

THE
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PLACE



General Epistles

CHURCH OF  THE NAZARENE

CLT Bible Study

GENERAL EPISTLES

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SUGGESTIONS FOR STUDY

Welcome to the Continuing Lay Ministries series of Bible studies. You are engaged in a study venture that will be both helpful and enjoyable. Here are a few suggestions that will make this Bible study the most beneficial to you.

1. Since this is a Bible study, have your Bible near you at all times. This study outline is only designed to help you read the Bible.
2. The Bible version used for this study is the New International Version (NIV). The editor primarily used the language of the NIV to prepare the lessons. You may use other versions of the Bible if you choose. While the language may be different, the meaning will be the same.
3. Before you begin each section, read the entire Scripture passage. This is very important. The study outline will help you understand the particular Bible verses, but it does not tell what they say.
4. **IMPORTANT:** Note that some of the scriptures from the particular book being studied may not have the book's name. For example, if the Bible reference is (1:6-8), you will find these verses (6-8) in the first chapter of James. Other books of the Bible will include the name in the reference, for example, Isaiah 53:1 and John 17:1.
5. Go through the study outline carefully. Take time to look up all the Scripture verses in the outline.
6. You may want to mark your study Bible as you go. Marking your Bible will help the words become more and more your own.
7. Finally, read the Bible passage again to better understand its meaning. Perhaps you may benefit of listening to the reading of James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude.
8. The editor has also included how to pronounce some of the more difficult proper names and words. The first time the word is introduced, the pronunciation will follow the word. At the end of each chapter, you will find a list of the words in the order in which they were introduced. Additionally, at the end of the document, all of the words and pronunciations will be listed alphabetically. For pronunciation of additional terms and their definitions please refer to *A Dictionary of the Bible & Christian Doctrine in Everyday English* (Eby, et al, 2004).

If a family or a few friends decide to take this study together, here are two suggestions.

1. Have one person read the Bible passage and another person read the Continuing Lay Ministries outline.
2. Then discuss the Scripture and outline. Ask questions of each other to help clarify the meaning of the Scripture.

OUTLINE

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Chapter 2. The Book of James

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Section 2.2. Exposition of James

Chapter 3. The Petrine Epistles

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Chapter 4. The Johannine Epistles

Section 4.1. Introduction to 1, 2, and 3 John

Section 4.2. Exposition of 1 John

Section 4.3. Exposition of 2 John

Section 4.4. Exposition of 3 John

Chapter 5. The Epistle to Jude

Section 5.1. Introduction to Jude

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CHAPTER 1

Background to the General Epistles



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The seven letters following Hebrews in our New Testament are called the General Epistles. These include:

James
1 Peter
2 Peter
1 John
2 John
3 John
Jude

Early in the church, these letters were considered universal, generally addressing the Church, especially when differentiated from Paul's letters. The Book of James seems to be more of a sermon or treatise than a letter, urging works consistent with the Christian's faith. First Peter deals with outward perils and is a letter of hope, encouraging persecuted Christians. Second Peter deals with inward perils, and is a letter urging Christians to grow in grace. The author of First, Second, and Third John is the same author as that of the Gospel of John. While the key word in John's Gospel is "believe," the keyword in First John is "know." In Second John, the author refers to himself as the "elder" or "presbyter" as he addresses "the chosen lady." Again, in Third John, the author refers to himself as the "elder" as he addresses his "dear friend" Gaius. The author of Jude identifies himself as a "servant of Jesus Christ" and a "brother of James" as he addresses "dear friends" who are called, loved, and kept.

CHAPTER 2

The Book of James

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SECTION 2.1. INTRODUCTION

A. AUTHOR

Although he is overshadowed by his Elder Brother (John) in the Gospels, James the Just is an important figure in the early pages of the Book of Acts. It is to him that the tradition of the Early Church ascribes the authorship of the Epistle bearing his name. He was early recognized as a leader, partly because of his link with Christ, but more likely because of his reputation for piety. He was highly respected among both Jews and Christians and provided an apt link between these two groups.

His prominence among the Christians is seen by his commanding role at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:13, 19), and his esteem among the Jews is demonstrated by their revolt against his execution by Ananos [UH-na-noz], the high priest. This latter event is recorded by Josephus. Most of what we really know of James is found in the New Testament. He was not a believer in Jesus as Messiah until after the Resurrection [reh-zr-EK-shn], but soon became a faithful leader among the early Christians. In fact, he was one of the named eyewitnesses of the Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7). However, there are many legends that grew up around James. Most of these legends grew out of his deep piety and righteousness, which must have made quite an impression on the people of his day, who knew him as “the Just” or “the Righteous One.” Certain of these legends described him as a Nazarite from his mother’s womb and having knees like a camel because of his long intercession periods. They also played up his stoning, ascribing some events to it obviously copied from Stephen’s martyrdom. However, it is true that he died a martyr’s death at Jerusalem in A.D. 61 or 62.

B. THE EPISTLE

The Book of James is one of the most unique books of the New Testament. It is not an Epistle in the generally understood sense since it is not addressed to a particular person or church but is more of a sermon or treatise [TREE-tuhs]. Some have called it a collection of sermon notes. James is the most Jewish book of the New Testament. Someone has observed that if the two or three passages referring to Christ were taken out, the whole Epistle might just as easily find its place in the Old Testament as the New so far as its doctrine and contents are concerned. His presentation is not so much theological in character as it is ethical



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in its appeal. It has, therefore, been classified as the wisdom literature of the New Testament. Its method and content are very similar to the wisdom literature of the Old Testament (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and certain psalms). It is marked by:

1. observation of nature (James 1:11; 3:3-6, 11-12; 5:7);
2. observation of human life (James 3:2, 15-16; 4:13; etc.);
3. the setting of members of a sentence against each other; i.e., in antithesis [an-TI-thuh-suhs] (James 1:22-23; 2:10; 3:9); and
4. a technical use of the word "wisdom" (James 1:5; 3:15-17).

However, James's fiery moral zeal is far above the Old Testament wisdom books. It is the wisdom of Jesus of Nazareth, who is the Christ. The Epistle of James is closely similar to the Sermon on the Mount.

The emphasis of the Book of James upon "works" has led to widespread controversy about its authority. The most often quoted objection is that of Martin Luther, who said:

In fine, Saint John's Gospel and his First Epistle, Saint Paul's Epistles, especially those to the Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and Saint Peter's First Epistle, - these are the books which show thee Christ, and teach thee everything that is needful and blessed for thee to know even though thou never see or hear any other book or doctrine. Therefore is Saint James's Epistle a right strawy Epistle in comparison with them, for it has no gospel character to it.

However, in fairness to Luther, we must say two things:

First, he did not totally reject the book but, in connection with his censure, said, "I . . . do not intend thereby to forbid anyone to place and exalt it as he pleases, for there is many a good saying in it." Second, Luther's judgment was based upon a hasty observation which misunderstood the emphasis of James. He thought that the writer was denying justification by faith, but there is no essential contradiction between Paul and James. They are in perfect agreement. The principle underlying the thought of both men was: "The proof of a person's belief in Christ is the manifestation of the Christ-life in that person's life."

It is important to note that this Epistle is not an organized discourse. One thought suggests another, and the writer launches into a new subject upon the provocation of a mere suggestion, but he never strays far from the main road, which is faith proven by works.

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C. OUTLINE

Salutation (1:1)
Faith Tested in Trial (1:2-12)
Faith Tested in Temptation (1:13-18)
Faith Tested by Obedience (1:19-25)
Faith Tested by Religion (1:26-27)
Faith Tested in the Congregation (2:1-13)
Faith Tested by Good Works (2:14-26)
Faith Tested by Speech (3:1-18)
Faith Tested in the Pursuit of Pleasure (4:1-12)
Faith Tested by the Submission to the Sovereignty of God (4:13-17)
Faith Tested by Endurance (5:1-11)
Faith Expresses Itself in Prayer (5:12-20)

SECTION 2.2. EXPOSITION OF JAMES

A. SALUTATION

1. Author

We have here the briefest salutation in the New Testament. It is also unique in the author's claim to being a servant (bond slave) to God *and* the Lord Jesus Christ. A servant is one who is at the disposal of his Master and corresponds to a "Lord," which means one who is the Master of slaves. This conjoining of the Father and the Son denotes a purpose to ascribe authority and deity to Jesus Christ. It is significant that James emphasizes servitude and not brotherhood.

2. Recipients

There is some dispute as to who is meant by the "twelve tribes of the dispersion." Some say that James means the Church as the new Israel scattered throughout the world, while others say he means Christian Jews outside of Palestine [PAL-uh-styn] for whom he is concerned and with whom he wished to commune. The nature of the book strongly supports the latter view. James identifies himself with his readers racially and as having a common faith with them. Oft-repeated is the phrase "my brothers" (1:2).

3. Greeting

Christian writers usually turned this element of correspondence into a prayer or wish for well-being, but James retains the more formal address, which is also the most common in early secular letters. This is the only occurrence of

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such a form in the New Testament. The word “greeting” has the meaning of “wishing joy.”

B. FAITH TESTED IN TRIAL (1:2-12)

The word temptation originally meant trials, both good and bad, but it has come to have only an evil connotation. This is not the implication of the word in this passage; hence, “trials” is the better translation.

1. The Trials (1:2)

James does not consider any particular form of trial but general hardships. The meaning is “variegated,” all sorts of trials. This passage assumes that many of the readers are undergoing difficulties.

2. The Attitude (1:2)

We have here a play on words carried over from verse 1. The salutation was “wishing joy,” and James immediately begins by saying, “Consider it pure joy.” Here is a striking exhortation to have “unmixed joy,” no sorrow or grief to be intermingled. James does not exhort the Christians to seek hardship but rather to rejoice in its appearance when it does come. One is to rejoice, not for the suffering, but because of it.

3. The Results (1:3)

He makes no authoritative statement but rather appeals to their own experience - “knowing from your own experience,” says the original Greek - that the result is endurance or staying power, here translated as “patience.” Thus, our faith is proved to be good, just as gold is proved to be standard, by enduring the trial by fire. The sterling element in our faith emerges. “It is the strong wind that becomes the occasion for our stability, our rugged dependability, and our most noticeable enlargement of soul.” (James B. Chapman)

4. Our Consolation (1:4-8)

This passage is not necessarily disconnected from the preceding but may be very aptly tied into it. The thought was suggested by the closing phrase of the preceding verse, “perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” James could very likely be saying that if we lack wisdom in the midst of trial, we may ask of God, who will give with a gracious spirit and will not “cast it in our teeth.” One would be tempted to question both the meaning of a particular testing and how to react to it. God will not upbraid us for questioning - even Jesus

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on the Cross asked, “Why?”

In the light of the context, the meaning of wisdom clearly involves insight into God’s ways and understanding of the significance of things rather than knowledge, which implies acquaintance with the facts derived from our own experience. Knowledge is attained; wisdom is given.

However, to receive this valued gift, one must not be uncertain about one’s desire to know and do God’s will. We must be of one mind, not like John Bunyan’s “Mr. Facing-both-ways.” “Double-minded” is a term coined by James but frequently used by later writers.

5. Social Results of Trials (1:9-11)

The underlying assumption is that suffering for Christ’s sake is a glorious privilege. From such a presupposition, James reasons that it exalts the poor to endure hardship for the profession of Christianity. Likewise, those Christians who may be rich should rejoice in their adversity since they are reminded of the impermanence of riches and guarded from being unduly attached to their possessions. The rich person is not here denounced; this comes later (2:1-6). James is now speaking of the rich brother.

6. The Reward of Trial (1:12)

Literally, “when he has been proved or approved,” refers to verse 3. Thus, the one who comes through intact will receive the symbol of approval from his Lord. This is not the victor’s crown referred to by Paul in a similar passage in 2 Timothy 4:8, but the same as the “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21) spoken by Jesus.

Summary: If our faith is genuine, it will produce endurance when subjected to trial. If it is spurious, we will waver in the midst of trial. To become bitter or to grumble indicates failure of faith.

C. FAITH TESTED IN TEMPTATION (1:13-18)

Beginning with 1:13, the modern understanding of “temptation” comes into the picture, meaning enticement or allurement to evil.

1. The Occasion of Temptation (1:13-14)

James introduces this thought to defend the goodness of God. When trials become an occasion for temptation, one must not accuse God of being its source. He sends the trials for our testing and proving, but our failure of faith would cause sickness to turn to bitterness or crowd pressure to become conformity.

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2. The Nature of Temptation (1:14-15)

We have in this passage the classic psychology of temptation. People are first “drawn away.” John Wesley sagely comments, “drawn out of God, his strong refuge.” This gives us a deeper insight into the meaning of temptation. More than an enticement to evil, in the words of Oswald Chambers, it is “the test by an alien power of the possessions held by a personality.” We have a picture of this in Jesus’ words to Peter (Luke 22:31-32). Peter is to have his possessions tested by Satan, but Jesus is praying that he will not have a failure of faith - precisely James’s meaning.

3. The Source of Temptation (1:14-15)

a. “Lust.”

This word has become so associated with immorality that it is better to use a more general word such as evil, “desire,” or “impulse.” Regardless of what is presented to us, it cannot become a temptation unless it finds a corresponding desire within us. We will not be tempted at any point where we have no desire or disposition, and temptation generally is presented to us along the line of our ruling disposition. James has reference to normal, natural desires, and as Wesley says, “Everyone has desires arising from one’s own constitution, tempers, habits, and way of life.” In addition to the desires common to all people.

b. “Enticed.”

This is an old word meaning to catch fish with bait. When desire and bait correspond, we are drawn to the bait. If we yield to desire and “take” the bait, we find a hook hidden therein.

c. “Conceived.”

The joining of desire and will gives birth to sin. It is not sin until the will consents to desire.

d. After the birth of sin, it grows to maturity in an act, then murders its parent unto eternal death.

Summary: If our faith is genuine, we will not respond to temptation but rather make it an occasion for strengthening. Failure of faith results in yielding to outward pressure.

4. Exhortation (1:16-18)

James returns to his original purpose, the vindication of the goodness of God. He wishes his “beloved brothers” to be assured that God sends only

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good and never evil. This goodness is seen in the light of two things:

a. God's unchangeable nature (1:17).

He is called the Father of the "lights," in semi-astronomical terms referring to the heavenly bodies. Thus, God's nature is compared to these creations. He is unlike the sun, which rises and sets, and the moon, which waxes and wanes because of the turning of the heavenly bodies. With him, there is no variableness, neither "shifting shadows."

b. His marvelous gift of new life (1:18).

God's gift to us is the new birth. This great endowment was of "his own will," and James has given its being from this source as further reason for defending God's goodness.

