

By the end of the first century when the apostle John wrote his Epistles, it is evident that problems were arising in the early churches. Among the believers there were some who had a genuine, inward experience of the Lord. But there were others who had only an outward profession, and their experience of Christ was shallow and lacked spiritual reality. In fact, John's three Epistles indicate that the shallow ones introduced many undesirable and deceptive things into the churches and eventually were the ones who "went out from" the fellowship of the apostles. Thus John wrote his Epistles to give several tests to help the believers discern reality and truth from deception and falsehood and know the difference between an inward and an outward Christian.

Some of the believers were saying certain things, but they were not practicing what they were saying. They claimed certain things, but they were not in the reality of what they claimed. So John's Epistles were a test to what was genuine in the church life. Everything and everyone was on the test. It was a testing during a time when some were making claims about their relationship with the Lord. They presumed to be with the Lord, but their lives manifested bad fruit (Matt. 7:16ff). They were not in reality.

Testing what we say with what we practice

We can see in John's first Epistle how many times

he repeats the phrase "If we say." In 1 John 1:6 we read, "*If we say* that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth." This is a transparent word. It exposes the fact that some were saying, "We have fellowship with Him," but at the same time they were walking in darkness.

John was testing what they said with how they walked. Their walk did not match their talk.

In 1 John 1:8 John says, "*If we say* that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Here again he says, "If we say." This kind of saying is related to a denial of the indwelling sin that Paul speaks of in Romans 7:17-18. For a believer to deny that there is indwelling sin in him is to be self-deceived.

Then 1 John 1:10 says, "*If we say* that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us." This kind of saying did not proceed from reality or genuineness. It denied the fact that we commit outward sins. One saying denied the inward sin nature, and this saying denied the outward committing of sins. Such a saying coming from a believer makes God a liar, and His word is not dwelling in him. John is going down the list of false "sayings" that were circulating among the believers. He addresses everything head-on to confront the deception and the false claims in order to bring the saints into the light and into reality.

Also 1 John 2:4 says, "*He who says*, I know Him, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." Some were claiming to really know

Inward and Outward Christians

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the Lord. It is very serious to make a claim saying, “I know Him,” and not follow Him. Again, this kind of saying reveals the nature of the problem existing at that time. It is similar to Paul’s utterances in his letters to Timothy and Titus in a time of degradation. For example, Paul speaks to Timothy of those who had “a form of godliness” but who denied its power, and he admonishes Timothy to “turn away” from such men (2 Tim. 3:5). Thus both John and Paul distinguished between the genuine things and the spurious things.

And 1 John 2:6 says, “*He who says* he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.” Here is another claim, the claim of abiding in Him. If we say we abide in Him, then we must walk in the way He walks. This kind of verse reveals the disparity between outward Christian profession and inward spiritual reality.

Then 1 John 2:9 and 11 say, “*He who says* he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. . . . But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.” This verse tells us that if we make affirmations about our relationship with God, the genuineness of our affirmations will be confirmed in our attitudes and actions toward the brothers.

The sheer repetition and accumulation of John’s penetrating words “If we say” and “He who says” puts us all on the test as to whether we are an inward or outward Christian. Thank the Lord for the testing word of God. This kind of speaking is testing our genuineness.

What kind of Christians are we? Inward or outward? Are we genuine? Or are we deceived? Does our walk correspond with our talk? Are we in the reality of what we say we believe? These kinds of questions help us to know where we are in this last hour. In 1 John 2:18-20 we read, ¹⁸ “Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us. ²⁰ But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know.” It is important to observe that the “antichrists” in verse 18 are directly related to the “they” who went out from the believers in verse 19, and are in contrast to those who “have an anointing” in verse 20.

Then we continue to read in 1 John 2:26-28, ²⁶ “These

things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. ²⁷ And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him. ²⁸ And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.” We should note in these three verses the difference between “those who are trying to deceive” in verse 26 and those who have an anointing and “abide in Him” in verses 27 and 28.

THE MEANING OF ANTICHRISTS

In verse 19 notice the words, “They went out from us.” Who went out from them? These antichrists. This is not referring to *the* Antichrist (Rev. 13:4-6), but it indicates that even at John’s time there were many who were anti-Christ, or in other words, against Christ. They were not against Christ merely in a doctrinal way. They were against the indwelling Christ, the moving Christ, the Christ who was anointing the saints.

