

# WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

—An Exegetical Study of I John 1:6-10—

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## I. Introduction: Preliminary Remarks

1. Approach: Note the circumstances which surrounded the writing of the book as a whole and the passage in particular.

2. The author: the Apostle John

“In one sense the authorship is not the most important issue, for the exegesis of the letter is not greatly affected by our conclusions regarding authorship. Yet it becomes more personal if an individual name can with any confidence be attached to it.”<sup>1)</sup>

a. External evidence.<sup>2)</sup>

b. Internal evidence.<sup>3)</sup>

3. Date of the Epistle: about A.D. 90-95.<sup>4)</sup>

4. Message of the Epistle: Fellowship of God.

5. Purpose:

a. That they might be happy, 1:4.

b. That they might not sin, 2:1.

c. That they might be on guard against error, 2:26.

d. That they might KNOW, 5:13.<sup>5)</sup>

6. a. Theology of the Epistle

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1) Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (London: Tyndale Press, 1970), p. 864.

2) See *Ibid.*, pp. 864f.

3) See *Ibid.*, pp. 865ff.

4) *Ibid.*, pp. 883f.

5) Henrietta C. Mears, ed., *Survey of the Bible* (Glendale, Calif.: Gospel Light Publications, 1960), p. 422.

- (1) God is Light, 1:5.<sup>6)</sup>
- (2) God is Love, 4:8, 16.<sup>7)</sup>
- (3) God is Righteous, 2:29.<sup>8)</sup>
- (4) God is Life, 5:11, 12.<sup>9)</sup>
- (5) God is Truth, II John.
- (6) God is Good, III John.<sup>10)</sup>

#### b. Christology of the Epistle

The center of doctrinal interest in the Epistle is the Incarnation, in which John finds the single guarantee of a true manifestation of the Divine Life in man, and the single channel for its permanent communication to men.

Here we perceive the first of the great practical consequences which depend upon the Incarnation. (1) It alone secures and guarantees the Christian revelation of God, and with its denial that revelation is immediately cancelled, "He that hath not the Son hath not even the Father" (2:23). (2) But, if the validity of the whole Christian revelation of God is involved in the fact of the Incarnation, this is most distinctly true of that which is its center. It is highly significant that the writer whose message to the world is "God is Love" derives it so exclusively from this single source (4:9). (3) But, again, the Epistle exhibits the vital significance of the Incarnation for redemption. The primary purpose of the Incarnation is not to reveal God's Love, but to accomplish man's salvation. God has sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world (4:14); to be the Propitiation for our sins (4:10). It is the same truth that underlies the more cryptic utterance of 5:6. (4) The final necessity of the Incarnation, for John, is that in it is grounded the only possibility for man of participation in the Divine Life, "He that hath the Son hath Life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not Life" (5:12).

Such are the practical aspects of the fact of Incarnation which the Epistle brings out. The full impersonation of the Divine Life, the perfect effulgence of the Divine Light, the supreme gift of the Divine Love, is this—"Jesus Christ come in the flesh."<sup>11)</sup>

#### 7. Its relation to Johannine Gospel

The Epistle appears to have been intended as a companion to the Gospel. The Gospel

6) W. E. Vine, *The Epistle of John: Light, Love, Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), p.7; Theodore H. Epp, *The Test of Life* (Lincoln, Neb.: Back to the Bible Publishers, 1957), pp. 12f.; Robert Law, *The Tests of Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), pp. 52ff.

7) *Ibid.*

8) Law, *op. cit.*, pp. 67ff.

9) *Supra* 6.

10) Mears, *op. cit.*, p. 423.

11) Law, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-107; cf. Guy H. King, *The Fellowship: An Expository Study of I John* (Fort Washington, Penn.: Christian Literature Crusade, 1976), pp. 13ff.

is an historical, and the Epistle an ethical statement of the truth. It is nearer the truth to speak of the Epistle as a comment on the Gospel, "a sermon with the Gospel for its text." References to the Gospel are scattered thickly over the whole Epistle. John's Gospel has been called a summary of Christian theology, his first Epistle a summary of Christian ethics, and his Apocalypse a summary of Christian politics.

