

IN RESPONSE - DOES GOD HATE THE SIN BUT LOVE THE SINNER?

by Dennis Prutow
Volume II, Number 7-1

Does God hate the sin but love the sinner? Does God love everyone? In many cases, misunderstandings and questions like these arise because we fail to be discriminating in our study of Scripture. When my mother had eye surgery, she said the doctor came out to her saying the previous patient took several years off his life. Why? When he was just about to insert the lens implant, the patient coughed. Surgery like this takes immense care. The doctor must be of steady hand. Caffeine is eliminated from the diet for this reason. One slip could cause the loss of a patient's vision. Should we not be at least as discriminating in our study of Scripture. After all, one slip in such study will often result in the blunting of our spiritual vision.

Let's take our first question. Does God hate the sin and love the sinner? I refer you first of all to Revelation 20:15, "And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." If God genuinely loves the sinner but hates the sin, why are *sinner*s cast into the furnace of eternal torment? In the end, it are *sinner*s who are punished. It is not just sins which are cast into the lake of fire. So we must conclude in the ultimate sense, the answer to the question is a resounding, 'No!'

But we must compare other Scriptures. For example, what about Matthew 5:43-45?

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Matthew 5:43-45).

There is little doubt Jesus is not only commending the love enemies, He is commanding the love of enemies. He does so on the basis of the Father's love of those opposed to Him. "He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." We are to follow the Father's

example. But this seems to contradict what we just said regarding Revelation 20:15.

However, we know there are no real contradictions in Scripture. And so we have a paradox, we have what looks like a contradiction. With reference to Matthew 5:43-45 we may and should say Jesus is speaking about a common love which God has for all humankind. The rain and the sunshine are manifestations of God's indiscriminate love of all people everywhere.

Riding in an airplane with a fellow pastor several years ago, the subject of this text came up in conversation. This fellow pastor repudiated the idea of common love to all human beings as set forth by Jesus. As a convinced Calvinist, this fellow said he could not abide the notion of such common love because, as he said, "It's the first step toward Arminianism." I think my friend was very wrong. He could not see the difference between this common love benevolence and the special love of God leading to salvation.

The same problem arose in conversation with a campus pastor. He was feeling guilty because of the lack of love he knew he had for a man who was repudiating the gospel. This man was teaching things contrary to the Word of God and the pastor could not abide the professor's stance. But he was feeling guilty. My response was simple. Christ defines two levels of love. First, there is a common love of God manifested to all. This love is defined in Matthew 5:43-45. You are obligated to display this kind of love. You must be kind, courteous, and even helpful. You must be benevolent. You must be prepared to give assistance in times of need, etc., etc.

On the other hand, there is a special love which Christ has for His people. It differs from this common love of benevolence. And you need not feel guilty because you do not have in your heart the same love for this man as you have for Christ and you know Christ has for you. While the common love we have mentioned is a benevolence you can carry out with your neighbor and your enemy, the special love which binds together the body of Christ is a love only produced by

Christ. This is not a false dichotomy. And it comes to the fore front in our understanding of John 3:16. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." We once again zero in on God's love. And we see God's love for the world. Is this a universal love like that portrayed in Matthew 5:43-45? At first glance it may seem to be.

But what is the world to which Jesus refers? Is this a reference to all humankind? No it is not. The word 'world' is a loaded theological term. It refers to all which is opposed to God. The world is a kingdom whose leader is Satan. And so the world is God's bitter enemy. From this perspective there is some similarity to Matthew 5:44 where Jesus says, "But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you." We are to be benevolent toward our enemies. But the love of John 3:16 is the love of God directed toward sinners for the sake of their salvation. This is the special love of God.

But again we ask if this love is directed toward all those who are members of the kingdom of darkness. Again, the answer is negative. This love is directed specifically toward those who turn to Christ in faith. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, *that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life*" (italics added). Love directed toward the world, that which hates God, is qualified. Those who are recipients of this love and actually receive eternal life are those who believe in and trust Jesus Christ.

This understanding of John 3:16 is verified by the apostle Paul.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless (Ephesians 5:25-27).

The love of husbands for their wives is to mirror the love of Christ for the church.

Now without doubt, the love of husbands is not indiscriminate. Husbands are not to love other women in the same way they love their wives. In like manner, the love Christ has for the church is special, discriminating, narrow, directed only toward the church. And the result of this love is the sanctification *of the church*.

Finally, we must add Romans 9 to the mix. Does God hate the sin and love the sinner? Romans 9 is too explicit to ignore in this context.

