

1 John Chapter 2 (vv.1-11)

1 John 2.1-2 concludes the preceding section (1.5-2.2) which presents a *threefold* test declaring the reality of a person's fellowship with God, according to the revelation that 'God is **light**' (1.5). 1 John 2.3-11 presents a second *threefold* test based on **love**. A genuine believer will love: *God* by obeying His word (vv.3-5a); *Christ* by following His example (vv.5b-6); and his *brethren* (vv.7-11). The remainder of the section (vv.12-17) distinguishes the family of God by dividing them into a *threefold* stage of spirituality as well as warning the 'young men' what not to love (vv.15-17).

The Function of the Advocate [2.1-2]

v.1: Despite the claim of the false professor (1.10), John recognises that genuine believers do fall into sin and describes God's provision for such. 'Little (or 'dear') children' (*teknion*, x7 in epistle) is a diminutive of *affection* (not age) which embraces *all* in God's family. John first heard the tender expression from the lips of the Lord Jesus (John 13.33). Lest the provision of confession (1.9) be taken as a license to sin, John clarifies that he has written 'these things' (i.e. the preceding statements in chapter one) that 'ye sin not' – the tense suggesting an isolated act. God does not condone sin in the least degree (John 8.11). John is neither seeking to encourage the believer to sin, nor denying the possibility of committing a sin. He is seeking to make them *watchful* in the matter, and *diligent* in the use of the remedy.

'If' (not 'when') any believer commits a single sin (extraordinary and infrequent), 'we have (John included) an Advocate'. **Advocate** (*paraclete*) is a word exclusively used in John's writings (John 14.16, 26; 15.26; 16.7) and means 'one summoned to the assistance of another'. Thus Christ, as Advocate, comes alongside the erring believer in order to restore them to the enjoyment of communion with the Father. *Jackson: He neither pleads the merit of His blood (it is for ever accepted) nor our case (we do not have one)*. This is not a ministry of *comfort*, but *conviction* and begins even before a believer sins (Luke 22.32). His advocacy does not follow confession (as if John says 'if any man confess, we have an Advocate') but is in order to bring us to confession. All is beautifully illustrated by the example of Peter. Christ makes us *aware* of the sin we have committed (by His word, Luke 22.61) and thus draws us to *acknowledgement* of that sin (Luke 22.62; 1 John 1.9) for which we receive a Father's forgiveness (1.9; 2.2). The **priesthood** of Christ is somewhat different, operating before God (rather than the Father) and emphasising our infirmities (rather than sins), cf. Hebrews 2.17; 4.14-16. He is Priest because He is *like* us. He is Advocate because He is *unlike* us (EW Rogers). Our Advocate is 'with' (*pros*, 'face to face' or 'towards') the Father (not 'God'). Thus, even if a believer sins, God remains their Father. Nothing can dissolve this *relationship* (though *fellowship* is marred). Our Advocate is in full and unbroken enjoyment of fellowship with the Father (as the 'righteous one'), hence His ability to restore the enjoyment of the erring saint's fellowship. **v.2:** The advocacy of the Lord Jesus is founded upon His *righteous* character and *propitiatory* work. 'He Himself is' the propitiation for our sins. Christ has offered an infinite *sacrifice* that has fully *satisfied* a holy God in respect of sins. He can now justly offer *sanctuary* to the guilty sinner through faith in Christ. Propitiation is unlimited and universal in its scope and direction ('for the whole world') for it rests upon an unlimited Saviour. To limit the work of Christ is to limit the value of His person. Thus, salvation is freely offered to all – but is effective only to them that believe (Romans 3.25, 'through faith'). Whilst Christ made propitiation at Calvary, He is the propitiation eternally as one who abides in the presence of God in all the value of His finished work.

The Features of Love [2.3-11]

v.3: 'And' or 'now' (NET) resumes the theme of fellowship with God (1.5-6). John presents a *second* threefold test of fellowship with love as its basic requirement, for love is the manifestation of divine life. Whilst John begins with a positive declaration to assure true believers, it is followed by three claims of the early Gnostic teachers (seducers) – 'he that saith' (vv. 4, 6, 9). Each false claim is denied and countered by *positive* truth (vv.5, 7-8, 10-11).

