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1 JOHN: The Fruit of Fellowship with Christ

by Ray C. Stedman

There are two of Jesus' disciples whom I would particularly like to have known in the days of their earthly life. One is Peter, and the other is John. I like these two men. I am especially impressed by the change that fellowship with the Lord Jesus produced in their lives. This is what intrigues me about these two.

Peter, as you know, was erratic, impulsive, brash. As someone has well said, "Whenever Peter enters a scene, it's always with a thud." He seems to have a gift for putting his foot in his mouth – he suffered from hoof-in-mouth disease. Yet the Lord made him a steady, stable, dependable rock, as his name implies. He became a rallying point, a gathering point for the Christians in the days of the persecutions which broke out in the 1st century. It was only because he was with the Lord, and knew the Lord. Most of the change took place after the Lord's death and resurrection, however, so we do not need to feel that it was the personal presence of Jesus that changed these men. He changed them after he died and rose again, just as he can change us.

John was the other one who was dramatically changed by our Lord. He was a young man, the youngest of all the disciples. In fact, many scholars feel that he was a teenager when he first started to follow the Lord. Perhaps he was seventeen or eighteen years of age. Along with his brother, James, he was a hot-headed young man, given to sharp and impulsive utterances with a tendency toward blowing off steam. He was probably a

loudmouth, because Jesus nicknamed him 'Son of Thunder.' That was our Lord's gentle way of labeling John's problem. He just kept the thunder rolling all the time. So our Lord called both James and John "Sons of Thunder," {Mark 3:17}. But John became the apostle of love. He was noted for his gentleness and his graciousness and his goodness. He was called "the virgin." As far as we know, he never married. There is no record that he ever did. But he was called "virgin" primarily because of the purity of his life. He became a man who was characterized by such an outstanding devotion and love for the Lord Jesus, that all his life he was singled out as the apostle of love.

Now it is this John who writes these letters to us. You may know that this first letter of John is possibly the last of the New Testament to be written. It may well have been written after the Gospel of John. It is perhaps, therefore, the last word we have from the apostles. It undoubtedly comes from near the close of the 1st century, perhaps even the year 100 A.D., as some scholars tell us. It was written from the city of Ephesus, where John spent the latter years of his life.

It was possibly written to the Christians in this city of Ephesus, who were facing (as we are) dangers and difficulties of living in a godless, pagan world, given over to the worship of sex and to licentious practices, lovers of human wisdom (as all these Greek cities were) and especially desirous of exalting man and his abilities. Now that sounds very much like our modern western world, doesn't

it? First John was written to people in this kind of situation then, and therefore it has a lot to say to us.

In one of the commentaries of First John, the author says, “The Epistle of First John defies outlining.” For many years, I would have agreed with that statement. I thought John was kind of a rambler. He just wrote on and changed the subject frequently. It did not look as if there was any rhyme or reason to his letter. But as I preached through a series of thirty-five messages on this letter, I began to see its makeup.

John is concerned about one thing, primarily, and that is *authentic Christianity*! I suppose that even as early as the close of the 1st century, some of the dullness and deadness and drabness with which Christianity has sometimes been plagued, had begun to appear. The freshness, the vitality, the newness, the excitement, the drama of the Christian faith had begun to lose its glow and its glamour. John, therefore, is led of God to call people back to the vital things, the things that make for real life. So he is concerned about an authentic Christian manifestation, and authentic Christianity is always made up of the same three elements. The body of this letter of First John is an emphasis upon the three essential things that make Christianity genuinely Christian. They are truth, righteousness, and love. Those three, held in perfect balance, are a sign of genuine Christianity. These become, therefore, the marks that John emphasizes as proof to anyone that he or she is a Christian. The letter gives us a wonderful measuring stick whereby we can test our own lives:

- How are we doing?
- Do we fulfill the qualifications?
- Do we manifest truth, righteousness and love?

There is a prelude that I will discuss in a minute, but beginning at Verse 18 of Chapter 2, and carrying on through Chapter 4, Verse 21, you have his emphasis on these three things: truth, righteousness and love.

But before he begins that, he gives us a prelude, which is really the key to the way truth, righteousness and love can be made manifest in your life. There is a relationship that is necessary. That relationship John terms **fellowship with Christ** – oneness with him, an identification of your life with

Jesus Christ. Now, if you do not have that you cannot produce righteousness, truth and love. It is impossible.

Someone has said that it is possible to search through all the writings of Socrates, Aristotle, Plato, Confucius and Buddha, and other great world leaders of moral and ethical thought, to find everything that is written in the New Testament that exhorts man as to what to do. In other words, if all you need is good advice, you do not need the Bible. You can get plenty of good advice from these other religions. But one thing these other leaders do not give you is the how. How! That is what John is talking about.

How do you follow this good advice? You know the Golden Rule is not found only in the New Testament. You find an expression of the Golden Rule, always in a negative form, in other religions: “Do not do to others as you do not want them to do to you.” Ah, but in Christ you find the secret of how! It is by unity with him – union with him, fellowship with the Lord Jesus – he dwelling in you and you dwelling in him. That is what John begins to talk about.

He says from the very beginning that he has a personal experience of this. “I saw him,” he says. “I felt him. I heard him. I touched him. He was a real person; there was nothing phony or sham about him. In the fellowship of his life, I found it possible to begin to love, to walk in truth, in obedient righteousness with God,” {cf, 1 Jn 1:1-2}. That is the heart and key to this letter, as he begins with this note of fellowship with Jesus Christ.

You will notice that all through this letter he emphasizes the fact that Jesus appeared in history. That is the first theme he talks about under the heading of **truth**. The truth about Jesus is that he is God and man. He is both –

- the eternal God, linked with all the great revelations of the Old Testament that mark out the being and character of God,
- and he is man, having come in the flesh, he lived among us, was a man, suffered as a man, died as a man.

All this, so that we might share his life, his divine nature.

