Introductory Lectures on the Catholic Epistles

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The Epistle of James

To the reader who enters on the consideration of the epistle of James from the epistles of Paul, the change is great and sudden, and by no means least of all from the epistle to the Hebrews, which, in the arrangement of the English Bible, immediately precedes James. The main object of that epistle was to consummate the breach of the old relationships of such Christians as were Jews in times past, and to lead them out definitively from all earthly connection into their heavenly association with Christ.

It is not so when we enter from the Acts of the Apostles; as in truth it is so arranged in the great mass of ancient authorities, and some versions which follow them. These “general epistles,” as they are called, are placed not after the Pauline but before them. Thus the break is by no means so marked, but on the contrary natural and easily understood; for, in point of fact, James coalesces with the state of things that we find in the churches of Judea, and notably in the church at Jerusalem. They were zealous of the law; they went up to the temple at the hour of prayer, — not only Israelites, but even priests, a great company, we hear at one time were obedient to the faith. We have no ground whatever to suppose that these left off either sacrifices or the functions properly sacerdotal. This sounds strange now as men constantly look and judge out of their own present state; but it is impossible to understand the scriptures thus. You must take what the Bible gives, and thus seek to form a just judgment according to God.

It is perfectly plain from the early portion of the Acts of the Apostles, and confirmed too by the latest glimpses which the Holy Ghost gives us of the church in Jerusalem, that there was still a great and decided cleaving to that which was properly Jewish on the part of the early Christians there. They used the faith of Christ rather for conscientious, godly, thorough carrying out of their Jewish thoughts. Whatever people may say or think about it, there is no denying this. Whatever they may know to be their own proper place as Christians who never were in such a position, and, so far from being led into it, guarded from it. Strenuously by the Holy Ghost, there is no question that the facts which scripture presents to us regarding the church in Jerusalem are as I have endeavoured to state them.

Again, the epistle of James was written not merely to the church in Jerusalem, but to the twelve tribes that were scattered abroad. This prepares us for something even larger, not merely for Christian Jews, but for Israelites, for such wherever they may be — not merely in the land but out of it — “scattered abroad;” as it is said, “the twelve tribes that were scattered abroad.” In short it is evident that, among inspired epistles, James’s address has a special and an exceptional place. Where this has not been taken into account, there need be no surprise that men have misunderstood the epistle of James. We all know that the great Reformer, Luther, treated this portion of the word of God with the most undeserved distrust and even contempt. But I am persuaded that no man, I will not say despises, but even attempts to dispense with, the epistle of James except to his own exceeding loss. Luther would have been none the worse, but all the stronger, for a real understanding of this

writing of James. He needed it in many ways; and so do we. It is, therefore, a miserable cheat where any souls allow their own subjective thoughts to govern them in giving up this or any portion of the word of God; for all have an important place, each for its own object. Is it too much to ask that a document be judged by its express and manifest design? Surely we are not to take Paul's object in order to interpret James by. What can be conceived more contrary, I will not say to reverence for what claims to be inspired, but even to all sense and discrimination, than such a thought? And it is thus that men have stumbled and fallen over this — it is little to say — precious and profitable, and above all, practically profitable portion of the word of God.

At the same time we must read it as it is, or rather as God wrote it; and God has addressed it, beyond controversy, not merely to Christian Jews, nor even to Jews, but to the twelve tribes that were scattered abroad. Thus it embraces such of them as were Christians; and it gives a very true and just place to those who had the faith of the Lord Jesus. Only it is a mistake to suppose that it contemplates nobody else. People may come to it with the thought that all the epistles were addressed to Christians, but this is simply wrong. If you bring this or any other preconception to the word of God, no wonder His word leaves you outside its divine and holy scope. For He is ever above us and infinitely wise. Our business is to gather what He has to teach us. There is no more fruitful source of error than such a course. No wonder, therefore, when persons approach scripture with preconceived thoughts, hoping to find confirmation there instead of gathering God's mind from what He has revealed, — no wonder that they

find disappointment. The mischief evidently is in themselves and not in the divine word. Let us prayerfully seek to avoid the snare.

James writes then after this double manner. He says “a servant of God.” Clearly there we have a broad ground which even a Jew would respect. On the other hand, to “a servant of God” he adds, “and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Here at once would spring up a divergence of feeling among them. The mass of Israelites would of course altogether repudiate such a service; but James writes of both. Observe he does not speak of himself as the brother of the Lord, although he was, and is so styled “the Lord’s brother” in the epistle to the Galatians. It seems needless to explain that the James who wrote this epistle was not the son of Zebedee; for he had fallen under the violence of Herod Agrippa long before this epistle was written — at a comparatively early date. I do not doubt that the writer is the one called “James the just,” and “the Lord’s brother;” but with all propriety, and with a beauty that we should do well to ponder and learn from, he here avoids calling himself the Lord’s brother. It was quite right that others should so designate him; but he calls himself “the servant,” not merely “of God,” but “of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

He writes, as seen, to the twelve tribes scattered abroad, and sends them greeting. It is not the salutation that the Epistles of Paul and the other apostles have made so familiar to us, but exactly the form of salutation that was used in the famous epistle of Acts 15 from the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, who wrote to the Gentile assemblies to guard them from yielding to legalism. And as he was the person who gave the

sentence, it is not without interest to see the link between what was written on that day, and what James writes here.

The object of the Spirit of God was to give a final summons by him who held a pre-eminent place in Jerusalem to the entire body of Israelites, wherever they might be. This is evident on the face of it. Nor is this an opinion, but what God says. We are so told expressly. Controversy here is, or ought to be, entirely out of the question. The apostle James it is who lets us know that such was his object in writing. Accordingly the epistle savours of this. No doubt it is peculiar, but not more so in the New Testament than Jonah is in the Old. As a whole, you are aware that the prophets addressed themselves to the people of Israel. Jonah's special mission was to Nineveh, to the most famous Gentile city of that day. Just as the Hebrew scriptures are not without this exception, so in the New Testament you have another exception. What could better convict the narrowness of man's mind, who would like to have it all thoroughly square according to his notions. As a whole, the New Testament addresses itself to the Christian body; but James does not. That is to say, in the Old Testament we have an exceptional address to the Gentiles; in the New Testament we have an exceptional address to the Jews. Is not all this quite right? One sees thoroughly, in the midst of the utmost difference otherwise, how it is the same divine mind — a mind above the contractedness of man. Let us hold this fast! We shall find it profitable in everything, as well as in the word that we are now reading.

"My brethren," says he, "count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trial of your

faith worketh patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." (James 1:2-3) Thus it is at once apparent that we are on practical ground — the manifestation of godliness toward both man and God, — that here the Holy Ghost is pressing this as the very first injunction of the epistle. "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations." Temptations, trials (for clearly he refers to outward trials), are in no way the dreadful ogres that unbelief makes them to be. "We are appointed thereunto," says the apostle Paul. The Israelites no doubt found it hard, but the Spirit of God deigns here to instruct them. They were not to reckon trial a grievance. "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations." The reason is that God uses it for moral purposes; He deals with the nature which opposes itself to His will. "Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience" (or endurance). "But let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

And how is this then to be effected? Here is brought in another essential point of the epistle. It is not only a question of trials that come upon the believer when he is here below. Clearly he is in this place addressing his brethren in Christ. He does not simply look at the whole twelve tribes, but at the faithful; as we find in the beginning of the next chapter, "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons." So I think it is clearly here men capable of understanding what was spiritual. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God."

These are the two most important points pressed practically throughout the epistle. One is the profit of

not enjoying the pleasant only, but the rough and hard that God sends for our good. Blessing now is not in ease and honour, but, contrariwise, counting joy in trial, accepting what is painful from God, certain that He never mistakes, and that all is ordered of Him for the perfect blessing of His own people. But then this leads the way, and makes one feel the need of wisdom from God in order intelligently and happily to profit by the trial; for, as we know, the blessing of all trial is “to them that are exercised thereby.” In order to discern we need wisdom. This he brings in: “If any of you lack wisdom.” There is thus the need of dependence on God, the spirit of habitual waiting on Him — of bowing to Him, and, in short, of obedience. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.” We shall see by and by whence this flows, but we have merely now a general exhortation. “Let him ask in faith,” says he, “nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.” Thus he shows that faith supposes confidence in God, and that this doubtful mind, this hesitancy about God, is in point of fact nothing but unbelief. Accordingly it is a practical denial of the very attitude you take in asking God. It is blowing hot and blowing cold; it is appearing to ask God, when in point of fact you have no confidence in Him. Let not such a one, therefore, expect anything of the Lord.

In the next place he proceeds to show too how this works practically: “Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: but the rich in that he is made low:” — such are the ways of God — “because as the

flower of the grass he shall pass away." All that is founded on a mere temporary set of circumstances is doomed, and in no way belongs to the nature of God as revealed in truth and grace by the Son of God. Hence, therefore, God reverses the judgment of the world in all these matters, — "Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted. but the rich, in that he is made low." The reason also is given: "For as the flower of the grass" (which is mere nature) "he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways."

On the other hand, one may and should be "blessed." Here we have the full contrast, and the reason why all this is brought in; for there is a perfect chain of connection between these verses, little as it may appear at first sight. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation," instead of being exposed either to the instability of unbelief which we saw, or to the mere dependence on natural resources which was next proved. The man that endures temptation, that accepts it and counts it joy, blessed is he; "for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him."

This leads to another character of trial in inward evil, not in outward. There is a temptation which comes from the devil as truly as there is a temptation that comes from God, and is good for man. That is, there is a trial of faith, and there is a temptation of flesh.

Now it is clear that the trial of faith is as precious as it is profitable; and of this exclusively he has been speaking

up to this point. Now he just turns aside to notice the other; and it is the more important to weigh it well because, as far as I know, it is the only place in scripture where it is definitely presented. Temptations elsewhere mean trials, not inward solicitations of evil; they have no bearing upon, nor connection with, the evil nature, but on the contrary are the ways in which the Lord out of His love tries those in whom He has confidence, and works for the greater blessing of those whom He has already blessed. Here, on the other hand, we find the common sense of temptation. Alas! the very fact of its being common proves where people are, — how little they have to do with God, how much in common with the world. “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.” Now he is touching upon another character; “for God cannot be tempted by evils,” — you must read it as it is in the margin, — “neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.”

Thus it is not only that God is inaccessible to evil Himself, but He also never tempts to evil at any one time whatsoever. There is no such thought that enters the mind of God. He moves supremely above evil: this is the ground of the blessing of every child of God, which he will show presently, when he has finished the subject of evil that comes through man’s nature. Evil is from himself; for, as he says, “Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” This is not the way in which the apostle Paul handles the matter. It is not that there is the very smallest contradiction between the two. They are perfectly harmonious; but then it is a

different way of looking at the matter; and the reason is obvious, because what Paul treats of in Romans 7, which is the scripture I refer to, is not the conduct but the nature. Now, if you look at nature, it is plain that sin is there first, and in consequence of the sin that dwells in the nature, there are lusts as the effects of it. Here he looks at sin in the conduct, and accordingly there are evil workings within, and then the outward act of sin. Thus we see it is only, to say the least of it, a very great want of perception, and a dulness that certainly is unworthy — nay, worthy — of any person that sets up to judge the word of God — a shameful position for a creature — for a man — above all for a Christian to take. But it is here, as is the case everywhere, blindness and ignorance in those that set one part of scripture against another.

To this, perhaps, it may be said, “Do you never find a difficulty?” To be sure, but what is the place of any one who finds a difficulty in the word of God? Wait upon God. Do not you try to settle difficulties, but put yourself in the attitude of dependence. Ask wisdom, and ask it all of God, who gives liberally and upbraids not. He will surely clear up whatever is for His own glory. There is not a man of exercised soul in this building, or any other, who has not proved the truth of what I am now saying. There is not a man who has been led in any measure to the understanding of the ways of God that has not proved the very passages, which he once found so difficult when they were not understood, to be the means of exceeding light to his soul when they were. And therefore, haste to solve difficulties is really and practically a finding fault either with God or with His word;-with His word, because it is deeper than we are; with Himself, because

He does not give the babe the knowledge that would be proper to the grown man. Now it is evident that this is only foolishness. It is just the haste that hinders blessing and progress. However, nothing can be simpler than that which the apostle here describes and recommends to us, and nothing more certain.

Now we come to the other side. “Do not err, beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above.” We have had the evil traced to its source, which is the fallen nature of man, no doubt wrought on by Satan, but without here bringing the enemy before us. We shall find this by and by, in James 4; but here he simply looks on man’s nature, and then he raises his eyes to God. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” The first point therefore in the mind of the Holy Ghost here is to vindicate God. at all cost, and this entirely apart from us. As evil comes from us, so all that is good comes from God; and not only is God the spring of every good — every good giving and every perfect gift being all from God — (the manner of it as well as the thing itself that is given); but, besides, there is no change in God, the creature in its best estate is nothing but change.

Thus there is a most complete vindication of God’s moral glory in this verse, contrasted with man in his weakness, and ruin, and evil. But he goes farther, and asserts — and asserting, too, in the most admirable manner — the truth of the sovereign action of grace. He has claimed this for God already; but now we come to see the application to us. It is not only, therefore, that God is good, but that He is a giver, and this of nothing that is

not good, and of all that is good. Stainless in His holiness, and invariable in His light, God is active in His love; and as the fruit of this energetic sovereign love He does not bless merely, sweet as it is from Him. Blessing is altogether short of that which we know now in Christianity-of that which even James treats of, according to his very broad and comprehensive epistle. In the bright day that is coming God will bless the creature. In the dark day that man calls “now,” God more than blesses — far more than blesses — those who believe. We are ourselves born of Him: He communicates His nature to the believer. He does so unsought, and surely undeserved. Undeserved! Why there was nothing but evil: he had shown this immediately before. There was nothing good from man’s nature as a fallen creature,-nothing but good from God.

Then, let it be repeated, it is not merely good we see here, but a communication of His own spiritual nature; and this He is doing by the word of truth. Scripture is the medium. The revelation of Himself by which He acts on souls is accordingly here brought before us, no less than His own sovereign will as the source of it. “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures.” He means to bring in fulness of blessing by and by. This will be, as far as government is concerned, in the millennium; but, being only government, evil will remain to be controlled and kept down to His own glory. This could in no wise satisfy God’s nature, and so scripture reveals a time coming when all will be according to God. Then will be in the fullest sense His rest, — when all question of His working and of man’s responsibility will be over, — when He, entering into the result, will grant

us to enter into His rest. Then shall we be not merely first-fruits of His creatures, but all in rest and glory according to the new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Meanwhile we who are thus begotten, the firstfruits, have the wondrous blessing here set forth. It is not merely that we are objects of this blessing. Alas! how often a blessing has been given, and as often lost, being turned to His shame and men's corruption. God blessed, as we know, at the very beginning — blessed everything that He had made; but there was no stability in a blessing itself. To ensure stability, all must rest on one who is God as well as man, giving us a nature according to God. In those that are fallen there must be the communication of the divine nature; and this there is in Christ, and so there always has been. It may not be always consciously known, and it was not in Old Testament times; but in order that there should be a basis of immutable blessing, and of communion in any measure between God and the creature, there must be the communication of the divine nature. Of this, accordingly, James here speaks. How it links itself with Peter, and John, and Paul, we need not stop now to enquire. We see at once that he who could despise such an epistle as this is a man — not to be despised indeed, for God would not have us despise any as He despises none Himself; but certainly — to call forth pain and sorrow that such thoughts should ever have been allowed in a soul born of God and withal a servant of Jesus Christ.

Founded, then, on this, the communication of His own nature, with its moral judgment, we. have the practical exhortation: — "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let

every man be swift to hear.” Hearing is exactly the attitude of dependence. Now one who is the servant of God looks up to God, confides in God, and expects from God. This is the place which becomes him that is born of God. “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak.” Speech is apt to be the expression of our nature — of ourselves. Be slow then to speak, swift to hear. Clearly he has God in view, and has His word before him, and that which would make His word understood. Let us, too, be “swift to hear, slow to speak.”

But another thing is to be heeded. It is not only that the nature of man expresses itself in the tongue, but in the feelings of the heart; and alas! in the wrath of a fallen creature. Let us be, then, not only slow to speak, but “slow to wrath.” You see at once that we have an exhortation founded on, first, the spiritual anatomy, if I may so say, of our nature, and then we are given to know the wondrous character of the new life that we have received by faith of Jesus Christ, and know to be ours, because we are “begotten by the word of truth.” Next, he gives the reason; “for,” says he, “the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.”

It need scarcely be remarked that it is no question here of the righteousness of God in a doctrinal sense. James does not deal with such matters; he never takes up the question how a sinner is to be justified. Therefore, certainly, he in no way contradicts Paul, any more than in what is said of faith, or justification; indeed he does not at all treat of the same question that Paul has before him. Where two persons really take up the same matter, and then give us contrary expressions, they of course contradict each other; but if they deal with two totally

different points, although they may be ever so closely connected, contradiction there is none: and such precisely is the fact as to Paul and James in the matter before us, without saying a word of the inspiration which makes it impossible. They both employ the words, “faith,” “works,” and “justify,” but they are not settling the same question, but two different ones. We shall find the reason of this by and by, but I the more willingly make this remark in passing, in order to help any souls who find a difficulty; because it often proves a snare, particularly to those who rest over-much on verbal analogies.

Let us look to the grace of the Lord to understand the scripture. It is the habit of many, if they find the same expression, to give it always the same meaning. This is true neither in every-day language nor in God’s word. Here, for instance, we have the righteousness of God clearly in a different sense from that so familiar to us in the Pauline epistles. He is speaking of what is not pleasing to, because, inconsistent with, His nature; and clearly the wrath of man is offensive to Him. It works nothing suitable to His moral nature. The passage speaks of practice, not of doctrine.

“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.” It will be observed how far it is from being an imposed law. Particular pains are taken to guard from this prevalent idea. A Jew would have been likely to have thought of it thus; for he naturally turned to the law as the one and only standard. But, on the other hand, James is far from leaving out the use of the law: we shall find it in this very epistle. Still he is careful in this place to show that

the word deals inwardly with the man, — that it is this implanted word, as he calls it, and not an external law, that is able to save the soul. The word enters by faith, or, as the apostle has it in Hebrews, is “mixed with faith in them that hear it.” “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.” It is plain that we find ourselves throughout on the practical side of the manifestation by life. This is the governing thought and aim of the epistle.