D. FAITH TESTED BY OBEDIENCE (1:19-25)

1. Receiving the Engrafted Word (1:19-21)

In the light of verse 18, James writes verse 19. The word is not "wherefore," as in the King James Version, but "take note of this," which is more forceful - as if to say: "You are aware of the heavenly origin of your new birth, but you must see to it that it reflects itself in your personal conduct." In the new birth, the Word (gospel) is engrafted or rooted within the soul. This planted Word must be nourished for growth. "Receiving" carries this emphasis.

a. Mental Requirements (1:19-20)

This passage refers to the attitude and conduct of those who are hearing the Word preached. The substance of the threefold attitude enjoined in verse 19 is a teachable spirit:

- i. ready to receive the truth,
- ii. slow to thrust in your own opinion, and
- iii. slow to be provoked when it crosses your own preconceived notions.

This is certainly a needed warning today.

b. Moral Requirements (1:21)

In addition to the mental attitude, there are also some moral requirements for receiving the Word. Not "excess wickedness" is meant, since all wickedness is bad, but probably any remains from the old life. The early Christian life is usually a time of pruning off the remaining

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marks of the world.

2. Hearing and Doing (1:22-25)

After speaking of the attitude necessary for the fruitful hearing of the implanted Word, James follows with this exhortation to be more than hearers but also doers. Here, he uses the metaphor of the Word as a mirror.

a. The Vision

As mirrors (only polished metal at that time) were very rare, it was not often that one could see one's reflection, and it would be easy for one to forget the "face of his birth." But, as Wesley says, "How exactly does the scripture glass show a man the face of his soul!" While looking into the mirror of the Word, we see what we are and what we could be.

b. The Response

Two responses are indicated by the Greek. The first (1:22-23) says, "Just a glance and off he goes." The other (1:25) speaks of one who "peers into" and is taken from an old verb meaning "to stoop and look into" - the same as John "peering into" the tomb on Easter morning (John 20:5).

E. FAITH TESTED BY RELIGION (1:26-27)

1. Negative (1:26)

The word religious has to do with external observances of public worship, such as church attendance, tithing, prayers, and fasting. James certainly has contempt for an unruly tongue. He anticipates what he develops more fully later on (3:1-18).

2. Positive (1:27)

He mentions the natural objects of charity in the community and one of the greatest hindrances to spirituality. We are not to take this as a self-contained definition of religion but as an illustration of the right spirit of true religion that leads to such acts.

F. FAITH TESTED IN THE CONGREGATION (2:1-13)

Up to this point, James has dealt with faith in their personal life, but now he shows how faith expresses itself within the congregation or in relative life. His approach is primarily negative, but the positive is easily identified.

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1. Respecting the Rich (2:1-4)

a. In the Assembly

The word used here is really “synagogue,” indicating an early date for the Epistle since these Jewish Christians were probably calling their gathering for worship by the old name. The rich man is given a prominent place, no doubt, to gain his favor for obvious reasons.

b. False Judgment

These Christians look upon outward appearance, while God looks on the heart. Seeing the gold ring, they presume the wearer to be rich. Since wearing gold is generally condemned in the New Testament as a mark of pride, no doubt a signet ring is implied such as the father placed upon the hand of the prodigal son, an indication of access to wealth. Fine clothing means new, glossy clothes. It is inconsistent to judge a person's essential worth by the wardrobe. James then points out the further inconsistency of this action (1:6) by reminding them of the treatment of Christians at the hands of rich people. “It is odd,” Calvin comments, “to honor one's executioners and, in the meantime, injure one's friends!”

2. Disrespecting the Poor (2:2-5)

a. In the Assembly

James graphically describes the gushing greeting given to the rich while the poor person is roughly instructed to stand anywhere, or if he wishes to be seated, to sit on the floor.

b. False Judgment

God has specially honored the poor by making them rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom. This is not an arbitrary choice, but the facts are that the poor have been most receptive to the true gospel of Jesus Christ. Their outward poverty but inward wealth is worthy of great respect.

3. The Principle of Faith (2:8)

Genuine faith manifests itself by fulfilling the “royal law,” Jesus' second greatest commandment. It is “royal” because it was given by the greatest King and is also the comprehensive law of the Kingdom. The reference to scripture is Leviticus 19:18. The whole content of this passage is incorporated in Leviticus 19.

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4. The Unity of the Law (2:9-13)

The law is an expression of the undivided will of a single Lawgiver, and thus, to break one aspect of the law is as if the whole gamut of law had been spurned. Here, we have to do with deliberate' picking and choosing. ' There is no basis for making one who errs culpable before God. How pertinent it is, however, in these days to take the "whole counsel of God" and not just those things that suit the fancy!

G. FAITH TESTED BY GOOD WORKS (2:14-26)

1. Faith Demonstrated by Works (2:14-20)

James is not saying that a person is saved by works, but that if he has genuine faith, he will manifest it by works. He has reference to faith as belief, not faith, which brings us into an actual personal relationship with our Lord; that link by which Paul could say, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). John Fletcher in *Checks to Antinomianism* argues that before we are converted, we are justified by *faith*; after conversion, we are justified by *works*.

2. Abraham and Rahab (2:21-26)

- a. James, in writing to Jews, makes a weighty argument by reference to Abraham. We have here a controversial passage that many people have thought to disagree with St. Paul in Romans 4:1-6. But, Paul was speaking of initial justification and a different event. A good translation is required since the word "justified" as used by James means, in effect, "proven to be justified." Abraham's obedience in offering up Isaac showed his genuine faith. As Wesley rightly observes, "St. James' justification by works is the fruit of St. Paul's justification by faith." Because of this second justification, as John Fletcher calls it, Abraham was called the "friend of God" (2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8).
- b. James adds additional proof of his point by using one who would be at the bottom of the social ladder - a gentile and a woman. The importance of the passage is probably: "Was not [even] Rahab the harlot justified by works?"

3. Verse 26 summarizes the whole argument.

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H. FAITH TESTED BY SPEECH (3:1-18)

James continues his examination of faith in light of its relation to a group—the congregation. This is the second picture he gives of this expression of faith. It is stated both negatively and positively, with a greater emphasis on the former. The positive side, the speech of genuine faith, is presented as “heavenly wisdom.”

1. Negative: The Unruly Member (3:1-12)

a. Control of the Tongue (3:1-4, 7-8)

This theme has cropped up twice before (1:19, 25) and is apparently a heavy burden on the writer’s mind.

- i. His address is first to teachers. Verse 1 is sometimes poorly translated and really means, “Let not many of you be teachers.” Since words are works, and the chief tool of teachers is words, they are more closely judged than others. He is exhorting the people not to thrust themselves into this prominent position and thus incur heavy responsibility.
- ii. He is speaking of “stumbling” rather than offending someone and confesses that we are most apt to stumble through speech (3:2). Controlling the tongue is difficult.
- iii. His illustrations (3:3-4) are calculated to show how the control of a small member provides domination over more imposing matters. The horse is led by the mouth. The ship, even in a storm, is controlled by the rudder. “Wherever the pilot wants to go” really means “wherever the will of the pilot directs.”
- iv. According to 3:7-8, in creation, mankind was given dominion over all types of creatures, which they have retained in a measure, but in the Fall, they have lost dominion over themselves - particularly their use of the tongue.

b. Conflagration (blaze) of the Tongue (3:5-6)

The picture here is of a great woodland ablaze from a tiny spark. The blight caused by an uncontrolled tongue is out of proportion to its size. If the tongue is not touched by the fire from off the altar, the purifying fire of the Holy Spirit, it will spread the fire that originates in hell. In this case, we can truly say, “You must fight fire with fire.”

c. Contradiction of the Tongue (3:9-12)

- i. Even though the tongue may sometimes be used for the highest

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purposes of human speech, it is not freed from condemnation if, at other times, it speaks evil of people who were created in the likeness of God (3:9-10). James uses “similitude” or “likeness” rather than image, probably with the thought in mind that the image has become marred because of sin, yet the likeness of God appears in every member of the human race.

- ii. It is further contradictory because such inconsistency contradicts nature (3:11-12). The thought is that the cursing of people, rather than the blessing of God, is the true index to what lies within. This is the wisdom of Jesus of Nazareth, who said, “Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12: 34).

2. Positive: Heavenly Wisdom (3:13-18)

Remember that James is still dealing with faith tested in the congregation. The point here is that “heavenly wisdom” will take seriously its responsibility to the Church and conduct itself as described in these verses.

a. Characteristics of Earthly Wisdom (3:14-16)

Or that kind of attitude which destroys the unity of the church. He has described the overt act that produces disunity and strife in the church (3:5-6). Now, he briefly describes the attitude that causes the uncharitable speech (note especially 3:16).

b. Characteristics of Heavenly Wisdom (3:17-18)

Or the attitude which guards the unity of the church. All the characteristics of earthly wisdom are traits of the carnal mind and this heavenly wisdom is not understandable apart from holiness. The expression of heavenly wisdom is the expression of a sanctified heart. Carnality [kar-NAL-li-tee] in the heart is the seedbed of disruptive forces; to be sanctified provides the basis for a truly unified church. Notice how James says that heavenly wisdom is “first pure” (holy) and then follows these marvelous fruits of righteousness as a natural outflow of the purified heart.

Summary: Where faith is lacking, the tongue is used to say things contrary to love and truth. The person’s speech with genuine faith is characterized by the silence of heavenly wisdom since faith in God makes more for silence than for speech about our fellow people.

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I. FAITH TESTED IN THE PURSUIT OF PLEASURE (4:1-12)

James has just discussed the result of a sanctified heart in the church - peace! He immediately deals with the question of what causes trouble in the church, the world, and individual life. It is carnality! He does not call it by this name but characterizes it in this passage as a strong, illegitimate desire for pleasure. And pleasure is essentially the satisfaction of desire. He presents carnality in the passage as lusting after: "the things of others" and "the things of the world."

Probably the text of the whole discourse is verse 8, which has a distinct "carnality-reference." The carnal mind is in complete domination of the "sinner" so that his hands are defiled. It is in conflict with the mind of Christ in the "double minded," and the implication is that purification (sanctification) will resolve the conflict. It is extremely important to master the full implication of this introductory paragraph in order to understand this difficult passage. As is his custom, James gives the negative side first and then the positive.

1. Characteristics of the Carnal Pursuit of Earthly Pleasure (4:1-4)

Paul similarly characterizes the unredeemed life in Titus 3:3, speaking of people as enslaved to "all kinds of passions and pleasures."

a. Seeks Its Own Ends without Reference to God (4:1-2)

Whether or not James means to imply that such violent circumstances prevailed in the church is difficult to say. It is better to understand it in a broader sense. If the words are translated as "factions" and "quarrels," as by some, we would be reminded of Paul's remarks about carnal Christians at Corinth (1 Corinthians 3:3). The word "passions" is literally "pleasures." John Wesley translates it this way and comments: "Your desires of earthly pleasures." These desires war in the soul (see 1 Peter 2:11). This picture is of the fortress of Mansoul under the complete domination of an alien army (in John Bunyan's "The Holy War"). As yet, it has no opposition and engages in militant action to get more territory in its possession without reference to God. "You want something ... you do not have because you do not ask God."

b. Seeks Its Own Ends under Religious Guise (4:3)

Once again, we have carnality seeking earthly pleasure, this time through prayer. But its prayers are not answered because its motives are wrong. The word "lusts" here is the same word as in verse 1, with the same meaning. If we cannot relate our asking to the glory of God, we ask amiss. (See Numbers 11:4-6 and Psalm 106:9-15.)

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c. Seeks Its Pleasure in the World (4:4)

God looks upon the love of the world as spiritual adultery. Disloyalty of Israel was often designated “adultery” by the prophets; also see the words of Jesus in Matthew 12:39. In the New Testament, the Church (God’s people) is presented as being the bride of Christ, the world bidding for its affections. There is no condemnation here of those who find themselves unwillingly in an atmosphere pervaded by worldly standards but of those who, by deliberate choice, seek pleasure in worldly pursuits. James goes even further and takes the New Testament meaning of adultery as a lustful look and incorporates it into this verse. Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world” really means “Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world.” Note that earthly pleasure is elusive; even though it is sought in the above ways, it is never truly found.

2. Characteristics of the Spiritual Pursuit of Heavenly Pleasure (Holiness) (4:5-12)

- a. James begins his transition into the remedy for the foregoing by quoting from scripture that we cannot pinpoint since no Old Testament scripture is precisely like this. Possibly, it references Exodus 20:5. At best, it is difficult to interpret his statement. And, it is entirely impossible to determine clear meaning apart from an understanding of the divided nature (double-mindedness) of the regenerated person who is not yet entirely sanctified. A good translation will help us: “The Spirit which He has made to dwell in us yearns jealously over us.” The meaning then would be that the Spirit of Christ (which is in all that are his, Romans 8:9) is grieved over this divided affection and constantly yearns jealously for our undivided love (entire sanctification). The question is this: “Is it in vain that God longs for such undivided love?” The rhetorical question requires a resounding “No”! So, James sets about to tell his readers how to pursue this coveted goal of an undivided heart: heavenly pleasure.
- b. Since we are faced with the problem of desire and how to control illegitimate desire, he begins his instruction with a word of encouragement for the seeker, “He gives us more grace.” (4:6)
- c. Note the progression beginning in verse 6, where he characterizes the pursuit of heavenly pleasure or holiness. The way up is down; the first step is to be deeply humiliated over this inner condition. Next, everyone must be intent on their own condition and not be sidetracked by critically comparing themselves with others (4:11).
- d. Finally, we reach the climax (4:12), where we submit ourselves to the one

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Lawgiver, who can save the sinner and destroy the carnal mind of the double-minded.

Summary: Genuine faith mourns over any inclination to earthly pleasure and is quick to seek the way that leads to heavenly pleasure, where complete satisfaction with the things of God rules the heart. This is only another way of saying that one who is truly saved is eager for personal holiness.

J. FAITH TESTED BY SUBMISSION TO THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD (4:13-17)

While speaking of humility, James's negative mind turns to those who have an arrogant trust in the security of human undertakings without consideration of God's will. He immediately proceeds to denounce them.

1. The Uncertainty of Life (4:13-14)

James puts these words into the mouth of an imaginary group of itinerant merchants as they draw up their plans for the future as if they were in their own keeping (Proverbs 27:1). Life is uncertain as to its contingencies and ending.

2. The Brevity of Life (4:14)

Life is compared to a mist that soon vanishes.

3. Submission to Providence (4:15-16)

God holds the future in his hand; we are dependent upon his will.

4. Faith Fails in Its Omissions (4:17)

In its setting, this verse means that knowing the aforementioned requirements and ignoring them is a sin. However, this maxim has much wider implications than the context.