Now this was opposed to a philosophy that was very current in John's day. It was what we call *gnosticism*. The nearest thing to it today is Christian Science which is almost pure gnosticism. Gnosticism taught that matter is evil and spirit is good. Therefore, the spirit of man is imprisoned in an evil body; the purpose of this life is to teach us how to somehow rise above the evil of our body and release the spirit from the evil, material body, thus achieving nirvana – or heaven, or whatever you want to call it.

Now, you will notice, that is still very commonly accepted in many places. It is against that idea that John writes, and says, "Now don't follow that" because Jesus has come in truth. The truth about Jesus is that he came as God, became man, and anybody who does not say that about Jesus Christ is a liar.

The problem was that there were many people back in those days who were wonderful. They gave the appearance of being suave and gentle and thoughtful and courteous. They were not out to destroy Christianity; they were out to improve upon it. So they just dropped out, de-emphasized some of the things that the New Testament says about Jesus and emphasized others that agreed with what they wanted to teach. Thus, they attempted to make Christianity intellectually respectable.

This process is still going on today. But John says that if you give way to this, if you succumb to this kind of delusion, you will find that you have been tricked and end up not a Christian at all. You will be following a lie and become a victim of a sham and a delusion. The results of that are terrible.

In the second section, the apostle emphasized **righteousness**. Christianity is not just signing the doctrine or creed. It is not just writing your name under a statement of belief – "We believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ his Son, our Lord who suffered under Pontius Pilate and was crucified, dead, and buried, and on the third day..." and so on. It is not that; it is more than truth; it is also righteousness. It means that your behavior changes. The emphasis of John, as with all the writers of the New Testament, is this: "Look," he says, "if you really have Jesus Christ living in you, you can't be the same person. You cannot go on living in sin, doing wrong things, ly-

ing and stealing, living in sexual immorality. You cannot do it."

You see, these Gnostics were saying, "Look, if spirit is good and matter is evil, and our bodies are matter, then the only thing that counts is the spirit. What you do with your body doesn't make any difference. So if you want to indulge the lusts of it, go ahead. It won't affect your spiritual standing with God." As a result they were turning (as Jude puts it) the grace of God into licentiousness {Jude 1:4 RSV}. People were being taught, Christians were being taught, that they could practice all the immorality of their day, and God would still treat them exactly the same. It would not change their relationship one whit. But John says,

No one born of God commits sin; for God's nature abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God. {1 Jn 3:9 RSV}

The two are incompatible. You cannot have the Holy Spirit living in you and live an unholy life. If you live the unholy life and profess to be a Christian, you are a liar, says John. He is very blunt about it.

Yet, there is still a third thing. It is easy for Christians to say today, "Well, yes, this is true. We've got to teach the truth, obey the truth, and believe the truth about Christ. And of course, we've got to stop doing the things the world is doing." That is as far as they go. Have you heard Christians get up and testify along this line? They say, "I used to smoke and drink and dance and go to the movies and play cards and gamble and all these terrible things. But I don't do any of them any more. I believe in the Lord. I've stopped all these things." They leave the impression that it ought to make everyone become a Christian, to see such a tremendous change. But what you discover, soon enough, is that people are not a bit impressed by what you have stopped doing. Not the least bit. Why, worldlings can stop doing these things if they have a good reason. And they do it. If that is the basis of your Christian testimony, you have got nothing more to say than they do. No, the world is not a bit impressed by stopping something.

What does impress them is seeing you do something they cannot do. That is **love**. That is why John says that the third mark of a genuine Christian is that he begins to love – not those that

love him (anybody can do that, is Jesus' remark) – but beginning

- to love those who do not love you,
- to treat kindly those who mistreat you,
- to return good for evil and to pray for those who spitefully use you,
- to welcome and treat kindly those who are against you and are trying to hurt you.

This is the mark, isn't it?

You no longer treat those who have needs around you with callous indifference, but you respond to them and do not shut them out of your life. John says, "If a man comes to your door and says, 'I am hungry, and I don't have anything to wear,' and you have what he needs, and you say to him, 'Well, that's all right brother. We'll pray for you. Go away and be filled and be warmed,' it is ridiculous to say that the love of God dwells in you." It is absurd. How can you say that? If you do not love your brother whom you can see, how can you say that you love God whom you don't see?" {cf, 1 Jn 4:20}. See how practical he gets in these matters?

So he emphasized that fellowship with the Lord Jesus, a oneness, a day-by-day walk with him, opening your heart to his word, letting his light shine upon you – thus letting yourself be changed by the power of Christ – will result in truth about Jesus righteousness in your personal behavior and love toward your brothers, your fellow members of the human race, as well as those fellow members of the church of God.

Then the final result, and the closing note of the letter, is **assurance**. You know things with a knowledge that is unshakable, which nobody can shatter, and no rational arguments will disturb. You know that what God has told you is true. You know that what he has revealed about the world is true. You have a continually growing certainty that underlies your life. As we read in John's closing note:

We know that one born of God does not sin, but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. {1 Jn 5:18 RSV}

That is righteousness. We know, he says, that we are of God, the very nature and being of God – the God who is love – and that the whole world is in the power of the evil one. That is why they cannot love. They talk about it and they want it. They search for it, but they cannot find it – because God is love. We know that we are of God, he says,

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, to know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. {1 Jn 5:20 RSV}

What a declaration that is, in an age when everybody is telling us that you cannot know anything for sure, that nobody knows anything for certain. John says that we do. We know. We have been given an understanding.

Here is his final word and it is such an important one. One that I think ought to ring in our ears every day:

Little children, keep yourselves from idols. (1 Jn 5:21)

Why? Well, because the first and great commandment is, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind," {Matt 22:37b RSV}. That is the chief end of man. And idolatry is loving something else as God. What is an idol? It is a substitute God. Your God is

- what you get excited about,
- what you save your money for,
- what you spend it on,

that is your God.

What is important to you, that is your God.

Little children – you who have found the true God – keep yourselves from these secondary idols, these substitute gods that demand your attention. Give yourself, alone, to the One who can fulfill in you all your heart's desires. It is a great word, isn't it? – the word that will lead us safely through all the difficulties along our path.

