and leadership of Jesus Christ our Supreme Allied Commander!⁵⁶⁵⁷

May we proudly wear His badge of Triune Baptism and unashamedly rally under the banner of Christ!⁵⁶⁵⁸ May we love Him and one another; keep His Commandments; and walk in the truth -- for ever! And may we resist and shun all deceivers and antichrists and march on victoriously -- **from** joy, and **unto** even fuller joy!

So on, then, Christian soldiers! Onward, to victory!

5630. II Jn. 4,12. 5631. II Jn. 1. 5632. II Jn. 13. 5633. Cf. I Pet. 1:1 & 5:1-4. 5634. I Tim. 4:14; 1:18; II Tim. 1:6; Rev. 1:1,4,9,12-16,20; chs. 2 to 3.
5635. II Jn. 1,13. 5636. Acts ch. 15 cf. Gal. 2:19 & Heb. 12:22f.
5637. I Cor. ch. 12 cf. Eph. 4:1-16 & 2:19-22. 5638. II Jn. 3,9.
5639. I Jn. 5:6-8 cf. Mt. 28:19 & I Pet. 3:20f.
5640. II Jn. 7,9-11. Note that we render v. 7 "the deceiver and the antichrist" (for the Greek has the definite article *ho* in both cases), rather than the less correct KJV's "a deceiver and an antichrist."
5641. I Cor. 10:1-4. 5642. I Pet. 3:19-21; II Pet. 3:3-9; Jude 14-16.
5643. Heb. 9:4,11,23-25. 5644. II Cor. 6:15. 5645. II Jn. 7-11.
5646. II Cor. 6:16. 5647. I Jn. 5:21. 5648. II Cor. 6:17f.
5649. I Jn. 2:8,14,11,17-29; 3:14,20; 4:3f,7,14,21; 5:2-5,9,14,18 cf. II Jn. 3-12.
5650. II Jn. 1-3. 5651. II Jn. 4-6. 5652. II Jn. 2f cf. Jn. 14:6,16,26; 15:26; 16:7-15. 5653. II Jn. 4. 5654. II Jn. 8. 5655. II Jn. 12.
5656. Cf. Rev. 1:1,4,9,12-20; 2:1 to 3:22; 21:2,10,22; 22:6,8,16,19,21.
5657. Cf. nn. 5635 & 5656 with Rev. 6:2 & 19:11-16f & 17:14. 5658. Isa. 11:1f,4,9-12f.

CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY ENGENDERS EVEN PERSONAL PROSPERITY

Third John

"The Elder unto the well-beloved Gaius, whom I love in the Truth. Beloved, I wish above [or in] all things, that you may prosper and be in health -- even as your soul keeps on prospering!"⁵⁶⁵⁹

John's *Third Epistle* was probably written almost simultaneously with his *Second Epistle*, and thus perhaps around or after A.D. 66. But whereas his *Second Epistle* probably gives advice to local Congregations grouped together into a regional Presbytery⁵⁶⁶⁰ -- his *Third Epistle* gives advice to individual local Christians grouped together into a local Congregation.⁵⁶⁶¹

First. John expresses his sorrow about the divisive activity of one Diotrephes, a surly Member of the beloved Congregation to which the Apostle was writing. Significantly, Diotrephes means "the one who divides."

As such, he was well-named. For his unsanctified and practically sub-Christian activity had a very divisive effect on the local Congregation which he sought to lead.

He had forgotten that he was but an undershepherd under King Jesus, that Great Shepherd of the sheep. And he had not wanted humbly to submit himself to the leadership of the Lord Jesus as the real Bishop of that Congregation of His Church⁵⁶⁶² -- to Christ's rule also through that Congregation.

Instead of loving Christ's local sheep for Jesus' sake,⁵⁶⁶³ Diotrephes (proto-papally!) exalted himself to a position of preeminence in the Church -- and even refused to receive the Apostle John and his party when they all desired to visit that Congregation!⁵⁶⁶⁴ Instead of extending the required Christian hospitality to John's party, Diotrephes spoke against John and his companions "with malicious words."⁵⁶⁶⁵

Not even content with that, the jealous Diotrephes also refused to receive any Christian brethren who desired to visit that local Congregation. Still more, he also forbade all of the Members of that Congregation to show hospitality to such would-be visitors. And he himself even threw those hospitable Christians out of their own local Congregation.⁵⁶⁶⁵

The facts being thus, John solemnly declared that those who act like Diotrephes -- have not seen God.⁵⁶⁶⁶ When the Apostle himself ultimately came to that Congregation, he would remember all the evil deeds done by Diotrephes -- and

John would then act accordingly.⁵⁶⁶⁷ Popess and popettes, beware!

May we too courageously oppose every modern Diotrephes also today! May we too get rid of all such from our local Congregations! And, by prayer, also from the Vatican!

Second. After condemning Diotrephes, John was pleased to commend another and a different Member of that same Congregation -- one Demetrius. In Ephesus, a silversmith called Demetrius had caused Paul much discomfort.⁵⁶⁶⁸ However, the Demetrius about whom John was now writing -- possibly not the same person but, if so, now **converted!**⁵⁶⁶⁹ -- caused John nothing but joy. And he was a joy also to the local Congregation to which John was writing -- as well as to all men everywhere who knew him.

For "Demetrius has a good report from all men, and from the Truth itself. Yes, and we too bear record. And you know that our record is true."⁵⁶⁷⁰

May our Congregations today have progressively fewer like the Diotrephes and progressively more like the Demetrius whom John here mentions! And in that way, may we too experience much joy!