Summary: Genuine faith submits to the sovereignty of God, while false faith takes its life into its own hands and lives after its own impulses, presuming on God.

K. FAITH TESTED BY ENDURANCE (5:1-11)

1. Verses 1-6 are a rhetorical condemnation of the rich, but James's real purpose is to comfort those whom the rich are oppressing (see 2:6). There are three exhortations in 5:7-12, each with a different emphasis, although using the same word.



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2. "Be patient" (5:7), meaning to refrain from hasty retaliation. The "then" points back to the emphasis that *God will vindicate* (5:4). James has used the title "The Lord of Sabaoth" [SAA-buh-owt], which is one of the most majestic titles of God in the Old Testament, drawing attention to his sovereign omnipotence. The use of the expression here emphasizes the truth that, though the poor and the oppressed appear to have no champions on earth, they have as their Helper and Avenger none other than the Lord God Omnipotent. Martin Luther, in the throes of the Reformation battle, wrote: *"Did we in our own strength confide, Our striving would be losing, Were not the right Man on our side, The Man of God's own choosing. Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He; Lord Sabaoth is His name, From age to age the same, And He must win the battle."*
3. "Be patient" (5:7-8), meaning to strengthen your heart in the assurance that Christ's return will end the strife. For illustration, James refers to the farmer's patient waiting for the latter rain, upon which he completely depended for harvesting his crop. He lived in confident expectancy that it would come because God had promised (Deuteronomy 11:13-14). With a like spirit, we should look to the Second Coming, for it is surely promised. Because of this faith, we should not grumble or blame our brother or sister for our present misery.
4. "Be patient" (5:10-11) because of the examples set before us. A different word for "patience" is used here and expresses a determination to face a particular trial or a series of trials without flinching. James bids us to remember the example of the prophets (probably has Jeremiah in mind) and also Job (Job 16:19). The "patience" of Job is better translated as "constancy" or "endurance." Job is determined to endure without losing faith in God. For this same type of exhortation, see Hebrews 12:1.

L. FAITH EXPRESSES ITSELF IN PRAYER (5:12-20)

In closing his book, James calls attention to a matter of supreme importance. Christians are here bidden to turn constantly to prayer, whatever their life circumstances may be. The habit of prayer should be, and indeed is, one of the most obvious features that differentiates a Christian from other people.

1. The Therapy of Prayer (5:12-16)

Therapy means the treatment of disease.

a. Prayer promotes mental healing (5:13).

In contrast to verse 12, one should pray rather than retaliate or have

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self-pity. “In trouble” in verse 13 is a cognate of “affliction” in verse 10. In affliction, prayer will create a healthy mental reaction.

b. Prayer promotes physical healing (5:14-15).

The word translated “anoint” is not a sacred and religious word, as one would suppose according to the popular usage of this verse; rather, it is the mundane and profane word used in medical treatises for “rub” with oil and means a medicinal application. Olive oil was the best healing balm known in those days, and therefore, this verse implies that we should not shun medical aid but rather combine the best medicine available with prayer.

However, for two obvious reasons, James does not recommend oil merely as medicine. First, he does not say the oil shall cure but that “the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well.” Second, the anointing is to be done by the elders, whereas anyone could have made a medicinal application. We thus conclude that some religious value was involved, possibly to stimulate the faith of the sick, which is the basis for its use today.

2. The Effectiveness of Prayer (5:16-18)

After the statement of verse 16, giving the character of the effective prayer and the results of his praying, James uses Elijah as an illustration of both.

3. The Redemptiveness of Prayer (5:19-20)

While writing in an atmosphere of prayer, James no doubt considered the erring and the most effective way of saving himself to God and the church. This truth still stands.

Ananos [UH-na-noz]
resurrection [reh-zr-EK-shn]
treatise [TREE-tuhs]
antithesis [an-TI-thuh-suhs]
Palestine [PAL-uh-styn]
carnality [kar-NAL-li-tee]
sabaoth” [SAA-buh-owt]

CHAPTER 3

The Petrine Epistles

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SECTION 3.1. INTRODUCTION TO 1 AND 2 PETER

A. AUTHOR

No New Testament character is probably better known than Simon Peter, “the Big Fisherman.” Impulsive, vacillating - who would have ever imagined that he would write a treatise that had for its major theme “Being Established in Grace” (5:12). But, all of that was before Pentecost! Afterward, he became eminently qualified.

One writer said that “the character of Peter is transparent and easily analyzed, and it is doubtless true that no other in scriptural history is drawn for us more clearly or strongly.”

Peter has been called the prince of the apostles and seems to have been their leader. His name is placed first in every list of them.

He was their spokesman. He was married and some have drawn from 1 Corinthians 9:5 that his wife accompanied him on his extensive journeys.

It is hard to separate tradition from fact in his death. Jesus had predicted (John 21:18-19) a violent death for him, and it is thought that he was crucified under Nero. A common tradition (not proved by history) is that he was crucified with his head down at his own request because he felt himself unworthy to be executed in the same manner as was his Lord.

B. EPISTLES

1. First Peter

The First Epistle of Peter has been termed the “Epistle of Hope” because its purpose is to encourage Christians under fiery persecution. *Victory over suffering* is the distinctive note. 1 Peter was written to scattered Jewish Christians but also would include gentile believers.

Language scholars tell us that the Greek of 1 Peter is much better than would have been expected from an unlettered fisherman and is in contrast to the rather crude Greek of the second letter. We introduce this to point out that 1 Peter was dictated to Silvanus (Silas) (5:12), which would account for the literary style. The second Epistle was probably written by Peter’s own hand.

As would be expected of the author, the books are not particularly



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theological but largely hortatory [HOR-tuh-taw-ree]. In fact, Peter tells us that in his writing, he was “encouraging” and “testifying” (5:12).

The structure of the Epistle is peculiar and almost defies analysis. It is similar to James in that one thought suggests another without an orderly progression of ideas. An old writer said, “He is fond of beginning a sentence in such a manner that it shall refer to a principal word in the preceding.”

The key to understanding the Epistle is probably 5:12, which we have already noted. Peter’s method was exhorting (encouraging and instructing) and testifying (witnessing out of personal experience). Wesley translates, “adding my testimony.” The stated theme is the “true grace of God,” while the purpose is stated in the words, “Stand fast in it.”

Using the key of “grace,” we offer the following outline. Apart from the salutation and closing, four major themes seem to have been developed, although all are directly connected with the purpose of strengthening those who were being persecuted.

Outline

Salutation (1:1-2)
Grace Bringing Salvation (1:3-25)
Grace Influencing Conduct (2:1-20)
Grace Imparting the Mind of Christ (2:21 - 4:11)
Grace Giving Victory (4:12 - 5:11)
Closing (5:12-14)

2. Second Peter

Second Peter is closely akin to 2 Timothy in that in each the author is facing death (1:14). Peter is now an old man, probably about seventy. In the second letter, he is addressing the same readers as in the first.

In 1 Peter, his theme was the sufficiency of grace, and his address was more general. In the second letter, he assumes that his readers are “in grace” and instructs them concerning the laws by which grace is made sufficient. We might say he is speaking of the responsibilities created by being in grace. This makes the letter more personal and individually applicable.

Hence, we may say that the first letter deals with *perils without*, while the second letter considers *perils from within*. The burden of Peter’s heart is that being in grace, his readers shall grow therein, especially given the imminence of Christ’s return. We feel that the lengthy passage on false teachers is more

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parenthetical than a part of his original intent. However, its purpose is very close to his reason for writing since it is a vicious attack upon the inner life of the Church.

Outline

Salutation (1:1-2)

Growth in Grace (1: 2-11)

The Certainty of the Christian Revelation (1:12-21)

False Teachers (2:1-22)

The Certainty of the Second Advent (3:1-16)

Closing (3:18)

SECTION 3.2. EXPOSITION OF 1 PETER

A. SALUTATION

1. Literary Elements

a. Author (1:1).

He uses the name Jesus gave him, meaning “a stone.”

b. Recipients (1:1).

These churches covered nearly all of Asia Minor and were probably founded by Paul. Peter’s acquaintance with their problems gives some indication that he may have visited them. The Christians are “scattered,” i.e., of the “Dispersion.” This is a technical name referring to Jews outside of Palestine but used here and in James 1:1 in a wider sense. They were also termed strangers or “sojourners,” the exact meaning of which is “dwellers in a strange land.” Peter looks upon life as a pilgrimage in a foreign land. The picture in the metaphor is that heaven is our native country, and we are only temporary sojourners here on earth. That this is a dominant note may be seen from referring to 1:17 and 2:11.

c. Greeting (1:2).

Peter combines the usual apostolic blessings of grace and peace. Grace nurtures the Christian life, while peace is its character.

2. Doctrinal Elements - “God’s Elect”

Since election is a controversial and important concept and plays such a prominent role in Peter’s thought, it is advisable to discuss it thoroughly here.

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In this passage (1:2), the apostle speaks of the source, the affirmation, and the consummation of election. Remember, however, that the word “elect” is always used as a noun in the New Testament, never as a verb, and should be understood as “invited ones.”

- a. The source of our election. “According to the foreknowledge of God.”

Our election originates in the foreknowledge of God because God’s foreknowledge saw the sad results of mankind’s probation and “from the foundation of the world” provided a means of salvation in “the Lamb slain.” (Read also Acts 2:23, where we find the only other use of this word in the New Testament.) This eternal provision, consummated at Calvary, encompassed the whole human race. This is predestination [pree-deh-stuh-NAY-shn], which means that God is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Or, in the words of Dr. H. Orton Wiley, “Predestination is the gracious purpose of God to save mankind from utter ruin.” Predestination, then, means that God calls all people unto repentance, but the elect are those who have accepted the conditions of the call. Hence, election is not determined by the secret counsels of God but is shown by the visible fruits of holiness. This is Paul’s clear meaning in Ephesians 1:4 and also Peter’s meaning here. As an old saint once said: “God voted for me. The devil voted against me. But, I voted for myself, broke the tie, and was elected by majority vote.”

- b. The affirmation of our election. “Through the sanctifying work of the Spirit.”

Sanctification is the door to the consummation of our election. We are not yet qualified candidates for heaven until this seal has been placed upon us.

- c. The consummation of our election. “For obedience to Jesus Christ.”

Here, we have the proof of our election in obedience. Elect “for obedience.” This “election” is connected with “sprinkling of the blood” showing how this obedience will be effected. Wesley says it is the foundation of obedience. The reference is undoubtedly to Exodus 24:7-17, but in connection with this Old Testament passage, we should immediately read Hebrews 12:18-24.

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B. GRACE BRINGING SALVATION (1:3-25)

Key verses: 1:10, 13

1. The Basis and Nature of Salvation (1:3)

"Mercy" is closely akin to "grace" and provides the basis for salvation, which finds its dynamic efficiency in the Resurrection [reh-zr-EK-shn]. The nature of the Resurrection influences the character of the salvation bestowed since it is a new birth resulting in a "living hope." No doubt the apostle is reminded of those dark days while Jesus was in the tomb, while he himself suffered the pangs of a guilty conscience over his denial; but when Jesus sent word to "the disciples and Peter," his hope was made alive (see Mark 16:7).

2. The Reserved Inheritance (1:4)

The living hope is set on an eternal inheritance with all the characteristics lacking in an earthly inheritance.

3. The Guarded Heirs (1:5)

The word "shielded" is a military term meaning "to garrison" or "guard." Divine protection is the lot of the elect (Psalm 34:7). Remember, however, that it is not unconditional protection but conditioned on faith.

4. The Inheritance a Source of Comfort (1:6-9)

The thought of suffering is first introduced here as a trial of faith. The purpose of the testing is a proving of faith - an identical phrase to that in James 1:3. Just as gold (which eventually perishes) is shown to be genuine by refining of fire, so faith (more precious than gold) is also purged of any dross and made standard to be negotiable at the "revelation" of Jesus Christ. This is a term used in scripture for the second coming of Christ as Judge and Rewarder.

5. Grace at the First Advent (1:10-12)

This great salvation effected by Christ was foreseen by the prophets of old, who "searched intently" its nature and the time of its appearing. That which they *did* see was more for our edification than theirs. The word concerning angels is a striking comment on the preciousness of our salvation. *"But when I sing redemption's story They will fold their wings, For angels never felt the joy That our salvation brings."* (Johnson Oatman)

6. Grace at the Second Advent (1:13-17)

Having earlier introduced the return of Christ (1:7), Peter returns to some

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exhortations in connection with it. This great event will bring final salvation, while the grace at the First Advent bestows what may be called initial salvation. Practical holiness is the substance of Peter's words.

a. "Prepare your minds for action."

This was particularly understandable to the Orientals, who wore loose, flowing robes. To work, fight, or run, they gathered up their robes. To be girded this way was a sign of readiness for coming action. Thus, the mind is to be unhindered by the cares or pleasures of this world but is to stand in readiness for the "revelation."

b. "Be self-controlled."

The phrase "set your hope fully on" may also mean to set your hope perfectly.

c. "Be holy."

We are urged to "live our lives as strangers here in reverent fear" (1:17). The idea of "conversation" is used eight times in this Epistle and each time should be understood as "manner of life." No doubt this thought harks back to the salutation, where Peter addresses his readers as "elect" or "called ones." As is the character of the One who calls, so must be the manner of life of the one who is called. In support of his exhortation, Peter quotes from Leviticus 11:44.

d. The final exhortation (1:17) refers to a holy fear, which is a wholesome note in any Christian's life.

7. Basis for Personal Holiness (1:18-21)

They are reminded of the vain manner of life from which they were redeemed or bought back. The character of the bounty paid as the ransom provides the strongest argument in the appeal for a pure life. Paul uses the same approach in 1 Corinthians 6: 20. *"I gave My life for thee, My precious blood I shed, That thou might'st ransomed be, And quickened from the dead. I gave, I gave My life for thee. What hast thou giv'n for Me?"* (Frances R. Havergal)

8. Summary (1:22-25)

Peter has previously discussed and now summarizes the proof of their election (obedience), the character of their new birth (of eternal seed), and the nature of the good news of grace (age-abiding). The one exhortation is for brotherly love. The imperative, "love one another," in the original implies a sustained effort, a constant striving.

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C. GRACE INFLUENCING CONDUCT (2:1-20)

Key verses: 2:19-20

(Read “thankworthy” and “acceptable” as “grace”).

1. Preliminary Injunctions (2:1-3)

No doubt, based upon 1:23, Peter encourages the Christians to lay aside those characteristics that are contrary to love, as old clothing would be laid aside. They may have been new converts, according to the implication of 2:2; at least Peter speaks here of a healthy childhood (for contrast, see 1 Corinthians 3: 2). After an initial satisfying experience (read Psalm 34:8), they should be hungry for more. Peter is strong on spiritual growth.