To sum up the relations of the Gospel to the Epistle, we may say that the Gospel is objective, the Epistle subjective; the one is historical, the other moral; the one gives us the theology of the Christ, the other the ethics of the Christian; the one is didactic, the other polemical; the one states the truth as a thesis, the other as an antithesis; the one starts from the human side, the other from the divine; the one proves that the Man Jesus is the Son of God, the other insists that the Son of God is come in the flesh. But the connection between the two is intimate and organic throughout. The Gospel suggests principles of conduct which the Epistle lays down explicitly; the Epistle implies facts which the Gospel states as historically true.<sup>12)</sup>

#### 8. Heresies in the Epistle

It is very difficult to pinpoint what kinds of heresy John fought with. The main questions of debate are gathered round the person and work of Jesus. On the one side He was represented as a mere man (Ebionism): on the other side He was represented as a mere phantom (Docetism): a third party endeavoured to combine these two opinions, and supposed that the divine element, Christ, was united with the man Jesus at His baptism and left Him before the passion (Cerinthianism<sup>13)</sup>).

The Epistle gives no evidence that John had to contend with Ebionistic error. The false teaching with which he deals is Docetic and specially Cerinthian.<sup>14)</sup>

#### 9. The characteristics of the Epistle

Two characteristics of this Epistle will strike every serious reader; the almost oppressive majesty of the thoughts which are put before us, and the extreme simplicity of the language in which they are expressed.

12) Alfred Plummer, *The Epistle of S. John* in the Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: University Press, 1889), pp. 34-41.

13) Pertaining to Cerinthus, one of the earliest heretics in the Christian Church, against whose crude Gnosticism the Gospel of John was written, according to Irenaeus. A. M. Macdonald, ed., *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary* (London: W. & R. Chambers, 1972); "One of the earliest of the Gnostics." Alexander Ross, *The Epistles of James & John* (New International Commentary, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 115.

14) Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John* (London: Macmillan, 1883), pp. xxxiii-xxxviii; Guthrie, *op. cit.*, pp. 191ff.; For a full discussion, see A. E. Brooke, *The Johannine Epistles* (ICC, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), p. xlix, who concludes that although other forms of false teaching are alluded to in I John, the main teaching attacked is that of Cerinthus. Cf. Gnostic with a Jewish flavour. Everett F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), p. 439.

Another characteristic of the Epistle, less conspicuous perhaps, but indisputable, is its finality. As John's Gospel, not merely in time, but in conception and form and point of view, is the last of the Gospels, so this is the last of the Epistles.

Once more, there is throughout the Epistle a love of moral and spiritual antithesis. The antithetical structure and rhythmical cadence of the sentences would do much to commend them "to the ear and to the memory of the hearers. To Greek readers, familiar with the lyrical arrangements of the Greek drama, this mode of writing would have a peculiar charm; and Jewish readers would recognize in it a correspondence to the style and diction of their own Prophetical Books" (Wordsworth).

If we say we have no sin,  
We deceive ourselves,  
And the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins,  
He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins,  
And to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we say that we have not sinned,  
We make Him a liar;  
And His word is not in us.

In this instance it will be noticed that we pass from one opposite to another and back again: but that to which we return covers more ground than the original position and is a distinct advance upon it. This progress by means of alternating statements is still more apparent in the following example.

He that saith he is in the light,  
And hateth his brother,  
Is in the darkness even until now.

He that loveth his brother  
Abideth in the light,  
And there is none occasion of stumbling in him.

But he hateth his brother  
Is in the darkness,  
And walketh in the darkness,  
And knoweth not whither he goeth,  
Because the darkness hath blindeth his eyes.<sup>15)</sup>

#### 10. Seven tests of our walk with God

15) Plummer, *The Epistle of S. John* in Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools & Colleges, pp. lvii-lxii.