Prayer:

Our Father, you know the many idols that loom before us each day: the god of pleasure; the god of selfishness; the god Narcissus, who makes us love ourselves, admire ourselves, look to ourselves; the god of love, Venus, how we follow her, Lord, and exalt her when we should not; the god Bacchus, who makes us revel in pleasure as if that were the chief end in life, as if fun were the reason for living. Lord, deliver us from these gods, these false gods, that will

rob us of our faith, of our love for humanity. Make us fall more truly in love with the Lord Jesus who alone is the only true God, who has come to give us an understanding of ourselves and the world around us, and has come to teach us righteousness and how to love with a heart that is self-giving instead of self-serving. These things we ask, Lord, in this 20th century hour, knowing that we are exposed to the same dangers that they were in the 1st century, and so desperately needing your power. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

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2 JOHN: The Vital Balance

by Ray C. Stedman

The second letter of John is the only letter in the New Testament that was written to a woman. As we can gather from the letter itself, it was written to a mother with several children, perhaps a widow. It appears that she had written to the Apostle John to ask his opinion about certain problems that had come up.

Back in those days, of course, the New Testament was not available as it is to us. The leaders of the churches were dependent upon certain men, called prophets, who went from place to place, preaching the truth. Evidently some of these men had come to the home of this woman, probably in the city of Ephesus, and they had raised certain doctrinal matters which disturbed her. Not knowing quite what to do, she wrote to the Apostle John and asked for his counsel. This letter is his response to her question. As we go through this, we will see how it also answers many of the questions we have today – especially the question of how to treat people who teach wrong things.

The first six verses present the problem to us and give us John's approach in answering it:

The elder [as John terms himself] to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth, and not only I but also all who know the truth, because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us for ever:

Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love.

I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children following the truth, just as we have been commanded by the Father. And now I beg you, lady, not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning, that we love one another. And this is love, the we follow

his commandment; this is the commandment, as you have heard from the beginning, that you follow love. {2 Jn 1:1-6 RSV}

Here John is setting the stage for the answer to this lady's problem. He is gathering together two things that must be taken into consideration in facing a problem of this kind. Two outstanding words are used all through the text. What are they? Truth is the first, isn't it? – and love. Truth and love. Notice how he links these two in Verse 3:

Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love. {2 Jn 1:3 RSV}

This ought to be the characteristic of Christians.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians he says the same thing – that a Christian should learn to speak the truth in love {cf, Eph 4:15 RSV}. The remarkable work of a Christian life is to gather these often opposing things together and keep them in balance.

Now that is our problem as well. Many of us emphasize one at the expense of the other:

- We may emphasize truth and center upon doctrinal matters, insisting that the Scriptures be followed carefully, but at the expense of love. When we do this, we are rigid and cold and judgmental, sometimes even cruel, in the way we say things. Even though what we say is exactly right, we are trying to defend the truth of God at the expense of love.
- On the other hand, there are those of us who make the mistake of emphasizing love at the expense of truth. They feel that we should ac-

cept everyone and everything, being tolerant in all directions.

This second group reminds me of the story Dr. H. A. Ironside used to tell about the man who came to church, and on the way out, as he shook hands with the pastor one Sunday morning, he said to him, “Oh Pastor, I want to tell you what a blessing you’ve been to me since you’ve been pastor of this church. Why, when I first started here, I didn’t have any regard for God, man or the devil. But since you came, I’ve learned to love all three.”

Now the problem is to keep truth and love in balance. This is what you see so beautifully in the Lord Jesus; he walked in truth and love. He could deal in tenderness with the dissolute sinner, the outcast from society who came to him. And with a blistering word, he could scorch a Pharisee until he turned red with shame, as all the rottenness in that man’s inner life was revealed. He spoke the truth and he dealt in love and he kept them in perfect balance.

John says, “When you go to handle a problem of doctrinal error, *emphasize both truth and love.*” A lot of people who read this letter miss these opening words; thus they miss the sanity of balance that pervades the letter.

In the next section, we have the answer to the lady’s question:

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; such a one is the deceiver and antichrist. Look to yourselves, that you may not lose what you have worked for, but may win a full reward. Any one who goes ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God; he who abides in the doctrine has both the Father and the Son. If any one comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into the house or give him any greeting; for he who greets him shares his wicked work. {2 Jn 1:7-11 RSV}

First, you have to recognize the nature of the error. Two things are said here that describe the fundamental types of Christian perversions. There are only two; all Christian error and heresies gather about one or the other of these:

1. There are, first of all, those who are deceived about the person of the Lord Jesus. There is one sign of the true redeemer and savior – he is the one who came from God into the world and became man. The incarnation is an essential doctrine of Christian faith. If you can trace a man’s origin from his birth, and you know that he entered this human stream through the normal reproductive faculties, and he claims to be a savior, you can write it off, because he is not God’s savior. And if he claims not to believe nor to accept this incarnation of the Lord Jesus, then the man is in error. No matter what else he may say, he is not speaking as the spokesman of God.

All through the New Testament letters, the mighty apostles of our Lord set this incarnation at the center of Christian theology – the Word becoming man. Everything else gathers around that, the person of the Lord Jesus. John says, if a man does not say that, no matter what else he may say, he is a deceiver. Now he may be deceived as well as being a deceiver, but he is an antichrist. He is against the doctrine of Jesus. Therefore, he is to be recognized for what he is – a man who is mistaken and trying to deceive others.

2. There is another type of error, however, that gathers around a misunderstanding or false conception of the teaching of the Lord Jesus:

Any one who goes ahead [literally, goes beyond] and does not abide in the doctrine [the teaching] of Christ does not have God. {2 Jn 1:9 RSV}

That is very revealing. That takes care of all groups that hold that the Bible is not an adequate revelation of God, and that say we need something else. Someone with such a view may be very persuasive and sincere. He may be a very great personality, but this is the test: If he does not abide in the doctrine of Christ, then he is not of God.