“For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass.” He may have ever so clear a view of himself; he sees clearly what he is like for a moment; but he as soon forgets all. “He beholdeth himself, and goeth his way.” The image is faded and gone. He “straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.” Oh, how true is this, and how admirably drawn to the life! It is that glimpse of conviction by the truth that comes before souls when they are forced to discern what the spring of their thoughts is, what their feelings are when the light of God flashes over and through a man; but how soon it passes away, instead of entering in and abiding within the soul! It is the power of the Spirit of God alone that can grave these things on the heart. But here the apostle is exposing the absence of an internal work where intelligence is severed from conscience, and this he illustrates, as we have seen, by the man that gets a glance in a glass, and then all is gone directly his back is turned. Whereas there is power and permanence with him who fixes his view on “the perfect law of liberty.”

And here it seems seasonable to say that, so far from James being legal in the evil sense of the word, he is the inspired man who, at least as much as any other, slays

legality by this very expression. For this end there is not a more precious thought nor a mightier word in all the New Testament. In its own province there is nothing better, plainer, or more striking. The reason why people often find legality in James is because they themselves bring it. They are under that influence in their souls, and accordingly they cloud the light of James with that which was meant to veil the guilty in darkness.

What then is the law of liberty? It is the word of God which directs a man begotten by the word of truth, urging and cheering and strengthening him in the very things that the new life delights in. Consequently it has an action exactly the opposite of that exercised by the law of Moses on the Israelite. This is evident from the bare terms: “Thou shalt not do” this, “thou shalt not do” that.1 Why? Because they wanted to do what God prohibited. The desire of man as he is being after evil, the law put a veto on the indulgence of the will. It was necessarily negative, not positive, in character. The law forbad the very things to which man’s own impulses and desires would have prompted him, and is the solemn means of detecting rebellious fallen nature. But this is not the law of liberty in any wise, but the law of bondage, condemnation, and death.

The law of liberty brings in the positive for those who love it — not the negation of what the will and lust of man desires, so much as the exercise of the new life — in what is according to its own nature. Thus it has been often and very aptly described as a loving parent who tells his child that he must go here or there; that is, the very places which he knows perfectly the child would be most gratified to visit. Such is the law of liberty: as if one said to the child, “Now, my child, you must go and

do such or such a thing," all the while knowing that you can confer no greater favour on the child. It has not at all the character of resisting the will of the child, but rather of directing his affections in the will of the object dearest to him. The child is regarded and led according to the love of the parent, who knows what the desire of the child is — a desire that has been in virtue of a new nature implanted by God Himself in the child. He has given him a life that loves His ways and word, that hates and revolts from evil, and is pained most of all by falling through unwatchfulness under sin, if it seemed ever so little. The law of liberty therefore consists not so much in a restraint on gratifying the old man, as in guiding and guarding the new; for the heart's delight is in what is good and holy and true; and the word of our God on the one hand exercises us in cleaving to that which is the joy of the Christian's heart, and strengthens us in our detestation of all that we know to be offensive to the Lord.

Such is the law of liberty. Accordingly "whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed" (or rather "doing"). There is, however, the need of attending to the other side of the picture: "If any man seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain."

Then the chapter closes with giving us a sample of what pure and undefiled religion is, but chiefly as we observe in a practical way — the main object and never lost sight of. There is, first, the "visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction," — persons from whom one could gather nothing flattering to the flesh, or in any way

calculated to minister to self; there is, on the other hand, the keeping one's self unspotted from the world. How often one hears people in the habit of quoting from this verse for what they call practice, who dwell on the first part to the exclusion of the last. How comes it that the last clause is forgotten? Is it not precisely what those who quote would find the greatest difficulty in honestly proving that they value? Let us then endeavour to profit by the warning, and above all by the precious lesson in the word of our God.

In all that we have had the question naturally arises, Wherein lies the special propriety of such exhortations or why are they addressed to the twelve tribes? Surely we may ask this; for those who value the word of God are not precluded from enquiring what the object is. Rather are we encouraged to ask why it was according to the wisdom of God that such words as these should be presented to Israel, and especially to such of the twelve tribes as had the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. James enters upon this expressly in the next chapter.

James 2 "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring." in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou here, or sit here under my footstool; are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised them." Here, it would seem,

we begin to learn more definitely the reason. We can see the need, value, and wisdom of what has been said, but we may find here the occasion of it: with Israel there was peculiar danger of taking up the doctrines of Christianity as a system. As a people who had an exceptionally religious standing, they were yet more exposed to this than the Gentiles. The Jewish mind on its own side was just as prone to make a code of Christianity as the Gentiles were to couple it with philosophy. The Greek mind might speculate and theorize about it, but the Jew would make a quasi-Talmud of it in its way. His tendency would be to reduce it merely to a number of thoughts, and thus an outward system.

At this precisely is the epistle levelled, namely, the severing faith from practice. Against this the Holy Ghost launches His solemn and searching words in the rest of the chapter. This brings in the allusion to the law: “If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: but if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.” Then follows a grave and searching consideration for those who talk about the law, — “for whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.” From this use of these two things, that is, the royal law which thus goes forth towards one’s neighbour, and again the law in general, he turns to take up the law of liberty which has been explained before. “For he shall have judgment

without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment."

This introduces then the famous passage which has been the perplexity of so many minds: "What should it profit, my brethren, though a man may say that he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save?" It is evident that it cannot. A faith that is unproductive has no living link with God. What is the good of a faith that consists in mere assent to so many dogmas, and thus proves its human source? The faith that is given us of God saves, not that which is the fruit of man's nature. We have seen this already, and so therefore, the grand principle of the first chapter leads as simply as possible into the application of it in the second. Here all is exemplified in a plain but striking way. "If a brother or a sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?" Evidently nothing. "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe and tremble." If there is any difference, the advantage is really on the side of those misleaders of poor ruined men. At least they do feel; and so far there is a greater effect produced than on these reasoning Jews. "But wilt thou know, O vain man?" says he. It is not all that the Corinthian was vain in his speculations, but the Jew not less, who thus spoke and acted. "Wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead."

Yet the remarkable feature we have also to weigh here is that when works are thus introduced, attention is directed to what would be perfectly valueless if they were not the result of faith, — nay, worse than valueless, positively evil, and entailing the severest punishment. For if we merely look at Abraham, or at Rahab, apart from God, apart from faith, — if we regard their ways here cited as a question of human good works — who in the world would ever so style that which Abraham or Rahab did? It is perfectly plain that according to man Abraham would have been in danger of losing his liberty, if not his head, for intent to kill Isaac; and unquestionably, judged by her country's law, the conduct of Rahab must have exposed her to the worst punishment of the worst political crime. But this would be judging their actions apart from God, because of whose will they were done, and apart from faith, which alone gave these works their life and character. Otherwise Abraham in man's eye was a father ready to murder his own son: what could be worse than this? In short, if we regard his work apart from faith, it is perhaps the darkest evil conceivable. And what was Rahab's act but treason against her country and her king? Was she not willing, so to speak, to hand over the possession of the city in which she had been born and bred to those who were going to raze it to the foundations?

The moment we bring into view God and His will and His purposes, it is needless to say that these two memorable acts stand out clothed with the light of heaven. The one was the most admirable submission to God — with unqualified confidence in Himself, even when one could not see how His sure promise could

stand, but sure it would. A man that did look straight up to God, swift to hear and slow to speak, was Abraham; — a man in whom the loud voice of nature was utterly silenced, that God's will and word might alone govern his soul. So, if it were his only son that came of Sarah, so much the more bound to his heart because so singularly given in the pure favour of God, yet he would give him up, and be prepared with his own hand to do the dreadful deed. Oh, if ever there was a work of faith since the world began, it was that work for which Abraham was ready — yea, did put his hand to. So on Rahab's story I need not dwell, except just to show how remarkably guided of divine wisdom was James's allusion. How truly it bears the very stamp of inspiration, and the more so because we know the apostle Paul refers to Abraham at least for a totally different purpose! But not more certainly was Paul inspired to present Abraham's faith and Abraham's act too in this closing circumstance of his life (we may say, the great and final test of his faith), not more was Paul guided in his application, than James was in that which has been just now before us.

The great point of all seems this: that there were works, but the works that James insists on are works where faith constitutes their special excellence, and indeed alone could be their justification. Is this then in any way allowing the value of works without faith? The very reverse is true. He does call for works, and is not content simply with faith, but the works he produces are works that owe all their value to faith.

Thus, therefore, the indissoluble union between faith and works never was more blessedly maintained than in the very circumstances that James thus brings before us.

So far is he from shaking faith that he supposes it, and the works which he commends are stamped with it in the most definite and striking manner.

Then we come to some fresh practical exhortations. As we have found, he particularly warns against the tongue as the expression of the heart's excitement if not of malice. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Here we open with its application in another and, if possible, still more important province; that is, in the matter of speaking to public edification. We have to remember that the danger is not only in what may be breathed in private; but, adds he, — James 3 "Be not many masters," — that is, in the sense of teachers — "knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation." For surely that which a man says publicly will be used to measure himself; and it is well to be prepared for it. If we ought as a rule to be slow to speak, there is no exception in setting up to teach others; for thus we certainly incur severer judgment. It is an exhortation that shows on the one hand the danger and wrong of being over ready to seize an open door through anxiety to display one's self; on the other hand, it supposes the perfect liberty that reigned among believers. Impossible that such an exhortation could apply where there exists the régime of an exclusive ministry.

Thus evidently not only does James's doctrine set forth clearly the blessed truth of a new nature, as already shown, but his exhortation supposes just the same openness among Christians in the exercise of ministerial gift as was found, e.g. in 1 Cor. 14, and in practice throughout the church of God. So far from there being any contradiction of others in the epistle of James,

although there is not a little which in form is new (for the twelve tribes) both in its breadth and in its speciality, the mind of God is one. The inspiring Spirit, even in the most peculiar production of the New Testament epistles, gives us what harmonizes with every other part, and cements the whole fabric of divine truth.

There is a moral reason added: “For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.” He does not, I apprehend, restrict himself to public speaking, though opening with it, as we have seen. “Behold we put bits into horses’ mouths.” He shows that it may seem a little thing to man, but we must not excuse what is wrong because it may appear to have a little source. He proves that the least things are often those which govern other bodies incomparably larger. “Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm.” This is applied to the subject in hand. “The tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter” (or wood, as it is given in the margin) “a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.” In all the Bible we meet no more energetic and truthful picture of the desperate evil to which men are exposed by that little active member. “For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: but the tongue can no man tame.” The comfort is that God can deal with it — God who gives the believer His own nature, and knows how to bring down the old nature so

that there may be scope for the manifestation of what is of Himself.

Nor does James spare the gross inconsistency too often experienced. “Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.” This is fortified by various illustrations, and followed up by the picture of the wise man, who is proved to be such, not by famous knowledge, but practically. It is always the every-day application that is in the mind of James. It is ever the right thing, as it was exactly what was most called for then and there. Had he in this epistle launched out into the vast expanse of the truth, he would only have given an impulse to the heaping up of more dogmas. Such a course would only have aggravated the evil instead of uprooting it. Himself a wise man in his ordinary ways, there was divine wisdom given him by the Holy Ghost in thus dealing so directly with the snares of the twelve tribes, and even of that portion which professed the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Hence, if a man be wise, the question arises, how is it to be proved? Assuredly not in talking much, which usually tends to talking ill. “Let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.” If on the contrary there were bitter envy and strife in their hearts, how could they boast against the truth, or he against it? How cuttingly severe, and this simply from laying bare things as they were! Yet, what an exposure! Think of people glorying in their shame! “And lie not against the truth.” It was a practical incongruity and contradiction of the mind of God.

Then we are shown two kinds of wisdom, — just as with regard to temptations there were two sorts of them — one blessed from God, and a real glory to the man that endures; and the other a shame, because it springs from his own fallen nature. No otherwise is it with wisdom. “This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.” Its works prove its nature and its source. There is confusion in every evil way, “but the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable.” Never reverse this order; it is not only that this wisdom is pure and peaceable, but it is first pure, then peaceable. It first maintains the character and glory of God, and then seeks the fruits of peace among men. But this is not all. It is gentle, and easy to be entreated, or yielding. Instead of ever giving battle for its rights supposed or real, there is clearly the yieldingness of grace about it. It is not the stubbornness of self-assertion or opinionativeness. This, on the contrary, stamps the sensual aspiring wisdom of man; but what comes down from above is gentle, yielding, full of mercy and good fruits, uncontentious, and unfeigned. When a man is conscious that his wisdom is of a suspicious kind, one can understand him unwilling to have his mind or will disputed; but the truth is, that there is nothing which so much marks the superiority of grace and truth and wisdom that God gives as patience, and the absence of anxiety to push what one knows is right and true. It is an inherent and sure sign of weakness somewhere, when a man is ever urgent in pressing the value of his own words and way, or cavilling habitually at others. “The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated:” it is also “full of mercy and good fruits,

without contention, and without hypocrisy." It is characterised by the self-judgment which delights in and displays the ways of God. "And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace." Thus if there is peace in the way, righteousness is alike the seed and the fruit. The seed, as ever, must produce its own proper fruit. "The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace." What an honour to be sons of peace in a world ever at war with God and those who are His!

Alas! we find in James 4 the contrary of this — wars and fightings, "whence come they?" Not from the new nature of which God is the blessed source, but from the old. "Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" I hope it will not be contended that these were persons born of God. It seems to me that what was stated at the beginning of the present discourse is an important key for interpreting expressions. On the other hand, the effect of forgetting to whom the words are addressed, and of assuming that the epistle contemplates none but such as are born of God, is that you are obliged to explain away the strength of the divine word. Receive its address in simplicity of faith, and every word of God is intelligently found to tell. You do not require to enfeeble a single phrase. James does contemplate Christians, but not Christians only. He is writing as he says himself, to the Israelitish stock, and not merely to those of Israel

that believe. Expressly he addresses the whole twelve tribes of Israel. Whether they believe or not, they are all addressed in this epistle. Consequently there is a word for those of them that were clearly not born of God, as well as for those who were.

Under this impression I read, “Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?” Need it be told you that this verse has been a matter of much difficulty to many minds? Although I am not at all prepared to dogmatize about its force, it appears to me a harsh expression to suppose that the spirit here described means no more than man’s spirit. I do not know how a man’s spirit can with propriety be said to dwell in a man. One can understand “the spirit of a man that is in him;” as the apostle Paul, when describing the human spirit, does put it in 1 Cor. 2, but hardly the spirit that dwelleth in a man. But if here it be not the spirit of man, the only spirit elsewhere said to dwell in man (i.e., the believer) is the Spirit of God. But herein is just what causes the difficulty. How, if it be the Spirit of God, can He be put in such a connection here? Must we translate and punctuate as in the common Greek Testament and English Bible?

Hence many are of opinion (and to this I am rather disposed, though I would not venture to say more) that the verse ought to be thus divided: — “Do ye think that the scripture speaketh in vain? Does the Spirit that dwelleth in us lust unto envy?” Clearly both the word condemns and the Holy Spirit leads in a wholly different direction. (Compare Gal. 5) The natural spirit of man does lust to envy, no doubt; but the Spirit that dwells in

us opposes the flesh at all points, as we know scripture does.

And this connects itself, as it seems to me, with what follows: “But he giveth more grace.” That is, so far from lusting to envy, God is acting in goodness. It is grace alone that has communicated the nature of God; it is grace alone that strengthens the new nature by the gift of the Holy Ghost who dwells in us; and yet more than this, “He giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.” He who realises with God what this world is, and what man’s nature is, is humble before Him; as also more grace is given to such. The sense of all around and within leads him out in self-judgment before God.

This, then, I suppose — though not venturing to speak with more decision — is the practical result. “Submit yourselves therefore to God. But resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” How much is covered by these two exhortations! One is the source of all that is good, and the other the guard against all that is evil. “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners.” Will it be contended that sinners means saints? They are utterly different. There prevails among too many evangelical persons a mischievous habit of talking about “saved sinners.” To my mind it is not only inexact but misleading and dangerous. Scripture knows no such being as a “saved sinner.” We may well rejoice over a “sinner saved” if we know the mercy of it in our souls; but if we license the phrase — a “saved sinner,” the moral effect is, that, when and though saved, he is still free to sin. Not that any one acquainted with the truth denies that a saved soul has still the flesh in him, and is liable to sin if unwatchful. Still he who is saved

has a new life and the Holy Ghost, and to sin is not natural for him: he is bound to walk in the Spirit as he lives in it. Evidently, if he sin, he must go athwart his new nature and position, and the blessed deliverance which God has given him in Christ.

Thus there is often a great deal of importance even in the way in which a truth is stated. The manner of stating a truth, however well-meant, may sometimes stumble souls, through our own want of subjection to the precious truth and the wonderful wisdom of God in His word. Instead of helping on holiness, one may on the contrary, by an unguarded word, give somewhat of a loose rein to the old nature. This no part of scripture does. It is perfectly true that, when God begins to deal with a soul, He certainly begins with him as a sinner; but He never ends there. I am not aware of any part of the word of God in which a believer, save perhaps in a transitional state, is ever referred to as a sinner. No doubt that he who was in the front rank of all the saints and servants of God, when he looked at what he was in himself glorying in the law and nature, could and did characterize himself as a chief of sinners, especially when he thought of the immeasurable riches of God's race of which he was so favoured a communicator to souls. In this we do and must all join in our measure. At the same time it is evident that to be a saint and a sinner at the same time is simply a flat contradiction.

In short, holy scripture does not sanction such a combination, and the sooner we get rid of phrases, which deserve no better name than religious cant, the better for all parties. It would be waste of time to speak of such a thing now, if it were not of practical moment; but I am convinced that it is' and that this and other

stereotyped phrases of the religious world gravely need and will not bear an examination in the light of scripture. The traditions of Protestants and Evangelicals are no better than those of Roman Catholics, any more than of Jews who were before them all. Our wisest course is to discard every unscriptural phrase which we find current and influential.

I press, then, that the word “sinners” here clearly to my mind shows that the Spirit of God in this epistle takes in a larger range than most allow. Also it is no mean confirmation of what has been already advanced as to James. “Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother” is really speaking evil of God’s own law and judging it.