The word translated “anointing” in verses 20 and 27 is *chrisma* (χρίσμα), which is derived from the Greek word for Christ, *Christos* (Χριστός). *Chrisma* is a gerund, a verbal noun, having characteristics of both a noun and a verb. This indicates that the anointing refers to the action and movement of Christ as a Person living within us, anointing us with Himself. It is His movement. And with His movement, His very life is inwardly imparted into our being, giving us a sense of life and peace or of restraint and forbidding over our attitudes and actions (cf. Rom. 8:5-6; Acts 16:6-7).

So we realize that the anointing speaks of an inward experience of the Lord. This is especially clear in verse 27: “The anointing which you received from Him abides *in you*” and “*teaches you* about all things.” The phrase “all things” does not mean we become omniscient so that we know everything. Rather, it means we know all the things we need to know. For example, we need to know about our daily life, about our relationships with others, and about deception. We can know all these things by the teaching of the anointing.

Thus what is described in 1 John 2:27 is an inward matter. Some among the believers really knew the indwelling Christ. They had a definite inward experi-

ence of the Lord. But there were others who were *anti* this. They did not have a personal, inner relationship. Although they were present in church meetings (Jude 12), they had no real substance to their experience and thus were identified as antichrists. They were “antichrist” not only about the objective truth concerning His Person, but also about the subjective Christ anointing them within. These were the ones mentioned in 1 John 2:19: “*They* went out from us, but *they* were not really of us.”

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF OUTWARD CHRISTIANS

We must see that we can be either a genuine, inward believer or just an outward believer. In 1 John both are exposed: an outward believer who has a shallow experience without much inward reality, and an inward believer who genuinely knows the Lord and the teaching of the anointing. An outward believer’s experience is very superficial. He is mainly concerned with what he can conveniently get out of the Christian life for himself. If environments become too hard and tests too severe, he will quickly give up. An outward believer progresses only as far as it is convenient for him.

The Lord talks about this kind of person in the Gospels in the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:3-8, 18-23). In this parable the seed, which is the Word of God, was sown into different kinds of ground, signifying the various conditions of believers’ hearts. Some seed fell upon rocky places and could not penetrate into the earth. The rocks prevented the seed from going deeper. The characteristic of this shallow type of experience is that these believers received the Word with joy at the beginning of their Christian life. They had an initial burst of outward enthusiasm to love and follow the Lord. Then the Lord began to allow some persecution, some deeper searchings, and some testing, and as a result they were offended. Beneath the soil was a hidden rock — another motivation secretly existing there. Thus as soon as things turned against their favor, the outward enthusiasm disappeared, and the rock — the selfish motivation — was exposed. Their experience was shallow and outward. This is in contrast to the seed penetrating all the way into the earth and bearing fruit, which refers to a deep and inward experience. So we need to expose some of the characteristics of an outward experience. This will help us see what it is to have an inward experience of the Lord and aspire to be those

who live one with Him in the teaching of the anointing.

Walking in darkness

What are the characteristics of an outward experience? To answer this question, we must first look at 1 John 1:6: “If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.” Here we find one of the characteristics of an outward experience in the phrase “walk in the darkness.” What does it mean to walk in darkness? It describes a condition of living without the ability to see the real situation. For example, if all the lights were turned off in a room, we would be in total darkness. We would not be able to see the size of the room or the items in the room. Our condition would be one of darkness, of not having the ability to see or perceive the real situation.

First John 2:11 says, “But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.” With this person there is no ability to see the real situation because “the darkness has blinded his eyes.” This is what we mean when we speak of darkness, and this is characteristic of an outward experience.

Let us consider another example. If I am an unbeliever my mind is darkened, resulting in an inability to see my real condition before God and His provision of redemption. I have no sense of need, no conviction, and no realization that I am a sinner. Instead, I feel I am all right. Everything seems to be going well in my life, and I see no need for Christ. This is an example of being in darkness.

The state of being in darkness is also true in degrees among believers. Remember, in this Epistle John was not addressing the unsaved world, but believers. This indicates it is possible for a believer to be in darkness and not see the real situation about himself or his relationships with others. Such a person does not really know his need. He does not have an inner life of touching the Lord. Experientially, he is anti-anointing. If he continues in this shallow experience, it may eventually cause him to become a little antichrist. He will be *against* the anointing, *against* the inner life, and *against* the Body. He may even leave the Body life. This is what John was exposing and dealing with in these chapters.