There are many people today who say that the teachings of the Scriptures are infantile. Modern man has grown beyond all this and can no longer accept these simplistic teachings of the Bible. The modern mind must find satisfaction in more scientific approaches. It cannot

rest upon these simple things. Do you see that that is another example of exactly what John is talking about here? Someone who goes beyond, departs from the revelation of Jesus, considering it too simple, and tries to add something to the teachings of the Word of God.

Those are the two types of error; now notice what the danger is. What will happen to you if you fall in with this kind of thing?

Look to yourselves, that you may not lose what you have worked for, but may win a full reward. {2 Jn 1:8 RSV}

What do you lose, as a Christian, if you get involved with cults and heresies and liberal approaches that are so widespread? Will you lose your salvation? Not if you are really born again, of course. That rests upon the work of Christ for you. You are not going to lose your place in heaven, nor your redemption, nor your part in the body of Christ. But you do lose a great deal, as John makes clear. You lose the value of your life spent here; you waste your time. You throw away precious moments and years involved in that which is utterly worthless, and which will be displayed at last as wood, hay and stubble, to be consumed in the fire of God's searching gaze. You will lose your reward, {cf, 1 Cor 3:10-15}.

All through the New Testament, this possibility is brought before us. In the book of Revelation, the Apostle John says something similar: "Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown," (Rev 3:11 RSV). These crowns are symbols of authority and honor which are given to those who have made themselves available to the work of God, to those who have given their bodies as a living sacrifice for God to work through.

If you get involved in something that is grounded upon false teaching, all your efforts are wasted. You are building nothing but an imposing facade. It may look very good, but at the end it will crumble and find no acceptance before God.

What do you do about people like this?

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into the house or give him any greeting; for he who greets him shares his wicked work. {2 Jn 1:10-11 RSV}

As we read this, let us remember what John has said about truth and love. It is so easy for us who are concerned about the doctrinal matters of Scripture to forsake the courtesy and charity that is expected of every Christian. We interpret a passage like this to mean that we are to slam the door in the face of anyone who offers us some of these heretical ideas, or that we are to order them out of the house the minute they bring up some kind of heretical teaching. If that were the case, it would be impossible even to have foreign students in our homes. If this is what John means, then when we discover that someone is not a Christian, we are not to let him in the house. We would be very offensive people, wouldn't we? We could never extend our friendship to those of another religion who may be visiting in our country. We would be acting in defense of the truth, but not manifesting anything of the grace of love. Well then, what does he mean?

He means that truth should be uttered in love, and love should be bounded by truth. In other words, we are not to receive these people in such a way as to imply that we are authenticating or accepting their teaching. You see, in those days motels did not exist, and inns were very few and far between. When these teachers traveled, they stayed in private homes. So when they went into a home with false teaching, and the person continued to open his home to them, he would be endorsing their doctrine. But this does not rule out the need for common courtesy, or for a gracious approach to the person, or for the meeting of emergency needs. After all, the parable of the Good Samaritan makes very clear that if someone is in need, it does not make any difference who he is, we are to help him. As long as we can make it clear that we are treating him graciously, thoughtfully, kindly, as a fellow human being, but definitely not endorsing his wrong ideas, then it is perfectly proper for us to have some kind of contact with him – even a degree of friendship. But we are not to share in his wicked work; that is the idea that John sets before us.

Notice how he underscores the importance of this in his closing verses. He says to her.

Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink, but I hope to come to see you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete. {2 Jn 1:12 RSV}

It was difficult to write letters in those days. Mails were uncertain, and I suppose the Apostle John, like most of us, found it difficult to sit down and write letters. So he said, "I'm not going to write more, but ... BUT – and this is the reason for the letter – this matter is so important that I have taken the time to write it anyhow. There are a lot of other things I would like to discuss, but certainly I could not wait about this."

Then he extends greetings from the Christian family he is evidently staying with, and thus underscores the need in Christian life for both truth and love.

Let us pray that we may so speak and deal with others that we will manifest the graciousness, the gentleness of Christ. Paul says that if a brother is overtaken in a fault, or if someone has strayed from the truth, the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle and understanding {cf, Gal 6:1-5,

2 Tim 2:24-25}. This is no encouragement, then, to rigidity and narrowness and bigotry, saying hateful and reviling things.

Do you remember the nursery rhyme of the gingham dog and the calico cat? I do not remember just how it went, but I remember how it ended. They ate each other up! I am afraid that is what may happen to some of these Christian groups, so-called, in their approach to one another. Let us not be that way – rigid, judgmental, scorching. We need to display love.

But our love must not be so wide, so tolerant, that it excludes the great fact that Jesus Christ is the only way to God:

- No other one has come.
- No other savior has been sent.
- He alone is the answer to humanity's hopelessness.

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3 JOHN: A Tale Of Three Men

by Ray C. Stedman

Third John gives us an intimate glimpse into the life of the early church. It is a delightful accompaniment to the second letter, which was written to a Christian lady about how to handle the false teachers who were abroad in that day. The third letter of John was written to a Christian man about how to take care of the true teachers who were traveling about ministering the Word of God. There is thus both a contrast and a similarity in these last two letters from the pen of John.

Third John shows us something of the problem of personalities within the church, and three people are mentioned here. There is a man named Gaius, to whom this letter is written; another man named Diotrephes, and a third individual named Demetrius. These three men are like three kinds of Christians found in the church in any age. Like all the letters of the New Testament, this is a very up-to-date and relevant letter.

First, there is the man named **Gaius**: This may be one of the three Gaiuses mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament, although Gaius was a common name in New Testament times, as is John. In any case, John evidently knew him, and addresses the letter to him in a warm and friendly way. We can gather from the letter that Gaius was a genial, gracious, generous individual. Three things that John says about him are important to notice:

- First, he was strong of soul; that was what warmed John's heart:

Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in health;

**I know that it is well with your soul.
{3 Jn 1:2 RSV}**

That is what the Revised Standard Version has, but I think the Authorized Version is a little more accurate:

... that you may prosper in health just as you prosper in soul. {cf, 3 Jn 1:2b KJV}

That is a wonderful thing to say about someone, isn't it? "I wish you could be as strong in body as you are in spirit."