- a. First test—walk in the Light, 1:6.
- b. Second test—admit you are a sinner, 1:8
- c. Third test—obey God's will, 2:4;3:24.
- d. Fourth test—imitate Christ, 2:6.
- e. Fifth test—love others, 2:9.
- f. Sixth test—relationship to the world, 2:12-17.  
All sins may be put into three categories:
  - (1) Lust of flesh;
  - (2) Lust of the eyes;
  - & (3) Pride of life.
- g. Seventh test—prove Christ is righteous by your life, 2:22, 29.<sup>16)</sup>

## II. Analysis of the passage (I Jn. 1:6-2:2)

- 1. Christ as the Light into which we are brought, vv. 6,7.
  - a. The first fault—profession without reality, and its effects, v.6.
    - (1) Lie of lip.
    - (2) Lie of act.
  - b. The remedy—genuine Christian experience, and its effects, v.7.
    - (1) Fellowship one with another.
    - (2) Cleansing by the blood.
- 2. Christ as the means of spiritual adjustment, vv.8-10.
  - a. The second fault—a false idea of sinlessness and its effects, v.8.
    - (1) Self exaltation.
    - (2) Absence of truth.
  - b. The remedy—the condition of the adjustment, v.9.
    - (1) Confession of sins.
    - (2) Forgiveness and cleansing on the basis of Divine fellowship and righteousness.
  - c. The third fault—the false idea of not having sinned and its effects, v.10.
    - (1) We make Him a liar.
    - (2) His word is not in us.
  - d. Sinning, 2:1-2.
    - (1) The avoidance—the purpose of John's writing, v.1<sup>a</sup>.
    - (2) The remedy—an Advocate, vv.1<sup>b</sup>, 2.
      - i. The person with whom He acts.

16) Mears, *op. cit.*, pp. 423-426.

- ii. The name of the Advocate.
- iii. The character of the Advocate.
- iv. The nature of His advocacy.
- v. The subjects of His advocacy.<sup>17)</sup>

### III. Exegesis

The general intention of this section of the Epistle is to set forth the distinctive marks of Christianity as a way of life and belief, over against current misunderstandings or misrepresentations.

There are three classes of religious sinners that are exposed in this last part of the first chapter of the Epistle. Three times the three words "if we say" occur to determine and outline the teaching of this section. In each case they occur in even-numbered verses and are followed by odd-numbered verses which give the correction of the fault and the remedy for the trouble.

The first class of sinners think that they are God's children but they continue to practice sin which only proves that they either are ignorant of God's way of salvation or are ignorant of the quality of life that God gives believer. The second class, described in v.8, claim Christianity but deny having the depraved nature. The third class is found in v.10 where we read they deny that they have committed sins.

#### THE FIRST FAULT AND ITS REMEDY, VV.6-7.

V.6—If we say (*ἐάν εἴπωμεν*)—the hypothesis is not based on the assumption, but on the fact. C. H. Dodd thinks the author is "alluding all through to certain maxims which were used as watchwords by heretical teachers."<sup>18)</sup> "If we say, as we or someone do." This *ἐάν* with the subjunctive is repeated in every verse as far as 2:1.<sup>19)</sup> The "we" of *εἴπωμεν*

17) Vine, *op. cit.*, pp. 9f., 18.

18) John R. W. Stott, *The Epistles of John* (Tyndale NT Commentaries, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 72.

19) If John had used *εἴ* with the indicative he would have stated a reality and would have left a wrong impression; by the use of *ἐάν* in both the negative and the positive statements the conditional clauses are made vivid. In the apodosis John uses present tenses and not futures (as is done in common cases of expectancy). Richard Charles Henry Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude* (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1945), p. 386. Cf. J. W. Wenham, *The Elements of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: University Press, 1967), p. 167. John is not speaking abstractly and theoretically when he says. The progression of thought is clearly marked by the recurring phrase, "if we say" or "he that saith," both marking the possibility of a spurious profession:

1:6 "If we say that we have fellowship with Him."

1:8 "If we say that we have no sin."

1:10 "If we say that we have not sinned."

2:4 "He that saith, I know Him."

in vv.6–10 is not the same as that in vv.1–5 (where the “we”—sentences which have an admonitory character in which the author includes himself with the readers, as in 4:14, 16<sup>20</sup>.), but rather has the general meaning of “one” or “someone.” In the same sense, *ὁ λέγων* in 2:4.<sup>21</sup>)

Walk—the image of “walking,” resting on the Old Testament *הלך*, LXX *περιπατεῖν* is not found applied to conduct in classical writers, but is common in John and Paul. The word is not found in this sense in James or Peter, and in the Synoptic group of writing only in Mk. 7:5; Acts 21:21. Thus “walking” is not to be limited to mere outward conduct, but covers the whole activity of life.<sup>22</sup>)

The two clauses (lie . . . do) correspond with the two which precede (say . . . walk). We lie, and do not the truth—antithetic parallelism. The negative statement here carries us further than the positive one: it includes conduct as well as speech.