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The All-Sufficiency of Christ

All of us as believers want to be changed. We all want to grow in Christ. We desire to live a life that is well pleasing to the Lord. Admittedly, we have a lot of shortcomings, weaknesses, and needs. We often see our irritable and contentious self being expressed. We find ourselves having reactions and striking out at others with cutting words. Our moods are sometimes those of depression or heaviness. We experience critical or lustful thoughts. We feel the tugs of the world upon our heart. Understandably, we want the Lord to grow in us. We want to be changed more and more into the image and likeness of Christ. But how will this growth and change take place? More specifically, from where will the life and power come to effect such a growth and change?

Often Christians look to many different sources for change. We delve into books that tell us “how to” — how to be victorious, how to overcome bad habits, how to get along with our spouse, and so forth. We hope that by closely following the books’ recommendations, we will be changed. Others of us search for a big experience of power, hoping that such an experience will instantaneously and permanently change us. Still others of us work hard to develop particular Christian virtues, such as patience or kindness, hoping to lessen our outbreaks of impatience or meanness.

But what is God’s answer to all these needs? Where does God point us? The Bible clearly reveals that God’s answer is quite simple, and it is always the same — God always points us to His Son, Jesus Christ. Why? Because God’s life, power, virtues, attributes, and wealth are all found in Christ! In other words, everything we need is found in Christ. God did not allocate any of His riches anywhere else. He deposited them all in Christ. As the well-known hymn says, “Everything is in Christ, and Christ is everything.”

Therefore, God has no answer for our problems or needs apart from Christ. If we need patience, God simply points us to Christ. Who is more patient than Jesus? If we need love, God points us to Christ. He is the embodiment of love itself. If we need power, God points us to Christ. Christ is the power of God. Simply put, Jesus is the great “I am.” Whatever we need, He is! He is wisdom, love, patience, joy, power, longsuffering, and kindness. He is the One who knows how to get along with your spouse. He is the One who knows how to relate to your boss. He is everything to us.

Jesus Christ is not just a *model* of the Christian life. Nor

is He merely someone who *helps us* live the Christian life. He actually *is* the Christian life! And to properly grow in Christ, we must see this fact. We must see that there is no Christian life apart from Him. Otherwise, we might unwittingly be distracted from the only One who can genuinely change us.

Who Is Christ?

To appreciate the wealth of Christ and His ability to change us, we must first understand who He is. The apostle Peter declared, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” The apostle Paul stated, “In Him [Christ] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form.” The Lord Jesus Himself said, “He that has seen Me has seen the Father.” These statements, as well as many others in the New Testament, reveal to us that Jesus Christ was God in the flesh. He was not merely a man of God or a prophet of God. He was actually God Himself. He was the incarnation of the almighty and infinite God. He was the eternal Son of God. The whole universe was created through Him. This means that in Christ are all the riches of the Godhead. Everything God is, including His glory, majesty, power, wisdom, omniscience, and righteousness, is found in Christ. As Paul says, “In whom [Christ] all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden.”

Moreover, we must realize that He was not only God, but He was also a complete and perfect Man. Jesus was not a phantom from heaven who appeared temporarily in a form resembling a human. He was a genuine Man who experienced hunger, thirst, pain, sorrow, exhaustion, and even temptation. Yet Jesus never committed a sin. He lived a human life in perfect holiness and righteousness during every moment of every day. He always did the things that were pleasing and obedient to the Father. He was loving and kind to those around Him. When necessary, He reproved and rebuked, but never out of the self. It was always out from the Father. He responded to every person and every situation in the most appropriate and fine manner. Indeed, all the positive human virtues were perfected in Jesus. Thus, the riches of an uplifted humanity are in Christ.

Further, all of Christ’s accomplishments, including His death, resurrection, and ascension, are also components of the riches of Christ. In His death He dealt with sins and the flesh. He crucified the old man and the evil world. He defeated Satan with all the fallen angels and demonic forces. By His resurrection He defeated death itself. The stronghold of hell was broken. And His humanity was brought fully into

glory. Finally, He ascended to the Father's right hand and was enthroned and made King of kings and Lord of lords.

Christ Transmitted into Us

Thus far we have seen how wonderful Christ is. Everything of the Godhead is in Him. Everything of a perfect and glorified humanity is in Him. And everything of His great work, including His death, resurrection, and victory, is in Him. But how does this affect us? Of what benefit is all this to us? The Lord Jesus is presently seated at the Father's right hand in the heavenlies. But what about you and me on this earth? Well, the Bible tells us that the risen and glorified Christ has everything to do with us! Whatever He is and has done is for our benefit. To see this, we must understand three matters.