It would be interesting to apply this test to people today. If your physical appearance reflected your spiritual state, what would you look like? Would you be a robust individual – strong and virile? Or would you be a doddering weakling, barely able to move?

Well, Gaius was the sort of man about whom the Apostle John could say, "I wish your physical life were as strong as your spiritual life."

- Further, he was consistent in his actions:

I greatly rejoiced when some of the brethren arrived and testified to the truth of your life, as indeed you do follow the truth. {3 Jn 1:3 RSV}

He showed the truth in his life, what impressed John was not that he knew the truth, but that he followed the truth. He lived it. He had a consistent life. He did not preach cream and live skim milk. He walked in the truth.

- And finally, he was generous in his giving:

Beloved, it is a loyal thing you do when you render any service to the brethren, especially to strangers, who have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey as befits God's service. {3 Jn 1:5-6 RSV}

One of the signs that a person has really been genuinely touched by God is that his pocketbook loosens up. His giving becomes generous, gracious, and cheerful, just as God loves. And this man is faithful (loyal) in his giving. This means that he is regular and systematic in his giving. He does not just give when his emotions are moved, but he plans his giving, and he carries it through, faithfully continuing with the work that he has promised.

It is clear, too, that he gave cheerfully, because John says he gave "as befits God's service," i.e., worthily of God. He does not want us to give because we feel we have to, or because somebody is taking a special offering, or to feel that, if we do not, we will be looked down upon by other Christians. And Gaius gives because he delights in giving.

We will come back to Verses 7 and 8 in a moment, but first let us look at this man **Diotrephes**:

I have written something to the church; but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge my authority. So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, prating against me with evil words. And not content with that, he refuses himself to welcome the brethren, and also stops those who want to welcome them and puts them out of the church. Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. He who does good is of God; he who does evil has not seen God. {3 Jn 1:9-11 RSV}

This is the first example in the New Testament church of a church boss – someone who tries to run the church. He may have been an elder or a deacon or perhaps a pastor, it is difficult to tell. But it was someone who conceived of his role as that of telling everyone else in the church what to do. Now the early church apparently had some kind of a mem-

bership roll, and if Diotrephes did not like somebody, he would scratch his name off the list, and put him out of the church. And John objects to that. John indicates here that Diotrephes was guilty of four particular wrong attitudes and actions:

1. For one thing, John says that this man was guilty of slandering the apostle, "prating [preaching] against me with evil words." He refused the authority of the Apostle John. We know from other letters that the apostles had a unique role in the history of the church. They were to lay the foundations of the church, and were given the authority to settle all questions within the church. It is this apostolic word that is passed along to us in the New Testament, which is why the New Testament is so authoritative to Christians.

So here was a man who not only disregarded the authority of the Apostle John, but he even spoke against him. He said slanderous, evil things against the apostle.

2. Furthermore, he says that Diotrephes is refusing to welcome the brethren who came, when these traveling ministers who went about from place to place, speaking the truth of God, came to this congregation. Diotrephes would have nothing to do with them. He turned them aside and refused to allow them to speak in the church.

3. A third thing is that he also puts people out of the church who would have taken these men in. He indulges in what we would call today "secondary separation." He not only objected to the men who came, but he objected to those who would have received them.

This has been one of the curses of the church ever since. Because of this tendency to refuse fellowship to someone who likes someone you do not like, a wide divisiveness has come into the church, doing injury and harm beyond recall.

4. But of those three offenses, none was as severe as the thing John puts first. The most serious problem Diotrephes had was that he put himself first. He loved to be first, which is a dead give-away that he was acting in the flesh. This is always the philosophy of the flesh – me first!

Me first, and the devil take the hindmost! In doing that, he was robbing the Lord Jesus of his prerogative. It is he who has the right to pre-eminence; he should be first, but here is a man who put himself first, and that is the really serious thing.

Unfortunately, there are plenty of men like Diotrophes in the churches today, and they are always characterized by this attitude. They want to be first. They want part of the glory. They rob God of his inheritance, stealing that which alone belongs to the Almighty.

I remember reading some years ago that Dr. H. E. Robertson, an outstanding leader among the Southern Baptists and a great Greek scholar, once wrote an editorial in the denominational magazine about Diotrophes. Later, the editor reported that twenty-five deacons wrote to cancel their subscriptions, feeling personally attacked.

Now let us see what John's counsel is in this situation. Notice that he does not advise Gaius to organize a split away from the church. Rather, he says,

Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. He who does good is of God; he who does evil has not seen God. {3 Jn 1:11 RSV}

In other words, do not follow these men who want the preeminence. If you see somebody who is always jockeying for position in Christian relationships, always wanting to be in the public eye, do not follow him. He is following his own way and not that of God.

There is, finally, a third generation mentioned here, **Demetrius**, and all we know of him is what John says:

Demetrius has testimony from every one, and from the truth itself [a widely accepted and honored man]; I testify to him too, and you know my testimony is true. {3 Jn 1:12 RSV}

He is speaking here as an apostle with the gift of discernment. Now he says, "I want to underscore what everybody thinks about Demetrius. Here's a man you can trust. He is a man of the truth. He has borne testimony from all that he is to

be trusted." Evidently, Demetrius was the bearer of this letter to Gaius, and was probably one of those missionaries who traveled from place to place. I reserved Verses 7 and 8 until now to comment on Demetrius, because they describe the kind of man of which he was a sample:

For they have set out for his sake and have accepted nothing from the heathen. So we ought to support such men, that we may be fellow workers in the truth. {3 Jn 1:7-8 RSV}

These words describe the first group of traveling missionaries. As they went from place to place they would enjoy the hospitality of the various churches. They labored as evangelists in that area, reaching out into places where the church had not yet gone, being supported and strengthened by these various churches.

The Apostle John says three things of them. He says first that they have gone out; they have left things behind. They gave up their income and their work, and went out to obey this higher calling. Not everyone goes – that was true in the early church as it is today. There were some, such as Gaius, who were to stay to help support these men. But there were others to whom the Holy Spirit said, "Come, I've called you to a special task." Their motive is given here, too: "... for his sake." Literally, for the name's sake – the name of Jesus.