By means of a series of six “if” clauses John intersperses three false affirmations with their refutations. He counterbalances wrong conceptions (vv. 6, 8, 10) with corrective actions (vv. 1:7, 9;2:1). In this section the problem of sin comes to the front. The noun and the verb “sin” appear together eight times between 1:6 and 2:6. It is by no means accidental that the doctrine of sin is mentioned in contrast to John’s statement that “God is Light.” Sin is darkness. There is no coexistence between the two. Perhaps the passage may be examined more accurately in the following paradigm:

	<b>FALSE AFFIRMATION</b>	<b>REFUTATION</b>
	To walk in the Darkness	To walk in the Light
Condition	1:6 The claim to have fellowship while walking in darkness.	1:7 Walk in light as He is in the light.

2:6 “He that saith that he abideth in Him.”

2:8 “He that saith he is in the light.” Law, *op. cit.*, p. 209, n.2.

20) Rudolf Bultmann, *The Johannine Epistles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973, trans. from *Die drei Johannesbriefe*, Göttingen, 1967, by R. Philip O’Hara with Lane C. McGaughey & Robert W. Funk), p. 12 n. 18; Dodd uses, the “preacher’s ‘we’”. Charles Harold Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles* (Moffatt NT Commentary, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1946), pp. 9–16; Lange: the “communicative plural”, John Peter Lange, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal and Homilectical* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), XII, p. 31; also Alford says, “the first person plural gives to the sayings a more general form, precluding any from escaping from the inference: at the same time that by including himself in the hypothesis, the Apostle descends to the level of his readers, thus giving to his exhortations the ‘come,’ and not ‘go,’ which ever wins men’s hearts the most.” Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), III & IV, p.426.

21) Bultmann, *op. cit.*, p. 18 n. 11. The “we” is now broader than it was in vv. 1–5 where there is a contrast between the Apostles and John’s readers: “we–you.” In vv. 6–10 “we = John’s readers plus himself or any Apostle; he no longer has a contrasting “you.” Lenski, *op. cit.*, p.386.

22) Westcott, *op. cit.*, p. 19. “This ‘walk’ is the Latin *versari* and signifies the ordinary course of life.” Plummer, *The Epistles of John*, p.80.

Consequences	1. We are lying. 2. We are not doing the truth.	1. We have fellowship one with another 2. We have cleansing.
Condition	1:8 Claim of not having sin.	1:9 Confess sins.
Consequences	1. We deceive ourselves. 2. Truth is not in us.	1. He forgives our sins. 2. He cleanses us.
Condition	1:10 Claim that we have not sinned.	2:1 Do not sin. But if one sins . . . .
Consequences	1. We make Him a liar. 2. His word is not in us.	1. We have an Advocate. 2. We have a propitiation. <sup>23)</sup>

Possible case of a believer saying he has fellowship with God, but yet is walking in spiritual darkness. Such a person lies, for it is impossible to be in God's fellowship and in spiritual darkness at the same time.

Spiritual darkness may be defined in three ways: (1) It is our walk outside the word of God (I Jn. 2:4). (2) It is our walk outside the way of God (Jn. 14:6). And (3) It is our walk outside the will of God (2 Cor. 6:14-17).<sup>24)</sup>

If God is Light, one must walk in light in order to have fellowship with Him. One who claims he is in fellowship with God while walking in darkness declares one of two things: either that God can have fellowship with sin, or that sin does not have the power to disrupt fellowship. They who say such things lie both in word and in action.<sup>25)</sup>

V.7 But—on the other hand (δέ).

