

MYSTERIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

BY WITNESS LEE

In 1 John there are seven mysteries: the mystery of life, the mystery of fellowship, the mystery of abiding, the mystery of the anointing, the mystery of the divine birth, the mystery of the divine seed, and the mystery of the water, the blood, and the Spirit. This article will briefly consider the mystery of life and the mystery of fellowship.

The writings of John have a unique position in the Bible. He wrote one Gospel, three Epistles, and the book of Revelation. The New Testament writings as a whole can be similarly categorized: the Gospels, the Epistles, and Revelation. It is noteworthy that each of these three sections concludes with one of John's writings. The final word, even in conversation, is generally the decisive word. Thus, in the writings of John we have the final word of the whole revelation of the Bible.

God's Means and God's Goal

The Gospel of John deals with the matter of life and building. Life is wonderful and profound, but it is not the goal. It is the way to reach the goal, God's building. The first two chapters of the Bible deal with creation. The last two chapters picture for us the holy city, New Jerusalem. This city is a building. By considering the beginning and the ending, we can see that the goal of God's creation is a building. In creation God called things not being as being so that He might have the materials for His building.

In between the beginning and the ending, the theme is life. You recall that on the final day of creation God created man (Gen. 1:27, 31). God was pleased with everything He had made, and He blessed man. In 2:8 we are told that God planted a garden in which He put the man whom He had formed. This garden was part of God's creation; as yet, no city had been built. In the midst of this garden, among many other trees, there was the tree of life. What the fruit of this tree looked like we do not know. We can identify a peach from a peach tree, but to know what life is, is not easy. Nonetheless, we know that we have life; describing it may be difficult, but in our experience we know what it is. Let us rejoice that there is the tree of life, even though we cannot precisely define what life is.

Life

Even our human life is too mysterious to be defined. A table has no life, but a man does. How to explain this mysterious element, we do not know. The life referred to in the tree of life is far more mysterious than human life. As most of us know, in Greek there are three different terms for *life*. The physical life is called *bios*. In addition we have a *psuche*, a psychological life. The third kind of life is called *zoe*, the life of the tree of life. In John 10:10 the Lord Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life and may have it abundantly." The Greek word for *life* used here is *zoe*. In the next verse He said, "The good

Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.” *Life* here is *psuche*. The Lord Jesus laid down His *psuche* life to accomplish redemption for us and thus to make the eternal *zoe* life available to us. Nothing can destroy the *zoe* life. Jesus as a human being died on the cross, laying down His human psychological life in our stead, in order to impart to us the *zoe* life.

This life, denoted by *zoe*, is the divine life; in actuality, it is nothing less than God Himself. It is not simply matter but the very divine person, the eternal Being. “(And the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and report to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us)” (1 John 1:2). This very life was beheld and handled by the apostles (v. 1). From the context it is clear that the life is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In the first verse the life is called “the Word of life,” and in verse 2, “the life” and “the eternal life.”

The Tree and the River

Life, then, is the eternal Being. This divine person is what lies between God’s creation in the beginning and God’s building at the end. This life is the means or procedure through which God will accomplish His purpose. In the New Jerusalem, God’s eternal goal, the tree of life, appears again (Rev. 22:2). It grows on both sides of a flowing river. This vivid picture tells us that even in eternity the tree of life will be the process by which the city is maintained. By the time we reach Revelation 21, the city has been produced, but the keeping element for all eternity will be the flowing supply of this life. God’s eternal building will be maintained with the very life grown in the flowing river. Even in the New Jerusalem, life is not the goal but the process by which the goal is reached and maintained.