Back in Old Testament times, the Jews treated the name of God in a unique way. The name of God, *Jehovah*, which appears throughout the Old Testament, was called the "Ineffable Tetragrammaton": *Tetragrammaton* means "four letters," and *ineffable* means "unspeakable, or incommunicable." So whenever they came to these four Hebrew letters for God they did not dare speak them, so holy was the name. Even when the scribe wrote them, he would change the pen away and continue with another one. Scribes also changed their garments before they would write the sacred name, so reverently did they regard the name of God. In the famous passage of Deuteronomy, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord" {Deut 6:4 RSV}, the name occurs twice, which would have required two changes of clothes and four pens to execute.

In the New Testament, then, the name is that of Jesus. The Apostle Paul says,

God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, ... {Phil 2:9-10a RSV} and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. {Phil 2:11 RSV}

Concern for his name was the underlying motive for missionary work in the 1st century. It ought to be the underlying motive for missionaries today. It is not the need of people that calls us out to different places in the world to preach the gospel. Need is abundant everywhere. Everyone without Christ is in need. And sometimes the most pathetic cases are not those who have physical needs, but those who have everything materially, but who are wretched in their inner spirit.

I remember when John R. W. Stott, speaking at a conference, said that it was primarily a jealousy for the name of God, a conviction that he should not be denied what is rightfully his, that should be the great motive for missionaries – that the Lord Jesus had died for the sins of men everywhere and that he longs to have from every tribe and nation a people for his name.

Now notice the part that the people who stay home are to have:

So we ought to support such men, that we may be fellow workers in the truth. {3 Jn 1:8 RSV}

Wouldn't it be wonderful if, after you got to glory, God wrote "FWT" after your name, in addition to whatever other degrees you may have: Fellow Worker in the Truth. What a degree to have!

Now John closes his letter with these very personal words:

I have much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink; I hope to see you soon, and we will talk together face to face. Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, every one of them. {3 Jn 1:13-15 RSV}

What an intimate little letter. It seems as though it came not only from John, but from the Lord himself. I like to read this letter as if it is reflecting what the Lord Jesus is saying to his own church. He is really saying to us, "There is much that I'd write to you about." He has written a whole book here, and he has much more to tell us about, but he says, "I'd rather not write with pen and ink. But I hope to see you soon, and we will talk together face to face."

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we thank you that your name has lost none of its ancient power to attract and bring us to yourself. We pray that you will strengthen our hearts and encourage us to honor your name here below until we see thee face to face. We ask in your name, Amen.

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JUDE: Contending for the Faith

by Ray C. Stedman

The letter of Jude is a thunderous word from a man who refers to himself in the first verse simply as,

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James. {Jude 1:1a RSV}

That identifies him, for James was very well known as a leader in the early church in Jerusalem, and he was also the author of the Epistle of James which we have in our New Testament. But he was famous not only because he was in himself an outstanding man, but also because he was the brother of the Lord Jesus Christ – the physical half-brother of Jesus. He had grown up in the little town in Nazareth with Jesus himself.

But notice that he says nothing about this relationship in the opening of his letter, instead refers to himself as “a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.” In that we can see that this man who grew up with the Lord Jesus and his brother James has now learned to see Jesus no longer after the flesh, but, as he truly was, God become man. He now worships him. Jude and James had an unique experience in the Christian church, in becoming the disciples of the One with whom they grew up.

What clear testimony this gives of the deity of the Lord Jesus. If anyone would be in a position to refute the claim of Jesus of being God, it would be the brothers of Jesus. Although they did not come to believe in him until after his resurrection from the dead, nevertheless these letters constitute a seal of confirmation that the claims of the New Testament concerning Jesus Christ are valid, in that they are supported even by those who would have every reason to deny them.

I am struck, too, by the fact that Jude takes the place of second fiddle to his brother James. Often, brothers and sisters of famous personalities are disturbed by being introduced as the brother or sister of so-and-so. But Jude is quite content to say he is the brother of James. He has learned the spiritual secret that God always has a place for every one. If it helps to identify him that way, he is perfectly willing to take that place.

Then he tells us how he came to write the letter:

Beloved, being very eager to write to you of our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. {Jude 1:3 RSV}

He had started out to write a letter containing certain insights and understandings of the faith. Certainly he was in a position to do this, and had perhaps been pressured by others to write his memoirs and to recount what he had experienced as the brother of the Lord. He had determined to do that when news came to him of an outbreak of some false and very distasteful teaching.

He feels constrained by the Holy Spirit to stop the treatise that he was going to write, and to write a tract instead. The treatise evidently never got written, but the tract is a very valuable addition to the New Testament scripture. So he writes to them to “contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”

There are some striking things about that instruction. That says:

1. First, that our faith is not something that anybody has manufactured; it was delivered to us. It is not fabricated, or worked up by a collection of individuals. It is one body of facts that is consistently delivered by authoritative persons, the apostles. It has come to us through them.
2. Furthermore, Jude says that it was once for all delivered. It was only given at one time in the history of the world. It does not need any additions. This little letter, lying as it does at the very back door of the New Testament, is a wonderfully helpful letter to use in answering the claims of the cults, -isms and false doctrines abroad today. It is my judgment that the essence of every false doctrine that has ever been expounded by anyone is answered here in this letter of Jude. For example, the Mormons tell us that the revelation that God gave us did not stop with the New Testament, but that we need new books and new revelations. But you see how clearly Jude answers this when he says, "I want you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints." It was given to us through the apostles, at one particular time in history, and it does not need any additions.
3. The third thing is that it needs to be proclaimed, or contended for. Now some think that contending for the faith means to roll the Bible up into a bludgeon with which to beat people over the head. Such people feel that they need to be very contentious in contending for the faith. But this is not what Jude has in mind at all. He is simply talking about the need for proclaiming the truth.