The blood—"the blood" is more specific than "the death" would be, for "the blood" denotes sacrifice. It is always the blood that is shed. The Lamb of God shed His blood in propitiation. He is the propitiation for our sins, more over not for ours only, but also for the whole world (2:2). It is the blood "of Jesus, his Son," of Jesus as a man who had the human nature and thus also blood but who is "his Son," (1:2,3), the Logos of the life (1:1), the second person of the Deity, who became flesh (Jn. 1:14), whose blood, when shed, has the power to cleanse us from all sin.

His Son—it is not redundant: (1) it is a passing contradiction of Cerinthus, who taught that Jesus was a mere man when His blood was shed, for the Divine element in His nature left Him when He was arrested in the garden; and of the Ebionites, who taught that He was a mere man from His birth to His death; (2) it explains how this blood can have

23) Charles W. Smith, "Two Purposeful Proclamations," *Biblical View Point* Vol. V. No. 1 (BJU, April, 1971, Stewart Custer, ed.), p.14. Cf. Law, *op. cit.*, pp. 21 & 65.

24) Roy L. Laurin, *Life At Its Best: Epistle of John* (Grand Rapids: Dunham Pub. Co., 1964), p. 36.

25) Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 15.



such virtue: it is the blood of One who is the Son of God.<sup>26)</sup>

Cleanse—note the present tense of what goes on continually; that constant cleansing which even the holiest Christians need.<sup>27)</sup> The thought is not of the forgiveness of sin only, but of the removal of sin. The sin is done away; and the purifying action is exerted continuously. The idea of “cleansing” is specially connected with the fitting preparation for Divine service and Divine fellowship.<sup>28)</sup>

From all sin—note also the “all”; there is no limit to its cleansing power: even grievous sinners can be restored to the likeness of God, in whom is no darkness at all.<sup>29)</sup>

Walking in the light involves not only fellowship with God but fellowship with the brethren. It is both a correction for sin and a preventive of sin. It is not how we walk, in the sense of being faultless and perfect, but where we walk. There is a double effect resulting from walking in the light:

(1) Fellowship—“we have fellowship one with another.” Light has a socializing effect. The light generates fellowship and fellowship means unity, harmony and understanding. A common paternity will lead to a common fraternity.

(2) Cleansing—“and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from all sin.” Light has a sanctifying effect. As we walk in it the blood of Christ becomes efficacious for all of sins pollutions. This is the cleansing of sanctification. A believer’s cleansing from sin is in sanctification. It is preventive as well as corrective for as we walk in the light Christ’s death-blood becomes our life-blood and brings us cleansing from sin before it can be brought forth into words and deeds.<sup>30)</sup>

### **THE SECOND FAULT AND ITS REMEDY, VV.8-9**

V.8 We have no sin—“To have sin” is a phrase peculiar to John in New Testament. There is no need to inquire whether original or actual sin is meant: the expression is quite general, covering sin of every kind.<sup>31)</sup>

We deceive ourselves—not merely we are mistaken, or are misled, but we lead ourselves astray. In the Greek it is neither the middle, nor the passive, but the active with the reflexive pronoun: the erring is all our doing. The active (*πλανῶν*) is frequent in John, especially in the Apocalypse (I Jn. 2:26; 3:7; Rev. 2:20; 12:9; 13:14; 19:20; 20:3, 8, 10). An examination of these passages will show that the word is a strong one and implies

26) Plummer, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

27) *Ibid.*

28) Westcott, *op. cit.*, p.21.

29) Plummer, *op. cit.*, p.82.

30) Laurin, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-39.

31) Cf. “Sin” is in the singular and refers to the inherited principle of sin or self-centeredness. Stott, *op. cit.*, pp.76f.

serious departure from the truth. Cf. Jn. 7:12.<sup>32)</sup> For self-deception does not mean a simple mistake, but rather that misdirected self-understanding which is not aware of its nothingness.<sup>33)</sup>

The sentence, with which v.8 begins, comes initially as a surprise, because the protasis “if we say that we have no sin” corresponds to the “if we say . . . .” in v.6 and accordingly “have no sin” becomes parallel with “walking in the darkness.” The sentence, however, is understandable in that vv.6–10 are aimed at the false teachers who assert their sinlessness.<sup>34)</sup> The conclusion “we deceive ourselves” corresponds exactly to the “we lie” of v.6. And “the truth is not in us” corresponds to “we do not do the truth” and designates the futility of such a mode of being.<sup>35)</sup>