Third. The Apostle was particularly happy about the great spiritual fruitfulness of a man called Gaius. He too was in the Congregation to which John was writing.⁵⁶⁷¹

We do not know whether this Gaius: was Paul's good travelling companion Gaius who got arrested in Ephesus;⁵⁶⁷² or whether he was that other Christian, Gaius of Thessalonica;⁵⁶⁷³ or whether he was that yet-again-different Gaius, the famous believer of Corinth;⁵⁶⁷⁴ or whether he was a completely different Gaius unknown to Paul but known only to John.⁵⁶⁷¹ At any rate, this Gaius to whom John was writing - - was a Leader of the local Congregation.⁵⁶⁷⁵

Possibly he was a Fellow-Elder or Co-Pastor together with the miserable Diotrephes.⁵⁶⁷⁶ Yet unlike Diotrephes, Gaius was "well-beloved" by John.⁵⁶⁷¹ For Gaius not only believed the Truth but walked in the Truth, because he was indwelt by the Spirit of the Truth alias the Spirit of Christ the Truth.⁵⁶⁷⁷

Gaius even extended true Christian hospitality to his brethren and to unknown strangers "who for His Name's sake...went forth, taking nothing from the Gentiles" (alias receiving nothing from the Heathen). And "we," wrote John, "ought [like that Gaius] to receive such [unknown Christian Workers], so that we [too] might be Fellow-Helpers to the Truth."⁵⁶⁷⁸

May we modern Christians likewise stand in the Truth!
And may we likewise manifest the same kind of hospitality as
did Gaius!

Fourth. The report of the manifestation of Gaius's
hospitality, had then reached both John and the
Congregation from which he was writing. The account had
even then become so widespread, that it had already brought
about many excellent repercussions. For the reports had
promoted the expansion even of the Gospel itself.

As John wrote to Gaius: "I rejoiced greatly, when the
brethren came and testified about the Truth that is in you,
even as you keep on walking in the Truth.... Beloved, you
are acting faithfully in whatsoever you do for the brethren
and for strangers who have borne witness of your charity
before the Church."⁵⁶⁷⁹

So too, when **we** are hospitable today -- **God** gets the
glory! For those who notice Christian beneficence in us,
soon learn that it is **Christ** Who is at the root of our
hospitality toward them.⁵⁶⁹⁰

Fifth. The very acts of Christian hospitality
promote joy. There was joy in John's heart; joy in John's
Congregation; joy in Gaius's Congregation; joy in the
reaction of some in the watching World; and (of course) joy
too in the hearts of the strangers whom Gaius had helped.
For, as John wrote to Gaius, the Apostle "rejoiced greatly -
- when the brethren came and testified about the truth that
is in you."⁵⁶⁸¹

The strangers bore witness about Gaius's charity toward
them.⁵⁶⁸² Without doubt, Gaius's Congregation also knew
about it -- representing a stark contrast to the behaviour
of Diotrephes.⁵⁶⁸³

John's Congregation too rejoiced to hear it.⁵⁶⁸⁴
Probably at least some of "all men" who heard about it,
rejoiced too -- as they had indeed done when they heard of
Demetrius's hospitality.⁵⁶⁸⁵ And Gaius himself, of course,
was happy to hear that his own hospitality had brought so
much direct and indirect happiness to so many others.⁵⁶⁸⁶

Last. Gaius himself would **greatly be prospered** by the
Lord for his truly Christian hospitality toward others.
"Beloved," wrote the inspired John to Gaius, "I wish above
all things [or **in all things**] that you may prosper and be in
health -- **even as your soul keeps on prospering!** ...

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my 'children'
keep on walking in the truth. Beloved, you are acting

faithfully in whatever you are doing to the brethren and to strangers."⁵⁶⁸⁷

Here, the *Geneva Bible* comments that Gaius's "walking in the Truth" means his "godly behaviour" -- like "those who have both the knowledge and fear of God." This, it states, became apparent in the "offering" of "hospitality" to strangers, and in the "furnishing them with necessities toward their journey -- knowing that the Lord says: 'He who receives you, receives Me!'" Matthew 10:40 & John 13:20.

May **our** souls similarly **prosper** today -- as we too serve the Lord in this way! Then, in addition, God will prosper us too in **health** and in **all** things!

O Christian! Let us avoid behaving like Diotrephes! Let us cultivate the attitude of Demetrius and Gaius!

In this way, even as a result of our hospitality -- **Christianity** shall **greatly** be **expanded**. And -- though much **less** importantly -- **we ourselves** shall then be **prospered**!

So on, then, Christian soldiers! Onward, to victory!

5659. III Jn. 1f. 5660. Cf. II Jn. 1 & 13 and our study for Nov. 29.
5661. II Jn. 1.9f,12f. 5662. I Pet. 2:20-25 & 5:1-4. 5663. III Jn.
7.
5664. II Jn. 3f & 14. 5665. II Jn. 10. 5666. III Jn. 11. 5667.
III Jn. 10 & 13f. 5668. Acts 19:24,38. 5669. Cf. I Tim. 1:12-16.
5670. III Jn. 12. 5671. III Jn. 1. 5672. Acts 19:29. 5673. Acts
20:4. 5674. Rom. 16:23 & I Cor. 1:14,4 cf. Acts 18:8,17. 5675. III Jn.
1,5,8,14. 5676. III Jn. 1,9,14. 5677. III Jn. 1f,5,11.
5678. II Jn. 5-8. 5679. II Jn. 3 & 5f. 5680. III Jn. 6 & 10.
5681. III Jn. 3. 5682. III Jn. 5f. 5683. III Jn. 1,9,14. 5684.
III Jn. 1,6,14. 5685. III Jn. 12. 5686. III Jn. 1-6. 5687. III Jn.
2-5.