First, we must see that who Jesus was and what He accomplished two thousand years ago was not lost in history. His human living, death, and resurrection are not just historical events to look back to and reflect on, but are present spiritual realities today. *Right now* Christ is the Son of God. *Right now* Jesus is a glorified Man. *Right now* He is in the reality of resurrection, ascension, and victory over sin, death, and Satan. Hence His Person and work are living and present realities. Nothing of His history has been lost; all is eternally preserved in Him.

Second, these present realities are in the Spirit today. Whatever Christ is and has done has been "incorporated" into the Holy Spirit. Why? Because the New Testament reveals that the Father, Son, and Spirit (the Trinity) live in Each Other. They mutually indwell One Another. The Three of the Godhead are inseparable and are of one essence. So wherever you have the Spirit, you also have the Son. This is why the New Testament uses such phrases as "the Spirit of Christ," "the Spirit of Jesus Christ," "the Spirit of Jesus," and "the Spirit of His Son." In fact, the Bible tells us that in resurrection Christ became a life-giving Spirit. Therefore, everything that Christ is and has done is a present reality in the Spirit. The very patience of the Man Jesus that we see demonstrated in the Gospels is incorporated in the Spirit. Jesus' ability to overcome temptation, to feel compassion, and to live a holy life is all in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The wisdom, love, and power of God Himself are in the Spirit. The same resurrection power that defeated Satan, death, the flesh, sin, and the world is in the Spirit.

Third, the Holy Spirit was poured out from the throne of God on the day of Pentecost, just fifty days after the Lord's resurrection. As a result the presence of the Spirit is

everywhere. Moreover, the Spirit is available to anyone who believes in Jesus Christ. When we believe in Christ, we receive the Spirit. The Spirit is actually transmitted into our heart and into our spirit. We become indwelt by the Holy Spirit. And what a Spirit He is who indwells us! We must realize that all the riches of Christ in His divinity and humanity are in the Spirit, and this Spirit lives within us. No wonder Paul declares that though we are just earthen vessels, we have such a wonderful treasure within.

Living by Christ's All-Sufficient Life

Based on this revelation, we can now return to our original questions: How can we be changed? How can we live the Christian life? How can we overcome our problems and weaknesses? Where do we look for the means to be changed? The answer is very clear. Everything we need is in Christ. Christ is patience. Christ is love. Christ is victory. Christ is power. Christ is humility. Christ is self-control. Christ is peace. God simply points us to His Son as the great "I am."

Whatever we need is found in Christ. He is God's constant answer to every need. Now this Christ is in the Spirit today. And as the Spirit, He lives within us. Just consider for a moment this fact — the patience of the Man Jesus indwells your spirit! So when situations arise in which you are becoming more and more irritable, what should you do? Instead of reading a book on how to be a patient Christian, or instead of gritting your teeth and doing your best to behave like a patient Christian, simply draw on the life of Jesus within you. All the patience you need is in Him. And praise God, He lives within you.

Therefore, as believers we do not need to try to be like Jesus. We simply need to see that He is everything, that as the Spirit He lives within us, and that we can draw upon His exhaustless resources all day long. His riches are for us to live by. So we need not imitate. We only need to draw. Draw on the Spirit. Draw upon His life. Each day tap into the wealth of Jesus Christ. In every situation, employ the unsearchable riches of Christ. How? By praying, by breathing His name, by singing, by enjoying His Word. And as we draw upon the riches of His life, spontaneously we will be changed. We will find the expressions of the self and flesh diminishing. We will find our desires for the world decreasing. We will find more desire for the things of God. Jesus Christ will grow in us and we will be conformed more and more into His glorious image.

— Kirk Eland

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Deception and shallowness

An outward experience is also characterized by deception. This is especially true concerning how you view yourself and your experience. Look again at verse 8: “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves.” Literally translated, it means we lead ourselves into deception. So by saying that we have no sin, we are leading ourselves into deception.

Thus far we have seen some of the marks of an outward experience: darkness, unreality, and deception. First John 1:10 exposes still another mark — shallowness: “If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.” A deceived person will always remain a shallow person, void of God’s speaking. To not have His word in us indicates we are empty and shallow, without any substance or content. This is characteristic of a mere outward, professing Christian.