It was common for the Gnostic teachers to say they had no sin. This was an evidence of ignorance and self-deception. Moreover, it was willful ignorance and self-deception. To claim present sinlessness because of personal perfection is to deceive ourselves. We certainly do not deceive our relatives, friends or neighbours and what is more certain, we do not deceive God. In claiming sinlessness Bible truth is not involved. It is personal truth. It is “the truth” as a principle of life that “is not in us.” We are not faithful to ourselves when we make such a claim. We are not accurate in reporting our own state.<sup>36)</sup>

V.9 Confess sins—(*ὁμολογεῖν τὰς ἁμαρτίας*), which occurs only here in I John, is the articulated confession of personal sins, not a general confession of sins before the congregation and its leader. “Confess” is otherwise used in I John for the confession of faith (2:23; 4:2f., 15), in passages, moreover, that are also to be attributed to the author.<sup>37)</sup> Nothing is said or implied as to the mode in which such confession is to be made. That is to be determined by experience. Yet its essential character is made clear. It extends to specific, definite acts, and not only to sin in general terms. That which corresponds to saying “we have no sin” is not saying “we have sin,” but “confessing our sins.” The denial is made in an abstract form: the confession is concrete and personal.<sup>38)</sup> Note the present, iterative subjunctive. “If we keep confessing our sins. . . .” John now uses the plural “our sins,” which only

32) Plummer, *op. cit.*, p.83.

33) Bultmann, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

34) Prov. 28:13 can perhaps be adduced as a parallel: “He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses them will obtain mercy.” From the Proverbs of Amen-em-Opet 18: “Say not: ‘I have no wrongdoing,’ Nor (yet) strain to seek quarreling. As for wrongdoing, it belongs to the god; it is sealed with his finger.” (James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Text* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955], p. 423.) In neither case, however, is forgiveness mentioned, quote in Bultmann, *op. cit.*, p.21 n.26.

35) *Ibid.*

36) Laurin, *op. cit.*, pp. 39–40.

37) Bultmann, *op. cit.*, p.21 n.28; Alford, *op. cit.*, p.429.

38) Westcott, *op. cit.*, p.23.

spreads out the details that are included in the preceding singular.

Faithful and just—better, faithful and righteous, to bring out the contrast with “unrighteousness” and the connection with “Jesus Christ the righteous” (2:1), where the same word (*δίκαιος*) is used. That God is “faithful,” or trustworthy, is a fundamental postulate of Biblical religion in Old and New Testaments (cf. Deut. 7:9; Ps. 36:5; 89 passim etc.; I Cor. 1:9; 10:13; I Thess. 5:24; 2 Thess. 3:3; I Pet. 4:19).<sup>39)</sup> The Greek “and” (*καί*) sometimes means “and yet,” and frequently does so in John, see Jn. 1:10. It is possible that it has this meaning here. God is faithful (to His promises to us) and yet righteous (in hating and punishing sin). He keeps His promise of mercy to the penitent without losing His character for righteousness and justice. In any case beware of making “righteous” a vague equivalent for “kind, gentle, merciful.” It means “just” (which is to some extent the opposite of “merciful”), and affirms that God in keeping His word gives to each his due (see Heb. 10:23; 11:11; Rev. 16:5–7).<sup>40)</sup>

To forgive us our sins—forgiveness of sin is pictured in the Bible as “casting behind one’s back,” “casting into the sea,” “blotting out as a thick cloud,” “a sending away.” People sometimes say, “I will forgive, but I cannot forget,” but God says, “Their sins and iniquities I will remember no more.”<sup>41)</sup>

And to cleanse us—this is not a repetition in different words; it is a second and distinct result of our confession<sup>42)</sup>: (1) We are absolved from sin’s punishment; (2) We are freed from sin’s pollution. The forgiveness is the averting of God’s wrath; the cleansing is the beginning of holiness.<sup>43)</sup>

Here are three great spiritual facts: (1) The confession of sins—“To confess” means to say the same thing, that is, to say the same thing about sin that God says. In ordinary circumstances, confession of fault brings condemnation, but in the Divine realm it brings forgiveness from the guilt of sin and cleansing from the filth of sin.<sup>44)</sup> The subject of our con-

39) Dodd, *op. cit.*, p.22.