Even now, we are all in that flow! Furthermore, that flow is within us! From the day we accepted the Lord Jesus as our Savior, there has been something flowing within us. Even in coming to a meeting, we are brought by a flow, not by ourselves. This river within is the source of our strength and joy. The flow within us, and the flow we are in, indicates that we are all in the process of God’s building. Whether we love the Lord or are careless, sooner or later we shall all be processed into the New Jerusalem. When we get there, some of us may be surprised that we ever made it. We may wonder how we managed to arrive along with so many others whose love for the Lord seemed so much stronger than ours. We may be assured that the flow we are in is not at a standstill! It is a process, which will someday take us all to the New Jerusalem.

This flow began in Genesis 2:10, where we are told that “a river went forth from Eden to water the garden” where the tree of life was. A river is mentioned again in Psalm 36:8: “You cause them to drink of the river of Your pleasures.” In Ezekiel 47 the river again appears. When we come to John 7:38, the one river has become rivers: “He who believes into Me, as the Scripture said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.” At the end of the Bible the river is still flowing.

The Flow of the River

All of us are in this flowing river. Even if we want to sidestep it, we have been caught and have no way out. We have been ensnared by the hunter! We are the fish with the hook in our mouth! Gospel preachers are hunters. The Lord told Peter that he would be a fisher of men (Matt. 4:19). Surely that word was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, when the fisherman caught three thousand fish (Acts 2:41)! I got caught on that hook fifty years ago. In spite of struggling my hardest to get free, I only became more and more trapped. This is the story of all of us. Even if we backslide, the hook will only sink in the more deeply. Our final destiny will not be the lake of fire but the city of water. We shall be in that city of living water.

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How are we going to get there? There is no plane to take and no transportation charge to pay! We are being carried there in the flow of this river. Every day, with the passage of time, we are being brought closer and closer to that city. Just as an airplane brings us to our destination even while we are sleeping, so we may be unaware that this flow is carrying us nearer and nearer to the New Jerusalem. When we wake up, we shall be there!

Life is the process we are under. This life is fully unfolded to us in the twenty-one chapters of the Gospel of John. Why, then, did John still write the three Epistles, an additional seven chapters? Many basic factors are unveiled only in these Epistles and are not mentioned elsewhere.

No doubt we all have life, but the process of life does not happen overnight. We are not saved one day and in the New Jerusalem the next. Hundreds of chapters are sandwiched between the first two chapters of the Bible and the last two! Between creation and building, many complications arise in the process of life. There are joys and sorrows, songs and lamentations. Thus, after the Gospel of John, we need the Epistles of John.

Only here do we have a saying like this: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life (and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and report to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us); that which we have seen and heard we report also to you that you also may have fellowship with us, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:1-3).

The preaching of the gospel, these verses indicate, is the declaration of life as a person to people. It is not the passing on of doctrine or knowledge but the proclamation of a person who is life.

Fellowship

The purpose of this declaration is not that its hearers may have life, as is the case with the Gospel of John (10:10); rather, it is that they may have fellowship with the apostles, whose fellowship "is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." In this chapter we are considering the mystery of life. But in 1 John 1:3 we have another mystery, the mystery of fellowship. What does the term *fellowship* mean? It is not easy to come up with a satisfactory definition. Fellowship is the flowing of the life we have received. Life is a person, the Son of God. When we receive this life, it begins to flow within us. Like the blood flowing in our veins, it is never at a standstill. All the time that we are going about our daily living, the blood keeps circulating. Physical exercise keeps us healthy by further stimulating our circulation. If our circulation stops, we are finished. *Fellowship* is the scriptural term for circulation. Our eyes are in the "fellowship," as are our shoulders and our feet. All the members of our body are in the fellowship; the blood circulates to all of them.

Fellowship is also like the current of electricity. When electricity is in motion, it is called a current. If you check your electrical meter when your appliances are operating, you will see that the current moves when you use the electricity. If you do not use any electricity, there is no flow of the current. The meter has nothing to register. When the appliances are switched on, however, they receive the current of electricity. That current is the fellowship. If you are not "switched on" and partaking of the flow of "electricity," you are not in the fellowship. Like an appliance, your functioning results from your participating in the current.

