

7. Outline of the Epistle

by Daniel Steele

The sermon outlines the complex structure of the Epistle, emphasizing the themes of light, love, and the believer's relationship with God and others.

Scripture: 1 John 1:5, 1 John 2:10, 1 John 3:14, 1 John 4:7, 1 John 5:4, 1 John 5:13, 1 John 5:21

Topics: "Biblical Interpretation", "Christian Discipleship"

Description

Daniel Steele delves into the complexities of analyzing the Epistle, acknowledging the challenges scholars face in deciphering the author's plan. While some view it as a disorganized collection of thoughts, modern scholars strive to uncover the subtle connections that divide the Epistle into coherent sections. Dr. A. Plummer's structured plan in the Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges provides a helpful guide, emphasizing themes of God's light and love, the believer's conduct, and the importance of confession, obedience, and fellowship. The Epistle underscores the significance of walking in the light, avoiding worldly influences, and embracing love as a mark of true discipleship, culminating in a call to faith, intercessory love, and a warning against idolatry.

Transcript

It is exceedingly difficult to analyze the Epistle and discover the author's plan. Some scholars think that he had no clear and systematic arrangement of his ideas when he began to write. They assert that it is "an unmethodized effusion of the pious sentiments and reflections of a prattling old man." Even so keen an intellect as Calvin's found it impossible to find any distinct lines of cleavage in what he regarded as a confused compound of doctrine and exhortation. But modern scholars, deeming this opinion derogatory to this great apostle, have set about the work of discovering the subtle links of thought which constitute divisions into orderly parts. They do not announce the result of their labors with much confidence, but admit that the transitions from one section of the subject to another, even in the main divisions, are very gradual, "like the changes in dissolving views." Few writers have been perfectly satisfied with the plan (of the Epistle) which they profess to have discovered; and still fewer have satisfied their readers. It is like finding exact boundaries between the constellations. But most students will agree that it is better to read the Epistle with some scheme which is tolerably correct than without the guidance of any.

Finding a superior scheme already prepared, I have thought it best to borrow it, with the slight addition of the bracketed words, to indicate pre-Christian sins.

Plan of Dr. A. Plummer in the Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges:

1-4. INTRODUCTION.

The subject-matter of the Gospel employed in the Epistle (i. 1-3).

The purpose of the Epistle (1.4).

i. 5 - ii. 28. GOD IS LIGHT.

i. 5 - ii. 11. What Walking in the Light involves: the Condition and Conduct of the Believer.

Fellowship with God and with the Brethren (i. 5 - 7)

Consciousness and confession of sin [committed before forgiveness] (i. 8 - 10).

Obedience to God by Imitation of Christ (ii. 1 - 6).

Love of the Brethren (ii. 7-11).

ii. 12 - 28. What Walking in the Light excludes: the Things and Persons to be avoided.

Three-fold Statement of Reasons for writing (ii. 12 - 14).

Things to be avoided: the World and its Ways (ii. 15 - 17).

Persons to be avoided: Antichrists (ii. 18 - 26).

[Transitional.] The Place of Safety: Christ (ii. 27,28)

ii. 29--v. 12. GOD IS LOVE.

ii. 29 - iii. 24. The Evidence of Sonship: Deeds of Righteousness before God.

The Children of God and the Children of the Devil (ii. 29 - iii. 12).

Love and Hate: Life and Death (iii. 13 - 24).

iv. 1 - v. 12. The Sources of Sonship: Possession of the Spirit as shown by Confession of the Incarnation.

The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error (iv. 1 - 6).

Love Is the Mark of the Children of Him who is Love (iv. 7 - 21).

Faith Is the Source of Love, the Victory over the World, and the Possession of Life (v.1 - 12).

v. 13 - 21. CONCLUSION.

Intercessory Love the Fruit of Faith (v. 13-17).

The Sum of the Christian's Knowledge (v. 18-20).

Final Injunction (v.21).

As a key to this plan we are to consider that the confession and conscious pardon of sin and obedience to God are necessary to fellowship with God and love to Him and to the brethren which excludes love of the

world. This is passing away, as is shown by the appearance of antichrists. Abiding in Christ insures against passing away. The words "begotten of God" suggest the sonship of believers, implying mutual love, and the indwelling of Christ to which the spirit testifies. The mention of spirit suggests that there are bad spirits which must be distinguished from the good. The topic of mutual love suggests faith as its original source, especially as shown in intercessory prayer. The whole closes with a summary of the knowledge on which the ethics of the Epistle is based and with a caveat against idolatry.

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