And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; for though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, 'The older will serve the younger.'

Just as it is written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated' (Romans 9:10-13).

God's discriminating love falls upon Jacob and is withheld from Esau. Esau is hated. The standard rebuttal to these very hard words is then addressed by Paul.

What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth' (Romans 9:14-17).

God is not unjust. The special compassion of God which saves sinners is a matter of mercy. It is not a matter of merit. Mercy is not something owed to any sinner. God's special love is bestowed upon some and in His sovereign discretion, God passes by others.

Where does this leave us? Does God love everyone indiscriminately. Yes. God's *common* benevolence is expressed to all humankind through His care of all. "He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45). No. God's discriminating, sovereign compassion is expressed toward and bestowed upon some. "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have com-

passion on whom I have compassion" (Romans 9:15).

Does God hate the sin and love the sinner? No. Those who are not recipients of God's special compassion are rejected. "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (Romans 9:13). Yes, in a sense. Recipients of God's saving love are loved by God before the foundation of the world. "In love He predestined us" (Ephesians 1:4-5). But sin must also be punished. And so Christ "bore our sins in His body on the cross" (1 Peter 2:24).

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IN RESPONSE - BAPTISM, HOLINESS, AND THE GREAT COMMISSION

by Dennis Prutow

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Two questions are before us. First, what does Paul mean when he says children are 'holy'? Surely, those who baptize babies misinterpret Paul. They think their children, by virtue of their being born into a Christian home, are sanctified by the Holy Spirit. The text in question is 1 Corinthians 7:14,

For an unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy.

The second question relates to the Great Commission.

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you (Matthew 28:19-20).

Those of baptistic persuasion maintain it is *only disciples* who are baptized. They place emphasis on the words, 'baptizing them,' referring to disciples. As a result, they insist the Great Commission of Christ confirms the illegitimacy of infant baptism.

But a proper understanding of both texts not only shows the propriety of infant baptism, it also shows the inestimable privilege of children born to Christian parents.

First, let's look at 1 Corinthians 7:14. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul makes a clear declaration. If both the parents of a child are believers or if one parent is a believer, the child is holy. What does Paul mean?

The background is that of the Old Testament. In ancient Israel, the utensils in the tabernacle were 'set aside' for use in the sacrifices.

And you shall make of these a holy anointing oil, a perfume mixture, the work of a perfumer; it shall be a holy anointing oil. And with it you shall anoint the tent of meeting and the ark of the testimony, and the table and all its utensils, and the lampstand and its utensils, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and the laver and its stand.

You shall also consecrate them, that they may be most holy; whatever touches them shall be holy (Exodus 30:25-29).

Notice, what ever touches the consecrated utensils becomes 'holy.' The reference is to ceremonial holiness not actual holiness. "The effect was to impart 'holiness' to them, as set apart for God's service."¹

In the same way, Aaron was consecrated to the Lord. God said to Moses,

You shall also make a plate of pure gold and shall engrave on it, like the engravings of a seal, 'Holy to the Lord.' And you shall fasten it on a blue cord, and it shall be on the turban; it shall be at the front of the turban. And it shall be on Aaron's forehead, and Aaron shall take away the iniquity of the holy things which the sons of Israel consecrate, with regard to all their holy gifts; and it shall always be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord. (Exodus 28:36-38).

Aaron represented the people before God. He was 'Holy to the Lord.' that is, he was 'set aside' to perform specific tasks. Most significantly, he bore the iniquities of the people before God and took them away. In this work, he was a type, or picture, of Jesus Christ.²

Needless to say, Aaron was not himself a holy person. He led the people in rebellion against God by fashioning a golden calf for their worship.

The point is, there are two types of consecration or holiness. There is the act of setting aside an object or person for special purposes. In this way, the object or person is considered 'holy.' This is the task of consecration accomplished by men at the command of God. Then there is the work of sanctification accomplished by the Holy Spirit. He renews, strengthens, and changes the human life. The outward and ceremonial consecration pictures this actual sanctification by the Spirit.

It is the former type of sanctification or holiness Paul has in mind in 1 Corinthians 7:14. The unbelieving husband is outwardly set aside by virtue of the

wife's union with Christ. The unbelieving wife is outwardly holy by virtue of her believing husband's actual union with Christ. In the same way, children in such a household are also outwardly 'holy,' that is, distinct from the world, by virtue of their being born in a Christian home.

But what is this distinction from the world if it is not actual sanctification? To answer this question, we again look at ancient Israel.

Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?