The Lord Jesus as the divine person is life to us. When we receive Him, He comes into us, and we are put into Him. This life then circulates as fellowship. The life received

issues in fellowship. The apostles declared life “that you also may have fellowship.” Many Christians do not realize that once they are saved, they are in a fellowship. Fellowship is simply the flowing of the divine life within us. When life stands still, it is life; when it flows, it is fellowship.

Grace and Love

In the Gospel of John we are told that the incarnated Word tabernacled among us, “full of grace and reality” (1:14). When we receive this Word who became flesh, we receive grace and truth (reality). “Of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace” (v. 16).

In the first Epistle of John, however, the words *grace* and *truth* are replaced. Instead of grace, we are told that God is love (4:8). Instead of truth, we are told that God is light (1:5). Suppose we have a pair of chopsticks. One is called grace at the tip and love at the other end. The other chopstick is called truth at the tip and light at the other end. When we pick up the chopsticks and look at the tips from which we eat, we see grace and truth. If we look at the other end, however, we shall see love and light. Grace is at one end, the one facing us, and love is at the other end, facing God. The other chopstick has truth on the end facing us, while light is the tip pointed toward God.

When God came to us in the person of the Son, He brought grace and truth. After we receive these, we return to God in the Son and find love and light. The Gospel of John presents us with the issue, grace and truth. His Epistle brings us to the source, where the Father is, and there we find love and light. When we receive the Son, we receive life and enjoy grace and truth. This life flows in us as fellowship, bringing us back to the Father, where we enjoy love and light, the source of grace and truth.

We enjoy grace and find it most sweet. But we must go on to love, which is deeper and more hidden. Grace is the expression; its source is love. These two are one. If we enjoy love, grace is included.

Truth and Light

The same is true of truth and light. At one end, the end of expression, it is truth, which means reality or realization. At the other end, the source, it is light. When we are holding the truth, by implication we are also holding the light. If we go on in the fellowship back to its source, we shall see that there is not only truth or realization but light as well. To be in the light means that we have the source of truth or reality.

The Bible does not say that God or Christ is grace. Nor does it say that God is truth, though it does tell us that Christ is the truth (John 14:6). But that God is love and light 1 John clearly states. We are also told that God is Spirit (John 4:24). *Love, light,* and *Spirit* are all common terms, yet how can we explain the difference in their usage here? *Spirit* refers to God’s essence; God is Spirit just as a book is paper. That God is love means that God’s disposition is love.

God is love. Even if you beg Him to hate, or tell Him that you do not want His love, He cannot be other than love. That is the way He is.

That God is light denotes His function in expressing Himself. Light is what shines and illumines. Without it, we are in darkness, deprived of any positive realization. Once the light comes, however, this shining issues in realization. We can see people, distinguish colors, and identify objects. How do we realize the truth of God? It is by His being light. When He shines in us, we realize Him as reality. Reality comes from the light’s shining.

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When we read the Bible, we find the truth. In Romans 6, for instance, we read that our old man has been crucified with Christ in order that we might be freed from sin. This is the truth, or the reality. Our reading, however, does not bring us the experience. We were taught to reckon that we were dead so that we might experience the truth of Romans 6. Reckoning resulted only in our being more alive than before. We felt that our efforts to know and experience this truth were futile.

There is another way. If we are in the fellowship and allow that fellowship to bring us into God, there in the source God as light shines over us. Under His shining we have a realization. This is the genuine reality, resulting not from reading the Bible but from being enlightened.

Suppose a sinner hears the gospel and believes in the Lord Jesus. The Lord comes into him as a living person. This newly saved one immediately senses the life flowing within him. His formerly unbearable situation seems to have faded away. The life flowing within sustains and strengthens him, making him feel joyous and free from any problems. This is the experience of grace. Along with it is the realization that the Lord Jesus is real and living. The thought of Jesus fills him with delight. He enjoys what the Lord is to him, and he has the realization of the reality of Jesus.