2. The Nature of the Church (2:4-10)

a. A Temple of Living Stones (2:4-8)

- i. Having a “living hope” (1:3) and a “living word” (1:23), they also have come to a “living stone” and have become “lively stones.” This is a conscious contradiction to combine life with stone. It is remarkable how much Old Testament scripture Peter incorporates into his Epistle (see Isaiah 28:16; Psalm 118:22). Upon this Living Stone as the foundation, the individual Christians as living stones are built into a spiritual temple (Ephesians 2:20-22). Here, no doubt, is Peter’s commentary on Jesus’ words to him following the great confession (Matthew 16:18). John Wesley so pertinently comments: “And St. Peter speaking of Him thus, shows he did not judge himself, but Christ, to be the rock on which the Church was built.”
- ii. In verse 4, Peter speaks of the Stone (Christ) as “chosen” and “precious”. In verse 7, the first phrase, the literal reading, is “for you therefore which believe is the preciousness” and refers to the living stones rather than the Living Stone. Not only is life imparted by contact with Christ, but also, when we come to him, He communicates to us those virtues which constitute his preciousness. Certainly, Peter lacked preciousness until Christ gave him his own nature and life - then Peter became precious. This is the work of grace. Having received this character, the next description applies.

b. A New Nation (2:9-10)

A nation of priests offering spiritual sacrifices, the Church is conceived as having replaced the nation of Israel as the chosen of God.

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c. The Conduct of the New Nation (2:11-20)

- i. Once again, they are reminded of their heavenly nationality (2:11). This is a basis for enjoining them to be unattached to the things of this foreign land since such works against the spiritual life. In verse 12, read “conversation” as “manner of life.” “Gentiles” means the inhabitants of the foreign land. Upon this basis, Peter gives instructions as to how these sojourners should conduct themselves in relation to the nations among whom they dwell. This passage describes the circumstances of the readers. Even though persecuted, they must be submissive to the government and let their conduct be above reproach.
- ii. Verses 19-20 speak of suffering for right. If we do right and then suffer, our patience is a mark of grace (meaning “acceptable”). Their response to persecution will reveal their inner grace.

D. GRACE IMPARTING THE MIND OF CHRIST (2:21 - 4:11)

Key verse: 4:1

1. Christ's Example of Suffering (2:21-25)

For the comfort of those who are being “persecuted for righteousness’ sake,” Peter offers the example of Christ, who was not exempt. The point is that they should bear their sufferings in the same spirit as did He. The word “example” is used only here in the New Testament and means “a writing copy,” such as is at the head of a child’s exercise book to imitate. Another suggested meaning is that of an outline or sketch for a painter to fill up - and this reminds us of Paul’s purpose to “fill up ... the afflictions [sufferings] of Christ” (Colossians 1:24). His reaction to mistreatment is our example to copy.

The apostle’s thoughts turn to Christ’s vicarious [vai-KEH-ree-uhs] suffering, which is used to remind the readers of their own salvation.

2. The Mind of Christ in Domestic Life (3:1-7)

a. Chaste living (3:1-2).

Just as servants are to be obedient to unbelieving masters, so are Christian wives to be submissive to unbelieving husbands - not highhanded, lest the husbands be driven away from the faith, but by pious living drawing the husband to Christianity.

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b. Modest dress (3:3-6).

Peter is here making a contrast between outward and inward adornment. The Christian wife is not to neglect her appearance, but neither is her beauty to come adorning herself with gold or jewels merely. The ornament of inner beauty is much more becoming to Christian beauty. "Every ornament of the body, however beautiful, is soon to be laid aside. The adorning of the soul will endure forever." (Albert Barnes)

c. The husband (3:7) should recognize his wife as physically weaker and honor her, lest his prayers be hindered — a striking statement about prayer.

3. Varied Injunctions to Right Living (3:8-17)

a. Call to high living (3:8-13).

The appeals here are based largely on the duty of the Christian in the household of faith. Many of the characteristics mentioned are used by Peter alone in the New Testament.

b. Such living provides comfort in persecution (3:14-17).

Peter has already dealt in a previous passage with the matter of suffering for doing good. He is anxious that they be not persecuted for misdemeanors. The statement in 3:14 is reminiscent of the words of Jesus (Matthew 5:10-11). The importance of 3:15 is that we should have an intelligent grasp of the inner hope.

4. The Vicarious Suffering and Triumph of Christ (3:18-22)

Peter refers back to the thought introduced in 2:21-25 for the encouragement of his readers, and in the course of doing so, he gives us one of the most controversial and difficult passages in the whole Bible. There are almost as many interpretations as there are commentators.

a. The Nature of His Suffering (3:18)

- i. The sacrifice is "once for all". It is not necessary to be repeated or that any other sacrifice for sin be offered.
- ii. It is vicarious in that He suffered "in the place of" another who was deserving of the death.

b. The Triumph of Christ (3:19-22).

The wisest course would probably be to join with Martin Luther, who

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confessed that he did not know what Peter meant. But, since so much false doctrine is drawn from this difficult scripture, we should attempt to arrive at a sensible interpretation of it. The Roman Catholic fiction of purgatory is largely based upon it, as is also the Jehovah's Witnesses' theory of a second chance. The Mormons likewise employ it for a similar purpose. However, one of the most important rules of Biblical interpretation is to never interpret an individual text so as to make it conflict with the general tenor of scripture. It is extremely precarious to rest in the hope of a second chance drawn from such an obscure passage in direct contradiction to the rest of God's Word.

Following the implication of Wesley's *Notes* and the splendid exegesis of Albert Barnes, the soundest interpretation seems to be that Peter is saying that in the spirit (his own spirit), Christ preached to the men of Noah's day through the instrumentality of Noah. It does not necessarily mean that He preached to spirits while they were in prison, during the time when He was in the grave, but it can easily mean that they *are now in prison*, describing their present condition. It was to them, those disobedient people of Noah's day, that Christ in spirit proclaimed a message, probably the righteousness of God (not the gospel).

In the light of the context, the import of this statement may be to encourage the readers to be long-suffering and patient, since out of their unhappy situation (like unto Noah's), they would be delivered by the power of Christ, the same power which raised him from the dead (see 3:18).

The parallel to baptism is noted, but it is a vague one. Peter hastens to explain that the saving by baptism is only symbolic (see also Hebrews 9:13). "Baptism does not wash away the filth of the flesh either in a literal sense, as a bath for the body, or in a metaphorical sense of the filth of the soul. Peter here expressly denies baptismal remission of sins!" (A. T. Robertson)

5. Further Characteristics of the Mind of Christ (4:1-11)

a. The Purifying Effect of Suffering (4:1-6)

- i. Having suffered intensely, one is weaned from the things of this world and has hope only in the future (4:1-4). Verse 4 is Peter's explanation as to why the old crowd resorts to abuse when they cannot entice the Christian back to the things of the World. One is reminded of those who ran after Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress* when he fled from the City of Destruction.

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- ii. But we live with the judgment in view (4:5-6). Verse 6 could mean either those dead in trespasses and sins (see Ephesians 2:1) or those who were once alive and now are dead (Wesley).

b. The End Is Near (4:7-11).

He introduces the perspective of the future; hence, his readers are urged to stay close together and be ministers to one another as “stewards of the many-colored grace of God.” Verse 11 gives the manner of this ministration.

E. GRACE GIVING VICTORY (4:12 - 5:11)

Key verse: 5:10

1. The Believer’s Source of Joy in Suffering (4:12-14)

- a. Peter’s choice of words (4:12) shows how intense the persecution must have been and how terrible the suffering. But, the Christians are not to be amazed at it since such is not strange or foreign to the Christian way, for even Jesus suffered (4:13) and plainly stated that this would be the lot of his followers (Matthew 10:24-52).
- b. The reason for this suffering is to “try” them (4:12). God was putting them to the test (read Zechariah 12:9).
- c. Their cause for rejoicing is twofold: first, in that they are partakers of Christ’s sufferings, and second, in that they shall receive abundant glory in the revelation of Christ (4:13).
- d. Throughout it all, the Holy Spirit - spoken of as the “spirit of glory and God” - is upon them and is glorified by their steadfastness while being blasphemed by the persecutors (4: 14). He rests upon the Christian as the Shechinah [sha-KAI-nah] rested upon the tabernacle. (BIGG)

2. Suffering as a Christian (4:15-19)

Here is an oft-repeated admonition. There is some consolation in the fact that the judgment upon those who oppose the gospel of Christ will eventually come and be so much more severe - but to this, the Christian will be only a witness. The Christian’s sufferings will have passed.

3. Instruction to the Elders (5:1-4)

Peter is now preparing to strengthen his readers for the battle and deals first with the orderliness of the Church. He looks upon it as a “flock” and instructs

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the elders to care for it by feeding it and keeping watchful oversight of it. They are not to dominate the flock (5:3) but are to be servants - not under the dominion of the flock, but under the Chief Shepherd.

4. The Spirit of the Flock (5:5-7)

The phrase “clothe yourselves” with humility is really “be girded,” and who could miss the reference to Jesus girding himself at the Last Supper and, in true humility, washing the disciples’ feet? His injunction (5:6) indicates what the attitude of the flock is to be under the suffering which God is permitting.

5. Victory in Conflict (5:8-11)

- a. The figure of the devil as a roaring lion may have some reference to the amphitheater scene where wild beasts were turned loose upon unfortunate victims - a fate that many Christians met. As the dripping fangs approach, Christians must be sober and vigilant, not cowardly and panicky. Peter may have in mind the common idea that a wild beast will attack only a fearful prey. One may stand him off with a fearless gaze. At least, he said, the devil roared, and the purpose of a lion’s roar is to strike terror into the heart of his intended victim. Him we are to withstand “firm and steadfast,” strong in the Lion of the tribe of Judah. The Porter’s word to Christian in *Pilgrim’s Progress* when he perceived two lions in the way is enlightening: “Is thy strength so small? Fear not the lions, for they are chained and are placed there for the trial of faith where it is, and for the discovery of those that have none: keep in the midst of the path, and no hurt shall come unto thee.”
- b. Suffering only temporary (5:10-11). This is a comforting thought that Peter develops, and it calls for the heartfelt doxology [daak-SAA-luh-jee], with which he closes this section.

6. Closing (5:12-14)

- a. This Silvanus [sil-VA-nuhs], who was the amanuensis [uh-man-yoo-EN-suhs] (recording secretary) and bearer of the Epistle, is the same Silas who traveled with Paul. See the introduction concerning his secretarial work in this letter.
- b. The “Babylon” noted here is presumed to be Rome. Peter would have every reason for keeping his presence there a secret since Nero was in power. John Mark was with him, which accords with the many early records that tell us he became Peter’s “interpreter” after leaving the company of Barnabas. It was under Peter’s influence that Mark wrote his Gospel.

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- c. The closing statement (5:14) is a remarkable testimony that even in the fiercest of circumstances, those who are “in Christ Jesus” can have peace. Amen.

SECTION 3.3. EXPOSITION OF 2 PETER

A. SALUTATION

1. Writer (1:1)

Here, the author uses both names by which he was known and adopts the designation used several times by the Apostle Paul in speaking of himself as a “bondman” and a “special messenger.”

2. Recipients (1:1)

- a. This Epistle is evidently addressed to the same readers as was the First Epistle (see 3:1), and Peter describes them as having received a common faith with the apostles. “Precious” is a characteristic word in these Epistles. Both “God” and “Lord” refer to Jesus Christ, so we have here a clear exaltation of Jesus to Godhood.
- b. This common faith is “obtained,” not “attained.” How important it is that we make this distinction! “Holiness is not an accomplishment but a gift received. It is not attained but is obtained from the Lord. It is not to be approximated by endeavor but is to be accomplished by divine enablement. It is wrought as an instantaneous crisis and not possessed by means of a gradual approach.” (J.B. Chapman)
- c. The word “through” should be translated “in”. It is not imputed righteousness by which we are saved, but our faith does find its foundation in the righteousness of Christ. We are not simply “accounted” to be righteous “through” the righteousness of Another, but rather have righteousness imparted by faith *in* the righteousness of Another.

3. Greeting (1:2)

The same two words are used as in the First Epistle but here there is a conditioning clause which strikes one of the keynotes of this Epistle. This “knowledge” here means full knowledge. It is certainly not head knowledge of which he speaks, but heart knowledge such as Hosea had in mind when he lamented over the lack of the knowledge of God in the land (Hosea 4:6).

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B. GROWTH IN GRACE (1:2-11)

1. Basis of Growth (1:2-4)

There is an overlapping with the salutation, so we include part of it under this heading since the “knowledge” of God and of Jesus our Lord is the basis for growth. One must be “into” grace before growing “in” grace.

- a. All things pertaining to life and godliness are given unto us through this divine knowledge. Here we have the mystery of godliness or piety of which Paul spoke in 1 Timothy 3:16. The word “godliness” here is a combination of two words meaning to worship well.
- b. We have the things of grace (glory and virtue) set over against “life and godliness” since the phrase literally is “by his own glory and virtue.” Hence, by the divine power, we have all that is necessary for life according to his glory and all that is necessary for godliness through his virtue. We are immediately projected forward to verses 17-18, where Peter speaks of the Transfiguration [tran-sfi-gyr-ay-shn], where he, with James and John, had seen “his glory” and also “his virtue,” which is the same word rendered “praises” in 1 Peter 2:9 and refers to that in him which satisfied the heart of God. Thus, the words, “This is my Son whom I love, with him I am well pleased “ (Matthew 3:17).
- c. Based upon his glory and virtue, we have many precious promises (1:4). This is the third time Peter uses “precious,” and not without reason since these promises are to the remarkable result of sharing in the divine nature—the same meaning as Hebrews 2:11. What wonderful resources grace has provided! Having this foundation of imparted divine life, we are now ready for growth in this grace.

2. The Nature of Growth (1:5-7)

- a. We now see the responsibilities which arise as a result of being in grace. Wesley catches the implication in his translation, “for this reason,” and comments, “because God hath given you so great blessings.” The word “add” means “adding on your part” and is from a word meaning “to bring in beside” or “to lead up, one after the other, in a lovely order.” Each one is to be added without losing the ones that have gone before. Even though human endeavor is indicated in the words used, there is some indication of God’s power at work imparting these gifts as we hasten to follow after them (Wesley).
- b. From faith, which is the root and basis of the Christian life, there is to grow this cluster of Christian graces. Since virtue comes first, we may

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conclude that moral uprightness and strength should be the first issue of the Christian experience. Then follows insight or understanding of more of the will of God (Ephesians 5:17). A careful reading of this will show a close relation between this part of the passage and 3:18, both correlated closely with the purpose of the book. But, there is a knowledge which puffs up, so Peter advises adding temperance, or self-control. True self-control then issues in genuine patience. To pray for patience will bring trials in which the exercise of self-control produces patience. The character thus far developed is certainly approaching godliness or Godlikeness. Then comes love for the brethren and, finally, the crown of all: love. The use of the word without modification could well mean “perfect love” or love for Christ.