As Charles Spurgeon used to put it: "The truth is like a lion. Whoever heard of defending a lion? Just turn it loose and it will defend itself." This is the way the Word of God is. If we begin to proclaim it, it will defend itself.

The reason for this counsel, as he goes on to tell us, is that there were certain false teachers who had crept into the church:

For admission has been secretly gained by some who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly persons who per-

vert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. {Jude 1:4 RSV}

What bothered Jude was that this was not an attack from outside the church; these were not pagans. These were people who professed to be Christians. They had arisen within the church and were doing two things:

First, they were changing the grace of God into license to live an immoral, sexually degraded life. They were teaching basically that it did not make any difference what you did with your body as long as your spirit was right. You could indulge the body to the full, since it was no good anyhow; it was the spirit that counted.

Second, they were saying that the grace of God is so broad that God will forgive anything you do; therefore, the more you sin, the more grace, so go to it. This same idea is being promulgated in our own day. People from within the church are saying we have progressed beyond these old-fashioned Biblical ideas against licentiousness and immorality, and that we now have a new morality. It is based on the Christian theme of love. If you love someone, they say, it does not make any difference what you do with them. Love justifies anything. This is an exact duplicate of this 1st century heresy, that called forth such condemnation from the Apostle Jude.

Let us look briefly at how Jude handles this problem. First he points out that God will not ignore this kind of thing; the judgment of this kind of person is certain. That is Jude's theme and he supplies three Biblical examples to support it:

1. To begin with, he reminds the people that when God brought the people out of Egypt, he did a great thing; well over a million people were saved by the power and right hand of God. But they were a mixed multitude, as the Old Testament tells us. While some of them were really believers, others were not. They were all delivered and they were all set free. They all went through the Red Sea and all experienced the miracles of God's fatherly care. But when they came into the wilderness, God began to choose and judge among them. Those who

murmured and complained and rejected his leadership, refusing to enter into the land, he judged. Finally, out of all the multitude that left Egypt, only two men entered into the land – Joshua and Caleb. The rest all perished in the wilderness. Their children entered in, but this was God’s way of saying that he has a way of handling those who refuse to act by faith.

2. In the second example, he reminds us of the angels who did not keep their first position. These angels lived in the very presence of God and ministered before him, serving constantly at his bidding, and yet they followed Satan in his rebellion. They came to earth and became involved with the daughters of men. Thus, they too were reserved for judgment. His point is that even angels are not excluded from judgment, when they fall through pride and lust. And pride and lust characterized these men that Jude was talking about.
3. Third, Jude reminds them of the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah. These two cities in the plain, down at the southern end of the Dead Sea, had fallen into the practice of homosexuality. So open, so blatant, so widely accepted was the practice, that when the angels visited Lot, the men of the city surrounded his house and ordered Lot to bring those men out so that they might have their way with them. For this, God judged that city.

Jude reminds us that God does not take these things lightly. There is a judgment provided for it. It may be sudden, as in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah. It may be long-delayed as in the case of the angels; or it may come about in the natural course of events, as in the case of those who came out of Egypt. God is not going to ignore it.

Reading further, we see what was wrong with these men:

Yet in like manner these men in their dreamings defile the flesh, reject authority, and revile the glorious ones. {Jude 1: 8 RSV}

Verses 9 through 13 expand upon those three divisions, taking them in reverse order:

1. First, Jude takes the reviling of the glorious ones, and refers to an incident that is not recorded in our Bible. It comes from a book called *The Assumption of Moses* which was familiar to the readers of the 1st century. Many have been troubled by this because they think Jude is referring to a book that has perhaps been lost from the Bible. It has not been lost; we still have it. It, and other so-called “lost books” can be read in any reputable theological seminary library. But they are a mixture of truth and error, and what these New Testament writers sometimes do is refer back to them for some recorded instance that is true, so that what is recorded here is perfectly true, but not everything in *The Assumption of Moses* is.

A little further on in Jude’s letter, there is a quotation from the *Book of Enoch*, another book we do not find in our Bible, but which is also available today. The quotation Jude uses is truth; the entire book from which it was taken is not.

What happened is that when Moses died, Michael, the great archangel, the highest of the angels, had disputed with the devil over the body of Moses. The claim of the devil was twofold; he said he had a right to the body of Moses, first, because Moses was a murderer – he had slain an Egyptian. Second, the devil said the body of Moses belonged to him because it was in the realm of material things over which he was lord. But Michael disputed this. He claimed the body for the Lord, just as the whole of Scripture claims that our bodies are important to God. God has a plan for them as well as for the spirit.

The point he is making here is that even the archangel Michael did not speak directly to Satan when he confronted him face to face, but simply said, “The Lord rebuke you.” Jude’s argument is, if archangels, who have so much power and knowledge of truth, are careful to respect the God-given dignity of a fallen angel, then why should we, mere men, speak contemptuously of the principalities and the powers in high places? It is a thing to think about, isn’t it, when certain people today just sneer at the idea that the Scriptures present the existence of demons or Satan.

2. Now the second matter he takes up is that of rejecting authority:

Woe to them! For they walk in the way of Cain, and abandon themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error, and perish in Korah's rebellion. {Jude 1:11 RSV}

Jude is tracing the way sin, especially rebellion, develops in a life. He personifies rebellion with three Biblical men: Cain, Balaam and Korah:

He speaks of "the way of Cain," which was essentially selfishness. Cain stands forever as the man who thought only of himself, who had no concern or love for his brother, but put him to death. He looked out only for his own welfare, and Jude says that is the first step on the way to ultimate rebellion – selfishness.

The second thing was the "error of Balaam." There are two stories about Balaam in the Old Testament. In one story, a pagan king hired him to curse the children of Israel. As he was riding along on a donkey to do this, the donkey balked because he saw the angel of God blocking the way. Balaam could not see the angel, and finally the donkey had to speak with a human voice in order to rebuke the madness of this prophet, (Num 22:21-35). The thing that leaps out at you in that whole story is the greed of this man, and this is confirmed by the second story. In return for money, Balaam taught the children of Israel how to sin, (Num 31:15). He sent the pagan women among the camp to seduce the men of Israel sexually, as well as to introduce them to the worship of idols, which involved sexual rites. Thus, he became guilty of teaching others to sin. That is the error of Balaam. To teach someone else to sin is far worse than sinning yourself. Jesus said, "it would be better for him [by whom temptations come] if a millstone were hung round his neck and he were cast into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin," {Luke 17:2 RSV}. That was the error of Balaam.

