

FOREWORD

It has been my pleasure to have been associated with Professor Morris Womack since the middle 1960s when we both accepted positions in the Los Angeles area with what was then Pepperdine College (now University). I have observed his growth as he developed into a distinguished and popular teacher, an accomplished author, diligent scholar, successful minister, and respected bishop of the church. He did these things while he maintained close, loving and productive ties with his family, friendship with his students, and exemplified a servant's attitude to those with whom he came in contact. Having demonstrated himself to be a man whose life in many ways illustrates that love which Christ said would identify his followers, I find it fitting that he should add this commentary on the three epistles of the "Apostle of Love" to his accomplishments.

As one peruses the pages of this work, it will be evident that the author has been able to balance his extensive theological training with his determination that this be a useful and practical work. While he shows mastery of the original language, the historical-cultural setting, the mechanics of biblical interpretation, and a profound acquaintance with the biblical text; he does so with an eye to clear exposition and insightful application of the basic issues portrayed by the Apostle John.

In his commentary on the biblical text, Professor Womack gives special attention to the developing problem of the gnostic heresy. The representatives of this aberrant religious group were dedicated to a view of Christ which in a very real sense robbed him of both his humanity and his divinity. In

much the spirit of Athens, their prideful intellect displaced God and relegated to the trash heap of foolishness and naivete those who sought to follow his word. Considering themselves to be above sin, they heralded the virtues of thought and intellectual enterprise while belittling the ignorant folk who believed that following Christ meant obeying his teachings.

Dr. Womack points out that although John said these false teachers were no longer to be considered part of the fellowship (2:19), they considered the church to be their mission field (2:26, 3:7). It therefore is incumbent on church leaders to “mark heresy promoters and not allow them to bring division in the body.” It was obviously not the position of the Apostle John that “I’m O.K. and you’re O.K.” regardless of religious belief. Eusebius claimed that Polycarp, a disciple of John, reported to Irenaeus that on one occasion when the apostle entered the baths at Ephesus and saw the gnostic leader, Cerinthus inside, he immediately left the baths saying, “Let us flee, lest also the baths fall in, since Cerinthus is inside, the enemy of the truth.” It is those who obey Christ that by so doing prove that they know him, while those who claim to know him without submitting to his will only prove themselves to be liars (2:3-6).

However, it is especially in this emphasis upon John’s insistence that Christians who claim to love God must also love one another that Professor Womack challenges the hypocrisy of a self-centered and legalistic spirit. The refinement of this “son of thunder” into the “Apostle of Love” is presented as both a challenge and a hope for all of us. Jerome reports that when in old age John had to be carried to the place of assembly, he always greeted the church with the words, “little children, love one another.” When, perhaps somewhat impatiently, he was asked why he always said the same thing, he responded, “Because this is the Lord’s command, and enough is done when this is done.”

I am honored to have the opportunity of recommending to you this faithful, and objective aid to your study and understanding of the words of the Holy Spirit as they were revealed through the Apostle John.

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