Touching the Source

While we are in this happy condition, we find our prayer spontaneously going out to the Father: "O Abba, Father! You are so good! How I thank You for forgiving my sins! Now You are with me. You are my life." We were not intending to address the Father, but there was an inner directing that brought us to Him. As our prayer continues, the sense increases that we are in the Father's presence. We wonder if we are in heaven or still on earth. There comes a sense of being sustained by something even finer, deeper, and sweeter than grace.

We have touched the source of grace, which is love. The grace that strengthens and upholds us is the expression of that love. Through prayer we have been brought into God. Not only has He entered into us, but we have been brought back into Him through fellowship. Abiding here in God we taste not only grace but love, the root of grace, as well.

The New Testament, strictly speaking, nowhere says that this love, which is God Himself, does anything for us. When Paul entreated the Lord to take away the thorn in his flesh, the Lord told him, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Cor. 12:7-9). Whatever Paul's suffering, grace kept and sustained him. He tells us further how grace operated in him and for him in 1 Corinthians 15:10: "By the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace unto me did not turn out to be in vain, but, on the contrary, I labored more abundantly than all of them, yet not I but the grace of God which is with me." Grace is spoken of as accomplishing things on Paul's behalf, but we do not find love referred to in this way.

Most of us are content to remain in the expression rather than come to the source. We testify to others how gracious the Lord is to us. We used to get angry with our wife if she simply looked at us in the wrong way. Now, even if she yells and screams at us, we are still happy and can praise the Lord. What grace He has given us! Yes, this is His grace, but we can go deeper and be brought into God, the source. Here we shall touch love, which is deeper and sweeter than the grace that sustains us.

As we are under the shining, God penetrates our very being. We are enjoying not the truth but God Himself as the light shining over us. Here we realize all that God is to us. We are in the hidden place, the secret place of the Most High. Here we are rooted

in nothing less than God Himself. God as the source of grace is love to us. God as the source of all realization is light to us. We enjoy Him as the source. Unlike most Christians, who are satisfied with the outward expression as grace and truth, we are at the source enjoying love and light, no longer limited to their external manifestation as grace and truth.

This shining occurs within the fellowship, which is the flowing of Christ as life within us. It is this flowing that brings us to the source of grace and of truth. Here God shines whatever He is into us. This brings us the realization. We enjoy God as love, the source of grace. We participate in God as light, the source of truth. This enjoyment and participation is the outcome of the fellowship, that life that is always flowing within us.

It is clear from the first verse of 1 John that this Epistle is a continuation of the Gospel of John. *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life* are the opening words of the Epistle, dealing, like John's Gospel, with the Word that was from the beginning.

John is a long book, of twenty-one chapters, comprehensively covering the matter of life. Out of this life there is a mingling of divinity with humanity. Chapters 14 and 15 refer to this, where the Lord says, "In My Father's house are many abodes" (14:2); "If anyone loves Me...We will come to him and make an abode with him" (v. 23); and "I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit" (15:5). *Abode* refers to the fact that we become God's dwelling and that He becomes ours. This mutual dwelling place is the mingling of the Triune God with all the believers so that they together form an all-inclusive, corporate entity.

In John 17 the Lord prayed for the oneness of all the believers in the Triune God: "That they all may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us...I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected into one" (vv. 21, 23). Such a oneness is what is typified by the tabernacle (Exo. 26:15-30). There were forty-eight boards all made one by being overlaid with gold. Upon the overlaid gold were golden rings, through which went the golden uniting bars to link all the boards together. Thus, the boards became a single entity, the building. The wooden boards signified humanity, and the gold overlay, divinity, not only in its nature but also in its glory. This oneness in the tabernacle portrays the mingling of divinity with humanity. The Gospel of John to some extent unfolds this mingling, but a careful reading is needed to see it.