3. Issue of Growth (1:8-11)

a. Fruitfulness (1:8-9).

Once more, we are introduced to “knowledge,” and it has the same meaning as in 1:2-3. The initial saving faith must bear fruit if it is to be preserved. It is the seed from which beautiful foliage is to come forth. If one fails in this growth, one has missed the purpose of one’s redemption.

b. Security (1:10).

While it is possible to fall from grace, it is unlikely that one who is giving diligence to grow in grace will do so. Here is Peter’s commentary on the proof of one’s election, which we noted from 1 Peter 1:2 to be not the secret counsels of God but the visible fruits of holiness.

c. Heaven (1:11).

If we “add” these virtues/ “do these things,” heaven will be added to us in the end. The term “eternal kingdom” is used only here in the New Testament. This is not reaching heaven “by the skin of your teeth” but abundantly.

C. THE CERTAINTY OF THE CHRISTIAN REVELATION (1:12-21)

1. Peter’s Duty to Remind Them of the Truth (1:12-15)

a. In the light of the danger of forgetfulness (1:12).

The apostle is constantly reminded of Jesus’ commission to him to “strengthen the brethren” (Luke 22: 32). He does not shun repetition as the words imply, literally saying, “To keep on reminding you of those

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things.” To be silent on any truth for any length of time is to rob it of its importance to us.

- b. In the light of his soon departure (1:13-15).

By using the word “tent,” Peter stresses the temporary character of his life, but he is also aware that the end is near. He is an old man. The word translated “put aside” is the word “exodus,” the same word that Jesus used on the mount of his departure (Luke 9:31). In fact, all of this section is written in the light of the Transfiguration.

2. The Confirmation of the Transfiguration (1:16-18)

- a. We see from verse 16 that Peter was conscious of false teachings which were already creeping into the Church. Beyond any reasonable doubt these were the same fables with which Paul and John came to grips in their Epistles. The same description is used in the Pastoral Epistles in 1 Timothy 1:4, etc. In contrast to these narratives, Peter asserts the certainty of the “power and coming” of Jesus Christ.

- b. The power and coming of Christ.

- i. The power refers back to what he has previously discussed in 1: 3, that power which gives enabling for life and godliness through his glory and virtue.

- ii. The coming.

That which Peter saw on the Mount of Transfiguration is the pledge and earnestness of that which was afterward to be revealed. These two things - “the power and coming” constitute the burden of this Epistle. Up to this point, he has dealt with the former. After the interlude of chapter 2, he takes up the second. Both items are extremely important to people under affliction - the first as *a source of standing grace*, the second as *an establishing hope*. His concern here is to show how both concepts have a firm foundation.

Hence, in addition to the New Testament revelation of which he was an eyewitness on the mount, they have:

3. A More Sure Word of Prophecy (1:19-21)

- a. Peter is not saying Old Testament prophecy is more certain than the Transfiguration revelation. His meaning is made clear when we see that the Greek says, “And we have the word of prophecy made more sure.” “The Transfiguration scene confirmed the Messianic prophecies

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and made clear the deity of Jesus Christ as God's Beloved Son." (A. T. Robertson)

b. The nature of the prophecy (1:19).

A very beautiful picture of the character of Old Testament predictions and the bursting forth of the true light. They are like a lamp, lighting up the pathway until the rising of the sun. This word for "dark place" was found on the tombstone of a boy in those days - what a change the coming of Christ made! "There's *a light in the valley of death now for me, Since Jesus came into my heart.*" (R.H. McDaniel)

c. The prophecy of divine origin (1:20-21).

i. Not human (1:20).

Some words here need an explanation to understand their significance. The word in Greek, "comes or springs," has the indication of "coming into being." The word "interpretation" is used only here in the New Testament and implies the "clearing" of what is obscure (lamp in a dark place) or the "losing" of what is complicated. Hence, Peter's meaning is that the Scriptures are not the writers' own interpretation of the things they beheld, not the prophets' reasoning from the facts at hand, but rather borne to him, as he says in the next verse.

ii. By the Holy Spirit (1:21).

Literally, it reads, "Prophecy was not sent [or borne] at any time by the will of people." It is the same word used of the "voice" in verses 17-18. Thus, it is used in comparison. Continuing his play on words, Peter changes from the negative "came not" to the positive: "but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

D. FALSE TEACHERS (2:1-22)

The transition is very obvious. While thinking of the true prophets who received their message from God, he is reminded that there were also men in those days who advanced messages that were not of divine inspiration. The natural trend of thought is that there will always be this sort of prophet, and he turns aside from his main line of thought to warn his readers about them.

1. The Judgment upon the False Teachers (2:1-9)

a. The nature of their heresy [heh-ruh-see] (2:1).

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It is a denial of Christ, and thus, we cannot help but believe that he refers to some form of Gnosticism [NAHS-tuh-SIZ-um] (see the Introduction to 1 John). “Christ rejection is the foremost heresy of the Christian Church. The proportion of ministers today who deny the deity of Jesus Christ is an alarming revelation of the true condition of the Church.” (Ralph Earle)

Peter describes this heresy as “damnable” but this word does not carry the full implication of the description. The apostle is saying that the outstanding characteristic of this heresy is that it leads people to destruction or hell.

- b. The certainty of God’s destruction (2:1-9).

That judgment upon them will be both swift and sure is shown by the illustrations of the fallen angels, the world of Noah’s day (a favorite with Peter), and Sodom and Gomorrah.

2. The Character of the False Teachers (2:10-22)

This passage is very closely akin to Jude’s description of false teachers. Peter’s contempt for them could grow only out of a passionate love for the truth.

- a. Immoral in their conduct, dominated by the lusts of the flesh, and defiant in their attitude (2:10-14).
- b. Followed the way of covetousness, like Balaam [buh-LAAM] of old (2:15-16).
- c. Destitute of the Spirit (2:17). See also Jude 12.
- d. Filled with lying promises (2:18-22).

They offer a freedom that is only an invitation to a life of lust. New converts are particularly susceptible. Peter sees in the results of following these heretics a fulfillment of Jesus’ parable of the unclean spirit (Matthew 12: 45). Such a graphic picture of the backslider, as is seen in the citation from Proverbs 24:11 should cause anyone to hesitate in turning from the way of truth.

E. THE CERTAINTY OF THE SECOND ADVENT (3:1-16)

Having dispensed with the false teachers, Peter proceeds to speak of the “coming” of the Lord, the second of his two great themes (see comments on 1:16-18). However, there is still a lingering word against false teachers, but about

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a different heresy.

1. Concerning Those Who Scoff (3:1-9)

a. Reiteration of purpose and authority (3:1-2).

Peter intends to keep reminding his readers of these important truths and points out the conjunction of “prophets” and “apostles” in their belief in the imminent return of Christ.

b. The scoffers (3:3-4).

Due to the lapse of time, some will deny that Christ will return. Their judgment is based upon the ongoing of the world with uninterrupted regularity. Evidently this lack of expectation was resulting in, or at least Peter saw that it would result in, a lapse of morality (3:3).

c. Their ignorance (3:5-9).

i. Ignorance of God’s ways (3:5-7).

These scoffers were willfully ignorant of God’s faithfulness. They closed their eyes to the fact that God had broken into the continuity of history before with the Flood, so He would again visit the earth with catastrophe [kuh-TA-struh-fee]. After the initial cleansing of the world by water, there must yet be a final and perfect cleansing by fire.

ii. Ignorance of God’s time (3:8-9).

God’s promises are not empty, and He is not slack in keeping them. Our problem is in adjusting our clock to God’s timepiece. A thing that is imminent is impending but hangs suspended, and it may continue to be suspended for an indefinite length of time. And, it is just thus with the time of Christ’s coming - it is of itself sure, sure as the promises of God - but the time of its occurrence is uncertain. (J. B. CHAPMAN)

2. The Impending Events (3:10-13)

We have here a graphic scene of the end of time. It is both destructive and constructive. Before we make any effort at developing a scheme to show the events of the end time, let us remember that was not Peter’s main purpose, but rather the maintenance of a high standard of Christian morality.

a. The Dissolution of the Old (3:10-12).

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- i. Using the same figure as Jesus, he points out the unexpectedness and suddenness of the event. The destruction will be accompanied by “a great noise,” the word meaning the whizzing sound of rapid motion through the air like the flight of a bird, thunder, or fierce flame.
 - ii. From the derivation of the word translated as “fervent heat,” some have suggested a conflagration from internal heat. But, whether it means an upheaval of the internal fires of the earth, an atomic explosion, or even a figurative description, we can only speculate.
- b. The Establishment of the New (3:13).

There are several references to this new economy (see Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; and Revelation 21:1). Peter’s concern is that we shall be holy and thus fit subjects to inhabit this new, holy universe.
- 3. Exhortations in the Light of These Events (3:14-17).
 - a. In the light of the “power,” the readers are exhorted to develop Christlike character; in the light of the “coming,” they are exhorted to guard that character.
 - b. It is an interesting comment about Paul’s writings that we have. Peter points out that Paul likewise taught about the Second Coming. Then, he adds something about twisting some difficult points in Paul’s writings. The Thessalonians did it with the Second Coming. Hymenaeus [hy-meh-NAY-uhs] and Philetus [fi-LEE-tuhs] did it with the resurrection (2 Timothy 2:17). Paul himself was aware that it would be done with his teachings about grace in order to make a license for sin (Romans 6:15).

F. CLOSING (3:18)

As one grows in the knowledge of Christ, one sees with increasing understanding God’s pattern for his own life (1 Peter 2:21). As this pattern unfolds, he needs more grace to fill out that pattern. Thus, a need for growing in both grace and knowledge. Peter’s final thoughts are the same as those with which he opened: the growth of the Christian life. His doxology closes the Epistle with a note that has been lying under the surface all the way through. In the light of all that he has been thinking, it is a natural desire to render honor and glory to the Redeemer.

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hortatory [HOR-tuh-taw-ree]
Predestination [pree-deh-stuh-NAY-shn]
resurrection [reh-zr-EK-shn]
vicarious [vai-KEH-ree-uhs]
Shechinah [sha-KAI-nah]
doxology [daak-SAA-luh-jee]
Silvanus [sil-VA-nuhs]
amanuensis [uh-man-yoo-EN-suhs]
Transfiguration [tran-sfi-gyr-ay-shn]
heresy [heh-ruh-see]
Gnosticism [NAHS-tuh-SIZ-um]
Balaam [buh-LAAM]
catastrophe [kuh-TA-struh-fee]
Hymenaeus [hy-meh-NAY-uhs]
Philetus [fi-LEE-tuhs]

CHAPTER 4

The Johannine Epistles



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SECTION 4.1. INTRODUCTION TO 1, 2, AND 3 JOHN

A. AUTHOR

The author of the Johannine [jow-HA-nuhn] Epistles is the same as the author of the Fourth Gospel - St. John the Beloved. He was probably the youngest of the apostles, but now he is old and the only one remaining alive. The years have deepened the characteristic which caused him to be known as the "Apostle of Love." Even though controversy is a major element in his letters, his address is still tender. Note how he says, "My little children." There is a story of the aged John, who, when too feeble to stand, would sit in his chair and preach, "Little children, love one another."

John is in Ephesus when he writes these Epistles. The time is about A.D. 85-90. We do not have a definite destination given, so we class these with the General Epistles.

B. EPISTLES

First John is the major Epistle of the three, both in length and content. Its purpose is correlated with the Fourth Gospel. The Gospel was written "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). In the Epistle we read: "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life" (5:13). The key word of the Gospel is "believe" while that of the Epistle is "know."

As we have intimated, there is also an element of controversy. The "Apostle of Love" was also a "Son of Thunder." He is combating the same error that confronted Paul in the Pastoral Epistles and just as severely denounces the false teachers (see 2:18; 4:1-6). This error is called Gnosticism and was propagated in the form discussed by John by a man named Cerinthus [ser-IN-thuhs]. The Gnostics said that matter was evil, and thus, since Christ had a material body, it must be evil. Thus, they had difficulty with the person of Christ. They denied the real humanity of Jesus, and this to John was the spirit of the antichrist (1 John 4:2-3).

Although the apostle never mentioned Cerinthus by name, the error so clearly



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opposed by the Epistles is the brand propagated by this false teacher. John's abhorrence of this heresy is shown by a story originating with the venerable father, Polycarp [PAA-lee-kaarp]. John and Cerinthus were both present at one of the public baths. When the apostle discovered that Cerinthus was in the same building with him, he rushed from the baths, exclaiming that he could not remain while Cerinthus, the enemy of God and man, was present.

To understand the Johannine Epistles, one must have at least the passing acquaintance with Gnosticism which we have given (see commentary on 2 Peter 2:1-9) particularly its implications concerning the person of Jesus Christ.

If Peter's writings are difficult to analyze, the First Epistle of John is even more so. Only those who have seriously undertaken it realize the difficulty of the task. Someone has suggested that it is like analyzing the face of the sky or of the sea. It is difficult to locate divisions, although we know they are there. There are four characteristic words: light, righteousness, love, and life. Much of the Epistle clusters around these four statements about the nature of God. Hence, without undue strain, we may divide the main body of the message into four divisions, with these as the controlling thoughts, although the central theme is "fellowship."

Outline of 1 John

Preface - The Nature of Eternal Life Is Fellowship (1:1-4)
Fellowship with God in Light (1:5 - 2:28)
Fellowship with God in Righteousness (2:29 - 4:6)
Fellowship with God in Love (4:7-21)
Fellowship with God in Life (5:1-13)
Conclusion (5:14-21)

Second John is roughly a condensation of 1 John, while the Third Epistle is only a brief note dealing with a personality problem in one of the churches. The two shorter letters have little theology in them. Their chief value, says Dr. Ralph Earle, is that of "giving us samples of correspondence between Christians in the Early Church."

Outline of 2 John

Salutation (1-3)
Occasion of the Letter (4)
The Burden of the Letter (5-6)
Reason for the Letter (7-11)
Conclusion (12-13)

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Outline of 3 John

Salutation (1-4)
Burden of the Letter (5-8)
The Troublemaker (9-11)
The Good Demetrius (12)
Conclusion (13-14)

SECTION 4.2. EXPOSITION OF 1 JOHN

**A. PREFACE - THE NATURE OF ETERNAL LIFE IS FELLOWSHIP
(1:1-4)**

This does not have a beginning like other Epistles. But, since there is a form of address in the body of the message, we term it an Epistle. The apostle launches immediately into his theme, his argument, and his purpose without prelude.