Great in every respect. First of all that they were entrusted with the oracles of God (Romans 3:1-2).

Paul tells us the tremendous privilege of ancient Israel. This nation was given the Word of God. No other nation had this privilege.

What advantage was it to have the sign of God's gospel promise placed upon you in that old economy? If you were privileged to be born within a believing family, you had the privilege of hearing the Word of God. You had the privilege of hearing the promises of God concerning the Savior to come.

Today, it is the church which is the repository of the Word of God. Today, as seen in previous lessons, baptism replaces circumcision. And the child who is born in a Christian family, who is baptized and brought into the visible body of Christ, has great advantage over other children and has a tremendous privilege. The great advantage over other children having parents who think little of the church and the gospel is the advantage of being taken to worship where the Word of God is proclaimed. The privilege is the privilege of hearing the Word of God on a regular basis. This means the probability of actual conversion taking place in the lives of such children is increased exponentially. This is what Paul means when, speaking of the children of believing parents, he says, "But now they are holy." Calvin adds that "this passage is a noteworthy one... For it shows that the children of believers are set apart from others by a certain special privilege, so

that they are regarded as holy by the church”³

The children born in unbelieving homes have little hope of hearing the good news of Jesus Christ *in their homes*. It is only as the church extends itself to embrace such children, to bring them into its classes and worship, and to speak the good news to them that these children have opportunity to hear about Christ.

This is also part of the beauty of the Great Commission. We maintain the children of believers are to be disciplined. The process of discipleship officially begins when the child is baptized. The grammar of the Great Commission bears this out.

Go therefore and *make disciples* of all the nations, *baptizing* them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, *teaching* them to observe all that I commanded you

Jesus gives the command, “Make disciples.” The verb is an imperative. And this imperative is followed by two present active participles, *baptizing* and *teaching*. The respective clauses begun by these two words are adverbial clauses. They explain *how* disciples are to be made. In addition, there is a particular time characteristic associated with the present participle. “The time indicated by the present participle is contemporaneous with that of the main verb.”⁴ In other words, baptism marks the beginning of the discipleship process and teaching continues that process. The grammar fully supports this. Any other view is patently false. And the Great Commission cannot be rightly used as an argument for ‘believer’s baptism only.’

We therefore maintain (1) that since the covenant promise to Abraham and the gospel in the New Testament are one and the same, (2) that since God commanded the sign of the covenant to be placed on children in the Old Testament, (3) that since this command has never been set aside, and (4) that since baptism in the New Testament clearly replaces circumcision in the Old Testament, the children of believers are baptized and brought into the visible body of Christ in order to be disciplined.⁵

In this way, the children of believers are given an inestimable privilege. They are brought within the pale of the visible body of the Church in accordance with the commandment of Christ in order to be instructed in the gospel and to be

brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

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¹ R. Alan Cole, *Exodus, An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), p. 208.

² Matthew Henry’s *Commentary* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 394.

³ *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries*, Ed. Torrence and Torrence (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), vol. 9, p. 149.

⁴ William Sanford LaSor, *Handbook of New Testament Greek* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), p. B-177.

⁵ See the previous lessons on baptism published ‘In Response.’

IN RESPONSE TO CORNERSTONES, PART I

by Dennis Prutow

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Cornerstones, a publication dedicated to a discussion of women's issues from a biblical perspective, has challenged my interpretation of Genesis 3:16.¹ In that text God, in the hearing of the serpent and in the hearing of Adam, outlines the consequences of sin. In an effort to continue the dialogue between us, I am beginning a point by point response to the editors of *Cornerstones*.²

In doing so, I trust we are, those of us on either side of the issue, irenic in spirit. It is not our desire to divide the church but to promote understanding. I do not take the exceptions of *Cornerstones* personally. Nor do I expect the editors or their compatriots to take my aggressive assault on their teaching personally. Each of us must be able to say to the other, "You are in error." We must be able to state our case with force. At the same time, we must *listen* to our adversary in debate with great care. We must take seriously points where any of us may genuinely be in error. And we must make corrections in our own thinking as we go along. Finally, as we take a break from the debate, we must also be able to sit across the coffee table from each other in cordial, yes loving, Christian fellowship.