First John further continues this very matter by telling us that the life from the beginning, which is the living One, has been reported to all believers "that you also may have fellowship with us, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1:3). The words are simple, but the significance is profound. There is one fellowship here, not only between the Father and the Son but also with the apostles ("us"); all believers ("you") are to be in this same fellowship. This fellowship is not only vertical, between God and man, but also horizontal, among all believers. What is called fellowship here is a corporate mingling of divinity with humanity.

Fellowship

The meaning of the word *fellowship* has been spoiled. All too often it is applied to social visits, conversations, various charitable or missionary societies, or the supplying of someone's financial needs. All these activities are quite commonplace, yet none of them is necessarily what the holy Word means by the term *fellowship*.

Fellowship corresponds to the circulation of the blood in the physical body. It is this

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circulation that unites all the members with the head and with each other. The body and the head are one because of this circulation. All the hundreds of members in the body are kept in fellowship or oneness with each other by this same circulation. Circulation is not something other than the blood itself. When the blood flows in the blood vessels, there is circulation; when the blood is stationary, there is no circulation. Once the blood flow stops, death and detachment result. The members are no longer related to each other or to the head.

Like circulation, fellowship is the flow of life through all the members of the Body of Christ. It is not our greeting each other and engaging in conversation. It is not our paying someone's bills. The church is not a social club or a charitable organization. It is a Body! In this Body flows the divine, eternal life, which is the living person of God Himself. Apart from this flowing, there is death and detachment.

An electrical current is another illustration of this flowing of the divine life, which the Bible calls the fellowship. When the electricity in a building is turned on, there is an electric current. Before this, the electricity is present but not moving, because it has not been applied. The electric current supplies electricity to the appliances as soon as the switches are turned on. The overhead lights, for example, are separate and unrelated until the switches are turned on. As soon as the electric current gets into them, there is a unity among them, the current of electricity itself, which brings them into "fellowship" with each other.

The microphone I am using is in the same "fellowship"! It not only fellowships with the lamps but also with the power plant, the source of its electrical supply. Similarly, while I am speaking, I am also fellowshipping with the third heaven! Do not think that I am being superstitious. Surely it is an obvious fact to say that this microphone is in touch with a far-off power plant, which supplies the electricity for its operation. The fellowship we are in is simply Jesus Christ, the living One, flowing within all of us.

The Church Life

This fellowship is what brings in the proper church life. We do not necessarily have the church life by merely coming together as believers in Jesus. The church life depends on the believers in the Lord Jesus being in the fellowship. It is not simply that the believers love each other. The church life is the flowing of the living Jesus; it is the fellowship revealed to us in 1 John 1. John nowhere in this Epistle uses the term *church*, but what he writes about is in actuality the church life. Nowadays the term *church* is commonplace, but its practicality is not much in evidence. What John writes about the fellowship is simply the church life, even though this term is not found here.

We may be in the church, but are we actually in the church life? If we are not in the flowing of the Lord Jesus within us, we are not really in the church life. We are like one of the overhead lights that is not receiving the current of electricity. It is in the building, but it is not receiving the electricity. We may think that as long as we are here, we are in the church life. This is true only positionally; in actuality, we are in the church life only when we are in the flow of the Lord Jesus.

Suppose you sit in the meeting, evaluating what I am saying. You have heard some negative criticism, so you pay close attention to my words, trying to figure out if what I say is heretical. As you sit there on guard, thinking you are protecting the church from heresy, you are like one of the lights with no electricity getting through. Or you may sit in the meeting, sure that you are in the church, but fast asleep! While you are sleeping, you are not receiving the heavenly electricity. Practically, you are out of the church life until you wake up and turn the current back on! Or part of the time that you are in the meeting, you may be in the practical church life, but after some minutes you

may be out of the flow and therefore temporarily out of the church life. Perhaps what I am saying sounds extreme, but I want to point out to you that the church life is living and real.