But he presses also the necessity of dependence on God in another form in the end of our chapter. That is, we are warned against forming resolutions, plans of our future doings and the like. This too is a practical subject. We ought all to know how much we need to watch against such an ignoring of God above us, and the coming of the Lord. As he says here, “Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow” — not even on the morrow. “For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away, instead of your saying, If the Lord will, and we live, we will also do this, or that. But now ye glory in your boastings: all such glorying is evil.” He does not

conclude, however, without another appeal to conscience. “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” It is the law of liberty, and of infinite purity and power. It is not only that sin consists in doing evil, but in not doing the good that we know. May we never forget what the new nature loves and feels to be true and holy according to Christ.

Then in James 5 we have a solemn word for rich men, to weep and howl for their miseries that shall come upon them. Will any man argue still that this means the saints of God? Are they the persons called to weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon them? Are they told to weep and howl? “Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together “not exactly “for the last days.” This would be hardly intelligible. What there can be little doubt the Holy Ghost meant us to gather is, “Ye have heaped together riches in the last days.” This aggravated the selfishness of their ways and their indifference to others. It is bad enough to heap treasure at any time; but to heap it up in the last days was to add not a little to the evil in the Lord’s eyes. “Is it a time,” said the indignant prophet, to his covetous and deceitful attendant, “to receive money, and to receive garments, and olive-yards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and men-servants, and maid-servants?” Was it a time, when God was dealing with unwonted power and grace even for Gentiles? Was this the time for an Israelite to lie for profit and get gain by it? And so here; when the last days were proclaimed by God’s word in solemn warning,

the heaping up of treasure in such days as these was indeed most offensive to Him.

“Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just.” What an unexpected moral link! The apostle shows that the spirit of heaping up riches in the last days is the same that in other circumstances slew Jesus Christ the righteous. It is not a connection that we could have anticipated, but it is just such an one as would be discerned by the Holy Ghost ever sensitive to the Lord’s glory; and so in fact it is as we may feel on reflection. It was this selfishness that came into direct personal collision with the Lord of glory, “who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich.” We can understand that those whose one object was their own importance, glory, and ease in this world, necessarily felt that such an one was a living witness against them, and convicted them of flagrant opposition to the grace of God, who taught by Jesus in word and deed that it is more blessed to give than to receive. For this doctrine and practice the Pharisees were quite unprepared. (See Luke 16) Accordingly their hatred grew until it resulted in the cross of the Lord; and hence this is one of the elements, though of course not the only one, which calls down the judgment of God; and the Spirit of God so treats it here: “Ye have killed the just.” The allusion is to the Lord, not the just in

general, but the Just One, even Christ, “and he doth not resist you.”

Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. “Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.”

Then he calls them again so much the more to avoid a murmuring spirit against one and another, because the judge stood at the door. He exhorts them to endurance and to patience. This reappears as a final appeal. We had it at the commencement of the chapter; we have it again here that it should by all means be remembered. “Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.”

Then another snare is connected with this for avoidance: “Above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.” What has the apostle in view here? The oath before a magistrate? In no wise does scripture slight that solemn obligation. The Lord Himself respected the adjuration of the high-priest; and in no passage whatever do we see a depreciatory allusion to a judicial oath in the sermon on the mount, or, in what James says here, or in any other part of the Bible, but the contrary, The Lord was addressing Jewish disciples,

James writes to the twelve tribes of Israel who are in the dispersion; but what they both set their faces against was the habit of bringing in religious asseverations for the purpose of confirming their word every day, besides the profaning of the Lord's name in matters of this life. This in point of fact weakens instead of establishing what is said; for it is evident that whatever is uncalled for gives no strength to an assertion, but is just a fruit and proof of weakness. Where there is simple truth, nothing is needed but the quiet statement of the fact.

There were no people so prone to ordinary swearing as the Jews. Accordingly, I have not the slightest doubt that what our Lord and His servants reprobated was the introduction of an oath in common conversation; and this, it is plain, does not apply to an oath administered by a magistrate. Indeed, it seems to me in itself sinful for a man to refuse an oath (supposing its form otherwise unobjectionable) if required to do so by proper authority. It would be to me a virtual denial of God's authority in civil government here below. I believe, therefore, that it is the bounden duty of every man to whom an oath is put, to take it in the fear of the Lord. I admit it must be put by competent authority. Therefore we are not to assume that the passage in Matthew 5, or this portion of James, has the smallest reference to judicial swearing. How could one think that those who indulge in such thoughts show any real intelligence as to the word of God? They certainly exhibit a certain care for conscientiousness. This is not in the least denied. But we have to take care that we are guided of God in this, which is important in the present day when we know that the spirit of the age is endeavouring to blot out God in all that touches man

here below. The Lord was silent till adjured by the high-priest: was not His conduct thus perfectly consistent with His own teaching? An oath, therefore, should not be refused when put by a magistrate. I am supposing, of course, that there is nothing in the terms of the oath that would involve false doctrine or countenance a superstition. For instance, in a Roman Catholic country there might be reference to the virgin, or angels, or saints. Such an oath I do not think that a Christian man would he at liberty to take. But I am supposing now that a person is required in the name of God to declare what he believes to be the truth in a matter of which he is a witness, the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. It appears to me that so far from his being at liberty to refuse this, he is on the contrary guilty, through ignorance, of no small sin in cavilling about the matter.

The rest of the chapter takes up another subject — the case of God's discipline. It is governmental. "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms." This does not mean expressly the inspired psalms. Persons are apt to think of the psalms of David whenever there is the introduction of the word. Doubtless old habits and associations lead to this; but there is no ground for it in the Bible. No more is meant here than that, being happy, he is to give vent to his joy in the praise of the Lord. It is nothing more. "Is any among you sick? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord." This we know was an old custom. It was used even by those who were clothed with miraculous power. When the apostles were sent forth of our Lord, they were directed by Him to anoint the sick

with oil. (Mark 6) And so here the elders were to act in the same remarkable style. Nor do I deny that there are answers to prayer of a very striking kind. I do not call these answers miraculous powers, because the true power of this kind is that exercised by a person raised up of the Lord for the purpose, and who knows that he can count upon it in the case where He pleases to show it; whereas in an answer to prayer there is a trial and exercise of faith about it, just as with those who were praying for Peter when he was in prison. There was no miracle in their part of the business, as far as they were concerned. There was a remarkably direct intervention of God, but it was in no way connected with any gift of miracles committed to the people who were praying. “And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up.” Here it is a question of God’s judgment. The person is chastened in sickness for some evil; it is now judged; grace intervenes, and God heals.

Then comes the general spirit of confession. “Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed.” It is the true love that interests itself, not only in that which is good, but even in what is, alas! the fruit of unjudged evil. But there is a careful abstinence from urging confession to the elders, I cannot doubt, in the far-seeing wisdom of God, who loves souls and hates superstition. “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” Elias is cited in support of this. Finally we have, “Brethren. if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.” It is doubtless put in a general form. At the same time it only confirms, as it appears to

me, what has already been shown to be the comprehensive character of the epistle.

In the next lecture we shall enter, if the Lord will, on what belongs more to the ordinary train of our Christian associations.

1 If my memory serve me, a celebrated man of the day wrote an essay on liberty, in which he observes that Christians are thrown on the law of Moses in default of positive morality in the New Testament. Can anything be conceived more superficial than such a remark? or a more evident token of the blindness of unbelief in him who made it? But it must really be so where Christ is not known. Is it not also striking as a proof that superstition is at bottom infidel as truly as free-thinking. In this the theologian and the sceptic come to the same conclusion, and from the same source — a lack of seeing and appreciating Jesus. Life in Christ is positive; the law was essentially negative. The word of God expresses that life, and the Spirit gives it power; but this needs faith which all have not.

The Epistles of Peter

1 Peter

The epistles of Peter are addressed to the elect Jews of his day, believing of course on the Lord Jesus, and scattered throughout a considerable portion of Asia Minor. The apostle takes particular care to instruct them in the bearing of many of the types that were contained in the Levitical ritual with which they were familiar. But while he contrasts the Christian position with their former Jewish one, in order to strengthen them as to their place and calling now in and by Christ, he takes care also to maintain fully whatever common truth there is between the Christian and the saints of the Old Testament. For it is hardly necessary to say to any intelligent believer, that whatever may be the new privileges, and consequently fresh duties which flow from them, there are certain unchangeable moral principles to which God holds throughout all time. These were insisted on in the Old Testament, particularly in the psalms and the prophets. And the apostle guards against the wrong conclusion, that, because in certain things we stand contrasted with the Old Testament saints, there are no grounds in common.

Let it then be well borne in mind, that God holds fast that which He has laid down for all that are His as to the moral government of God. That government may differ in character and depth; there may be at a fitting moment a far closer dealing with souls (as undoubtedly this is the case since redemption). At the same time the general principles of God are in nowise enfeebled by Christianity, but rather strengthened and cleared

immensely. Take, for instance, the duty of obedience; the value of a gracious, peaceful walk here below; the degree of confidence in God. It was ever right that love should go out towards others, whether in general kindness towards all mankind, or in special affections towards the family of God. These things were always true in principle, and never can be touched while man lives on earth.

It is equally true, however, that from the beginning of his first epistle, Peter draws out the contrast of the Christian place with their old Jewish one. It is not that the Jews were not elect as a nation, but therein precisely it is where they stand in contrast with the Christian. Whatever may be found in hymns, or sermons, or theology, scripture knows no such thing as an elect church. There is the appearance of it in the last chapter of this very epistle, but this is due solely to the meddling hand of man. In 1 Peter 5 we read, “The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you;” but all concede that the terms “the church that is” have been put in by the translators: they have no authority whatever. It was an individual and not a church that was referred to. It was probably a well known sister there; and therefore it was enough simply to allude to her. “She that was at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you.” The very point of Christianity is this, that as to election it is personal — strictly individual. This is precisely what those who contend against the truth of election always feel most: they will allow a sort of body in a general way to be elect, and then that the individuals who compose that body must be brought in, as it were, conditionally, according to their good conduct. No such idea is traceable in the word of God. God has chosen

individuals. As it is said in Ephesians: He has chosen us, not the church, but ourselves individually. “The church,” as such, does not come in till the end of the first chapter. We have first individuals chosen of God before the foundation of the world.

Here too the apostle does not merely speak, nor is it ever the habit of scripture to speak, in an abstract way of election. The saints were chosen “according to the foreknowledge of God the Father;” for it was no question now of a Governor having a nation in whom He might display His wisdom, power, and righteous ways. They had been used to this and more in Judaism, but it had all passed away. The Jews had brought His government into contempt by their own rebellion against His name; and Jehovah Himself had found it morally needful to hand over His own nation into the power of their enemies. Consequently that nation as a display of His government was a thing of the past. A remnant, it is true, had been brought up from Babylon for the purpose of being tested by a new trial by the presentation of the Messiah to them; but alas! only to their responsibility, not to their faith; and if it be responsibility, whether to do the law or to believe the Messiah, it is all one as far as the result in man is concerned. The creature is utterly ruined in every way, and with so much the speedier manifestation the more spiritual the trial.

Thus, as is known, the rejection of the Messiah was incomparably more fruitful of disastrous consequences to the Jew than even had been of old their breach of the divine law. This accordingly gave occasion for God to exercise a new kind of choice. Undoubtedly there was always a secret election of saints after the fall and long before the call of Abraham and his seed; but now the

choice of saints was to be made a manifest thing, a testimony before men, though of course not till glory come absolutely perfect. Accordingly God chooses now not merely out of men but out of the Jews. And this is a point that Peter presses on them, — a startling thought for a Jew, yet they had only to reflect in order to know how true it is: “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” He is forming a family, and no longer governing one chosen nation. Those addressed from among the Jews were among the chosen ones, “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.”

But there is more than this: it was no longer a question of ordinances visibly separating those subject to them from the rest of the world. It was a real inward and not merely external setting apart; it was through “sanctification of the Spirit.” God set them apart unto Himself by the effectual working of the Holy Ghost,. We do not hear now of the gift of the Spirit. Sanctification of the Spirit is altogether distinct from that gift. His sanctification is the effectual work of divine grace, which first separates from the world a person, whether Jew or Gentile, unto God. When a man for instance turns to God, when he has faith in Jesus, when he repents towards God, even though it may be faith but little developed or exercised, and although the repentance may be comparatively superficial (yet I am supposing now real faith and repentance through the action of the Holy Ghost), these are the tokens of the Spirit’s sanctification.

There are those who constantly think and speak of sanctification as practical holiness, and exclusively so. It is granted that there is a sanctification in scripture which bears on practice. This is not the. point here, but

if possible a deeper thing; and for the simple reason, that practical holiness must be relative or a question of degree. The" sanctification of the Spirit" here spoken of is absolute. The question is not how far it is made good in the heart of the believer; for it really and equally embraces all believers. It is an effectual work of God's Spirit from the very starting-point of the career of faith. Elect of course they were in God's mind from all eternity, but they are sanctified from the first moment that the Holy Ghost opens their eyes to the light of the truth in Christ. There is an awakening of conscience by the Spirit through the word (for I am not speaking now of anything natural, of moral desires or emotions of the heart). Wherever there is a real work of God's Spirit — not merely a testimony to the conscience but an arousing of it effectually before God — the sanctification of the Spirit is made good.

If asked why this should be accepted as the meaning of the expression, I acknowledge that one is bound to give a reason for that which no doubt differs from the view of many, and I answer, that in my judgment the just and only meaning of the word is proved from the fact that the saints are said to be "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ."

The order here is precise and instructive. Now practical holiness follows our being sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ, whereas the sanctification of the Spirit of which Peter here treats precedes it. The saints are chosen through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience. This is somewhat difficult for theology, because in general even intelligent and godly souls are

much shut up in the prevalent commonplaces of men. Never should I for one blame their tenacity in adhering to the truth and duty of advancing in practical holiness, or what they call sanctification. This is both true and important in its place. The fault is in denying the other and yet more fundamental sense of sanctification here shown by Peter in its right relation to obedience. A truth is not the truth. True growth in practice confessedly is after justification; sanctification in 1 Peter 1:2 is before justification. It is very evident when a man is justified, he is under the efficacy of the blood of Christ. He is no longer waiting for the sprinkling of that precious blood, he is already sprinkled with it before God. But the sanctification of the Spirit laid down here is in order to the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus; and therefore unless you would destroy the grace of God, and reverse a multitude of scriptures as to justification by faith, this sanctification cannot be one's practice of day by day.

Confound the one with the other and you upset the gospel: distinguish sanctification in principle from the beginning for all from sanctification in practice in the various measures of believers, and you learn the truth of what Peter here teaches, which is forgotten for the most part in Christendom. If you say that practical holiness precedes the being brought under the blood of Jesus, I ask, How is one to become holy? Whence is the power or the growth in holiness? Certainly such is not the teaching of God's word anywhere, still less is it what the apostle Peter insists on here. There is a wider and, if possible, a deeper thought than the measure of our walk, which, after all, differs in all the children of God, — no two being exactly the same, — and all of us depending on self-judgment as well as growth in the

knowledge of the Lord and of His grace. The word of God, prayer, the use that we make of the opportunities that His goodness affords us, both public and private, — all the means that teach and exercise us in the will of God no doubt contribute to this practical holiness.

But here the apostle speaks of none of these things, but only of the Spirit separating the saints to obey as Jesus obeyed, and to be sprinkled with His blood. And so we find it in fact and in Scripture. Thus, for instance, Saul of Tarsus had this sanctification of the Spirit the moment that, struck down to the earth, he received the testimony of the Lord speaking from heaven. He went through a profound work in his conscience after that. For three days and nights, as we all know, he neither ate nor drank. All this was thoroughly in season; and after it, as we are told, the blindness was taken away, and he was filled with the Holy Ghost. This is not the sanctification of the Spirit. It was clearly the consequence of the Holy Ghost being given to him, but the gift of the Spirit is not the sanctification of the Spirit. Sanctification of the Spirit is that primary action that was experienced before Saul entered into peace with God. When a man is roused to hate his sins through God’s testimony reaching him, and convicting him before God, and not in his own eyes, — when a man is ashamed of all that he has been in presence of God’s grace, ever so little known and understood, — still where a real work goes on in the soul, sanctification of the Spirit is true there. Now this ought to be a great comfort even to the feeblest of God’s children, not an alarm. There is not one of them who has not really sanctification of the Spirit They may be troubled as to the question of practical holiness, but the fundamental

and essential sanctification of the Spirit is that which is already true of all the children of God. I am not speaking of a particular doctrine. It is not a question of that; but of a soul quickened by the Spirit through the truth received in ever so simple and limited a manner. But it is a reality, and from that time this sanctification of the Spirit becomes a fact.

But then, to what are they sanctified of the Holy Ghost thus? Unto Christ's obedience and the sprinkling of His blood; for "Jesus Christ" belongs to both these clauses. This again is a difficulty to some minds. They would rather have placed the sprinkling of the blood first, and obedience next. I can understand them, but do not in the least agree with them. Indeed such difficulties serve to show where people are. The root of all is that people are occupied about themselves first, instead of leaning on the Lord. No doubt if a person were at once to be brought into the comfort of full peace with God through the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus, this would suit the heart's sense of its own need. But it is not what the word of God gives us by that converted soul, to whose case I have adverted. What is it that Saul of Tarsus says as the effect of the light of God shining on his soul? "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" And was not this before he knew all the comfort and blessing of the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus?

The first impulse of a converted man is to do the will of God. There may be no sense of liberty yet, nor even joy in the Lord; there can be no solid peace whatever. All this will come in due time, and it may be very rapidly, even the self-same hour; but the very first thing that a soul born of God feels is the desire at all cost to do the will of God. It is exactly what filled Jesus perfectly. It

was not a question of what He was to gain or what He was to avoid; but as it is written, “Lo, I come, to do thy will, O God.” To my mind, nothing is more wonderful in our blessed Lord here below than this devotedness to His Father, not merely now and again, but as the one motive that animated Him from the beginning to the end of His course here below. He came to do the will of God, and this not as the law proposed, in order that it might be well with Him, and He might live long in the earth; He never had such a motive though He fulfilled the law perfectly. On the contrary, He knew quite well before coming that He was not here for a long life, but to die on the cross. He was about to be a sacrifice for sin, giving Himself up spite of suffering, not only from man, but from God. But at all cost God’s will must be done; “by the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” The self-same principle is true in the believer, although of course it is pure grace toward him, whereas it was moral perfectness in Jesus. In our case it is all through Jesus. It is the Holy Ghost no doubt producing it. It is the instinct of that new nature, — of life in the believer, who, being born of God, has this necessary feeling of the new nature, the desire to do the will of God. In point of fact Christ is the life of the believer; and we can well understand, therefore, that the life of Christ, whether viewed in all its perfection in Him, or whether it is seen modified in ourselves, is nevertheless just the same life, — in our case hindered alas! by all sorts of circumstances, and above all by the evil of our old nature that surrounds it, in Him, as we know, absolutely perfect and without mixture.