1. The Theme of the Epistles (1:3)

Although the theme is not stated first, it is better to analyze this preface logically to fully understand the later development of the thought. The stated objective in John 5:13 is that those who have believed in the name of the Son of God may know that they have eternal life. Thus, John must state what is the nature of eternal life. It is fellowship with God and with his Son, Jesus Christ. The theme, as John later develops it, is how we may test this fellowship in the light of the nature of God as revealed in Jesus.

2. Foundation of Fellowship (1:2)

The preface is analogous to the first eighteen verses of the Gospel, and it is to this prologue that John has reference. The student would do well to place them side by side for a comparative reading since the apostle draws heavily on the prologue. In both places, he speaks of Christ as the Word or Logos - here, it is the Logos of Life. He implies that in the Gospel we have the unveiling of eternal life in its manifestation in the Son of God (see John 1:4). Not only do we see in the Gospel the Incarnate Life, but we also see (John 1:12; 20:31) that we may share that life through faith: thus, the foundation of fellowship is the "manifestation of life" (1 John 1:2), and the purpose of the manifestation was to bring people into fellowship with God.

3. The Argument (1:1)

At the very outset, we see John's concern for establishing the reality of the



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Incarnation [in-kar-NAY-shuhn]. The Docetic [doh-SHE-tik] Gnostics [NAA-stuhks] (see also commentary on Jude 4) had denied its reality and taught that what men looked upon was only an apparition - the body of Jesus was not real. From the argument of personal experience, John soundly refutes this falsehood. He was severely opposed to this heresy. if for no other reason, he opposed it because of its negative implications for fellowship with God. If the incarnation of the Word of Life was the foundation of fellowship, to deny that Incarnation would be to destroy the basis upon which fellowship with God is possible.

4. His Purpose (1:4)

The prayer of Christ (see John 15:11) and the purpose of John are one. "Joy is that serene happiness, which is the result of conscious union with God and good people, of conscious possession of eternal life. (Alfred Plummer)

B. FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD IN LIGHT (1:5 - 2:28)

Key verse: 1:5

1. Necessity of Walking in the Light (1:5)

To have fellowship with God, we must first understand what God is. It was to give this revelation that Jesus Christ came, and the substance of his message, John says, is that God is Light. Hence, to have fellowship with God, one must walk in light.

2. Results of Walking in the Light (1:6-10)

Tragically, some have misrepresented this glorious passage to attempt to prove that one cannot be without sin in this life. Its message is exactly the opposite of this. Christian experience reverses John's order. And, for his purposes John is first dealing with confession of known sin then walking consistently in the light.

a. An equation of sin and darkness (1:6-7).

One of John's characteristic concepts is the opposition of light and darkness. From the Gospel, we learn that it was also Jesus's thought (John 12:46).

b. Walking in the light brings cleansing (1:7).

i. We do well to emphasize a crisis experience wherein God cleanses

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the heart from all sin, but we must not thereby blind ourselves to the need for perpetual cleansing after the crisis. This is the real heart of John's meaning. If we consider the tenses of the controlling words, we find that he is saying that if we walk and keep walking in the light, the Blood cleanses and keeps on cleansing. Should we fail to walk in the light, we forfeit our cleansing and are walking in darkness and sin. This walking in the light makes possible fellowship with God (one with another: God and us). Men may fellowship in darkness, but light is the only ground upon which God and men may walk together.

"Oh, for a heart to praise my God, A heart from sin set free, A heart that always feels Thy blood So freely shed for me!" (Charles Wesley)

ii. Answer to an objection (1:8).

Some of the Gnostics maintained the position opposed here. The language clearly references a sin principle that must be cleansed - the roots of sin or original sin. To deny its existence before Blood cleansing is to engage in self-deception.

c. Confession of sins brings forgiveness (1:9-10).

i. Of course, this naturally comes before the cleansing of original sin in the Christian experience, but John's progression of thought is not concerned with any artificial divisions.

ii. Objection answered (1:10).

To make this apply to persons who have been converted and continue to sin is to abort the whole Epistle, as can be clearly seen by reading the immediately succeeding context, as well as 3:6-10. Whether or not some Gnostics made this claim, we are not able to say.

3. Maintain Fellowship in the Light (2:1-6)

a. Christ, our Advocate (2:1-2).

In the light of the foregoing provisions for forgiveness and cleansing, i.e., the utter destruction of the root and branch of sin, John says, "so that you will not sin." This initiatory statement is also in anticipation of anyone who would abuse the doctrine of reconciliation that he is about to set forth. Sin breaks fellowship, and his message states that we may live in unbroken fellowship with God. However, in the light of human frailty and the constant liability to falling, he says provision is made in case

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something arises to disrupt fellowship. Wesley comments, "If anyone sins, let him not lie in sin despairing of help." Jesus Christ comes to our rescue and pleads our cause. He is our Advocate or Lawyer, as the sense is. It is the same word used in John 14, 15, and 16 for the Comforter. The Holy Spirit is our Helper or Lawyer on earth. Jesus Christ is our Helper in heaven. This is a wonderful consolation.

We must guard against the false doctrine of "sinning saints" by saying that this intercession and consequent restoration of fellowship is not automatic but rather harks back to 1:9 and avails for only those who confess. Further, we must look forward to 3:1-10.

The effectiveness of the advocacy of Christ is due to the fact that He is the Propitiation for sins (2:2), the atoning Sacrifice by which the justice of God is satisfied.

b. Christ, our Example (2:3-6).

The Gnostics made much of "knowing" God, but John asserts that the proof of this knowledge is the keeping of his commandments (see John 14:15). In this, as in other parts of the Epistle, John has clearly before his eyes the person of Christ, who is our perfect Pattern to which he has reference in verse 6.

4. The Nature of Walking in the Light (2:7-11)

He has made a general statement about keeping the command - brethren. If we do this, we are in the light.

5. Address to Various Groups (2:12-14)

This paragraph marks a pause in the message as John stops to make a pointed appeal to his readers. He is the elder and looks upon all others as "little children," an affectionate address. "Fathers" refers to those of more mature Christian experience; "young men" refers to those full of vigor and strength because of the Word of God abiding in them. The purpose of this interlude is possibly to remind them that he is not accusing but warning them concerning the dangers they face, which would disrupt their existing fellowship with God. This is verified by the immediately succeeding context.

6. Relation of Light-Dwellers to the World of Darkness (2:15-17)

a. The world.

By the world, he clearly means those who dwell in darkness and the

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world system apart from Christ. In understanding John's meaning, it would be a helpful exercise to take an exhaustive concordance and run the references in John's Gospel on the relation of light and darkness. Representative scriptures are John 1:5 and 3:19-20.

b. The things in the world (2:16).

He refers here to the three avenues through which the "world" satisfies its desires or love. In other words, do not desire the unlawful pleasures of sense, the unlawful sights to be seen, or the pride (vainglory) that comes from the possession of goods (the means of life). It is said that the three temptations of Jesus correspond to these three avenues: the temptation to turn stones into bread - the lust of the flesh, the temptation to gain dominance of all He saw - the lust of the eyes, the temptation to gain worship by spectacular means - pride of life. All were legitimate desires, but to get to the desired goal through the suggested avenues was to take the wrong shortcut. All would eventually come to pass, but God's way was the long way around. Sometimes, we, too, are tempted to take shortcuts to success, but this is worldliness.

c. The transitory way of darkness (2:17).

Possibly, the meaning is that those things which are gained in the foregoing manner are short-lived, but the true pleasure of doing God's will is eternal.

7. Peril to Fellowship (2:18-28)

This is really the second peril that John mentions since worldliness is also a danger.

a. The antichrist (2:18-23).

In this passage, John makes a frontal attack upon the Docetic Gnostics and their teaching. They had evidently once been in the Christian ranks but had veered from the truth, and John manifested relief that they were gone (2:19). He speaks of them as anti-Christ in their teachings. There are two streams of thought with regard to antichrist. The first found its fountainhead in Jewish apocalyptic thought, which conceived of the embodiment of all that was opposed to the Messiah in one diabolical being, the man of sin. This was the stream that Paul followed in his discussion of the Antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:3-12). The other stream is more originally Christian, and John's use of the word is determined by this Christian concept. This does not deny either but explains the dual

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use of the term in the Scriptures.

b. The anointing (2:20, 27).

There is a play on words here, which is not discernible in the English translation. It is an anointing from the Anointed One of which he speaks - this is the meaning of "Christ." "All Christians in a secondary sense are what Christ is in a unique and primary sense, the Lord's anointed." (Alfred Plummer)

There is one point of exegesis that will help to soften these rather difficult passages. The better manuscripts read "you all know" rather than "you know all things." The Gnostics claimed exclusive knowledge, but John says that knowledge of the truth is the lot of all anointed ones. This is not to say that the presence of the Holy Spirit gives immediate, intuitive knowledge of all theology and certainly not of other fields of knowledge. By way of further explanation, we note that the tense of the Greek in verse 27 makes the difficult phrase read, "... you do not need anyone to teach you". The presence of the Holy Spirit will cause one to recognize truth and error in something like the same way that almost anyone can recognize a lack of harmony in music, even though one may not be able to carry a tune. It is much the same thing that Daniel Steele had in mind when he spoke of the Holy Spirit as the great "Conservator of Orthodoxy" [kuhn-SUR-vuh-tr] [OR-thuh-daak-see].

c. Truth and error (2:22-28).

John's readers had received the truth, and anything which was opposed to this truth was a lie. The error was concerning the person of Jesus Christ. To deny his humanity was to also deny the Father. This was the error of the Cerinthian [ser-IN-thee-uhn] Gnostics (see the introduction to 1, 2, and 3 John). John closes this section with an exhortation to abide by the truth they had received to be prepared for his coming. This was precisely Jesus' point in John 15:4.

C. FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD IN RIGHTEOUSNESS (2:29 - 4:6)

Key verse: 2:29

1. The Nature of Those Begotten by God (2:29)

- a. Two propositions are advanced here. The first, a knowledge of the nature of God, is an awareness based upon intuitive knowledge; the second has

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to do with learning by experience. The combination of these two forms is common to John (John 13:7; 21:17).

- b. Righteousness in God is closely akin to justice and is sometimes identified with it. Dr. Wiley speaks of it as the foundation of the divine law, while justice is the administration of that law. Both are closely related to holiness. In people, Dr. Wiley equates Christian righteousness and justification by faith. The word itself suggests conformity to a standard, which this text gives as God's righteousness.
- c. Being born of God logically demands that we bear God's image in this aspect of his nature. However, this scripture speaks of "doing," and John carries out the thought, in the succeeding verses, of practicing righteousness.

2. The Purifying Hope (3:1-3)

The second coming of Christ is a strong incentive to holiness of heart and life.

3. On Practicing Righteousness (3:4-10)

- a. We have here one of the strongest passages on "sinless perfection" to be found anywhere. To the question, "In what sense is a Christian perfect?" John Wesley answered first, "He is so far perfect as not to commit sin." He had a good scripture foundation.
- b. Sin is defined (3:4) as the transgression of the law or, as the Greek says, "lawlessness." Thus, sin is more a spirit than an act, but the spirit always issues in an act. Based on this statement, Wesley defined sin as "the voluntary transgression of a known law."
- c. Doing sin is set in contrast to doing righteousness (3:7-8). This is John's negative approach to emphasizing his proposition that we must be righteous to have fellowship with God.
- d. To understand verse 9, we should also refer to 2:1, where the same word is used (sin) but undoubtedly with a different shade of meaning. In the passage before us, John speaks of that lawless spirit of disregard for God's law. In 2:1 he refers to what in our language may be properly called mistakes, such unpremeditated acts as may need forgiveness. The meaning is, then, that we cannot be the children of God and, at the same time, have a lawless spirit.
- e. He sums up his previous position (3:10) and, at the same time, introduces

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another aspect of practicing righteousness: love for our brethren.

4. Love for the Brethren (3:11-18)

Here is a repeated emphasis since it was also a test of walking in the light. Likewise, it will be found in the next section, which highlights love, hence the designation of this Epistle as one of love.

a. A brother's hate (3:12-15).

Once again, John's argument takes a negative turn. The thought that Cain (because of his wickedness) slew Abel (because of his righteousness) suggests that for the same reason, the Christian will be hated by the World. One cannot have fellowship with God - have eternal life - and have hate for one's brother. John takes Jesus' statement that hate is equivalent to murder.

b. Love is a self-giving concern (3:16-18).

Like James, John emphasizes the practical side. With the example of Christ for a pattern, we should be just as sacrificial for our brother's welfare. This outgoing concern will manifest itself in material assistance where needed.

5. The Reward of Practicing Righteousness (3:19-24)

a. An assured heart (3:19-20).

In addition to outward signs by which we may know that we have eternal life, there is also an inner assurance of heart, a heart at rest before God. It is said that John means "conscience" by "heart" since he never uses the word conscience. But, if our "heart" condemns us, God does the more so.

b. Answered prayer (3:22).

Two things stand out:

- i. Confidence of receiving from the hand of God.
- ii. Living beyond a Pharisaical [fair-uh-SAY-i-kuhl] requirement by doing "those things that are pleasing in his sight."
- iii. The witness of the Spirit (3:23-24). Having fulfilled the requirement of righteousness, we have knowledge born of the Spirit's indwelling.

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6. False Spirits (4:1-6)

After introducing the Holy Spirit, John proceeds to warn against those spirits that are not of God. The controversy with the Gnostics arises again, and his criterion of true and false spirits is the doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ.

D. FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD IN LOVE (4:7-21)

Key verse: 4:8

1. Definitive Love (4:7-10)

- a. The nature of God as love is set forth in appealing terms (4: 7-8).

Let it be remembered that John emphasizes this truth very strongly, but he also has pointed out that God is Light and righteous. One will become involved in unlimited error by placing all his emphasis on one point - as have the liberals by making love bear the weight of an entire theological system.

- b. The apex of love is seen in God's self-giving concern (4: 9-10).

This theme recurs throughout this section.

2. Maintaining Fellowship through Love (4:11-21)

- a. Loving one another (4:11-12, 19-21).

God's love for us is the pattern of our love for one another - in fact, it is impossible to love God and not love our brother. John uses the family relationship (5:1) to strengthen his point.

- b. Sharing in God's love (4:13-16).