In God's Presence or in His Essence?

When there is this flowing within us, we are brought not only into God's presence but into His very essence. The term *in* is used over and over in 1 John. We are in God, and He is in us (2:5-6, 10, 14, 24, 27-28; 3:6, 24; 4:4, 12-13, 15-16; 5:20). We like to say that we are in God's presence, but the word *presence* is not found once in 1 John. The fellowship brings us not only to God but into Him as well. Consider how great a difference there is between being in God and being in His presence. As I am speaking before you, I am in your presence. We are face to face. For me to be in you, however, is another matter entirely. I cannot get inside you. For us to be in God, on the other hand, is possible, because God today is the Spirit. He is like the air we breathe. We are in the air and can also have air in us. We are in God and He is in us, not by striving but by letting the Lord Jesus flow and keep flowing within us.

God Himself, as 1 John tells us, is both love (4:8) and light (1:5). When we are brought into Him, we are brought into love and light in their essence. God's reaching out to us is grace and truth, as the Gospel of John tells us (1:14). Now this fellowship brings us into the source of grace and truth so that we are no longer just superficially experiencing them. Instead of grace coming to us outwardly, we experience God Himself as love. Rather than objectively knowing some aspects of truth, we experience God as light.

The Source of Grace

Paul also made this distinction between grace and love. In 2 Corinthians 13:14 he wrote of "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit." These three are linked to show that they are mingled and practical. Second Corinthians is a book on grace. When Paul was suffering, pricked by a thorn in the flesh, he prayed three times that the Lord would remove it. "He has said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness" (12:9). From this experience of Paul's, we can see that grace is present with us to do something on our behalf. First Corinthians 15:10 also indicates that grace acts for us: "By the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace unto me did not turn out to be in vain, but, on the contrary, I labored more abundantly than all of them, yet not I but the grace of God which is with me."

To be in the realm where grace does things for us is to be somewhat superficial. If we are brought into the fellowship, that is, into God, we shall find the source of grace—love—which is far sweeter and more intimate. Even on the human level, we have experienced this distinction. Our family may do something to help us when we are in a low situation. At first, we may consider that this is their love for us, but actually, their doing is only the expression of their love. If we appreciate only their outward doing, without recognizing the love behind it, we are being too superficial toward them. When we realize the love that motivates their doing, our appreciation will be for themselves alone rather than for their kind deeds. The accompanying sense of sweet intimacy indicates that we are appreciating the source of their gracious doing, which is love.

Many of us acknowledge the Lord's help in difficult circumstances, His supply of strength in our weakness, His intervening in hard places, and the many other evidences of His care for us. What we are appreciating is merely His grace. If we are brought deeper into the inner circulation of the divine life, this fellowship will bring us into

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God Himself, who is love. We shall turn from our appreciation of what He has done for us to treasure Him as the source of grace. Eventually, we lose our interest in having the Lord do things for us. We care only to remain in this love, whether or not there is any outward expression of it.

Suppose someone, in order to express his affection for me, buys me a Bible. I am pleased to have such a beautiful leather-covered, gilt-edged edition. I admire it and carry it around to show others what a lovely gift I have received without having paid even a penny for it. My thoughts seldom turn toward the giver; I just enjoy his present. Such is our appreciation of grace rather than of the source of grace.

Suppose, for another example, your wife always expects presents from you. You must bring her flowers, buy her a new outfit, and even get her a car for herself. She seems to have little interest in you as a person and no tender feelings of love for you. What kind of wife would that be? How much better it is to have a wife who appreciates you for yourself! Instead of looking for presents, she is content to enjoy your love and satisfied in the assurance that you care for her. You may give her things because you love her, but she does not regard those things as highly as the love that prompted you to buy them.