No fellowship

The next sign of being an outward Christian is that there is no genuine fellowship in the flow of the divine life. The apostle John was burdened for all the saints to be in the fellowship of life with himself and the other apostles. In 1 John 1:2-3 he says, ² “And the life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us — ³ what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

From these two verses we can see John’s burden for fellowship. He speaks of “fellowship with us,” and this fellowship is “with the Father and with His Son.” It is the flow of the divine life, the moving of God in and through the saints, producing real fellowship with one another. It is what John refers to in verse 7: “If we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another.” This indicates that we should have fellowship not only with God, but also with one another. One of the main features of an outward experience of the Lord is the lack of fellowship. There is not much fellowship in life, that is, fellowship which gives us the sense that we are connected, attached, and enjoying a flow of life between us.

Our physical body provides an illustration of fel-

lowship. We may say that the fellowship of the members of our body is in the circulation of the blood. When our blood circulates through our arteries to all the parts of our body, there is a “fellowship” between all the members. If our blood stopped flowing, all our members would be without a life-connection between them and we would immediately die. In a sense, without blood our members would be detached. However, because the blood is flowing, there is a fellowship among all the members. Our right hand, our left hand, our head, our legs — all the members of our body — are in coordination and in contact. Nothing is detached, because there is a flow circulating throughout our whole body.

This is also true spiritually speaking. When there is an inward experience of life, there is a spontaneous fellowship with the other members of the Body. The more we enjoy the inward current of life, the more there will be the sense of fellowship. Therefore, the *kind* of fellowship we have indicates to us whether our experience of the Lord is inward or outward.

In speaking of fellowship, we do not mean a social gathering, a mere handshake, or refreshments after a meeting. In the Bible, fellowship is *the flow of God in your being meeting the flow of God in my being*. If God is flowing in you and He is flowing in me, when we come together we have fellowship. The fellowship is there because we not only have the same life, but we are touching this life together. We have an inner life in common. We have *God* in common.

Without an inward life of fellowship with the Lord, our relationship with other believers is shallow. We have to make up things to talk about. We have to try to find something interesting to keep a conversation going. But the more this fellowship with God intensifies in us, the more we have a flow of fellowship with one another. What is this? It is not a society or a social gathering. It is a divine organism. It is the enjoyment of the one Body of Christ in the current of the divine life. This is marvelous!

First John 2:19 says, “*They went out from us,*” referring to those who deviated both doctrinally and experientially. Their going out was due to a lack of fellowship in life. There was no fellowship because there was no inner life: there was no walking in the light, no reality, no truth, but only an outward, shallow experience that ended in a severance from the saints. In 1 John 1:7 John says, “We have fellowship with one

another.” This verse is not referring to a vertical fellowship with God, but to a horizontal fellowship with the members of the Body. Our horizontal fellowship proves whether or not our vertical fellowship with God is genuine and proper. In other words, the real test of whether or not we have fellowship with God is if we have fellowship with the believers.

Lack of openness

In an outward experience there is not only a lack of fellowship but also a lack of openness and transparency. First John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” In our lives if we do not confess and acknowledge our sinful state, our experience of the Lord will be characterized by a lack of openness and transparency.

Perhaps you have never opened to another person and made an apology. Or perhaps you have never confessed your sins, as if to say that everything you have done was right. But the truth is that all of us still have the flesh, and at times we still walk in the flesh. We fail and we even sin. At these times if we are those who have an inward experience of the Lord, we will confess, admit, and even apologize. Then we will be an open and transparent person because we have had an inward dealing with the Lord by confessing our sins and enjoying the cleansing of the blood. This dealing issues in fellowship since every barrier existing in our relationship with one another is removed. But if we have only an outward experience, we will be closed, not having much confession and admission. This lack of openness, transparency, and fellowship is characteristic of an outward experience.

Walking in disobedience

Another main characteristic of an outward experience is walking in disobedience to the Lord’s speaking. First John 2:3 says, “And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.” In other words, a test of the genuineness of our knowledge of Him is whether or not we keep His commandments. Verses 4-6 continue, ⁴ “The one who says, I have come to know Him, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; ⁵ but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has

truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: ⁶ the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.”

We know that the characteristic of the Lord’s walk was obedience, not disobedience. He was obedient to the Father’s speaking, to His commandments, and to His word. In the same manner, the characteristic of a genuine and inward Christian walk is obedience to the Lord’s specific commandments from His inner speaking. This obedience builds up an inner life. On the other hand, if we only *talk* about knowing Him but do not go along with His inner speaking, the result is an outward, shallow experience.