We seem to have a progression here. Note that John says in 4:13 that we have received "of his Spirit." He then sets forth the manifestation of God's love in his Son (referring back to the first phrase of 4:12) as the exemplification of love. Finally, the implication is that we are partakers of this love - "of his Spirit." This is fully in accord with John's main line of thought that fellowship is conditioned by the nature of God.

- c. Perfect Love (4:17-18).

"In this way" probably refers to the preceding: God's love as revealed by Christ, dwelling in us. The possibility of having perfect love is clearly

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stated. John defines the type of fear that is incompatible with love - the kind that has torment. *"Oh, glorious hope of perfect love! It lifts me up to things above; It bears on eagles' wings. It gives my ravished soul a taste, And makes me for some moments feast With Jesus' priests and kings."* (Samuel Medley)

E. FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD IN LIFE (5:1-12)

Key verse 5:12

We now meet another fundamental concept in John's thought. The word "fellowship" has faded into the background, but eternal life and the knowledge of it are still prominent. The outstanding fact is that life itself. The means of entering into life is by the new birth through faith, hence the use of faith in this passage. One who is familiar with the Gospel of John will realize the importance that the apostle attaches to these ideas (read John 1:3).

1. Faith and Life (5:1-3)

In the background, one can discern the Gnostics, who emphasized intellectual knowledge, yet John is speaking not only of a mental acceptance of the truth but more fundamentally of a faith life that brings about an inner transformation - "born of God." Brotherly love finds its way into this cycle of thought just as it did in the others.

2. Faith-Life and Victory over the World (5:4-5)

This thought is subtly connected with the former statement that his commandments are not grievous. "It is the world and its ways which makes the Divine commands grievous, and the new birth involved in faith gives us a new unworldly nature and a strength which conquers the world." (Alfred Plummer)

Two unique statements are found in this passage:

- a. The Greek word *pistis*, meaning "faith," is used here the only time it is found in John's writings, although "believe" is used many times.
- b. There is a play on words in the phrase, "This is the victory that has overcome the world," which cannot be reproduced in English. A different form of the same word is used for "victory" and "overcome." The first refers to an individual experience in the past, a victory won. This could refer to entering into the life of the Son of God through faith. It is this "victory" that continues to maintain victory over the world.

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3. Witnesses to the Object of Faith (5: 5-10)

Faith implies witness since faith is possible only on the strength of testimony. The substance of the testimony is the identity of the historic Person Jesus with the eternal Son of God - this divinehuman Person is the Object of our faith.

a. The Spirit, the water, and the Blood (5:6-9).

Various meanings have been attached to these witnesses. Whatever John's hidden meaning, we know that his purpose was to establish the true humanity of Jesus Christ and his deity. It is the unified testimony of earthly and heavenly witnesses that this is so.

St. John here shows the immovable foundation of that faith that Jesus is the Son of God, not only the testimony of man but the firm, indubitable testimony of God. (John Wesley)

b. The inner witness (5:10).

John's appeal is to religious experience. He uses the term "to believe on" for the first time in the Epistle but uses it nearly forty times in the Gospel. It implies the strongest confidence and trust. It was true then and still is that genuine faith has its own verification.

4. Summary (5:11-13)

This is a strong review in which John answers the age-old debate as to whether we believe because we know or know because we believe. Theologians have argued for centuries, but John says, "If we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, we thereby know that we have eternal life."

F. CONCLUSION (5:14-21)

John combines several of his leading thoughts for these final words.

1. Intercessory Prayer (4:14-17)

He has previously spoken of the Christian's boldness twice in relation to the judgment (2:28; 4:17) and in another passage similar to this (3:21-22). Here, it is joined to brotherly love, which will induce us to pray for the erring one.

2. The Sum of the Christian's Knowledge (5:18-20)

Each verse repeats "we know." With John, some things are certain. Each of

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these certainties points back to a thought in the main body of the Epistle: the first, to the passage on sinless perfection (3:4-10); the second, to the relation of the Christian to the world (2:15-17); and the third, to the unction which gives intuition of the truth (2:20, 27).

3. Final Injunction (5:21)

Idolatry was always prevalent in the ancient world. The implication of the language is “once for all, be on your guard and have nothing to do with.” It is also reflective, showing the need for our personal effort.

SECTION 4.3. EXPOSITION OF 2 JOHN

A. SALUTATION (1-3)

1. Author (1)

The author styles himself as the “elder” because of his age. The Greek word is *presbuteros*; hence, some have tried to identify the author with John the Presbyter, who seems to appear in another writing. However, there is no doubt that the Apostle John is the author of this and the First Epistle.

2. The Recipient (1-2)

There is no way of saying with certainty who is meant by the address “unto the elect lady.” Some have said that it refers to a church; others, that the word “lady” in Greek is a proper name of a woman; while others affirm that it refers to an outstanding but unnamed woman in one of the churches. Most commentators prefer to hold that it is an individual rather than a church. At any rate, John feels much affection because of the truth. He is striking the dominant note of the Epistle, which is the truth as it is revealed in Jesus Christ.

3. Greeting (3)

He adopts the threefold greeting that Paul used in the Pastoral Epistles. These blessings flow from the Father and the Son of the Father. The wording of this statement about Jesus Christ indicates that John has in mind the false teachings that he discounts in verses 7-11. Both truth and love are keynotes of this short Epistle, the former being used five times and the latter four times.

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B. OCCASION OF THE LETTER (4)

The apostle has encountered some of the children of the “elect lady” and is happy that they are walking in the truth according to the commandment - another characteristic of John. Stimulated by this contact, he has penned this letter in support of the truth to their mother.

C. THE BURDEN OF THE LETTER (5-6)

He confesses that this is only a reiteration of that which is already well known. The sum of the exhortation is that genuine love will produce obedience to the commandments. This was Jesus’ point in John 14:15.

D. REASON FOR THE LETTER (7-11)

The reason for the letter is stated in the first words of this section: “Many deceivers ... have gone out into the world.” Once more, John’s concern for the truth comes to the forefront, and we are confronted with the archdeceivers, the Gnostics, who deny the true humanity of Jesus Christ. John is very uncharitable toward those who bear this falsehood and advises that the “lady” not extend hospitality to them lest she become a partaker of their evil deeds.

E. CONCLUSION (12-13)

John hopes for a personal encounter in the near future. Some have suggested that these words reflect the failing strength of an old man to whom writing is a burden. It is possible that the sister mentioned is dead or absent at the time of writing.

SECTION 4.4. EXPOSITION OF 3 JOHN

A. SALUTATION (1-4)

1. The Author (1)

As in the Second Epistle, John speaks of himself as an elder.

2. The Recipient (1-4)

It is impossible to determine who Gaius [GAY-yuhs] really is since it was one

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of the most common names in the Roman Empire. He is well thought of by the apostle, who has utmost confidence in his religion. His joy is unbounded because Gaius is still walking in the truth - John's great concern.

3. The Greeting (2)

We have here not a common form, but rather a simple wish for the prosperity of Gaius, consisting chiefly in bodily health.

B. BURDEN OF THE LETTER (5-8)

This exhortation contrasts with the one in 2 John. There, he forbids hospitality to false teachers; here, he urges that it be extended to traveling evangelists of the truth. Evidently, there had been some trouble in the church caused by the refusal of the ministry of visiting brethren—Diotrephes [dee-AH-tre-fehz] (see verse 9), no doubt being the source of it. Possibly, Gaius was an influential member of the church, and John wanted him to set an example before the rest of the people.

C. THE TROUBLEMAKER (9-11)

Whatever position this Diotrephes held in the church, he had prevented one of John's letters from being read and had spoken maliciously against him. He possibly sympathized with the Gnostics, whom John fiercely condemned. He prohibited others from preaching (preferring to do it himself evidently, according to verse 9) and excommunicated [ek-skuh-MYOO-nuh-kay-tuhd] those who were favorable to the traveling preachers. We can only guess how this man attained such a place of influence, but John's condemnation of him is unsparing (verse 11). To Gaius, he says, "Do not imitate him."

D. THE GOOD DEMETRIUS (12)

In contrast to Diotrephes is Demetrius [deh-MEET-ree-uhs]. He was probably the bearer of the letter, and John sets him up as an example that may be imitated. Who he was we do not know, but possibly the Ephesian silversmith (Acts 19:21), who may have been converted under John's ministry. This good man has a threefold witness: first, his brethren all give him a good report; second, the Spirit of truth, meaning the Holy Spirit, approves him; and third, John testifies on his behalf. He must have been a godly man.

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E. CONCLUSION (13-14)

Very similar closing to 2 John. Just as the Good Shepherd knows his sheep by name, John, as the undershepherd, would also know his sheep by name.

Johannine [jow-HA-nuhn]
Cerinthus [ser-IN-thuhs]
Polycarp [PAA-lee-kaarp]
Incarnation [in-kar-NAY-shuhn]
Docetic [doh-SHE-tik]
Gnostics [NAA-stuhks]
Conservator [kuhn-SUR-vuh-tr]
Orthodoxy [OR-thuh-daak-see]
Cerinthian [ser-IN-thee-uhn]
Pharisaical [fair-uh-SAY-i-kuhl]
Gaius [GAY-yuhs]
Diotrephes [dee-AH-tre-fehz]
excommunicated [ek-skuh-MYOO-nuh-kay-tuhd]
Demetrius [deh-MEET-ree-uhs]

CHAPTER 5

The Epistle to Jude



NOTES

SECTION 5.1. INTRODUCTION TO JUDE

A. AUTHOR

The writer of this Epistle identifies himself as the brother of James. Since there is little doubt that this is the James of the Epistle bearing his name, then Jude is also a brother of our Lord in the flesh. Since the translations differ, he is called Judas in other places in the New Testament - the Greek word is the same. With unaffected humility, he likewise designates himself "a servant of Jesus Christ." He does not claim the status of an apostle but rather refers to the apostles as "they" (verses 17-18). Probably his reference to James was due to James's prominence and his own obscurity.

B. EPISTLE

Although quite short, this letter is by no means unimportant. It has a very salient message. Its contents are very easy to analyze, and we can readily see that the theme is the peril of apostasy, while the appeal is to "earnestly contend for the faith." This appeal is addressed to those who are faithful to the truth.

This message has much in common with 2 Peter. In fact, some of it is so nearly identical to 2 Peter 2:3-4 that some have affirmed that one copied from the other. The least that we can say is that the one who wrote last (probably Jude) must have been very familiar with the earlier writing.

C. OUTLINE

Introduction (1-2)
Reason for Writing (3-4)
Examples of Apostasy (5-7)
Description of the Apostates (8-19)
Exhortation to the Godly (20-23)
Conclusion (24-25)

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SECTION 5.2. EXPOSITION OF JUDE

A. INTRODUCTION

Jude addresses his message to those who are sanctified, and since they were not yet in heaven, it seems evident that one may be sanctified in this life. He likewise speaks of them as called and preserved in Jesus Christ. This divine preservation is striking in the light of the teaching of the book concerning apostasy.

B. REASON FOR WRITING (3-4)

1. The Desired Message (3)

Jude's original intention was to write a treatise on the common salvation. This was possibly to be an exhaustive treatment of the nature of the Christian religion. However, this ambition was deferred because of the crisis character of the situation in the churches.

2. The Needful Message (3)

"I felt I had" (the word means "I had necessity") to write and urge them to fight for the faith. "Earnestly contend" is a good translation. It comes from a word that sounds a great deal like "agonize" and calls for intense effort. Passivity is not to be desired in the face of threats to the well-being of the Church.

3. The Faith to Be Defended (3)

"Once for all" is indicative of the character of the Christian faith.

4. The "Termites" of the Faith (4)

Jude states here the specific occasion for his writing, the creeping in of apostates who would undermine the foundation of the faith. Note how they entered in. They did not herald their coming but slipped in secretly and unaware, doing their damage before anyone awoke to their insidious presence.

5. The Nature of Their Apostasy (4)

They were changing the grace of God into a license for immorality. This means that they worked on the presumption that their conduct was unimportant because of their standing in grace. At this point, this apostasy was probably only practical. History records the fact that it has



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been formulated into a formal doctrine from time to time. Thus, we see a historical truth that apostasy is always first moral, and then doctrinal - moral declension is followed by theological adjustment. This apostate doctrine is called antinomianism [antee-NOH-mee-uhn-ism].

6. Campbell Morgan's analysis is piercing indeed: "The antinomian heresy declared that because a man is in Christ he cannot be lost, and therefore it matters little what his conduct may be because nothing he can do can sever as between Christ and himself. That is apostasy in its worst form. No man can hold that doctrine without denying the Lord and Master."

C. EXAMPLES OF APOSTASY (5-7)

These historical references show the nature of apostasy but primarily indicate that God's judgment will certainly fall upon those who deviate from the right.

D. DESCRIPTION OF THE APOSTATES (8-19)

1. Their Nature (8-10, 12-19)

It is this passage which is so closely akin to 2 Peter. Such a rhetorical and graphic picture of the corrupt apostates tells us that Jude conceived of them as a festering sore on the face of the Church. We are also led to believe that their conduct was even more detestable than their doctrine. As we have already noted, we understand apostasy to be first a moral declension and then intellectual.

2. Their Error (11)

They have duplicated three Old Testament deviations from the true way. The way of Cain is the denial of Blood redemption. The error of Balaam [BAY-luhm] is an attempt to bargain with what the Lord has to say or a repudiation of first convictions. The gainsaying of Korah, the incident found in Numbers 16, is the denial of the authority of God's appointed messengers, making themselves a law unto themselves.

E. EXHORTATION TO THE GODLY (20-23)

This exhortation has a threefold application:

1. It is the way to obey the command to earnestly contend for the faith;

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2. It is the way to avoid being numbered among the apostates and
3. It is an exhortation to save all they can from apostasy.