There are perhaps many of us who appreciate what the Lord has done for us and how much He has given us, yet we lack an appreciation of the source of His grace. This lack results from our not being adequately in the fellowship. Once we are in the fellowship, we are brought right into God Himself. We no longer see much of grace; we see the divine person as the fountain. We no longer have much interest in whether we have this or that good thing; it is enough to have God Himself as love, the source of grace.

The Source of Truth

As believers we all have some apprehension of the truth. How many of us, though, are in the light? Light is in God and is God Himself. Until we are brought into God Himself, we may be under the shining of the light, but we are not in the light. To be under the shining of the light is one thing; to be in the light is another. Under the shining, we may have the truth, or the realization, but we are not in the light until we are in God Himself.

Then every hidden thing will be exposed. From the time we were saved, we have been under the shining, coming to certain realizations and understandings. Some day we shall be willing for this inner fellowship to bring us into God. In Him we shall be in the light, not merely the shining. Most Christians today are far off, even in darkness. Some are under the shining, but very few are in the light. Probably a good number of us have occasionally had experiences in which we were brought into God and recognized that we were in the light.

Suppose you get annoyed with another brother. You are not in the light yet, but under the shining, you sense that your attitude was poor. You go to that brother and apologize that your attitude earlier was wrong. For you the apology is sufficient; after all, a bad attitude is a common fault, not to be taken all that seriously.

Some Christians would not even admit that they were wrong to be annoyed with a brother. It was the brother's fault, they would insist. Why did he act that way toward them? He is the one who needs to say he is sorry; there is nothing for which they need to apologize. Such Christians are fully in darkness.

Will you allow the inner fellowship to bring you into God? Then you will be in the light. Under its glare you will tremble. You will realize that it is not only your attitude

toward your brother that is to be condemned. You yourself in every part are sinful, fully contaminated, and thoroughly unclean. In the light there is no excuse, no back door, no side exit, no escape. You will weep, repent, and take hours to confess. Your hands may look quite clean now, but if you see them in the light, you will see how full of germs they are.

In this fellowship with the Father, we have light, and in this light we have fellowship (1 John 1:3, 5, 7). The result of being in the light is the recognition that we are utterly sinful. Every member of our body is sinful. Every relationship with others is sinful. The way we wear our clothes is sinful. Because we are in the old creation, nothing about us is clean; we are polluted and condemned. Everything within us—our feelings, our intentions, our decisions, our concepts, and our ideas—is sinful. As human beings we are full of sin. The reason we do not have this conviction is that we are not in the light. When Isaiah was brought into the glory of God, he said, “Woe is me, for I am finished! / For I am a man of unclean lips” (Isa. 6:5). We have some amount of truth, knowing that we should do this and be like that, but such a realization is not light; it is only truth. If we are willing to abide in the fellowship, it will bring us into God. Then we shall be thoroughly exposed by this light from which nothing can be hidden.

The Blood

It is common among us to say that we apply the blood to our situation. This is not what 1 John 1 says about the blood, however; it says, “If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from every sin” (v. 7). To say that we apply the blood is an indication that we are not in the light but rather avoiding it. Light takes away all our cover-ups. It penetrates every hiding place. It so exposes us that we cry out, “Woe is me! I am unclean!” At that very moment the blood cleanses. This verse clearly tells us that if we are in the light, the blood follows the light to cleanse us. There is no requirement on our part to apply the blood. To apply the blood means that we have the realization that we are sinful but have not yet had our sins exposed in the light. Whatever the light exposes, the blood cleanses. Praise the Lord for His provision!

Yes, the blood cleanses, but all too often the weak ones, after the exposing, keep right on condemning themselves. We Christians are peculiar! Before we are brought into the light, we will not admit that we are sinful; yet once the blood has cleansed us, we will not believe that we are cleansed. We seem to like being in a state of condemnation!