Verse 5 says that when we keep His word, the love of God is perfected in us. By obedience our love grows and our intimate touch with the Lord increases and intensifies. In other words, our love is perfected. Thus the perfecting of love is not merely something emotional. It is the issue of obeying the Lord in the details of our daily life. It is through obedience that we come to know Him. We may be very stirred in our emotion and declare, “Lord, I love You!” Or we may speak in tongues and praise God very emotionally. Yet if we live in disobedience, not following His commandments or obeying His word, there is no real deepening and perfecting of the love. So here John gives us another test by which we can know inward reality from mere outward profession.

Walking in darkness in relation to others

The next main characteristic of an outward experience of the Lord is walking in darkness in relation to others. First John 2:9-10 says, ⁹ “The one who says he is in the light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. ¹⁰ The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him.” A characteristic of an outward experience is walking in darkness in our relationships with others, which in these verses is described as *hating our brother*. We must realize that such a definite feeling of hatred toward a brother distorts our whole view of him. To be one with the Lord and to walk in the light in relation to others means that our view of them will be clear and accurate. But a person who lives in darkness misinterprets others. He often reads into their words and facial expressions and inaccurately interprets them. Because

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of the hatred within him he cannot accurately relate to others. His view of them is off.

Hatred is a feeling of bitterness toward others. This hatred always distorts your view of others, and because of this you stumble over everything they do. In your estimation they can never do anything right, because your basic view of them is off. Look at verse 10 again: “The one who loves his brother abides in the light.” This means he is living in spirit. The Lord’s love is there. He is in the light. Then it says, “and there is no cause for stumbling in him.”

Have you ever had a relationship with a person who could not do anything right? If he even smiled, you stumbled over his smile. You stumbled over whatever he said and whatever he did. Everything about him offended you. This is because you were in darkness and did not see the real condition of your own heart — you had a grudge, you had bitter hatred within you. The evidence of your hatred was the repeated occasions in which you were offended and stumbled by him.

Brothers, are you stumbled by your wife? In your home does your wife find it impossible to do anything right for you? Are you offended with her no matter what she says or does? If so, it is probably because your heart is dark — you have never dealt in the light with the hatred and the longstanding bitterness you have toward your wife. Thus there is always an occasion to stumble over many things. You are always losing your temper, you are always angry, you are always misinterpreting and misjudging. This exposes that your heart is dark. And because of this darkness, you are not able to see where you are going. You stumble again and again.

From 1 John 2:9-10 we can realize why there is an inability to see and interpret things clearly regarding others. It is because of a lack of being in the light where there is confession and dealing and where there is truth and reality. In the light we are not just behaving according to outward truths, but we are inwardly knowing God. We know Him because He has spoken to us and shined on us. We have confessed to Him and dealt with Him. As a result we live in His light and there is no occasion for stumbling in our relationships with others.

THE INWARD REALITY IN THE CHURCH LIFE

The apostle John shines light on both the inward and the outward experiences. These matters are not so well-known among believers. For example, we may be

assembled together, *apparently* in the church. However, being in the church in reality depends on whether we live an inner life that is in the light and in fellowship. We may just attend meetings, say hello, shake hands, and have a little social contact. Or we may enjoy a genuine, inward fellowship with one another.

We can check ourselves and discover which experience we are in simply by considering how many times we stumble over others — over what they say and what they do. It may seem that we are walking quite well with the Lord, but suddenly we stumble again. We stumble because someone said something to us in the “wrong way,” or they did not look at us in the “right way.” This is in contrast to having a solid relationship in love, which can happen only when we deal with God in the light.

In God’s light our love is perfected. It becomes solid. Then all suspicion disappears. Every occasion to stumble is removed, and our relationships are not characterized by ups and downs, getting along and not getting along. Our love becomes solid, able to pass through every test and trial. We may hear an evil report about someone, or we may be in a relationship in which the other person fails, but the love of God is still being perfected in us. This kind of heart relationship and love relationship is possible only if we are in the light as He is in the light. It is not enough to be in the light *as some truths* are in the light. We must be in the light *as God Himself* is in the light. How we need to be those living in the source of light rather than remaining outside in an outward experience. May the Lord deepen our inward experience as we go on with Him.

— Bill Freeman

the **Christian**

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