In this case, then, it seems to me that the order is divinely perfect, and manifestly so. Being sanctified of the Spirit, we are called to obey as Christ obeyed. It is another character and measure of responsibility. The Jew, as such, was bound to obey the law. To him it was a question of not doing what his nature prompted him to do. But this was never the case with Jesus. He in no case desired to do a single thing that was not the will of God. Now the new nature in the believer never has any other thought or feeling; only in our case there is also the old nature which may, and which alas! does struggle to have its own way. Therefore God has His own wise, holy, and gracious mode of dealing with it. We shall see that this comes later on in our epistle, and therefore I need say no more upon it now.

Here we have the first great primary fact, that the Christian Jew does not belong any more to the elect nation; but is taken out of this his former position, and is elect after a wholly new sort. In this case, those actually addressed had belonged to that elect people, but now they were chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. It was no afterthought, but His settled plan. It was the foreknowledge of God the Father in virtue of (ἐν) sanctification of the Spirit, and this unto the obedience of Jesus Christ (that kind of obedience), and the sprinkling of His blood. These two points are carefully to be weighed — Christian obedience, and the sprinkling of His blood. I consider them both to stand in manifest contrast with the same two elements under the law in Exodus 24, which appears to be in view. In that chapter we have Israel agreeing to do whatever the law demanded, and thereupon the blood of certain victims is

taken and sprinkled on the people, as well as on the book that bound them.

It is a great mistake to suppose that the blood there is used as a sign of the putting away of sin. This is not by any means the only meaning of blood, even where it was sacrificially employed. The meaning in that sense I take to be this: that the people formally pledged themselves to legal obedience, and bound themselves in this solemn manner to obey. Just as the blood sprinkled was from the animals killed in view of the old covenant, so they shrank not from that dread and extreme exaction if they failed to obey the will of God. It was an imprecation of death on themselves from God if they violated His commandments. Therefore it is observable there was the sprinkling of the book along with it. This had nothing at all to do with atonement — a supposition which only arises from people closing their eyes to other truths in the Bible, to their own great loss even in the truth they hold. We must leave room for all truth. Atonement has its own incomparable place. But certainly when the Israelites were binding themselves to obey the law, it was as far as possible from a confession of atonement. It is a total fallacy, injurious to God’s glory and to our own souls, to interpret the Bible after this fashion. It only makes confusion in jumbling up law and gospel, to the detriment of both, and indeed to the destruction of all the beauty and force of truth.

In the case of the Christian all is changed. For Christ communicated a new nature which loves to obey God’s will, which accordingly is given us from conversion, before (and it may be long before) a person enjoys peace. From the time that this new nature is given, the

purpose of the heart is to obey. Such was, unhindered by imperfection, the obedience of Jesus.

But besides this, the gospel, instead of putting a man under blood as a threat or imprecation of death in case of failure, the awful sign of his doom before his eyes if he disobeyed, puts him under the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus, which assures him of plenary forgiveness. With this he is intended to start as a Christian; he begins his career with that blessed shelter which tells him that, although he has entered on the path of Christian obedience, he is a forgiven and justified man in the sight of God. Such is the suited and striking preface with which our apostle commences, contrasting the portion of the believer in Christ with that of the Jew, as it stands in their own sacred books, which we as well as they acknowledge to have divine authority.

Next follows the salutation, “Grace unto you, and peace,” the usual Christian or apostolic style of address. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to he revealed in the last time.” Thus he loves to bring out again confirmatorily the new relationship in which they stood to God. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” It is not here blessing them in heavenly places in Christ. Such is not., the topic of Peter; it had been given to another instrument more fitted for revealing the heavenly position of the believer. But if it is not union with Christ, if not our full place in Him

before God, there is a clear statement of our hope of heaven. And this is what Peter immediately enlarges on. Speaking of God he says, “Who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven.” It is not the universal inheritance of which the apostle Paul treats, so that clearly we have the distinction between his testimony and Paul’s very definitely.

Bear in mind that the one is just as truly Christian as the other. There is no difference in their authority, but each has its own importance. The man that would make all his scripture to be the epistle to the Ephesians would soon find himself in want of Peter. And I am persuaded that a hardness of character, quite intolerable to men of spiritual minds, would inevitably be generated by making all our food to consist in what could be extracted from Ephesians and Colossians, the effect of which would soon become painfully sensible to others. The consequence would be that much of the exercise of spiritual affection which humbles the soul, a vast deal which renders needful the gracious present care of the Lord Jesus as advocate and priest on high, would be of necessity left out. In other words, if we think of firmness, as well as the sense of belonging to heaven, — a bright triumphant consciousness of glory, surely we must enter into and enjoy the precious truth of our union with Christ. But this is not all; we need Christ interceding for us, as well as the privilege of being in Christ; we need to have Him active in His love before our God, and not merely a condition in which we stand. Peter treats chiefly of the former, Paul of both, but

chiefly of the latter. Such was the ordering of matters under God's hand for both. The epistle to the Hebrews of all the Pauline epistles is that which most approaches the testimony of Peter, and coalescing in it to a large extent. There we have not union with the Head, but "the heavenly calling;" and substantially the latter line of truth is that which we have in 1 Peter.

Nor is it only that we find here the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus, but the life that grace has given us is characterized by resurrection power. "We are begotten again," says he, "to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." The blood of Jesus Christ, however precious and indispensable, does not of itself constitute a man a Christian either in intelligence or in fact of standing. It is the foundation for it; and every one who rests on the blood of Christ is surely a Christian; but I repeat that, both for position before God and intelligent perception and power of soul, we need and have much more. Supposing God only gave the believer according to his own thoughts (often meagre); supposing one believed in the power of the precious blood of Jesus ever so truly, and had nothing more than this our real portion by the Spirit, such an one, I maintain, would be a sorry Christian indeed. No doubt as far as it goes it is all-important, nor could any one be a Christian without it. Still the Christian does need the effect of the resurrection of Jesus following up the sprinkling of His blood — I do not say the resurrection without His blood, still less the glory without either. A whole Christ is given and needed. I do not believe in these glory-men, or resurrection-men either, without the blood of Jesus; but, on the other hand, as little are we in scripture limited to that most wonderful of all

foundations — redemption through Christ Jesus our Lord. To restrict yourself to it would be a wrong, not so much to your own soul as to God's grace; and if there be any difference, especially to Him who suffered all things for God's glory and for our own infinite blessing.

In this case then we have the Christian by divine grace possessed of a new nature which loves to obey. He is sprinkled with Christ's blood, which gives him confidence and boldness in faith before God, because he knows the certainty of the love that has put away his sins by blood. But, besides this, what a spring is conveyed to the soul by the sense that his life is the life of Jesus in resurrection. So, he adds, there is a. similar inheritance for the saints with Christ Himself — "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven," where He has already gone. More than this, there is full security, spite of our passing through a world filled with hatred and peril, for the Christian above all. "For you," says he, "who are kept;" for Christian doctrine is not, as men so often say, that of saints persevering. In this I, for one, do not believe. One sees alas! too often saints going astray, comparatively seldom persevering as the rule, if we speak of their consistent fidelity and devotedness. But there is that which never fails, — "the power of God through faith," — by which the believer is kept to the end. This alone restores the balance; and thus we are taken out of all conceit of our own stability. We are thrown on mercy, as we ought to be; we look up in dependence on One who is incontestably above us, and withal infinitely near to us. This ought to be the spring of all our confidence, even in God Himself, with His own power preserving us. There is given to the soul of him

who thus rests on God's power keeping him a wholly different tone from that of the man who thinks of his own perseverance as a saint. Far better is it, then, to be "kept by the power of God through faith." In this way it is not independent of our looking to Him.

But there is discipline also. God puts us to the proof; and, undoubtedly, if there be unbelief working, we must eat the bitter fruit of our own ways. It is good that we should feel that it is unbelief, and that unbelief can produce nothing but death. This may be in various measures, and therefore no more is meant than so far as want of faith is allowed to work. In the unbeliever, where it does work unhinderedly, the consequences are fatal and everlasting. In the believer the evil heart of unbelief is modified necessarily by the fact that, believing on Christ, he has everlasting life. But still, as far as unbelief does work, it is just so far death in effect. The saints, then, are "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." And here it is well to observe, as an important fact to be recognised, that salvation in Peter's epistle looks onward to the future, where it is not otherwise qualified. Salvation is here viewed as not yet come. In the general sense of the word, salvation awaits the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ. It supposes that the believer is brought out of all that is natural even as to the body — that he is already changed into the likeness of Christ. "Salvation," says Peter, "ready to be revealed in the last time." This is the reason why he connects it with the appearing of Jesus Christ. It is not merely the work effected, but salvation revealed; and hence it necessarily awaits the revelation of Jesus Christ.

There is another sense of salvation, and our apostle, as we shall shortly find, does not in anywise ignore it; but then he qualifies the term. When he refers it to the present, it is the salvation of souls, not of bodies. This also is a very important point of difference for the Christian, on which it will be desirable to speak presently. On the other hand, as here, when salvation simply and fully is meant, we are thrown on the revelation of the last time. “Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.” Such is the path of trial through which the believer goes forward, putting to the proof the faith which God has given him:” That the trial of your faith” (not of flesh as under the law) “being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”

It is not said to be at Christ’s coming. The trial of our faith will not be revealed then, but “at the appearing of Jesus.” This is the reason why the appearing of Jesus is brought in here. The coming of Jesus might be misunderstood, as being a much more comprehensive term than His appearing or revelation. His coming (παρουσία) is that which effects the rapture and reception of the saints to Himself; and His appearing is that which subsequently displays them with Himself before the world, and therefore expresses but a part of His presence, being the special (not the generic) term. The appearing of Jesus is exclusively when the Lord will make Himself visible, and be seen by every eye. It is evident that the Lord might come and make Himself visible only to those in whom He is distinctly interested, and who are themselves personally associated with Him;

and such, I have no doubt, is the truth of scripture. But then He may do more and display Himself to the world. Such is the “appearing” of Jesus, and of this the apostle Peter speaks when the revelation of the sons of God in glory will take place. Then it is that the trial of the faith of the Christian will be made manifest in glory. Wherever the saints have shown faith or unbelief, whether hindered by the world, the flesh, or the devil, whatever the particular snare that has drawn them aside, all will be made plain then. There will be no possibility of self-love keeping up appearances longer: unbelief will cost as dear in that day as it is worthless now; but the trial of faith, where it has been genuine, will be “found unto praise and honour” then. Proved unbelief will be certainly to the praise of none, but where feeble faltering faith has been put in evidence by the trial, while surely forgiven in the grace of God, nevertheless the failure cannot but be judged as such. The flesh never counts on God for good. All unbelief therefore will be shown plainly to be of the flesh, not of the Spirit, and never excusable.

But this gives the apostle an occasion to speak of Jesus, especially as he had spoken of His appearing, and this in a way that remarkably brings out the character of Christianity. “Whom,” says he, “having not seen, ye love.” It is a strange sound and fact at first, but in the end precious. Who ever loved a person that he never saw? We know that in human relations it is not so. In divine things it is precisely what shows the power and special character of a Christian’s faith.

Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your

faith," — not yet the body saved, but soul-salvation — "the salvation of souls." This at once gives us a true and vivid picture of what Christianity is, of signal importance for the Jews to weigh, because they always looked forward for a visible Messiah, — the royal Son of David — the object, no doubt, of all reverence, homage, and loyalty for all Israel. But here it is altogether another order of ideas. It is a rejected Messiah who is the proper object of the Christian's love, though he never beheld Him; and who while unseen becomes so much the more simply and unmixedly the object of his faith, and withal the spring of "joy unspeakable and full of glory."

While this is in full and evident contrast with Judaism, it needs little proof that it is precisely what gives scope for the proper display of Christianity, which could not be seen in its true light if at all till Jesus left the world. Whilst the Lord was here, it is ignorance and error to call such a state of things, however blessed and needed, Christianity. Of course it was Christ, which, after all, was far more important in one sense than the work He wrought for bringing us to God. All on which one could look with delight and praise was concentrated in His own person. What were the disciples then? Members of His body? Who told you this? None eau find it in Scripture. Up to that time membership of Christ, or to be in Christ, was not a fact, and consequently could not be testified to any soul, nor known to the most advanced believer. What Christ was to them then was all: not in the least did any suspect (for indeed it was not yet true) that any were in Him. The Lord spoke of a day when they should know it; but as yet the foundation was not even laid for it. This was done in the mighty work of the Saviour on the cross; and not the fact only but its results

were made good when Christ, after having breathed His own risen life into them, went up to heaven and sent down the Holy Ghost that they might taste the joy and have the power of it. This gives room for all the practical working of Christianity. It was necessary to its existence that Jesus should go. There could have been no Christianity if Jesus had not come; yet as long as He was visibly present on earth, Christianity proper could not even begin.

It was when He who died went to heaven that Christianity appeared in its full force; and accordingly then came out faith in its finest and truest character. While He was here, there was a kind of mingled experience. It was partly sight and partly faith; but when He went away, it was altogether faith, and nothing but faith. Such is Christianity. But then, again, as long as Christ was here, it could not be exactly hope. How could one hope for One who was here, however different His estate from what was longed for and expected? Thus neither faith had its adequate and suited sphere, nor had hope its proper character till Jesus went away. When He left the earth, especially as the Crucified, then indeed there was room for faith; and nothing but faith received, appreciated, and enjoyed all. And before He went away, He had left the promise of His return for them. Thus hope also could spring forth as it were to meet Him; as, indeed, it is the work of the Holy Ghost to exercise the faith and hope He has given.

This, then, may serve to show the true nature of Christianity, which, coming in after redemption, is founded on it, and forms in us heavenly associations and hopes while Jesus is away, and we are waiting for Him to return. Perhaps it is needless to say how the heart is

tried. There is everything, as we have seen, to give not only faith and hope their full place, but also love. As we are told here, “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing,” — no wonder he adds, — “ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” But none of these wonders of grace could have been, unless by redemption we receive the end of our faith meanwhile, namely, soul-salvation.

A very important development follows in the next verses. “Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you.” How little, it seems, the Old Testament prophets understood their own prophecies! How much we are indebted to the Spirit who now reveals a Christ already come! The prophets were constantly saying that the righteousness of God was near at, hand, and His salvation to be revealed. Thence, we see, they did speak of these very things. They “prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching), what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories after these.” Take Psalm 22 or Isaiah 53, where we have the sufferings which belonged to Christ, and the glories after these. But mark, “To whom it was revealed, that not to themselves, but to us they did minister the things which are now reported to you in virtue of the Holy Ghost sent from heaven. This is Christianity. It is very far from identifying the state and testimony of the prophets with ours now under grace and a present Spirit. He shows that first of all there was this testimony of that which was not for themselves but for us, beginning of course with the converted Jewish remnant,

— these Christian Jews who believed the gospel which in principle belongs to us of the Gentiles just as much as to them.

Christianity is come to us now; but when really known, it is not at all a mere question of prophetic testimony, even though this be of God, but there is the preaching of the gospel by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. The gospel sets forth present accomplishment — redemption now a finished work as far as the soul is concerned. At the same time, the day is not yet come for the fulfilment of the prophecies as a whole. This is the important difference here revealed. There are three distinct truths in these verses, as has been often remarked, and most clearly, as we have seen. “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” Then the prophecies will be fulfilled. Thus the Lord Jesus, being already come and about to come again, brings before us two of these stages, while the mission of the Holy Ghost for the gospel fills up the interval between them. Had there been only one coming of Christ, then the accomplishment that we have now, and the fulfilment of the prophecies that. is future, would have coalesced, so; far as this could have been; but two distinct comings of the Lord (one past, and the other future) have broken up the matter into these separate parts. That is, we have had accomplishment in the past; and we look for future fulfilment of all the bright anticipations of the coming kingdom. After the one, and before the other, the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven is the power of Christian blessedness, and as we know also of the church, no less than of preaching the gospel everywhere.

And when the Lord Jesus appears by and by, there will be not the gospel as it is now preached, nor the Holy Ghost as He is now sent down from heaven, but the word going forth and the Spirit poured out suitably to that day. There may be a still more diffusive action of the Holy Ghost when He is shed upon all flesh, not merely as a sample, but to an extent (I do not say depth) beyond what was accomplished on the day of Pentecost. In due time there will be the fulfilment of the prophecies to the letter. Christianity accordingly, it will be observed, comes in between these two extremes — after the first, and before the second, coming of Christ; and this is exactly what Peter shows us in this epistle. “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope perfectly,” etc. Again in the 14th verse: “As children of obedience, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as he which hath called you is holy, be ye also holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.” There is an instance of what I referred to — that the essential moral principles. of the Old Testament are in nowise disturbed by Christianity. And, indeed, you find this not merely in Peter but in Paul. Paul will tell you so, even after he shows that the Christian is dead to the law; and then a term is used to show that he does not at all mean that the righteousness of the law is not fulfilled in us, but that it is. In fact, the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in no one but the Christian. A man under the law never fulfils the law: the man who is under grace is the one that does, and the only one; for the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in those “who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” So Peter takes up a passage of Leviticus, and shows that it is strictly true — yea, if one can employ such an

expression, more true (of course meaning by this more manifestly true) under the Christian than under the Jewish system. As all know, many things were allowed then for the hardness of the heart, which are thoroughly condemned now. That is, the holiness of the Christian is fuller, and deeper than that of the Jew. Hence he can fairly take up the quotation from the law, not at all conveying that we were under law, but with an à fortiori force. As Christians, we are under a far more searching principle, namely, the grace of God (Rom. 6), which assuredly ought to produce far better and more fruitful results.

It is clearly seen how he treats these Jews, and what they used to boast of. “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. And if ye call on the Father” — that is, if ye call on Him as Father — “who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning in fear: forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.” What can be more magnificent than this setting of the Christian on his own proper basis?