F. CONCLUSION (24-25)

This closing doxology is a hymn of praise very fitting to a message of warning against apostasy. We will not be faultless here, only blameless, but we shall be faultless in heaven. We are not only to be kept (24) but also to keep ourselves (21) - a very practical observation.

antinomianism [antee-NOH-mee-uhn-ism]
Balaam [BAY-luhm]

STUDY QUESTIONS



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CHAPTER 1. BACKGROUND TO THE GENERAL EPISTLES

1. Which of these is classified as a General Epistle?
 - A. 1 Peter
 - B. 1 John
 - C. Jude
 - D. all of these
2. Which of these seems to be more of a sermon or treatise than a letter urging works consistent with the Christian's faith?
 - A. 2 Peter
 - B. 2 John
 - C. James
 - D. none of these
3. Which of these deals with outward perils and is a letter of hope, encouraging persecuted Christians?
 - A. James
 - B. Jude
 - C. 1 Peter
 - D. none of these
4. Which of these deals with inward perils, and is a letter urging Christians to grow in grace?
 - A. 1 John
 - B. 2 John
 - C. 2 Peter
 - D. none of these
5. While the keyword in John's Gospel is "believe," the keyword in First John is "know."
 - A. True
 - B. False
6. In Third John, the author refers to himself as the "elder" or "presbyter" as he addresses "the chosen lady."
 - A. True
 - B. False

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7. In Second John, the author refers to himself as the “elder” as he addresses his “dear friend” Gaius.
 - A. True
 - B. False
8. The author of Jude identifies himself as a “servant of Jesus Christ” and a “brother of James.”
 - A. True
 - B. False

CHAPTER 2. THE BOOK OF JAMES

9. What is true of the author of the Book of James?
 - A. He was in the shadows of his elder Brother in the Gospels.
 - B. He is a commanding figure in the Book of Acts.
 - C. He is known as James the Just.
 - D. all of these are true
10. Why was James prominent in the Early Church?
 - A. He is linked with Christ.
 - B. He was pious.
 - C. He provided an apt link between the Jews and Christians.
 - D. all of these
11. The Book of James is one of the most unique books of the New Testament.
 - A. True
 - B. False
12. James is the least Jewish book of the New Testament.
 - A. True
 - B. False
13. James’ method and content are very similar to the wisdom literature of the Old Testament.
 - A. True
 - B. False

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14. There is a close similarity between the Epistle of James and the Sermon on the Mount.
 - A. True
 - B. False
15. The emphasis of the Book of James upon “patience” has led to widespread controversy about its authority.
 - A. True
 - B. False
16. What is true of the organization discourse in James?
 - A. This Epistle is not an organized discourse.
 - B. One thought suggests another.
 - C. It never strays far from the main theme, which is faith proven by works.
 - D. all of these
17. What is not true regarding the salutation in James?
 - A. It is the briefest salutation in the New Testament.
 - B. It is unique in the author’s claim to being a servant (bond slave) to God and the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - C. James emphasizes brotherhood over servanthood.
 - D. all of these
18. What is true of James’ presentation of the social results of trials?
 - A. The underlying assumption is that suffering for Christ’s sake is a glorious privilege.
 - B. James reasons that it exalts the poor to endure hardship for the profession of Christianity.
 - C. Christians who may be rich should rejoice in their adversity since they are reminded of the impermanence of riches.
 - D. all of these
19. What is true of James’ presentation of the mental requirements of faith tested by obedience?
 - A. A teachable spirit ready to receive the truth
 - B. A teachable spirit slow to thrust in one’s own opinion
 - C. A teachable spirit slow to be provoked when it crosses one’s own preconceived notions
 - D. all of these

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20. What is not true of James's presentation of faith tested by good works?
- A. James is not saying that a person is saved by works.
 - B. If someone has genuine faith, one will manifest it by works.
 - C. Rahab is an example of someone who had neither faith nor good works.
 - D. all of these are true
21. James indicates that the expression of heavenly wisdom is the expression of a sanctified heart.
- A. True
 - B. False
22. James denies that the characteristics of earthly wisdom are traits of the carnal mind.
- A. True
 - B. False
23. What is not true of James's presentation of faith tested by endurance?
- A. We are encouraged to make hasty retaliation.
 - B. We are encouraged that the return of Christ will end strife.
 - C. We must be determined to face a trial or a series of trials without flinching.
 - D. all of these are true

CHAPTER 3. THE PETRINE EPISTLES

FIRST PETER

24. What is true of Simon Peter?
- A. He is also known as the big fisherman.
 - B. He has been called the prince of the apostles.
 - C. His name is placed first in the lists of apostles.
 - D. all of these
25. What is true of the First Epistle of Peter?
- A. Defeat in suffering is the distinctive note.
 - B. Its purpose is to discourage Christians under fiery persecution.
 - C. It has been termed the "Epistle of Hope."
 - D. all of these are true

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26. What is true of the Second Epistle of Peter?
- A. It speaks of the responsibilities created by being in grace.
 - B. It considers perils from within the Church.
 - C. It assumes the readers are “in grace” and instructs them concerning the laws by which grace is made sufficient.
 - D. all of these
27. According to First Peter, sanctification is the door to the consummation of our election as Christians.
- A. True
 - B. False
28. Peter agrees with James that the purpose of the testing is a proving of faith.
- A. True
 - B. False
29. What is true of Peter’s presentation of grace at the second advent of Christ?
- A. It will bring final salvation.
 - B. Practical holiness is the substance of Peter’s words.
 - C. We are urged to “live our lives as strangers here in reverent fear.”
 - D. all of these
30. What is true of Peter’s presentation of the nature of the Church?
- A. We are a temple of living stones.
 - B. We are a nation of priests offering spiritual sacrifices.
 - C. We have heavenly nationality.
 - D. all of these
31. What is not true of Peter’s injunctions to right living?
- A. We are called to “high living” due to financial blessings.
 - B. It is based largely on the duty of the Christian in the household of faith.
 - C. We are to avoid being persecuted for our misdemeanors.
 - D. all of these are true
32. What is true of Peter’s presentation of the vicarious suffering and triumph of Christ?
- A. Christ’s sacrifice is “once for all.”
 - B. Christ’s sacrifice is vicarious in that He suffered “in the place of” another who was deserving of the death.
 - C. We are encouraged to be long-suffering and patient.
 - D. all of these

NOTES

33. What is true of Peter's presentation of the purifying effect of suffering?
- A. Having suffered intensely, Christians are weaned from the things of this world.
 - B. The old crowd resorts to abuse when they cannot entice the Christian back to the things of the world.
 - C. We live with the judgment in view.
 - D. all of these
34. Mark was the amanuensis/recording secretary and bearer of Peter's first Epistle.
- A. True
 - B. False
35. Peter's closing statement in 1 Peter 5:14 is a remarkable testimony that even in the fiercest of circumstances, those who are "in Christ Jesus" can have peace.
- A. True
 - B. False

SECOND PETER

36. In Second Peter, the writer is identified as a "bondman" and a "special messenger."
- A. True
 - B. False
37. Second Peter is evidently not addressed to the same readers as was First Peter.
- A. True
 - B. False
38. What is true of Second Peter's presentation of growth in grace?
- A. One must be "into" grace before growing "in" grace.
 - B. All things pertaining to life and godliness are given unto us through divine knowledge.
 - C. By divine power, we have all that is necessary for life according to his glory.
 - D. all of these

NOTES

39. What is not true of Second Peter's presentation of the certainty of the Christian Revelation?
- A. There is a danger of forgetfulness.
 - B. Peter stresses the permanent character of his life.
 - C. Peter was conscious of false teachings which were already creeping into the Church.
 - D. all of these
40. What is true of Second Peter's presentation of the false teachers?
- A. Their heresy is a denial of Christ.
 - B. Peter refers to some form of Gnosticism.
 - C. The outstanding characteristic of the heresy is that it leads people to destruction or hell.
 - D. all of these
41. What is not true of Second Peter's presentation of the character of false teachers?
- A. They were immoral in conduct.
 - B. They followed the way of covetousness.
 - C. They were filled with the Holy Spirit.
 - D. all of these are not true
42. Peter reminds us that after the initial cleansing of the world by water, there must yet be a final and perfect cleansing by fire.
- A. True
 - B. False
43. Peter's concern in 1 Peter 3 is that we shall be holy and thus fit to inhabit the new, holy universe.
- A. True
 - B. False
44. Peter rejected some of Paul's "misunderstandings" about the Second Coming of Christ.
- A. True
 - B. False
45. Peter's final thoughts in 2 Peter are much different from those thoughts with which he opened this letter.
- A. True
 - B. False

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CHAPTER 4. THE JOHANNINE EPISTLES

46. What is not true of the author of the Johannine Epistles?
- A. He is not the same as the author of the Fourth Gospel.
 - B. He was probably the youngest of the apostles.
 - C. He was known as the "Apostle of Love."
 - D. all of these are true
47. First John is the major Epistle of the three Johannine epistles, both in length and content.
- A. True
 - B. False
48. To understand the Johannine Epistles, one must have at least a passing acquaintance with Gnosticism.
- A. True
 - B. False

1 JOHN

49. First John begins much like most other Epistles.
- A. True
 - B. False
50. There is no similarity between the opening verses in John 1 and the opening verses in 1 John 1.
- A. True
 - B. False
51. What is true of First John's presentation of fellowship with God in light?
- A. In order to have fellowship with God, we must first understand what God is.
 - B. One of John's characteristic concepts is the opposition of light and darkness.
 - C. Walking in the light brings cleansing.
 - D. all of these are true

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52. What is not true of First John's presentation of forgiveness of sins?
- A. Confession of sins brings forgiveness.
 - B. It naturally comes before the cleansing of original sin in the Christian experience.
 - C. We do not need to guard against "sinning saints."
 - D. all of these are true
53. The substance of the message of 1 John is that we may live in unbroken fellowship with God.
- A. True
 - B. False
54. John asserts that the proof of knowledge of God is in peaceful sleep.
- A. True
 - B. False
55. John condemned the Docetic Gnostics as anti-Christ in their teachings.
- A. True
 - B. False
56. What is not one of First John's witnesses to faith?
- A. the Spirit
 - B. the water
 - C. the offering
 - D. all of these are true

2 JOHN

57. The writer of Second John styles himself as the "elder" because of his age.
- A. True
 - B. False
58. What do some suggest as the possible "lady" addressed in Second John?
- A. The "elect lady" was the mayor of Ephesus.
 - B. The word "lady" in Greek is a proper name of a woman.
 - C. The word "lady" in Greek is the name of a local church in Ephesus.
 - D. all of these are true
59. The writer of Second John adopts the threefold greeting that Paul used in the Pastoral Epistles.
- A. True
 - B. False

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60. The writer of Second John encountered some of the children of the “elect lady” and was happy that they were walking in the truth according to the commandments.
- A. True
 - B. False
61. Second John affirms that genuine love does not produce obedience to the commandments.
- A. True
 - B. False
62. John was very charitable toward those who bear falsehood and advised that the “lady” extend hospitality to them.
- A. True
 - B. False

3 JOHN

63. The writer of Third John also styles himself as the “elder.”
- A. True
 - B. False
64. What is true about the “Gaius” addressed in Third John?
- A. It is impossible to determine who he was.
 - B. Gaius was a very common name in the Roman Empire at that time.
 - C. He is well thought of by the writer.
 - D. all of these
65. What is true of the contrast between Second John and Third John?
- A. The exhortation in 3 John 5-8 is very similar to that presented in 2 John.
 - B. Second forbids hospitality to the false teachers, whereas 3 John urges that hospitality be extended to traveling evangelists of the truth.
 - C. Diotrephes is looked upon favorably in 2 John, whereas 3 John opposes Diotrephes.
 - D. all of these are true
66. Third John points out Demetrius as the main troublemaker in the church.
- A. True
 - B. False.

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67. The closing in Third John is very similar to the closing in Second John.
- A. True
 - B. False

CHAPTER 5. THE EPISTLE TO JUDE

68. What is true about the writer of the Epistle to Jude?
- A. He identifies himself as the brother of James.
 - B. He is a brother of Jesus.
 - C. He is referred to as Judas in other places in the New Testament.
 - D. all of these are true
69. The writer of the Epistle to Jude designates himself “a servant of Jesus Christ.”
- A. True
 - B. False
70. Jude is quite short, and the letter is not very important.
- A. True
 - B. False
71. This message in the Epistle of Jude has much in common with 2 John.
- A. True
 - B. False
72. Jude addressed his message to those who were not yet sanctified.
- A. True
 - B. False
73. What is true about Jude’s original intention for writing?
- A. He wanted to write a treatise on the common salvation.
 - B. He wanted it to be an exhaustive treatment of the nature of the Christian religion.
 - C. His ambition was deferred because of the crisis character of the situation in the churches.
 - D. all of these are true

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74. What is true about Jude's amended reason for writing the epistle?
- A. The specific occasion for his writing was to address the creeping in of apostates who would undermine the foundation of the faith.
 - B. He wished to affirm James's epistle.
 - C. He wished to affirm John's epistles.
 - D. all of these are true
75. The closing doxology of Jude is a hymn of praise very fitting to a message of warning against apostasy.
- A. True
 - B. False

METHODS OF STUDY

Have you enjoyed this study of these General Epistles? Do you wish to study further? If so, here are a few more suggestions.

1. Compare relationship of the General Epistles to the prison epistles.
2. Compare relationship of the General Epistles to the pastoral epistles.
3. Contrast Second Peter to the Epistle of Jude.
4. Examine 1, 2, and 3 John in light of the Gospel of John.
5. Examine the views of apostasy in the pastoral, prison, and general epistles.
6. Examine views of leadership in the pastoral, prison, and general epistles.

May Jesus, the Head of the Church, become even more influential in your life as you study the General Epistles!

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

NOTES

amanuensis [uh-man-yoo-EN-suhs]
Ananos [UH-na-noz]
antinomianism [antee-NOH-mee-uhn-ism]
antithesis [an-TI-thuh-suhs]
Balaam [BAY-luhm]
Balaam [buh-LAAM]
carnality [kar-NAL-li-tee]
catastrophe [kuh-TA-struh-fee]
Cerinthian [ser-IN-thee-uhn]
Cerinthus [ser-IN-thuhs]
Conservator [kuhn-SUR-vuh-tr]
Demetrius [deh-MEET-ree-uhs]
Diotrephes [dee-AH-tre-fehz]
Docetic [doh-SHE-tik]
doxology [daak-SAA-luh-jee]
excommunicated [ek-skuh-MYOO-nuh-kay-tuhd]
Gaius [GAY-yuhs]
Gnosticism [NAHS-tuh-SIZ-um]
Gnostics [NAA-stuhks]
heresy [heh-ruh-see]
hortatory [HOR-tuh-taw-ree]
Hymenaeus [hy-meh-NAY-uhs]
Incarnation [in-kar-NAY-shuhn]
Johannine [jow-HA-nuhn]
Orthodoxy [OR-thuh-daak-see]
Palestine [PAL-uh-styn]
Pharisaical [fair-uh-SAY-i-kuhl]
Philetus [fi-LEE-tuhs]
Polycarp [PAA-lee-kaarp]
Predestination [pree-deh-stuh-NAY-shn]
resurrection [reh-zr-EK-shn]
resurrection [reh-zr-EK-shn]
sabaoth [SAA-buh-owt]
Shechinah [sha-KAI-nah]
Silvanus [sil-VA-nuhs]
Transfiguration [tran-sfi-gyr-ay-shn]
treatise [TREE-tuhs]
vicarious [vai-KEH-ree-uhs]