In my articles on "Biblical Submission," a linkage can be made between my opening statements and Genesis 3:16. The linkage stems from my use of the word 'desire.' In "Biblical Submission, Part I," I said,

There is a movement within the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America to advance the cause of women by moving the church away from the traditional understanding of men and women within the church. In this, it seems to me, there is a *desire* to downplay the biblical understanding of headship. And at the same time there is a *desire* to erroneously replace headship with another legitimate concept that there is neither male nor female.³

The imprudent use of the word 'desire' in these comments may have led the editors of *Cornerstones* to think I was attributing to them the same 'desire' described in Genesis 3:16. This is not the case. It was not my intention to even intimate such a connection. My error was

simple. I honestly did not catch the possibility of the connection. My opening remarks should have been made without the use of the word 'desire' as follows:

There is a movement within the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America to advance the cause of women by moving the church away from the traditional understanding of men and women within the church. In this, it seems to me, there is a downplaying of the biblical understanding of headship. At the same time, the concept of headship is erroneously replaced with the biblical idea there is neither male nor female.

It was not my intent to impugn the motives of the editors of *Cornerstones* or anyone else. Rather, it has been my intent to display how *Cornerstones* has properly interpreted Scripture.

Secondly, the editors of *Cornerstones* state I have engaged "in a personal attack on a sister in Christ, Kathy Stegall."⁴ They cite my statements, "Mrs. Stegall is in error.... She errs," etc.⁵ I deeply regret these statements are perceived as a personal attack. They are not intended to be nor do I think they are. Kathy Stegall is a vibrant, intelligent, articulate Christian lady, wife, and mother. At the same time, I think Mrs. Stegall is in error. And I think her error is a serious one. For this reason, I welcome debate with her and with *Cornerstones*.

Now back to my rebuttal. *Cornerstones* says, "In Rev. Prutow's opinion the sinful desires of women are the fundamental cause of strife in the husband/wife relationship and the driving force behind the current discussion of women's issues in the church."⁶

First, the fundamental cause of strife within the husband wife relationship is sin. God promised this sin would manifest itself in *two* ways. Wives would be sinful manipulators. Husbands would be sinful dictators. My exposition of Genesis 3:16, "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you," displayed the two sided nature of the sin problem. It is not my position, nor is it the position of Scripture, that the sinful desires of women are *the* fundamental cause of strife in the husband/wife relationship.

Second, there must be a distinction made between fallen men and women and redeemed men and women. My discussion of Genesis 3:16 zeros in on the consequences of sin and the fall. When we think of fallen men and women, we think of sin being the dominant influence in their lives. This is the situation to which God speaks in Genesis 3:16. When sin rules (Romans 6:20), men tend to be dictators in the family and women tend to be manipulators. Christ corrects these devastating influences of sin. And as I have attempted to show, Paul's exhortations in Ephesians 5:22 and 5:25 are corrective of these very manifestations of sin.⁷

As a result, the driving force within redeemed men and women is not the sinful nature. Yet it must be admitted, although sin no longer reigns, it does remain. Men, Christian men, often manifest a sinful determination to be dictators. And women, Christian women, often manifest the sin of

being manipulators. Are the sinful desires of women the driving force behind current discussion of women's issues within the church? By the same token, many pastors are viewed by women in the church as dictators. Is it the sinful passion of pastors and elders which is the driving force behind the current discussion of women's issues? Both questions are valid. If as Christians we are succumbing to the tendencies of the old sinful nature in our dealings with one another, we are in need of repentance.

Cornerstones goes on to say, "So severe is this problem of women's desires that he declares that many women are incapable of interpreting Scripture properly."⁸ My imprudent use of the word 'desire', as discussed above, has no doubt contributed to this perception. For this I am deeply grieved. But *I* have not made any such statement. *Cornerstones* is simply wrong at this point.

It is also my conviction that *Cornerstones* and their followers are *misinterpreting* Scripture. Is this not the crux of the discussion? We are to come to grips with the Word of God. And through His Word, we are to come face to face with God Himself. What does God want? That is the crucial question. What *I want* and

what the editors of *Cornerstones* want should be conformity to the Word of God.

The editors of *Cornerstones* also lump me in with those they call “hierarchicalists.”⁹ My understanding of this term comes from an encounter with an intern some years ago. This young man, along with his wife, was using Jay Adam’s book *Christian Living in the Home* in a study with another young couple. My intern was at that time a real hierachalist. He thought husbands were privileged to spank their wives if they were not submissive.

I was horrified. I pointed out the Fifth Commandment, “Honor your father and mother” (Exodus 20:12). The truth of the commandment is that father and mother are to receive equal honor. For a father to undermine the honor and respect due to a mother, his wife, and to fail to give her proper respect, especially before the children, is a direct violation of the moral law of God. This is a manifestation of the dictatorial spirit stemming from the fall. It is abhorrent. And I am no hierarchalist in this sense at all.