It will be observed here that there are two motives to holiness: the first is that He has called us; the next, that we call Him, and this by the sweet and near title of

Father. It is no longer relationship with and recognition of a God that rules and governs. This was known in Israel, but it could in no wise draw out the affections in the same way as calling Him Father. We are told and meant to know, that as He called us by His grace, so we should call on Him as Father. It is after the pattern, not of a subject with a sovereign, but of a child's dependence on a parent. To this double motive there is added another consideration on which it all rests, and without which neither of these things could be. How is it that He has been pleased thus to call us? and how is it that we can call Him Father? The answer is this: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ." The Jews were all familiar with a ransom price that used to be paid in silver. But it did not matter whether one gave silver or gold, it was all corruptible; and to what did it come at last? The precious blood of Christ is another thing altogether; and there alone is efficacy found before God; so also His incorruptible seed revealing Himself is planted in the heart of the saint.

They were redeemed then with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. It was no new thought. Though but newly brought out, it was in point of fact the oldest of all purposes. Did they boast about their law, the apostle can say that Christianity — the present blessed revelation of grace in Christ — was in God's mind before the foundation of the world. Therefore there could be no comparison on that score, not even for a Jew. And this was an important point; for the Jews reasoned, that because God brings

out one thing today, He could not bring out another tomorrow. They consider that, because God is unchangeable, He has not a will of His own. Why even your dog has a will; and I am sure you have a will yourselves. And here is the wonderful infatuation of unbelief. That very system of reason that makes so much of the will of man, and is not a little proud of it, would deprive God Himself of a will, and under penalty of man's accusation of injustice forbids its exercise according to His own pleasure. But thus it is He brings out one part of His character at one time, and another part at another time. Therefore be would have them know that, as to the novelty with which they reproach Christianity, it was altogether a mistake; for the Lamb without blemish and without spot, though only lately slain, was foreordained before the foundation of the world. When he refers to Him as a "lamb without blemish and without spot," he evidently points to their types, yea, to Christ before the types, because we had that from the very beginning in the first recorded sacrifice, long before there was a Jew and still more before the law. To what did it all point? To "the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." It is plain that, if God foreordained it, He at the same time took care to act on it, and this is long before either Judaism or the law.

Thus there was a most thorough conviction of the folly of the Jewish argument as to Christianity being a mere novelty; but it was "manifest in these last times for you who by him do believe in God." Here it is not merely believing in the Messiah, but believing in "God that raised him up from the dead."

Now I do not believe there ever can be settled peace in a man's soul till he has confidence in God Himself, according to the truth of His raising up Christ from the dead. Simply to believe in Christ may make a man quite happy, but it never of itself gives solid unbreakable peace. What brings a man into that peace which resists all efforts from without to take it, all weakness within in giving it up, is the certainty that all is clear with God. It is He that raises the question of conscience in His sight, and this is so much the more dreadful, because when renewed we know better our own subtlety and His unstained essential holiness. It belongs to the condition in which man is that, being fallen, and yet having a conscience of the good that alas! he does not do, and of the evil that he does, he has a dread of God, knowing that He must bring into judgment the good that he knew but did not, and the evil that he knew and did. So guilty man cannot but quake, still by scepticism he may reason himself out of his fears, or he can find a religion that soothes and destroys his conscience. But that man has this conscience in his natural state is most certain.

Christianity alone settles all questions. There we have not merely the blessed Saviour who in unspeakable love comes down and attracts the heart, and searches the conscience, but He settles all for us with God by redemption. Nor is it only that He comes down from God, but He goes up to God. That we receive the peace we need as Christians is mainly connected, not with His coming out from God, but with His going back to God; as it is said here, "Who by him do believe in God that" — what? Gave Him to shed His blood? There can be nothing without this: impossible to have any holy and permanent blessing for the soul without it; nevertheless

this is not what is said. We have the value of Christ's blood already spoken of, but now it is added of God that He "raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory." Where? In His own presence. Even the kingdom on earth does not suffice. According to Christian light nothing will do but ability to stand before the glory of God. And this by Christ's work is made good for us, because the very one that became responsible for our sins on the cross is in glory now. God has raised Him from the dead and given Him glory. The consequence is that all for ever is made clear and settled for those who believe in God, that our "faith and hope might be" — not "in Christ," though it is so, assuredly, but more than this — "in God." This is the more important, because of itself it completely dissipates a thought as common as it is grievous to the Lord, that Christ is the one in whom the love is, and that His task for the most part is to turn away the totally opposite feeling that is in God Himself. Not so; for as He came out in the love of God, who none the less must by this very Christ judge every soul that lives in sin and unbelief, He would not go back to heaven until He bad by His own sacrifice completely put sin away. But this was the will of God. (Psalm 40; Heb. 10) Thus He goes in peaceful triumph into the presence of God, establishing our faith and hope in God, and not merely in Himself.

But there is another thing to be considered. "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren," — for this is the sure effect — "see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently." There was the best and weightiest reason for this, because the nature thus produced in them is this holy nature that comes by grace from God

Himself. “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth; because all flesh is as grass, and all its glory as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.”

1 Peter 2. Next he shows some of the privileges as well as wants of the Christian. First he is surrounded by an evil world, but, besides, he has not lost in fact something nearer that is quite as bad as what is in the world. “Laying aside,” he says, “all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby to salvation.” “To salvation” you will not find in your common Bibles, but it is none the less true for all that. The apostle represents us as growing by the word to salvation (i.e., the end in glory). It is not often that words are thus left out. The more usual fault of those who copied the scriptures was that they added words. They assimilated passages one to another; they thought that what was right in one case must be right in another; and thus the tendency was to blunt the fine edge of the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. But in this case they omitted. At first sight, perhaps, these words may be startling to some, that is, to such as think that the sense of “salvation” is weakened thereby. But you need never be afraid of trusting God or His word. Never fear for the honour of the scripture, never shrink from committing yourself to what God says. I have no hesitation in saying that this is in my judgment what God said, if we are to be guided by the most ancient and best authorities.*

If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious; to whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious, ye also as lively stones are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." Two characters of priesthood are here shown us. We have first seen one of them, — "a holy priesthood;" there is another lower down, in verse 9, where he says, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood." Both flow from Christ and are in communion with Him who is now carrying on a priesthood according to the pattern of Aaron, but in His own person is a priest after the order of Melchisedec. That is, He is a royal priest just as truly as His functions are now exercised on the ground of sacrifice, interceding after the Aaronic pattern within the veil but a veil that is rent. He is now fulfilling the Levitical types in the holiest of all. On this is founded the spiritual priesthood, and in consequence we who are His draw near and offer up spiritual sacrifices. Besides that, not only is there holiness in drawing near to God, but royal dignity stamped upon the believer. This too is of the greatest importance for us all to remember and seek to realize by faith. Where is each to be proved? Before God we bow down in praise and adoration; before the world we are conscious of the glory grace has given us. We do honour to the world and shame to this our place by seeking its favours. Alas! how often and readily the. Christian forgets his proper dignity. Let us then bear in mind that we are a royal priesthood "to show forth," as it is said here, "the virtues of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light." But when it is a question of drawing near, let us not forget that we are a holy priesthood. We can all understand this: holiness,

when one has to do with God; royalty, before the world when the temptation is to forget our heavenly honour.

*In fact but one uncial (Cod. Angelicus Romanus) of the ninth century with many cursives warrants the omission; but, A, B, C, K, more than fifty cursives, and all the versions but the Arabic of the Parisian Polyglott support the words. The early quotations, Greek and Latin, save of Oecumenius, point to the same reading.

“Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.” Here again we have a scripture of the Old Testament applied; and this has often been, and still is to this day, exceedingly misunderstood; as if the persons here spoken of must be Gentiles because they are called the strangers of the dispersion. It means Jews, and none but Jews, who believe in the Lord Jesus. What he refers to is the loss of their title to be the people of God, which Israel sustained at the time of the Babylonish captivity. They then ceased to be manifestly God’s people. Accordingly their land became the possession of the Gentiles; and so it has gone on to this day. As we know, from that day to this there has never been a real recovery, but only the return of a remnant for special purposes for a season. The times of the Gentiles are still in course of accomplishment. They are not yet finished; and they must be punctually fulfilled. Hence it is evident that, as long as the times of the Gentiles proceed, the Jews cannot regain their ancient title, nor become the real owners of Emmanuel’s land. Indeed, it is too plain a fact for any one to dispute. All this time they are not a people; they are dependent on the will of their Gentile masters. But even now grace gives the believer (here believing Jews) to enter that

place; we are now God’s people. We do not wait for times and seasons. Israel must wait; but we do not.

This is just the difference between the Christian and the Jew. The Christian does not belong to the world, and consequently is not bound by accidents of time. He has everlasting life now, and is a heavenly person even while upon the earth. This is Christianity. Thus he says to the Jews addressed that they were not a people (that is, in the days of their unbelief), but are now. So far was their believing in Christ from taking them out of the people, it is then alone that they became, a people. They “were not a people, but now are the people of God;” they” had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.” It is a quotation from Hosea 2.

And this is exceedingly interesting, because if the prophet be compared, it will be seen to illustrate what has been remarked before — the difference between the present accomplishment made good in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, and the future fulfilment of the prophecies. If persons take the actual application as the fulfilment of the prophecies, it in fact not only nullifies the future of scripture, but destroys the beauty and point of the present; for what the apostle intimates is, that they had obtained mercy now, though none were yet sown in the earth. These Christian Jews were not sown in the earth. The earth will be sown with the seed of God when the Jewish nation, as such, obtains mercy. They will be the greatest people on the face of the earth, and all the Gentiles shall own it. They will have everything at their command, and worthily use all for God. Not only are they to be set publicly at the head of the nations, but God himself will link His own glory from above with them as His earthly people here below, and nothing but

peace, righteousness, and plenty will be found all over the earth in that day of glory. Such will be “that day,” and of that day Hosea prophesies. You can easily judge whether that day is come now. It is only a theologian who finds a difficulty. His traditions wrap him up in fog.

I do not think it requires much argument to show whether under the gospel the Jews or the world are in such a condition as the prophet describes, or whether there, is anything in progress that is intended or calculated to bring about such a result. But what will not men believe, provided it be not in the Bible? I admit that what is in the Bible requires faith; and this is as it should be. It is, however, too evident that there is nothing like incredulity for swallowing anything that panders to the first man, and leaving out the glory of the Second. In the word of God, then, we find that the accomplishment of the prophecy supposes an earthly place, with visible power and glory given to the Jewish people. But the wonderful place given to the Christian is that, though we do become the people of God now, whether Jew or Gentile, and although the believing Jew does obtain mercy now, he is not sown on the earth, but called out for heaven, and, in consequence, becomes a pilgrim and stranger here below till Jesus appears. This will not be the case when the Jews shall be brought back to the land. In a certain sense they are strangers now; but it is an awful sense, because it is the fruit of judgment. They are scattered over the earth, and can find no rest for their souls, any more than their feet. This is notorious to every one — even to themselves. Least of all can the Jews be said to be sown in the land of Palestine. I do not mean that they may not acquire previously a delusive glory; nor that the antichrist by

fraud will not palm himself off as the Messiah, and settle some of them in the land, according to Dan. 11. Nor do I believe that this day is far off. The hour of temptation is near.

But while fully looking for this, it is sweet to see the place of the believing Jew now as divine wisdom here applies Hosea, mutatis mutandis. Although he is of the people of God, instead of getting an earthly character by Christianity, on the contrary he becomes a pilgrim and stranger. “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.” It is as if God had purposely put verse 11 to negative the conclusions which men have drawn from a misunderstanding of verse 10.

Then he begins his exhortations, and first of all with the personal snares of every day, with what the Christian had to contend with in himself. Next he proceeds to bring in what had to do with others. There he says, “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether to the king, as supreme; or to governors, as to them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and praise to them that do well.”

I suppose there was a danger of these Christian Jews being somewhat turbulent. Certainly the Jews of old were rarely good subjects. They were apt to rise against oppression and to fail in obedience to a superior, at least among the heathen. They were ever a rebellious people, as we know; and the Christian Jews were in danger of using their Christianity in order to justify insubjection. We can easily comprehend it. They could see how gross, dark, and dissolute these Pagan governors were; and in

such circumstances one needs the distinct sense of God's will to abide in the duty of obedience. "How can we obey men that worship stocks and stones, whose very religion makes them immoral and degraded?" However this may have been, it is of all importance for the Christian that he should be established in the place of patient submission; as we see Paul elsewhere taking especial pains to insist that the Christians in Rome should obey, even where they had to do with one of the most abandoned men that had ever governed the empire, persecuting themselves to death a short time after. Nevertheless the apostle there claims the most unqualified subjection to the powers that be. So here we find that the Christian Jews, who might have exonerated themselves from the burden laid on them by their heathen masters, are earnestly exhorted by the apostle Peter to do their bidding for the Lord's sake. I do not say that there are no limits. Obedience is always right, but not to man when he would force the dishonour of God. Nevertheless obedience abides the principle of the Christian. But the lower obedience is absorbed by the higher one when they come into collision; and this is the only seeming exception.

After this Peter not only branches out into the outward life, but takes particular note of the family and its relationships. Some of those addressed were domestics, whether or not they were slaves. The apostle Paul pressed on the Christian slave the beauty and responsibility of obedience; but Peter insists on it whether a man be a slave or not. This is founded on the very principle of Christianity itself; that is, doing good, suffering for it, and taking it patiently. I admit it requires faith; but then the Lord cannot but look for faith in

Christian people. Nay, we have Christ Himself brought in to enforce and illustrate it. It is not merely the Christian who is called to this, but this is what Christ was called to. “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again.” To be reviled was a pain to which as domestics they would be particularly exposed, as well as to suffer in all sorts of ways. What had Christ not gone through in the same path?

“When he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously; who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree.” He suffered in other ways; in this He stands alone for us; “that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.” Since He came and showed the perfect pattern, it was less than ever the time to sanction disobedience; it was more than ever unbecoming to shirk the path of suffering.

The exhortation is not limited to slaves. Here we find the various relations of life practically met. At any rate the most important part is noticed; and in particular the great social bond, wives and husbands (1 Peter 3). Then comes the general exhortation: “Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, pitiful, lowly-minded: not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.” What a place for the Christian! — called to blessing, and to be a blessing. And this is fortified, singular to say, (but confirming what has been

already remarked) by the Psalms. He had quoted the law in 1 Peter 1, the prophets in 1 Peter 2, and now the psalms in 1 Peter 3. Thus all the living oracles of God are turned into use for the Christian, only you must take care that you do not abuse them or any part of them.

“For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.” And then he asks, “And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.”

This leads to another important point; that if we do suffer, it ought never to be for sin, and for the affecting reason that Christ has once for all suffered for sins. Let this be enough. Christ has suffered for sins; He has had there, if we may so say, a monopoly; and there let it end: why should we? He alone was competent to suffer for sin. We ought never to suffer but for His name, unless it be for righteousness, as is said here, “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the Spirit: by which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison.”

Carefully observe that Peter does not say that Christ went to prison and preached to the spirits there. No such words are used, nor is this what he means. The spirits are characterised as in prison. They are waiting

there for the day of judgment. God may have judged them in this world, but this is not all. He is going to judge them in the next world. There may have been a judgment, but this is not the judgment. So he says these very spirits which are spoken of were “once disobedient, when the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was preparing, wherein few, that is eight souls, were saved through water.”

It is not a description of all that died in unbelief, but of a generation favoured with a special testimony and smitten by a particular stroke of judgment. The preaching was in the days of Noah. It was just before that judgment fell on them, and this because they despised the testimony of Christ through Noah. Just as the Spirit of Christ prophesied in the prophets, so the Spirit of Christ preached by Noah. There is no difficulty that I see about it. There is nothing at all in the verse that warrants a web of doctrine strange to the rest of the Bible. It is a mistake to construe it of one that knows not what took place in the lower parts of the earth. Nothing is said of preaching in prison, but to the imprisoned spirits — not when they were there. He is speaking about the people that heard Noah, and despised the word of the Lord then. It was not Noah’s own spirit that preached; it was the Spirit of Christ.

It may be well to point out that the Spirit is used particularly in connection with Noah, as we find in Genesis 6: “My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh.” There was a term of patience assigned: “Yet his days shall be a hundred and twenty years.” That is, the Spirit went on striving in testimony to men all that time. Then the flood came and took them all away; but their spirits are now kept in prison waiting

for that judgment which has no end. And why does Peter notice them particularly? For this reason, — that very few were saved then, whilst. a great many perished. On reflection it will be evident that there is no instance so suitable as this for the argument in hand — so few saved and so many perishing. The unbelieving might taunt the Christians with their scanty numbers, while the great mass still remained Jews, and with the absurdity of such a conclusion to the coming of Messiah. There is no force in that argument, the Christian can reply; for, when the flood came, only a few were saved after all, as is shown by the first book of Moses, their own indisputably inspired history. It is beyond cavil that the many perished then, and still fewer were saved than the Christian Jews at that time. Thus the passage is sufficiently plain. There is not the slightest excuse for misinterpreting the language, or for allowing anything unknown to the rest of scripture. It is a solemn warning to unbelief founded on plainly revealed facts before all eyes in this world, and not something to be understood as relating to another world.

“The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the request. of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” This, again, is somewhat peculiarly put in our version. It is not exactly “the answer of a good conscience.” The real meaning may make the difficulty appear to be greater for a moment (as, I suppose, the truth often, if not always, does); but when received and understood, what has such strength of appeal to the conscience? The word is a somewhat difficult one; but I believe the force is that it is what conscience wants and asks for from God. Now, when a

conscience is touched by the Holy Spirit, what is it that satisfies such a conscience? Clearly nothing less than acceptance in righteousness before God; and this is precisely the position that baptism does set forth. That is to say, it is not simply the blood of Christ, which indeed is never the meaning of baptism; still less is it the life of Christ: baptism means nothing of the sort. It really is founded on the death of Christ; and therein further our due place is shown us by His resurrection. Thus he says, “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us.” Never do we see salvation in its real force so affirmed apart from resurrection. You may find that which meets guilt in death, but never is salvation short of or separable from the power of resurrection. Hence, when he says it saves us, he necessarily brings in resurrection. “Baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh…”) He did not mean the mere outward act of baptism. This could save nobody; but what baptism represents does save. It declares that the Christian man has a new place and standing — not in the first Adam at all, but in the Second in the presence of God — man without sin, and accepted according to the acceptance of Christ before God. This it is that baptism sets forth; and what of course as a sign it brings one into. “Baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the request of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.”

“Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind.” In this chapter (1 Peter 4) we come to the divine

government in dealing with nature opposing itself to the will of God. “For he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin.” If you yield to nature, you gratify it; but if you suffer in refusing its wishes, then “he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin.” It is practical; and holiness costs suffering in this world. Suffering is the way in which power in practice is found against the flesh; so that “he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.” The time past might well suffice for the wretched gratification of self. Do men wonder at one’s abstaining? They are going to be judged. “For for this cause was the gospel preached to the dead also, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.” Thus he shows that even if you look at those that are dead, there was no difference. They too, those who had been before them, had been put to the proof in this way. He is keeping up the link with saints of old by a general principle. Whatever the form, God never gives up His righteous government, though there is His grace also. Hence, if any received the gospel, they were delivered from judgment, and lived according to God in the Spirit. If they despised it, they none the less suffered the consequences.

“But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.” After this episode which has to do with men here, not in the unseen world, he returns to the relative duties of Christians, and exhorts them to watchfulness with sobriety, to fervent love, and also to “use hospitality one to another without grudging.” And

then he takes up what is distinctly spiritual power, which should be used not in charity only but with conscience before God, and for His glory through our Lord Jesus. We saw in a similarly characteristic way in the epistle of James the connection of his moral aim with teaching. But they both suppose an open door for ministry among Christians in the Christian assembly. Why was there the mighty action of the Spirit of God producing such various gifts for profit if they did not create the responsibility to exercise them?

No Christian should think or talk about a right of ministry; for although liberty of ministry may be legitimate enough in itself, still I think it is a phrase apt to be misunderstood. It might easily be interpreted as if it meant a right for any one to speak. This I deny altogether. God has a right to use whom He pleases, according to His own sovereign will and wisdom; but the truth is, that if you have received a gift, you are not only at liberty but rather bound to use it in Christ's name. It is not a question of merely having license. Such a principle may be very well for man; but responsibility is the word for men of God, "as each man hath received the gift." It is not merely certain men, one or two, but "as each man," whatever the number, whether few or many.

"As each man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, [let him speak] as [the] oracles of God." According to this none ought ever to speak unless he has a thorough conviction that he is giving out God's mind and message, as suited for that time and those souls. Were this felt adequately, would it not hinder a great many from speaking? Nor is

there any reason to fear that silence in such a case would inflict a real loss on the church of God. It does not seem to be of such prime importance that much need be said. The great matter is, that what is spoken should be from God. Persons ought not to speak unless they have a certainty that what they wish to say is not only true (this is not what is said) but the actual will of God nor the occasion. The speaker should be God's mouthpiece for making His mind known there and then. This is to speak "as oracles of God." It is not merely speaking according to His oracles, which is the usual way in which men interpret the passage, and thence derive their license for speaking as they judge fitting without thinking of God's will. They think they have an understanding of scripture, and that they may therefore speak to profit; but it is a totally different thing if one desire only to speak as God's mouthpiece, though it is granted that one may here as elsewhere mistake and fail.

The principle, however, is sound; and may we heed it in conscience, looking to the Lord's grace in our weakness. "If any man speak, [let it be] as oracles of God; if any man minister, [let it be] as of the ability which God giveth." Let it be observed here that ministry is distinguished from speaking. What a vast change must have passed over Christendom, seeing that now a man is chiefly thought a minister because he speaks! whereas real service of the saints is as precious in its place as any speaking can be. "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth." Ministry, then, is clearly in itself a distinct thing from speaking; it is another kind of service to which he is called of God. It is granted that, even in connection with spiritual gift in the way of

speaking, there is such a thing as the natural ability of the person taken into account; but this is not the gift, though it be the suited vehicle for it. We must always distinguish the ability of the man from the spiritual gift which the Lord gives; and, besides both, there is also the right use of the gift. One must exercise and give oneself up to the cultivation of that gift which God has given. There is nothing contrary to sound truth or principle in that, but indeed a very great defect in those who do not believe it; in fact, it is flying in the face of scripture. And scripture is clear and peremptory as to all these things. “He,” it is said of Christ, “gave them gifts, to each man according to his several ability.” There we have the gift, and this given according to the man’s ability before he was converted. That is the outward framework of the gift, which latter is suited no doubt to that ability; but the gift itself is the power of the Spirit according to the grace of Christ. No ability constitutes a gift; but the spiritual gift does not supersede natural ability, which becomes the channel of the gift, as the gift is given and works in accordance with that ability. But there is need also of present strength from God to those who look to Him. Thus He is in all things glorified through Jesus Christ, “to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever.”

Next we have the trial that the saints were passing through alluded to, and the call to suffer not for righteousness merely but for Christ’s sake. Finally a warning is given as to the importance of suffering according to God’s will, committing meanwhile their souls in well-doing to Him as a faithful Creator. He is righteous; He is jealous of His house; but if this be serious for His own, where shall the sinner appear?

Again we have an exhortation to the elders (1 Peter 5). Here it is a pain to be obliged once more to make a depreciatory remark on our common English version. It is indeed a forcible and, in general, a faithful version, but it not seldom fails in accuracy. The elders are told to feed or shepherd the flock of God which was among them, exercising the oversight, not by necessity, but willingly; not for base gain, but readily, etc. They have to bear in mind first that the flock is God's. If a man does not carry the sense in his soul that it is God's flock, I do not think he is fit to be an elder or in any other office of spiritual trust: he is far from the right ground for being a blessing to what, after all, is God's flock. In short, we find here too a guard which shows the meaning more clearly. "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage." It will be observed that "God's" is inserted in italics. Now there need be no hesitation in declaring that the phrase does not mean God's heritage at all, but another idea wholly different. The true drift is this — "Nor as lording it over your possessions." The elders are not to treat the flock as if it belonged to them. This is exactly what modern presbyters think they may and ought to do every day of their lives. It is into this very snare that unbelief has brought men in Christendom. It is the constant and notorious source of the difficulties that one has continually to contend with, because feelings are roused by this — all sorts of jealousies and wounded feelings are created by a position so false. In short, one may find here and there a truly excellent man, and, we will suppose, a number of godly people. But then they are "his congregation;" they think so, and the godly man

really believes it. He thinks they are his congregation, and they think so too. The consequence is that when minds get disturbed, it may be, about their position, then all sorts of difficulties come in. He feels exceedingly wounded because, as he will tell you very often, “Why, it is one of the best of my people. I have lost the cream of my congregation.” Accordingly he is exceedingly annoyed because one of the most spiritual of his congregation goes away, though it may be to follow God’s word more faithfully; and no doubt there is a great deal of pain and feeling on the part of the member of the congregation who is leaving his minister.

Now all this is here judged and set aside as quite wrong The elders are exhorted and warned. There are those who guide, and it is a most proper thing. At the time of this epistle, it was in due order. Now, I need not tell you, things are in a certain measure of confusion. You may have the real substance of the truth, but you cannot have it in all official propriety at the present time. However, apart from that, on which I do not mean to enter more tonight, one thing is remarkable, that even when all was in apostolic, order, and where pastors and teachers and prophets and so on were, and besides, where the elders had been fitly appointed by the apostles themselves or by apostolic men, even there and at that very time they were exhorted against the notion of considering, “This is my congregation, and that is your leader.” Nothing of the sort is ever said in God’s word but what excludes it.

What they were here directed to was to “feed the flock of God.” I repeat, it is God’s flock, not yours; and you are not to lord over it as if it were your own belongings. If it were your heritage, you would have certain rights; but

the truth is that he who stands in the position of an elder has no small responsibility. Assuredly he is to shepherd the flock, and this as God's flock, not his own. Where this is duly weighed, it is wonderful what a change is produced in the mind, tone, and temper — a change both in those who tend the flock, and in those who are cared for; because then God is looked to, and there is no petty feeling of infringing the rights of man in one form or another. It is not then a question of wounding; for why should it hurt you, if I see a particular truth and must act according to it? Why should this be a cause for vexation? The truth is that the assumption of "my flock," or "yours", is the root of endless mischief. It is God's flock; and if a person is charged of the Lord to shepherd His flock, how blessed the trust!

The rest of the chapter consists of exhortations to the younger ones, and finally to all, with a prayer that "the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, when ye have suffered a while, himself shall make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be the glory and the might for the ages of the ages. Amen. By Silvanus, the faithful brother, as I suppose, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand. She that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and Marcus my son. Greet ye one another with a kiss of love. Peace be with you all in Christ Jesus."

2 Peter

In the second Epistle of Peter (and here I must be brief, because of the hour; and I may be brief because Jude will afford us a further consideration of it) we have the same substantial truth of God's righteous government

maintained. But the apostle here supplements his first letter by bringing in its effect on the world in that coming day, and especially in its judgment of Christendom or corrupted Christianity. Written of course for the guidance of the saints, it may well serve as a warning to sinners, whether in the profane world or as to those that abuse righteousness and truth.

There is an expression in 2 Peter 1:3 to which I particularly call your attention. “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us by glory and by virtue.” It is really not to glory and virtue, but by His own glory and by virtue. This seems to me an important statement of the Holy Ghost’s to understand. What serves to make it plain is this: — Adam was not “called” when in Paradise. When innocent, he was not called by God’s own glory and by virtue. What Adam was bound to do was just to stay where he was. That is, he was responsible to do the will of God, or, rather, not to do what God prohibited in his case. There was a simple test of obedience. It was not a thing that Adam really needed in the smallest degree. He had everything that he wanted and much more, for God showed Himself to be one that delights in abundantly blessing when He put man in Paradise. The business of man, then, was to keep his first estate; he should have simply abode in his position. When he listened to the devil, this was a call not by God’s own glory and virtue, but to do the devil’s will. It was a seeking of his own independence by disobeying God’s express word. Our calling is by God’s own glory.

The whole principle of Christianity is just this. It takes the believer out of the place in which he naturally is, and

alas! now in sin; and therefore it is spoken of as a calling. The Christian "calling" supposes that the gospel, where received, deals with the soul by the power of the Spirit of God; and that he who receives it is called out of the condition in which man is now plunged by sin, not put back again into the position of Adam, but taken into another position altogether. It is no longer a question of man on earth; he is called by God's own glory and by virtue. It is by God's own glory, because if God saves, He calls to stand in nothing less than that glory. The declared effect of sin is, as it is said in Romans 3, that all "come short of the glory of God." By this they are now measured. Are they fit to stand in presence of the glory of God? The glory of God is the standard of judgment now for a sinner; it is no question of regaining the lost paradise or of keeping the law, even if it were possible. The blessedness of the gospel is that it calls a man not to put him in the place of the unfallen man or of a Jew on the earth, but by God's own glory; and along with this "by virtue." There is a holy restraint put on the allowance of the flesh in any respect whatever. It brings in not "virtue" as the first great point, but God's own glory, and then virtue along with this (that is, the moral courage which refuses the gratification of the old nature).

"Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature." Such is the efficacy of the call of grace. A new nature is communicated which loves the will of God, and abhors the evil whereby Satan has inundated the world. "Having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." Then he shows there is no time for waiting or ease. "And beside this, giving all

diligence, add to your faith virtue" (or the moral courage I have already described); and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness love." These last two qualities are not the same. "Love" is a great deal more and deeper than "brotherly kindness." The latter makes one's brother the prominent object; the former tests everything by God and His will and glory. Therefore you may find a Christian very full of brotherly love, but sadly at fault when the test of love comes, which feels and insists that the first of all duties is that God should have His way. "By this we know," as John said, (and who knew love better?) "that we love the children of God, if we love God, and keep His commandments."

In the next part of the chapter (2 Peter 2) we have the kingdom introduced, which is really the main object of Peter's testimony in the first epistle as well as in the second. Being about to depart himself, he as it were throws open the blessed prospect of the Lord's interference to put aside evil in the world, and display His own power and goodness here below. Such is the kingdom that will be brought in at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. His coming, or presence, embraces the kingdom within its wide circumference.

But then in stating this, the utmost pains are taken to show that there is something better than the prospect of the kingdom, glorious as it is; and this is of capital importance to see clearly. Thus verse 19 opens the matter, which I must give you rather more exactly than as it stands in our version: "We have also the word of prophecy more confirmed, whereunto ye do well that ye

take heed." They were quite right in holding fast the old prophetic scriptures. Even as Jews they had known those portions of the word of God, and the apostle in no way blames them for adhering to them tenaciously. So far, it was quite right. "Ye do well that ye take heed" to them. It was needless to press attention with greater warmth; but still he commends the heed they paid to the prophetic word of the Old Testament. Yet study it either in the New Testament or in the Old Testament, one cannot but dread when prophecy becomes the all-absorbing object. It is not meant deeply to engage the affections. It may occupy the mind to the exclusion of what is better still. Its nature forbids it from adequately filling the heart that is purified by faith; nor does the apostle mean that it should ever have such a place. When he says, "Ye do well that ye take heed to it," he adds the instructive comparison, "as unto a lamp that shineth in a dark place." This is what prophecy resembles. He does not then stop, but points us to another and brighter light — "until the day dawn, and the morning-star arise in your hearts." He means that prophecy is a divinely given lamp for this dark scene. None can despise without loss the light it casts on this obscure place, the world which is going to be judged. It shows us the awful end and thereby guards us all the way through.

As a lamp for the dark, prophecy is therefore excellent; it is given of God for this purpose; and no Christian can afford to slight or overlook it as an unprofitable study, which does not claim and cannot reward his heed. They were quite right, then; but let them see to it that the heart possess a far better treasure. And what can this be? Not Christianity indeed as a whole, but the Christian

hope. The Lord's coming, and all that is bound up with Him on high as the hope of the Christian and of the church, must not be lowered to a mere prophetic event. Prophecy deals with the earth, with the Jew, with the nations, with evil here below; prophecy declares men to be so bad that the Lord must come and judge them, and then introduce His own kingdom, no longer morally and in testimony, but in power and glory. But is this all that Christ is for us? Do you confound the Christian hope with the judgment of Babylon, the overthrow of the Gentiles, the restoration of Israel? A Christian has the faith that in principle all evil has been judged long ago in the cross; that it has been absolutely and perfectly condemned, beyond whatever can be in the creature here below. His hope, therefore, rises far above the revelation of that display of power in righteousness as well as mercy which is to put aside evil, and then bless a long guilty and miserable world with peace and joy and every form of creature goodness. The Christian hope is the taking the Christian out of the world altogether to be in glory with Christ, the object of his heart. Therefore Peter says, "Until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts." When does he mean by this expression? When the Christian lays hold of this hope; when he is not merely warned by prophecy, but has his heart reached and filled with the heavenly hope, the light of a better day, yea, Christ Himself the source and centre of it all.

Accordingly, "till the day dawn" does not mean till the day come — till the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings, and the wicked are trodden down like ashes under the feet. This is not at all the meaning of the phrase. It is the dawn of day in the heart; it is a

hope that should be realized now because we are children of the day. Consequently we ought to have, as a present thing, that daylight dawning, and the morning star arising in our hearts. A soul born of God might believe all that is in the prophecies — and it is well to heed it all — but this is not enough. Not the downfall of Nineveh, nor the judgment of the great whore, nor the destruction of the beast, is the Christian hope. Our hope is that we and all Christians are to be taken out of the world, and translated into heavenly glory. Consequently the light of the lamp does not suffice; we need also daylight. Good as the lamp is, its main value in an obscure place is “till daylight dawn” — not till we acquire more of its own light, but till a brighter character of light, daylight, dawn. It is not the actual arrival of the day that he means, but the light of day before itself comes: “Till daylight dawn, and the morning-star arise in your hearts.” Christ is made known in this heavenly light for the Christian. It is not Christ dealing with the world and judging the nations. This is the way in which Christ is described in prophecy. But not thus is Christ set before the Christian.

In short, the apostle means that it is well to hold fast the prophetic lamp, which he did not want to disparage in any way, provided it were kept in its proper place. It foreshows the judgment of the world, and it separates the believer, if he believes it, from the world. But this is negative. Do we not ourselves belong to another scene? It is all well then to turn our back on the world, which the prophetic lamp judged; but are we also turning our faces to the light that dawns from above? There are many Christians now that seem to be all occupied with the vast changes either in progress or in anticipation for

the earth. About them they fritter away thought and time with no worthy, positive, sanctifying object for their affections. How can one have affection for the judgment of Babylon and the beast? I am not called to anything of the sort. The lamp shows it me, and I am glad to be warned and responsible to warn others. But am I not called to have the only worthy object filling my heart? It is Christ Himself; and this not in the execution of judgment, but in the fulness of grace about to take us out of the world to heaven, and not merely to be assessors with Himself in judging the world when He appears in glory.

Therefore I do most strenuously oppose the petty efforts that have been made to sever the expression “in our hearts” from this verse. It is a sorrow to see them, and to know that any Christians could be influenced by them. Only this morning I was looking at a book in which there was a most misleading parenthesis introduced, as if the meaning were, “Ye do well to take heed in your hearts;” thus severing the connection of “in your hearts” from “the day dawn and the day-star arise.” What can one call this but abominable?

There is another way also in which I have seen the truth sought to be destroyed, by connecting “in your hearts” with “knowing this first,” contrary to all analogy of Peter or any one else, and in fact without the smallest reason, but with the evident object of obliterating for the heart the value of the heavenly hope. Such dealings with the text I cannot characterise as mistakes only, but as unwarrantable meddling with the word of God. There is not the slightest foundation for either the one punctuation or the other. The English version is perfectly, correct in this at least.

And it may help some enquirers perhaps if I show them that Peter elsewhere thoroughly confirms this to a plain English reader. In the first epistle it is written, “Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.” It is clear that the expression “in your hearts” is no unimportant phrase in Peter’s epistles. If we do not “sanctify the Lord God in our hearts,” we shall not gather much good either from prophecy or from the heavenly hope; but if we do, it is of. the highest moment for us to have Christ as the morning-star arising in our hearts, and not such a knowledge of prophecy satisfying us as a godly Jew might once have possessed. Compare also “knowing this first” in 2 Peter 3:3. There is no connection with “in your hearts” there any more than here.