Test One: Keep God's Commandments. How can we be *sure* that we have come to personally know God and thus have the fellowship of eternal life? Cf. John 17.3. Answer: We *habitually* obey His commandments. Obedience is not *optional* or *selective*! It is necessary evidence of a vital knowledge of God. In fact, the word 'keep' means to be 'watchful', to 'attend to carefully' and 'guard' as a characteristic practice. Genuine believers strive to form their lives in obedience to God. 'Commandments' could point to every definite expression of God's will as contained in scripture but seems to be defined by John in two specific commands: 'to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another' (cf. 3.22-24). **v.4:** The *positive* principle of v.3 now becomes a *negative* example. The false professor claims to 'know' (*ginosko*, by experience) God but persistently fails to keep His commands. There is therefore a contradiction between his profession and daily practice. Such an individual is clearly a 'liar' (character) and the truth is not actively operating in his life. Thus, the knowledge of God cannot merely be *intellectual*; it must be practical (devotional). **v.5a:** This verse expands the truth of v.3. The genuine believer habitually *perseveres* in and seeks to *protect* (carefully guard) God's

'word' (the *whole* revelation of His will, of which the commandments are the *parts*). In such a person, the 'love of God' is 'perfected', i.e. reaches its desired end (goal). The Greek allows for *two* interpretations here. Either, *God's love for us* was manifested in order that He might have a people in this world that obey Him (4.9), **or** *our love for God* reaches fulfilment (perfection) through obedience (as in 5.3; John 14.15; 15.10).

Test Two: Imitate Christ's Conduct. v.5b: 'Hereby' likely looks forward to v.6. How can we be *sure* that we are 'in' (or 'abide in') Him? Answer: We seek to *imitate* the example of Christ. 'Him' likely refers to the Father (as v.6a) but abiding 'in the Father' or 'in Christ' are tantamount to the same spiritual experience (John 14.20). 'In Him' speaks of standing (position) and suggests intimate spiritual union and relationship (life). **v.6:** To 'abide' in Him is to cause that standing to have its proper practical counterpart in our conduct (EW Rogers). The word 'abideth' (*meno*) is used of dwelling in a home and is suggestive of harmony and friendship. This is cleaving to the Father (and His Son) in total dependence as one's vital sphere of life (John 15.4-5). If we profess to have such a relationship, we are morally obligated (compelled) to imitate the example of Christ. Genuine believers continue to conduct themselves in close conformity to the way 'He walked' (aorist). The whole pathway of the Lord Jesus is viewed as one complete pattern to be imitated. It is instructive to note the way John records the walk of Christ in his gospel (John 1.35; 7.1; 10.23; 11.54). He walked: *by* the sea fishing for men (Matthew 4.18); *in* the temple about His Father's business (Mark 11.27); *with* His people enjoying their fellowship (Luke 24.15) and *as* the Lamb of God in public witness (John 1.36).

Test Three: Love Fellow Christians. v.7: One particular way in which we can keep His commandments (v.3) and imitate Christ (v.6) is in the matter of love. Older manuscripts commence the verse with 'beloved brethren' – fitting given the forthcoming appeal. Unlike the 'new' false teachings, John was writing something 'old' (in time), even that which was inherent in the original apostolic proclamation of the gospel which in turn was received from Christ. The use of the singular 'commandment' suggests John has a particular precept in mind, presumably: 'Love one another as I have loved you' (John 13.34), cf. vv.9-11. **v.8:** The commandment was old, and yet, in another sense 'new' (*kainos*). It was new in *character* and *quality* as exemplified in the person of Christ. Believers are to love as *He* loved (cp. Leviticus 19.18). This new quality of love was perfectly expressed in Christ and should be gradually produced in believers through the indwelling power of the Spirit (Romans 5.5). Thus, the 'darkness' (ignorance and unbelief) of the present evil age is passing away (2.17) because the true light of full revelation (John 1.9) has begun to shine, *first* in Christ and *now* in His believing people. *Hiebert: God's redeeming love has already initiated the process of eliminating moral darkness, but the process will be fully consummated only when Christ the redeemer personally returns to earth to banish the darkness.* **v.9:** The one who claims to be 'in the light' (position) and therefore enjoying fellowship with God, but persistently displays a hateful attitude towards his brother (an assumed relationship) is, in fact, in darkness (i.e. unregenerate). This is not an occasional outburst of anger, but a habitual attitude of ill-will and malice. **v.10:** Conversely, he that *continuously* and *habitually* loves (*agape*) his brother 'abideth in the light', i.e. his *practice* is proper (fitting) to his *position*. Furthermore, there is 'none occasion of stumbling in him' (or 'it'), i.e. the path to eternal glory is well-illuminated by the word of God so as to see clearly and walk properly along the way (Psalm 119.165 RV; John 11.9-10). In addition, he will not cause *others* to stumble through a disconnect of profession and practice. **v.11:** Sadly, the unregenerate (betrayed by his behaviour), has no true perception of the ultimate destiny (of perdition) to which he is travelling. Those that make a conscious choice to dwell in darkness eventually lose the ability to appreciate light (blindness).