An Advocate and the Propitiation

Because of this tendency of ours to remain under condemnation, 1 John 2 begins by telling us that if we sin, “we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for those of the whole world” (vv. 1-2). Christ is our Advocate, taking care of our case with the Father. He is also our propitiation, meaning that He has settled our problem with sin. Whatever concern we have, He has already made provision for. Yes, our sin does cause a problem between God and us. But we must realize that the Lord Jesus, as the propitiation for our sins, has already settled this problem. Based upon His propitiatory work, He is now our heavenly Attorney, presenting our case in the heavenly court. We may be assured that when we are exposed by the light, the blood cleanses us. The very One who made propitiation for our sins is now the Advocate taking care of our case.

Not only does the blood maintain our fellowship; besides the blood, we have the Advocate and the propitiation. God is righteous and holy. We are both sinful and

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unholy. When we come into the light, we are exposed, but right away the blood cleanses us. This we find hard to believe. Thus, the apostle John tells us that we have an Advocate with the heavenly Judge. This Advocate has already settled our case. As our propitiation, He paid our debt, met our obligations, and at His own expense took care of whatever was outstanding against us. There is therefore no longer any problem between the Judge and us. The word *advocate* is the same word in Greek as that translated “Comforter” in John 14:16; 15:26; and 16:7. The Spirit of reality is the Comforter within us, while the Lord Jesus is the Attorney in the heavenly court, handling our case upon the basis of His own propitiatory work. We must not be bothered, therefore, by the exposing.

Satan is subtle. When we pray, even with fasting, he would always seek to keep a veil over us. Eventually, of course, he is frustrated, for whenever the heart “turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away” (2 Cor. 3:16). Then we see how evil and contaminated we are. When the light exposes our true condition, there is no need to apply the blood. It is right there to cleanse us. But Satan’s strategy is to keep condemning us, telling us how unclean we are. Because we lack the assurance that the blood has cleansed us, the apostle goes on to remind us that Jesus Christ the Righteous is our Attorney and our propitiation. We must not be upset by the exposure of our evil condition; it has already been taken care of by Him. It is therefore possible for us to go on in the light.

Notice that “He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us” (1 John 1:9). John does not say that God is merciful and kind. We are inclined to beg for mercy when we sin, but it is *righteous* for God to forgive us. Christ has made propitiation. God can therefore righteously forgive us, not out of mercy or kindness but because He is righteous. He has given us the good news; now He must keep His word. Otherwise, He would not be faithful. He therefore *righteously* forgives us because of Christ’s propitiation and *faithfully* forgives us because of His own spoken word.

The apostle John’s writings appear simple, but that cannot be said of these two chapters, where he speaks of the blood’s cleansing, the Advocate with the Father, and the propitiation for our sins. These terms are probably not all that clear to you, but in any case I do want to assure you that if you are willing to abide in the fellowship, it will surely bring you into God, who is light. Here you will be fully exposed.

Growth in Life

Without this thorough exposure there can be little growth in life. Once we have been exposed and cleansed and have the assurance that God’s claims against us have been satisfied by Christ, our growth in life will spurt forward. Why is it that so many of us seem to have come to a standstill as regards our growth in life? This lack of progress results from our not being in the light, even while we have the truth. We may mentally perceive that we are wrong or sinful, but until we are in the light, that knowledge or conviction is at best superficial. In the light we shall have the deep, deep realization that every part of our being is sinful and that even what we consider holy is still sin. This exposing is for the cleansing of the blood. These two, the exposing and the cleansing, are for the growth in life.

Satan attempts to thwart our enjoying the growth in life by attacking our conscience with self-condemnation. We must be at peace, assured that in spite of our sinfulness, the Lord Jesus has made propitiation for us and is now our Advocate in the heavenly court. In spite of our sinfulness, we will not be distracted from going on, because this Attorney fully takes care of our case. Propitiation, unlike redemption, is not concerned with bringing us back to God. Propitiation brings our enlightened conscience peace by answering God’s case against us. Regardless of how much is exposed, our conscience is not troubled. We can advance rapidly in the growth in life. 