It is difficult to speak with patience of these rash ways with the word of God. I hold it to be a grievous sin indeed to warp scripture from the purpose for which God has written it. If it be said that these innovations meant only what is good, the question is whether any are at liberty without the best reasons to change the form of the text, and particularly to do so without telling you. In this very place for instance, in a book which professes to be the authorised version of the bible, you unsuspectingly take up the book without knowing. any chance has been made in the punctuation, and your hope is destroyed before you know why, — that is, if you trust their form of the book, which the compilers meant you should.

There is another phrase that follows, on which it may be well to say a word: “No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.” Many a soul asks, What is meant by this? Of course, the error of Catholicism is not to be thought of: the remedy against making prophecy of

private interpretation is in no way ecclesiastical tradition. I am speaking now to persons uninfluenced by such thoughts, and need not expose its irrelevant absurdity. But, again, there are many Protestants like Bishop Horsley who think it means that the way to hinder prophecy from being of private interpretation is to take history to interpret prophecy. In this I do confess I see little change for the better. Whether you take the church to interpret prophecy, or look into the world to read its interpretation, it is but a sorry choice, and as far as possible either way from the sense. The meaning is, that no prophecy of scripture is of its own insulated interpretation. Limit a prophecy to the particular event that is supposed to be intended by that scripture, and you make it of private interpretation. For instance, if you so regard the prophecy of Babylon's fall in Isaiah 13, 14, you make this prophecy of private interpretation. How? Because you make the event to cover the prophecy, you interpret the prophecy by the event. But this is precisely what scripture prophecy is made not to be; and it is to hinder the reader from this error that the apostle writes as he does here. The truth, on the contrary, is that all prophecy has for its object the establishment of the kingdom of Christ; and if you sever the lines of prophecy from this great central point on which they all converge, you destroy the intimate connection of these prophetic lines with the centre. It is like lopping off the branches from the tree to which they belong, or limbs from the body of which they are integral parts.

So it is with prophecy. All prophecy runs on to the kingdom of Christ, because it comes from the Holy Ghost. If it were the forecasting of men, a man might apply it to a particular event; and there it would end. It

might be a sagacious conjecture or not. But supposing it to be ever so correct, after all it is only within the limits of a man's mind. But not so with prophecy of scripture. The Spirit of God is satisfied with no aims short of the kingdom of Christ, and hence therefore prophecy as a whole looks onward to that bright end. It may have had a partial accomplishment, a just application by the way, but it never stops short of His coming and "that day." For the very same reason, when Moses and Elias were put by Peter on the smallest approach to equality with the Lord Jesus on the mount, the Father set aside Moses and Elias with the words, "This is my beloved Son: hear ye him." His object is not Moses, or Elias either: it is Christ, the beloved Son of God. So the Holy Ghost in prophecy does the self-same thing. He had the same object as the Father — the glory of the Lord Jesus. Only as the Father held to the glory of His Son as such, the Holy Ghost in prophecy looks to the kingdom to be put under the Lord Jesus: and so "the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." They could not therefore have any object other than that of the Holy Ghost who inspired them; and so prophecy must be interpreted, not isolatedly, but as forming part of the Spirit's testimony to the purpose of God in glorifying Christ.

The second chapter shows us the opposite side — Satan's instruments in defaming Christ and injuring souls — the false teachers in Christendom, just as there had been false prophets among the people of old. What an awful character is given to them, justifying the judgment that is coming upon them!

In the last chapter (2 Peter 3) we have not merely false teachers, corrupt in their ways as in their doctrines, but scoffers ridiculing the coming of the Lord Jesus. What is the answer of the Holy Ghost to this? Their ground was the assumed unchangeableness of the world. Oh the folly of man when he opposes God! What a confirmation it is that at this present time philosophy is precisely coming to this! Christendom is going back to heathen conclusions as fast as possible. It does not matter whether we look at the popular physiologists, geologists, naturalists, astronomers, economists, metaphysicians, historians, or any others you like, they are in general hastening to this humiliating end; that is to say, a denial of the distinct statements of scripture and an exclusion of God from His own world. Their idea is, that a sort of cycle governs nature, ever repeating itself through the same round. It is the same at bottom as Peter denounces here — the notion that there is a perpetuity in the state of things around us.

Consequently such as believe in nature must scoff at the assertion of the Lord coming to change the face of all things. The apostle warns them to abandon that delusion, for after all God has intervened already. The God that caused the flood, and destroyed the world that once was, can destroy the world again. And this is precisely what the Lord is going to do. Therefore, if you tauntingly say," Where is the promise of his coming?" I answer you, not that He is coming for you, but that the day of the Lord is coming on the world. What can scoffers have to do with the coming of the Lord for His own people? You may ask with a scoff, "Where is the promise of his coming?" But we can answer with assurance that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in

the night — as sudden, unexpected, and unwelcome, for the judgment and destruction of the creation which is your rest and ruin. When everything has disappeared that can, and all that is to be shaken shall have been dissolved, the result will be the new heavens and new earth, “wherein dwelleth righteousness,” without one scoffer more.

The believer then in the face of this is exhorted to holy conversation and godliness. “Ye therefore, beloved, seeing that ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away by the error of the wicked, should fall from your own stedfastness;” for there is danger of the Christian’s contamination by the spirit of the world. What then is the preservative? “Grow in grace, and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.”

The Epistles of John

The Epistles of John have evidently a character altogether peculiar to themselves. Christ Himself personally is more before us than in any other of the inspired epistles. Nevertheless there is this difference between the Gospel and the Epistles of John: that his gospel necessarily treats of Christ in a direct and immediate way, and then the provision that He made, when He was about to leave the world and His disciples in it, by the Holy Ghost taking His place down here (these being the two chief subjects of the Gospel of John); in the Epistles, on the other hand, while Christ is still prominent, the main characteristic is to show Christ is in us, as well (so to speak) as Christ in Himself — that it is the self-same life, Christ personally being its full perfect expression. In order to set out this astonishing truth with all clearness, the Epistle opens directly with the Lord, and this as He was manifested in this world. The Gospel begins with Christ before all worlds. Such is not the manner in which the Holy Ghost begins here.

I am aware that some have been disposed to take “That which was from the beginning,” (1 John 1:1) as if it taught the same truth as “In the beginning was the Word.” No doubt there is an allusion, but there is also a marked difference. We gain nothing by forcing scripture: we always lose somewhat. In the Gospel, where Christ Himself directly and immediately is the object, the Holy Ghost starts with revealing His divine subsistence when there was none but God: “The Word was with God,” and lest there should be any question of His glory, “the Word was God” — not the creature. “The same was in the

beginning with God." Thus He had a distinct personal existence, which had been from everlasting. No matter how far one goes back, we may still find the Word, and the Word with God: it is not said exactly with the Father, but with God. We never in scripture find the "Word" coupled with the "Father." We do find it in what is not scripture, as I shall show before we have done with considering this Epistle. In unquestionable scripture, "the Word" and "God" are correlative, — the "Son" and the "Father." Man cannot even imitate the word of God without exposing his own weakness.

The Gospel therefore, in order to assert His glory, goes back before all time. And "in the beginning" — no matter where you may ask to place the point within eternity — the Word was there. But this is not at all the object of the Epistle. It is assumed no doubt, but It is to show how truly the life is the very same. It is not union. Life is never confounded with union, though in the Christian closely connected. Union is by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, but life was before this, whether in Christ personally, or even in us. Christ Himself is our life.

Hence, when flesh had hindered and overlaid the power of the Spirit; when the world was gaining vast influence; when Satan was working with all subtlety to undermine the foundations, the Holy Ghost directs attention to Christ, in whom the life was manifested. In what the Son of God was before entering the world, there could be no instruction for us how the life is to be now displayed in us; and what God looks for, — how by the Holy Ghost He nourishes and exercises us. The weightiest instruction turns on what Christ was here, having to do with man — with Satan — above all, with His God and Father. So

have we. Hence, therefore, it is not here, “He was in the beginning with God,” but “That which was from the beginning.”

This is a phrase (

ἀπ᾽ ἀρχῆς) constantly used as to the manifestation of the one or thing spoken of: it matters not whether it be good or evil. We find the formula used, for instance, of Satan. There is no reference to what he was before he became the devil; there is silence as to his subsistence as an unfallen angel, but when he departed from God, he sins from the beginning. Such is his character as devil: he sinned. As for our Lord Jesus, He was manifested as man here below; but before we hear of what was manifested, John says, “That which was from the beginning.” He had a personal being as man here below — a divine person no doubt, but He took a real place in this world. This seems to be referred to in the expression “which was from the beginning.” Next we have the fact that others are directed towards Him — what we have “heard” about Him — what we have “seen with our eyes.” It was not a mere phantom, but a real person in this world — hence “that which we have looked upon,” or contemplated. Even though from above, He was really an object seen; He was not a passing shadow, but a person, “which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled” (coming down as it were into the closest familiarity) “concerning the word of life.” It will be understood that all these different clauses refer to the Word of life — what was from the beginning about the Word of life: what we have heard about the Word of life: what we have seen, and so on.

“And the life was manifested.” The second verse yet makes the first plainer; for there we find His pre-existence with the Father, when the apostle has stated His manifestation (for that expression “the life was manifested” is a kind of summary of what had been laid down in the preceding verse): “The life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and announce to you that eternal life, which was with the Father.” Now here we have the Son’s eternal being, so that there is no holding it back in this verse. It is supposed and treated of as a known truth; but the present object is to put forward the Lord Jesus as He was displayed in this world; for “it was manifested to us: that which we have seen and heard” (taking up the two verses) “announce we to you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” Thus the evident aim here is to show that there has been a manifestation — an adequate personal revelation of God the Father. The only such adequate manifestation was Christ Himself. But it was Christ Himself in this world, a man as truly as any other, though infinitely above man, but a man who displayed what divine life is in all imaginable circumstances. He became a babe, a child, a full-grown man. He grew up subject to His parents; He entered on public life, as before He was traced in the, unobtrusive privacy of His home after the flesh. He is then found confronted with the enemy, going forth in the power of the Spirit, dealing with every kind of pain and sorrow that pressed down humanity, in everything showing out what God is, but in everything also displaying what man ought to have been, and was not — Himself always absolute perfection, but perfection as man in dependence on God.

What, it may be asked, has this to do with us? Everything. It is not true that we only want propitiation, or as guilty sinners to be justified. We want life — eternal life. But have not the children of God eternal life? Certainly, but where shall I look at it? I see a beautiful trait of the divine life in this saint; I see something else sweet, and at the same time humbling to my soul, in another — perhaps where least expected. But in all there is weakness and even positive failure. Who would not confess it? who does not feel it? This, then, after all, is but an unworthy expression of what divine life is, because it is shaded too often and modified by the effect of the world, by the allowance of nature, by a thousand thoughts, feelings, ways, habits which do not savour of Christ. All these things break in upon and mar the perfect outshining of that new life that is communicated to all the children of God. And here is the blessedness of what the Holy Ghost at once ushers in without a single note of preface, — without the smallest allusion to any other person or topic. With Christ before Him, could it be otherwise? There was but one adequate and worthy object of the Holy Ghost, and it was Christ. Neither was it at all requisite to say for whom John was inspired to write thus. Of necessity, Christ was for His own. For whom could Christ be portrayed,. if not for the Christian? But then the suitable homage to Christ was to bring into prominence none but Christ Himself; and so we find the epistle of John opening in a way unlike any other. There may be some approach to analogy in the remarkable manner the apostle Paul writes to the Hebrews. He who writes and those who are written to are in the back ground, that God may unfold His ancient oracles about the Messiah His Son. But in Hebrews, the reason is rather the grace that condescended to Jewish

weakness. In John, the reason is the all-eclipsing glory of Him, the Eternal Life, who deigns in grace and by redemption to be our life. It was John's allotted province thus to bring Christ before those that are His; and he has done so in the power of the Holy Ghost, and with a wisdom that proves itself altogether divine to him who has ears to hear.

Through such a revelation as this the great comfort is that God is showing His children, conscious of their own weakness, what in this respect grace has given them in Christ — what the very life is that they have received. Often cast down and groaning in the feeling of how little they manifest the life of Christ, and needing to know what His life — their life — Christ — is in its own excellency, they are directed to Himself. In its perfection it is seen in Christ alone.

This it is therefore that opens our epistle; and what is the effect? "These things which we have seen and heard we announce to you, that ye also may have fellowship with us." The apostles had fellowship with the Son of God, and they were particularly chosen out, as we find in the Lord's prayer (the proper prayer of the Lord, not that which is commonly so called in Matt. 6, Luke 11, blessed as it is, but in John 17) For it is evident that the apostles have a singularly distinguished place assigned them. But Christians also are immediately concerned; for there is no doubt that others were to be brought in and to believe through their word. And thus they are expressly the objects of their Lord's communications to the Father.

Here, too, the design was that others should have fellowship with the Son of God: the first favoured ones

were not to keep it to themselves, but to spread abroad the riches of His grace. As we see in John 17 that others were to believe through the apostles' word, so here John acts on the intimation himself The object is, "that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." It is with "the Father," because he communicates what He loves best. Never was anything, or one in His sight, so precious as the manifestation of His own Son in manhood here below. It was what opened the heavens, so to speak; it was what caused the Father's voice to be heard; and this in various critical circumstances, where it might have seemed that a dishonouring shade hung over the Anointed of God. But not so; it was but an appearance in the eyes of dimly seeing man — Christ was perfection always. Take, for instance, the scene of His baptism; or, again, the mount of transfiguration. Our fellowship then is with the Father. He shares with us the object of His own delight.

But our fellowship is no less with His Son Jesus Christ, who lets us into the secret of the Father's love, and gives a place with Himself to His own, as far as it could be communicated to the creature. "Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

And what is the designed effect? Fulness of joy. "These things write we unto you that your joy may be full." If any believer, then, looks at Jesus as He was here below, and if the effect on his heart is to take away from the spring of joy in his soul, or to fail in ministering divine joy, it is clear that he has misapprehended God's own object and love. He has not interpreted aright the revelation of the Son of God. Now there are many that do so read the gospels. They derive far more joy from

that which Paul brings before them in Romans 5 or 8. One can understand this at first. Ought it to be so always? There are states no doubt where the clearing and consolidating chapters in the epistle to the Romans supply the requisite food of the soul. Nor could one in the least desire to weaken this, still less to set one part of scripture against or above another. But while assuredly in the first learning of salvation it is of consequence that we should be built up in the good news of grace that God sends us through the work of the Lord Jesus, the object of God in settling us on redemption is to make us free to enjoy the Son and the Father. We are not to be arrested along the way however precious, but to enjoy Himself who has reconciled us by Jesus Christ, — to appreciate and adore our God and Father who has manifested His glory in Christ His Son. Short of this we cannot rightly stop. We may pause midway, but we ought to be going on until we can rest perfectly in this blessed communion of love — fellowship "with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

The effect then, I repeat, is fulness of joy. And mark, all this is simply from the manifestation of grace in Jesus Christ the Lord. There is not one question of ourselves, but the simplest receiving what God has brought and given us in His own Son; the intended issue is the overflowing of joy in the Holy Ghost.

But if we had a manifestation, there is also a message. The manifestation, with its connections and result, was given us in the first four verses. The message begins from the fifth verse. If you have this life of Christ, if I too have it, if we who believe are brought thus into fellowship with the Father and with the Son Jesus Christ, — if we possess the wondrous place of being (so to

speak) in the family circle, and the most intimate affections of our God and Father through the Son of His love, I cannot be there, nor you, without the creating of a certain demand on our souls by virtue of the divine nature of which grace has made us alike partakers. No doubt love is the spring, but it is in truth; and the God who thus brings us by His own Son into the present enjoyment of life everlasting makes the soul sensible of the antagonism between the state of nature and of all around us with God Himself. But mark the grace of God. not a word of that whatever until fulness of joy is established, and this solely by the gift of Jesus the Son of God to us, and eternal life in Him. But having given us the joy, now He turns us back, as it were, and gives the eye inwardly to discern as those enabled to see according to God, — to judge all that is of self, and consequently all false pretensions wherever they may be. It could not, ought not to be otherwise. We can afford to judge ourselves now that we have the fulness of the blessing, which is eternal life. Remember it, and Him in whom it is, and by whom only we could have it. God the Father has given in Christ that sure blessing, and assured it for ever, in order that the soul may be free to look at anything, and to take up everything in the interests of His own holiness and glory, as having fellowship with the Father and the Son.

“This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light.” It is not the Father now. In the early verses it was expressly and only as the Father, because there it was the outflow of grace through the Son. But now, this nature being communicated, we cannot if we would avoid having to do with God; and we feel for His will, holiness, and glory,

just because we are so blest by His grace. “This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you.” It is not the law but a message. Grace does not put under law, but it does communicate the judgment of God Himself on all that is contrary to His nature.

The message is that God is light. Heathenism was founded on a quite contrary assumption. They supposed darkness to be the source of everything; but not such is God to the Christian. “God is light.” Consequently all is detected and judged. “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” Even Moses, in view of the hardness of men’s hearts, allowed a little darkness; for the law made nothing perfect; it was not the perfect expression of God: Christ only is this. It is only divines, or those misled by their errors, who give His glory to the law as the image of God. But according to scripture (and it “cannot be broken”) Christ is the image of God: never is the law so styled. The law had not to reveal God but to deal with man, — it condemned the first Adam. God under law had fallen sinful presumptuous man before Him. Law was really the expression of the lowest claim that God could assert over the first man had he been able to meet it. He could not abate those terms. It was the very least measure — the ten words — that God could accept even from a sinful man.

But it was altogether different when the Son of God came. Undoubtedly He vindicated the law, which fell through all other hands. Perfectly and in all things He retrieved the honour of God, which might else have seemed only committed to man to be sullied. Alas! the first man had done nothing but sin or break the law of God. The last Adam not only rescued the jewel from the

filth of the men who had brought it into obloquy and turned it if not to corruption to their own ruin, but set it off so as to shed its own lustre and glorify the God who gave it. The mischief lay in sin, never in the smallest degree in the law. There was everything wrong in the first man; and this was the true secret. But to lower the Son of God to a mere doer of the law is unconsciously to deny His divine glory; nay, it is unwittingly to deny even His human perfection. No doubt the Lord never failed to magnify the divine law; but I venture to say He never did one thing in which He did not go beyond the law. It must be maintained further that not to speak of Christ, the Christian, who does not go beyond the law does not understand, enjoy, or adorn Christianity. And so far is this rising above the character of law in our walk from being an extraordinary effort, it is what the Christian man is called to do every day in his life. I admit this, that you cannot even contemplate such a thing until you know your place in Christ, and that Christ risen is your life; but when this is a settled truth for your soul, you will soon understand its certainty and preciousness, as well as your own new responsibility, as living in the Spirit, to walk also by the Spirit.