Next, the editors of *Cornerstones* take exception to my comparison of Genesis 3:16 and Genesis 4:7. “A comparison of Genesis 3:16b and 4:7b reveals that the Hebrew is the same, except for appropriate changes in person and gender.”¹⁰ For this reason and because we are dealing with *fallen human nature*, Genesis 4:7 is selected to show the meanings of the words ‘desire’ and ‘rule’. Genesis 3:16 says, “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” Genesis 4:7 says, “Its desire is for you, but you must master it.” The *desire* here is an unseemly desire to conquer. God says the result of the fall is the same unseemly desire. For the man’s part, he has the sinful desire to be a tyrant. This, as already stated is the result of sin. The comparison of the texts stands.

Three objections are raised to this comparison. “First of all, it necessitates comparing women to sin.”¹¹ But this is decidedly not where the comparison is made. We are comparing sin’s *desire* in Genesis 4:7 to the woman’s *desire* in Genesis 3:16. We are saying the *desires* are similar. *Cornerstones* goes on to say, “Just as sin is a problem that Cain must deal with, so are women a problem husbands must deal with.”¹² These are the words of the editors of *Cornerstones*. These are not my words nor do these

words represent my thinking. This may be a characterization of a *bone fide* hierachalist. But it is not my thinking. And I have never intimated the same. Rather, the parallel being studied shows that fallen males take it upon themselves to selfishly and sinfully suppress their wives. God does not *tell* men to do this in Genesis 3:16. He explains men *will* do this as the outgrowth of the fall. *Cornerstones* first objection to the comparison of Genesis 3:16 and Genesis 4:7 is invalid.

“The second problem is that man’s behavior is blamed on woman.”¹³ This is *Cornerstones* interpretation of my language. I am not taking this position. But *Cornerstones* is insistent, “Clearly, in Prutow’s argument, the man is acting in reaction to the woman. “... so a husband would fight back and rule over his wife as she attempted to dominate him.”¹⁴

This is true as far as it goes. But both the fallen man and woman are the subjects of sinful passions. The reverse order is therefore also true. Husbands seeking to repress their wives will evoke rebellion. The strife is two sided. Men, myself included, are influenced by sin as deeply as women. I will not engage in the blame shifting of Adam. The second objection is also invalid.

The third objection mentioned involves my failure to cite Songs 7:10 as the only other text where the Hebrew word translated ‘desire’ is to be found. I plead guilty to this charge. The supposed error is the failure to explore the meaning of this text in comparison to Genesis 3:16. But Genesis 3:16 speaks of the results of the fall. It describes fallen men and women. But the beautiful words of Songs 7:10, “I am my beloved’s, and his desire is for me,” speak of a redeemed relationship. As *Cornerstones* rightly puts it, Genesis 3:16 states the problem.... Song of Songs 7:10 is a resolution of that problem.”¹⁵ This being the case, it is inappropriate to use the redeemed ‘desire’ of Songs 7:10 to define the sinful ‘desire’ of Genesis 3:16. Yet *Cornerstones* says, “Rev. Prutow’s selection of Genesis 4:7, rather than Song of Songs 7:10, when attempting to interpret *desire* (*teshuqa*) of Genesis 3:16 exposes his view of woman as the problem.”¹⁶ Because the editors compare apples and oranges, redeemed desire with sinful desire, their third objection is invalid.

Cornerstones thinks it has exposed my view that *women are the problem*.

This is not my view. But the remainder of their article is based on this false premise.

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¹ *Cornerstones*, Second Quarter 1993, p. 1. All references to *Cornerstones* are to the editor’s article “Woman’s Desire or What **Do** Women Want?”, Second Quarter 1993.

² I’ve done this without extensive quotations to save space.

³ In Response-Biblical Submission, Part I, italics added.

⁴ Page 4.

⁵ In Response-A Rebuttal to Kathy Stegall, Part I.

⁶ Page 1.

⁷ In Response-Biblical Submission, Part III where I discuss Ephesians 5:22 and 25 as the response of the Holy Spirit to our sinfulness.

⁸ Page 1.

⁹ Page 1.

¹⁰ Susan T. Foh, “What is the Woman’s Desire,” *Westminster Theological Journal* (Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1975), vol. XXXVII, No. 3, p. 379-380.

¹¹ *Cornerstones*, page 3.

¹² Page 3.

¹³ Page 3.

¹⁴ Page 3.

¹⁵ Page 3.

¹⁶ Page 3.