And the development from selfishness, through teaching someone else to sin, ends finally in the defiant rebellion of Korah: Korah and his group were the ones who said to Moses

and Aaron, "Who do you think you are, making yourselves the leaders of Israel? We are as good as you; we have as much authority as you have in Israel. What makes you think you have the right to speak for God?" {cf, Num 16:3 RSV}. Thus, he openly and blatantly challenged the God-given authority of Moses and Aaron. Do you remember what happened to them? God said, "Look, Korah and your group, you stand over there. Moses and the rest of you, stand over here. I'll show you what is going to happen." Suddenly the ground opened up beneath Korah and his group and they went down alive into the pit {see Num 16:20-35}. This was God's remarkably dramatic way of saying that defiance of God-given authority represents ultimate sin.

3. Jude goes on, and is evidently getting pretty worked up. He now tackles the third matter, "defiling the flesh." He says these people are blemishes on your love feasts, as they boldly caroused together. Now love feasts were potluck suppers. In the early church, the Christians would gather together and bring the food with them to the service on Sunday. After the service, they would all partake together, and they called this a love feast.

What a blessed name! I like potluck suppers, but I do not like the name. I am physically opposed to the first syllable and theologically opposed to the second. But love feast! Now there is a term for you!

Anyhow, these love feasts were wonderful times for fellowship for a while. But then people began to divide into cliques, and some of them kept the chicken for themselves. Others set aside the best pieces of angel food cake, and soon there was division; people began to boldly carouse together, looking after themselves. That is the mark of this kind of a person.

As Jude goes on, we can see his remarkable sense of imagery. It reminds us of James and also of the Lord Jesus in his ability to use all the events and scenes of life around him as illustrations. Listen to all of these, all describing useless people:

...waterless clouds, [promising rain, but never coming through] carried along by

winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, [not only dead in Adam, but dead in that second death – rejecting Christ] uprooted wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars for whom the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved forever. {Jude 1:12b-13 RSV}

Then he quotes Enoch, in that quotation I referred to above. He says that these are exactly the kind of men that were before the flood, and finally, he describes them as,

... grumblers, malcontents, following their own passions, loud-mouthed boasters, flattering people to gain advantage. {Jude 1:16 RSV}

That hurts, doesn't it? Some of us are guilty of some of these things, even though we do not fall into this classification. But now comes the positive, as Jude comes to a close:

... you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; {Jude 1:17 RSV}

They told you this would happen, so what are you going to do about it?

... you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith: {Jude 1:20a RSV}

That means study your Bible; learn what the truth is. He doesn't say to them, "Organize a counter-movement. Try to get these people thrown out of the church." He says to oppose them with the positive; learn the truth. And second:

... pray in the Holy Spirit; {Jude 1:20b RSV}

To pray in the Holy Spirit means to pray according to his teaching, and in his power, depending upon God. Study and learn what prayer is, follow the teaching of the Scripture about it. Obey the Holy Spirit in your prayer life.

Third, he says,

... keep yourselves in the love of God; {Jude 1:21a RSV}

Now some have misunderstood that to mean that it depends on us to stay in the family of God – as if your salvation depended wholly upon us. But what he is saying is, "Look, God's love is just like the sunshine, constantly shining on us. But we can put up parasols and various barriers that shut it off." Jude says we must learn how to keep walking in the experience of the love of God.

When there is no unjudged sin in your life, God's love is constantly able to warm your heart, fill your life. Of course, he loves you whether you are walking in the light or not, but if you walk in the light, you will experience that love. That is what it means to "keep yourselves in the love of God."

Finally:

... wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. {Jude 1:21b RSV}

That refers to the second coming; keep your hope sharp and bright, looking for the intervention again of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now what about others? Jude mentions three things concerning our attitudes and behavior towards other people:

... convince some, who doubt; {Jude 1:22 RSV}

Answer their arguments; reason with them. And next,

save some, by snatching them out of the fire; {Jude 1:23a RSV}

There are some with whom we need to move right in so as to try to bring them back from disaster. And then, finally,

... have mercy with fear, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. {Jude 1:23b RSV}

That is a wise word. Be careful. There are some you cannot help yet; you are not experienced enough, or old enough yet. You are not wise enough to help these others. Even the wisest have to handle them with great fear, being very careful not to contract the disease they are trying to cure.

Now, at the end, we have this great benediction which is one of the great words of the New Testament:

Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and for ever. Amen. {Jude 1:24-25 RSV}

This too falls into three divisions:

“Now to him who is able to keep you from falling” indicates the potential in the Christian life. It does not say “Now to him who does keep you from falling,” because God does not always keep us from falling. He is able to, Jude says, but he does not always do it. We need to fall sometimes; some of us will not learn any other way. If we were not so thick-headed and stubborn, and if we would obey him, he would keep us from falling. In that sense, we never need to fall.

But even when we do fall, he is able “to present us without blemish before the presence of his glory.” The word translated “without blemish,” is the word *anomas*, which means “apart from the law.” He has so completely dealt with us that even our falls have already been handled in Christ. Therefore, after we have learned the painful lesson of it, he is free to wipe it out of the record, and to present us faultless before his glory!

And this will be done, he says, “with rejoicing.” That means we will have had a part in this too. We are also involved in the process, and when we get where we’re going, we can say, “Hallelujah! Thank God, I’ve won!” As Paul says, “I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness,” {2 Tim 4:7b-8a RSV}.

Then there is the final recognition of the only God, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. To him be “glory, majesty, dominion, and authority before all time and now and for ever.” That takes in everything, does it not? From the beginning, through the present to the eternal future, he is the One around whom the universe itself gathers.

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