40) Plummer, *op. cit.*, pp.83–4.

41) W. A. Criswell, *Expository Notes on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963), p.110.

42) Since two cleansing are mentioned here it is interesting to notice the contrast they present. There is cleansing from sin by walking in v.7. This is an unconscious cleansing since walking is an unconscious and involuntary action. One does not need to think in order to walk. It is one of those automatic functions performed by the body such as breathing. As one walks in the light he is kept cleansed from all sins. It is a spiritual prophylactic. There is the cleansing from sins by confessing in v.9. This is a conscious cleansing. In the cleansing by walking we obtain cleansing as we walk. In this cleansing only when we confess. The first cleansing is from the principle of sin. The second cleansing is from the practice of sins. A further contrast is found in the fact that in the first cleansing it says, “the blood of Jesus Christ . . .” while in the second cleansing it says, “he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse. . .” In one case it is the blood of Christ, in the other case it is the faithfulness and justice of Christ. One is the means and the other is ground of forgiveness and cleansing. Laurin, *op. cit.*, pp. 41f.

43) Plummer, *op. cit.*, p.84.

44) Smith, *op. cit.*, p.15.

fession is our sins which must include anything of a conscious or unconscious character, both of commission and omission. (2) The forgiveness of sins—forgiveness is conditional. It requires confession. Unconfessed sin in a believer will bring the loss of fellowship, but it cannot bring the loss of salvation. Unconfessed sin will remain until the Judgement Seat of Christ where it will be dealt with; not as a judicial thing resulting in the loss of life, but as a spiritual thing resulting in the loss of reward. (3) The cleansing of sins—these three facts concerning sin in a believer are interlocking and inter-related. Sin can never be cleansed from us until it is forgiven in us and it is never forgiven in us unless it has been confessed by us. Confession is our responsibility while forgiveness and cleansing are God's. No act of ours can produce either forgiveness or cleansing. It can only come from the grace of God. Confession upon our part is the fulfilment of a condition which makes it possible for grace to operate.<sup>45)</sup>

### THE THIRD FAULT AND ITS REMEDY, VV.1:10-2:2

V.10 That we have not sinned—this is not the same as “that we have no sin” (v.8), and therefore we have once more not repetition, but expansion and strengthening of what precedes. “Have no sin” refers to a sinful state; “have not sinned” refers to the actual commission of particular act of sin: the one is inward principle, the other is its result. Both expressions are perfect (*ἡμαρτήκαμεν*) which has the common meaning of the Greek perfect, present result of past action; “We are in the condition of having sinned.” This use of the perfect is specially frequent in John.<sup>46)</sup>

We make Him a liar—worse than “we lead ourselves astray” (v.8), as that is worse than “we lie” (v.6). This use of the verb “make” in the sense of “assert that one is” is frequent in the Gospel (Jn. 19:7, 12. Cf. 5:18; 8:53; 10:33). Paul says, “Let God be found be true, but every man a liar” (Rom. 3:4).<sup>47)</sup>

His word is not in us—cf. I Jn. 2:14; Jn. 8:31; 13:44; 15:4; I Jn. 1:8.

The reference is still to believers but the application may be more extensive. Anyone claiming, as in v.8, that he has no sin in the present makes himself an untruthful person because he is not honestly reporting what his conscience is saying. Anyone claiming, as in v.10, that he has not sinned in the past, makes God an untruthful person because God's word speaks of sin in both believer and non-believer (see Rom. 3:23).<sup>48)</sup>

2:1-2

My little children—the diminutive form (*τεκνία*) does not at all imply that he is addressing

45) Laurin, *op. cit.*, pp.40-41.

46) Plummer, *op. cit.*, pp.84f.; Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 395.

47) Plummer, *op. cit.*, p.85.

48) Laurin, *op. cit.*, p.43.

persons of tender age: it is a term of endearment.<sup>49)</sup>

And if any man sin—John is not telling the intending sinner that sin is a light matter; but the penitent sinner that sin is not irremediable. In both sentences “sin” is in the acrist, and implies a definite act, not an habitual state, of sin. What is being considered here is not habitual sin but occasional sin. The Scriptures do not say that it is impossible for a Christian to commit incidental and occasional sin, for he is the child of two natures and he may live in the lower one as well as the higher. What the Scriptures do say, is that there is a difference between occasional and habitual sin. At no time is sin justified or excused or condoned or permitted. While provision is made for it, justification is not given to it.<sup>50)</sup>

We have an Advocate—on Advocate or Paraclete (*παράκλητος*) see on Jn. 14:16. It means one who is summoned to the side of another, especially to serve as his helper, spokesman, or intercessor. The word occurs in New Testament only in John; here in the Epistle and four times in the Gospel (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7).<sup>51)</sup>

And he is the propitiation—there is no article in the Greek. Note the present tense throughout; “we have an Advocate, He is a propitiation”: this condition of things is perpetual, it is not something which took place once for all long ago. Beware of the unsatisfactory explanation that “propitiation” is the abstract for the concrete, “propitiation” (*ἔλασμός*) for “propitiator” (*ἐλαστήρ*). Had John written “propitiator” we should have lost half the truth; viz. that our Advocate propitiates by offering Himself. He is both High Priest and Victim, both propitiator and propitiation. It is quite obvious that He is the former; the office of Advocate includes it. It is not at all obvious that He is the latter: very rarely does an advocate offer himself as a propitiation (see Num. 5:8; 29:11; Lev. 25:9; Ps. 130:4; Heb. 2:17; Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:5; I Jn. 4:10).<sup>52)</sup>

The Christian is not left a defenseless, helpless victim to sin’s inevitability. He is shown a Christ who not only died to put away sins committed, but He lives to prevent sins committing. His death deals with our justification and His life with our sanctification. One deals with the judicial aspect and the other with the practical aspect.<sup>53)</sup>

We have two facts to consider:

(1) The presence of sin in a believer.

It is indicated in the word “if any man sin.” It is addressed to believers and just now concerns them only. The condition of the offence and the correction of the offence are two

49) Plummer, *op. cit.*, pp. 85–6; Lenski, *op. cit.*, p.397.

50) Laurin, *op. cit.*, p.45.

51) Plummer, *op. cit.*, pp.86–7; Johannes Behm, “*παράκλητος*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968, G. W. Bromiley, ed.), V. pp.800–814.

52) Plummer, *op. cit.*, p.88; Lenski, *op. cit.*, pp. 399–400.

53) Laurin, *op. cit.*, pp. 44–45.

different things. The offence of sin always creates a condition and God always provides a correction.

When a child of God sins it never destroys his relationship; he is still a child of God. He still has union though he has lost communion. If we sin it is still the same relationship, for the remedy is "with the Father." While sin affects one's state, it cannot touch one's standing. This remains unbroken and unsevered. Our union with God is eternal while our communion may be preserved by "walking in the light" but whenever it is marred and broken there is a remedy. This remedy is God's provision.

(2) The provision for sin in a believer.

"We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." In John, Jesus promised "another Comforter." This signifies the double advocacy with which God supports the believer. One advocate is in heaven in the person of the Holy Spirit.

One thing remains. Christ is said here to be "the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." In our concern for the Christian's sin problem, we must not forget the world's sin problem. Jesus Christ is the Christian's advocate and the world's redeemer.

The provision for sin is as extensive as the extent of sin. We are not left to piously contemplate the advocacy of Jesus in our behalf, but to remember that the world needs the benefits of His redemption. To tell it is our responsibility.<sup>54)</sup>

#### IV. Conclusion

The problem of sin cannot be met by denying the power of sin (1:6), the presence of sin (1:8), or the possibility of sin (1:10). The menace of sin is removed only by the propitiatory act of Christ in the shedding of His blood and in its application to our hearts for cleansing (1:7, 9; 2:2). Much of the beauty of this verse has been removed by arguments about the meaning of a propitiation for sins "not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." Suffice it to say that Christ's propitiation is the only propitiation this world needs. It is available to any who request it.

<sup>54)</sup> Laurin, *op. cit.*, pp.46-49.

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