Let me repeat once more the message — “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” Nothing is now allowed in view of the hardness of their hearts. This was the license under law, as our Lord Jesus Himself tells us, but it will not stand the revealed light of the gospel. There is nothing tolerated except what suits the nature of God Himself. Christ, the reality of it in His own person and ways on earth, alone has brought us the revelation of this truth. Where was it ever seen or heard of before? It was seen and heard in every way, in every word, of

Jesus. It was so because He was God, but it was never so till He became man. It is there we see adoringly the wondrous truth of the person of the Lord Jesus. As long as He remained simply God, no such manifestation was or could be. Had He been merely man, it would have been simply impossible; but being not only what He was, but who He is, in Him here below we have God as well as man perfectly displayed. This it is that judges — judges everything in us.

Accordingly there follows the various testings of this divine nature in the believer. “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.” It is no longer a question merely of an open falsehood. Of course this cannot but remain always immoral and inexcusable; and its true gravity is brought out incomparably more under the gospel than ever it was under the law. But then what is spoken of here goes far deeper than a pronounced lie; it might be only such virtually and practically — a lie that we live and do where we may not speak one. “If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.” The Christian walks in the light; and the reason why he walks there is this, because he sees Christ, who alone is the light of life. And if he sees and follows Christ, which all His sheep do, he cannot but walk in the light, because following Jesus, who is the light, he necessarily walks in the light I do not say that he necessarily walks according to the light. This is a very different matter, often confounded with it, but in fact wholly distinct, though it too ought to be. But every Christian walks in the light, if he is walking according to it, then glory is brought to the Lord; if, as is too often the case, he fails to walk according to the light, he

dishonours the Lord so much the more because he does walk in the light.

A Jew as such did not walk in the light. When God had His dealings with Israel, there was nothing of the kind. He, though always light Himself, dwelt in the thick darkness. Not that He was darkness: this never was nor could be; but He dwelt in the dark, veiled and shut up by curtains and clouds of incense, sacrifices and priests. Thus He dwelt because man was in the dark; and God, by the very fact that He dwelt surrounded by His people Israel, dwelt in dark seclusion in view of the condition of Israel — the first man — in whose midst He deigned to dwell.

But now that Christ the Son is come, the full unclouded light of God shines out in love. Accordingly, as we have seen, He reveals Himself as light, with whom is no darkness at all. More than this, “if we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.” Further, “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” This total and evident contrast is what every Christian by his Christian profession assumes. If you are a Christian at all, you walk in the light; it is where you walk, and not here a question of how. The apostle John is not here at all discussing how far it may be made good, or how far you have realised it — albeit an important question for conscience. Here he is showing what is true and real, and so absolutely necessary that it is involved in the very being of a Christian man.

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light (for Christ can be no less a standard than this) “we have

fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." Manifestly he is describing, not some special class among the faithful, but all genuine Christians, whoever they may be. As having seen and followed the Lord Jesus, they walk in the light, and being in that light, where all sin is judged, there is fellowship mutually. For the fellowship here is not with the Father and the Son: this had been already settled in the early verses. But here John is speaking of the communion of Christians one with another; and he says that being in the light of God (because the light is no less than Christ), the hindrances to fellowship are judged: — "We have fellowship one with another." You see it every day, and wherever you may be. If you pass through any circumstances where you look to find no Christian, a little word is dropped, — Christ's own name, or that which betrays to your heart the sense of His grace, and at once you are knit to the man, no matter who, indeed, the more, so to speak, because of the sound falling on your heart in such unexpected circumstances: — "We have fellowship one with another." Then there is another comfort not less needed — "that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." Such is the precious place grace has given us, the ever abiding power of the blood of Jesus Christ cleansing us from every sin.

This is not put here as a provision against our failure and for our restoration. The apostle treats of the place in which we are set by the grace of God from the beginning of our Christian career, and which remains unchanged right through. No doubt the apostle does not contemplate such a thing here as the departure of a real Christian from Christ. Still less, if possible, does he

contemplate a Christian's trifling with sin: this could not be, for the Spirit of God never does. We shall find, however, in its own just place, that if he slip into evil of a practical kind, or sin, God does not leave him without a resource. The grace that never fails appears for the child, if he have been drawn aside. But this is not at all the object in the verse before us, which is simply the assertion of the Christian's place; and this, too, when it is a question of God's own nature, which might produce (not searching only, but.) trial and anxiety in the spirit. But if there is, the very place where the power of the blood of Jesus Christ cannot fail to cleanse you from all sin is asserted.

But there might be another form of pretension. Instead of setting up to fellowship with God, while indifferent to His will, without sense of or care for standing in the light of God, the flesh might assume another character of delusion — the denial of sin. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." By a Christian is not meant one insensible to his own sinfulness. The truth is in him; and he confesses instead of hiding or ignoring his sins. He has fellowship with God; but, far from saying along with this "I have no sin," he is the very man that hates and spreads out his sins before God. Accordingly verse 9 tells the tale of that which grace and truth effect in the Christian: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." So the Christian does from the very starting-point of his career.

Still less does the Christian refuse to own that he has sinned. This is a yet grosser form of contrariety to the truth of God. Therefore the condemnation is still more stern: "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him

a liar, and his word is not in us." The word of God, not to speak of conscience, declares so plainly that all have sinned, that it proves the audacity of unbelief and rebelliousness in those that deny, and this denial is incomparably more guilty since Christ came, to whose name these deniers laid claim.

This then closes the second part of the chapter. The first was the manifestation of the fulness of grace in Christ; the next, the detection of what is contrary to God in us. Hence we are now judged before God in His light. Having a nature which feels according to God, we at once discover what is inconsistent with Himself. For this very reason the Christian would be extremely cast down if, when drawn aside through the power of the enemy, there were not the provision of grace to meet and restore his soul. Hence two verses follow in the beginning of 1 John 2 as a sort of appendix to the doctrine and application of the first chapter: "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for... the whole world." I leave out "the sins of." It is clear enough that they ought never to have been inserted in the common English Bible. Not only are they not required for the sense, as words generally are, but they injure the sense, and really insinuate erroneous doctrine. If the sins of the whole world were met by the propitiation of Christ, the whole world would be saved. No such statement occurs anywhere in the word of God. There is a righteous ground in the sacrifice of Christ on which God can meet the whole world — not only bear with it, but send the gospel to every creature. This, however, is a totally

different statement from a “propitiation for the sins of the whole world.” In the real phrase it is clear that we have the beautiful wisdom of scripture, and at the same time an exact expression of the Lord’s rich grace without exaggeration: “My little children, I write unto you that ye sin not;” but if any one should alas! sin, instead of cause for despair, “we have an advocate with the Father.” Wondrous mercy! Jesus as much lives to take up the failure of His own, as He died to put away their sins by His blood. This too is founded on propitiation; but there is besides the blessed fact that He is the righteousness of the believer in the presence of God. His one expiatory sacrifice avails in abiding value; His place is before God as our righteousness; and there for the failing He carries on His living active advocacy with the Father.

Such is the doctrinal ground of this epistle, with the added special provision for those who may fail.

From 1 John 2:3 we begin the consideration of the characteristics of life in Christ which the believer possesses, and is bound to manifest. What is the leading trait? what the especial features of divine life in man? It is not power, nor love, nor even righteousness. What is it then? Obedience. This, it is clear, gives no importance to man. It necessitates the just subjection of the creature, and maintains also the majesty of God. How dreadful when grace, so-called, lowers His glory in the eyes of any soul! It is not denied that danger there is; but the danger is fully met by the precious word of God: “And hereby we do know that we know1 him, if we keep his commandments.” Do not call this legal: where is anything of the sort in John? Indeed there can be nothing legal in one who under the Holy Spirit unfolds

Christ. And let me say further that, where love is, nothing is sweeter than the doing the will of the one that is loved, particularly where we know that He whose will we do is absolutely good and wise in all that He lays upon us. We know that this is the case with God.

“And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” He is no Christian at all, any more than those that pretended to have fellowship with Him and walked in darkness, or said they had no sin, or denied that they had sinned. The contrast is of real Christians with mere pretenders. It is not a comparison between faithful Christians and unfaithful ones. Banish all this kind of notion from your minds. It is delusion, and you lose thereby the profit for your soul. It is not what the Lord is treating of here. He is putting down a new class of evil that was beginning to spring up, of persons pretending to fresh light, but involving a departure from the only light of God, — persons who indulged in fine-spun speculations and claimed undiscovered truth, but were in the awful predicament of contradicting the revealed mind of God. It was a different Christ, who was not another but antichrist, as we shall see, — a different truth which was not really truth.

The characteristic object of the epistle is to maintain that none can ever rise above the Christ already manifested in this world. After all you may have learnt from Paul or any other, know as you may the Christian’s place in grace and all he hopes for in glory, if you want to behold perfection in man you must look back at what Christ was in this world — the self-same Jesus who is now in the glory of God. Such is Christ everywhere.

There is a season when one needs most of all to think of the cross. There is a season when one needs the comfort of having Him as the Priest in heaven. There is a season when one can appreciate Him as the glorious Head of the church. But it is false that any of these points of view is to make Christ less precious as manifested in this world. Nor is there one who treats it with such decision and solemnity as John. The time was come for this: "Even now are many antichrists." It is the very point and object of our apostle's writing to maintain the indefeasible glory and the infinite excellence of the Lord Jesus in every respect, and this as displaying God the Father in this world. This Satan was seeking to annul through the false teachers now in view. Therefore are we shown from the first, as I have endeavoured to explain, the fulness of grace that came in His person, as well as the revelation of the moral nature of God. But now we have the first great test of the reality of divine life in man, namely, obedience. In this the unbeliever, no matter what his profession may be, is sure to fail. His will is unjudged. He either seeks his own way in pleasure, or he bows to man in superstitious asceticism, without knowledge of the true God or confidence in His grace. His failure is not perhaps in notions, but in obedience. On the other hand the Christian keeps the commandments of God; but he goes farther. It is said, "Whoso keepeth his word." It is more than what is commanded.

He loves to do whatever may be the will of God, no matter what the form. It may be simply seeing how He manifests His character in Christ: this is enough. The obedient heart enters into and ascertains the will of God where disobedience would find nothing but difficulties,

obstacles, and uncertainties. There is always to such either a lion in the way or no light. We find it too often in our families. See a child whose heart is not in obedience: what readiness of excuse! “Indeed, I did not know. You never told me. Why did you not forbid me before?” On the other see the obedient child. She has watched her mother’s looks even when not the appearance of a command was heard. She knows right well what will please her parent. Just so should we cherish the will of our Father as obedient children. It is not in this case the keeping of the express commands, but of His word. Let me add, that this is the answer to all the pride of man’s heart. For take the most moral man you ever saw: on what does he rest? He does this and that because he judges them right. This is his boast: “I always do what I believe is right.” Such is the desire of the moral man. I answer, that even if always consistent, and you always did a thing because it is right, you must inevitably be always wrong.

The true ground for a believer, and that which pleases God, is this, — not to do a thing simply because it is right, but because it is His will. The life that is formed on obedience is of an altogether different texture and source. To do things because they are right is to do without God and His word. It is merely idolizing self. The man becomes judge of all: “I think this, I do that, because it is right in my judgment.” Obedience alone puts man down, and God in His place. This only is right. Hence therefore we find, as the first distinguishing trait of the divine life, the exercise of obedience: not only are His commandments to be kept, but also His word.

But there is more than this. “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.” I

need not only commandment and word, but Himself as a living person before my eyes. It is always thus in John, who treats of Christ Himself Thus while providing for the deepest, there is a grace which wins the simplest. It is clearly Christ Himself, as He walked day by day in this poor world.

But there follows another and a remarkable word, which needs a little explanation. “Beloved,” says he (for this is the true word in verse 7), “I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning.” It means, as before, from the time that Christ was manifested in this world. “The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you.” The old commandment was manifested in Christ Himself He alone was always the obedient one. It is now not merely an old commandment, but a new one, yet the very same. Why? Because it is the same life, whether viewed in the Christian or in Christ. If I look at Christ Himself, it is the old commandment seen in Him from the beginning; but now it is no longer this solely, but a new commandment, “which thing is true in him and in you.” It is the same life, seen in Christ in its perfection, in us often hindered and obscured by the activity of what is of the first man. Christ alone was its fulness; now we have it in Him. As John tells us, it is true in Him and in you because it is the very same life.

“He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.” Love now comes in. It is not disobedience only which detects that a man is not really born of God, but also hatred. He that loves not is not born of God. “But he that hateth his brother is in

darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes." This was the more important to press, because these false teachers had not the smallest concern about their brethren. What they sought was self — in one form or another; and consequently light, as they called it, was no more than the invention of novel notions. But the true way in which divine light (Christ) shows itself is in obedience as its effect, and so surely in love, You cannot obey God without loving your brethren also.

This, however, leads into a remarkable parenthesis in the epistle, on which we need not dwell, because it is perhaps more than any other part of the epistle familiar to all. The great characteristic throughout, being life in the Son of God, forbids the apostle from entering into the different measures of attainment as a rule; yet as it is a fact that there are some more mature, some more vigorous, and some comparatively feeble in the expression of Christ here below, the Spirit of God in this parenthesis notices these differences briefly.

Before this is done, He lays down what they had all in common. They were forgiven for Christ's name.

Then the fathers were known by their knowledge of Christ — a beautiful and blessed distinction. They had "known him that was from the beginning." This we have seen to be the great text of the whole epistle, and it is the more remarkable that he does not mention any depths or heights of knowledge. Not a word is said about dispensations, or prophecy, or anything that is thought abstruse. There was one that was beyond all others and included everything else: it was Christ Himself. The fathers were those marked by knowing

Him. Wherever they might have learned, however their vigour might once have gone forth, they came back to what they started with — even Christ. It was a deeper appreciation of Christ, and this as manifesting God the Father here below. Such are the fathers.

The young men went forward in the ways of God, undaunted by difficulties, feeding on the word, and overcoming the wicked one. The babes (παιδία) had a real enjoyment of the Father's love.

The apostle traverses the ground again, and in doing so simply repeats in so many words what he had said of the fathers, adding a little more as to the young men, and most of all when he comes to the babes. The gracious condescension of love in this must be manifest to any spiritual mind. Those are peculiarly the objects of our Father's care who need it most. The babes therefore have the chief place in this expanded form. The fathers did not so much want it. It is in addressing the babes that we find the development of the antichrists. They require to be guarded against. They abound in snares and seductions. We have therefore very important light as to the nature of the antichrists; and this consists of two great parts. All Jewish hope is denied, and so is all Christian truth. He denies the Christ, that is, the Jewish expectation. He denies the Father and the Son, and that is the sum of Christianity. Such the antichrist will be — the result of a total rejection of both Old Testament and New. He denies the object of a Jew's faith, and also the person into whose love and fellowship the gospel brings those who believe now. All this will be completely swamped by the antichrist. This is the very point to which things are rapidly carrying men in the world at the present moment. I do not mean to say that more

than currents everywhere are setting in toward that direction; but undoubtedly there is an undermining of the Old Testament, and a total ignoring as well as a growing rejection of the true grace of God in the New.

After all this is closed, in verse 28, the whole family are seen joined together as little children once more. “And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence.” The way in which people commonly understand it is, that you may have confidence, but it is “we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.” This is exceedingly blessed. He appeals to divine love in the saints. Do you be careful how you are walking; that when Christ appears, we may not be ashamed because of the little you have profited by the grace and the truth of God we have been ministering to you in Christ. This seems the meaning of it. “If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.”

Now he is going to enlarge on the subject of righteousness. However, before he enters into it fully, he gives us a prefatory note beginning with the last verse of 1 John 2, and then shows us the privileges into which grace brings those who are born of God.

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God.” (1 John 3:1) It may be mentioned here that “sons of God” is never the expression of the writings of John. We have “sons of God” as well as “children” in Paul’s epistles. But “children of God” the Holy Ghost employs exclusively both in the gospel and in this epistle of John. Is it asked

what is the difference? It lies in this, that son (υἱὸς) is more the public, title, whereas child (

τέκνον) conveys rather the closeness of connection by birth. It expresses community of nature as born of God. For it will be understood that a person who was not a child might be adopted as a son; but the Christian is not only a son adopted by our God — he is really a child as being a partaker of the divine nature. This only it is John puts forward and prominently speaks of; and it is seen at once how it connects itself with his doctrine everywhere. We are born of God, born of water and of the Spirit, made partakers of the divine nature (in the sense, of course, of having the life that was in Christ). “Therefore the world knew us not, because it knew him not.”

So absolutely is the life of Christ found in us, that we have the same fare, so to speak, as Christ in this world. The world did not know Him; therefore it does not know us. It is simply because of Christ, unknown then personally, unknown now in us who live of His life. When He was here, it was no other life than that which we now have in Him. The world never knew, never appreciated, the life that was in Christ; neither does it recognise that which is in the children of God. But this can in no way hinder the blessedness of the result for the children of God.

This is no mere empty title. “Beloved, now are we the sons (children) of God; and it doth not yet appear” (that is, it has not been manifested) “what we shall be.” As far as the word of God could show, (and how well it does!) it is clearly revealed there. This remark is added to cut off misapprehension of the sense, as it may hinder the vagueness that prevails in many minds. Indeed, an hope

has been revealed to us most distinctly: what we shall be is revealed not only elsewhere, but here also. The apostle does not at all overlook this. But “it doth not yet appear,” in the sense that it has not yet been manifested as a fact before the world; but “we know,” says he, and we only know because it has been revealed by the Holy Ghost in the word. “We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” There is no haze over the future of the child of God. He has the certainty in his soul, because he has the revealed assurance in scripture that he shall be like Christ. Christ being his life now, no wonder that he must be like Christ then; and this too is founded on a ground blessedly sure and simple, and at the same time full of glory to Christ: “We shall see This is enough. Such and so great is the gracious assimilating energy of the Second man, that for us to see Him is to be like Him. When we saw Him here on earth by faith, we were made spiritually like Him; when we shall see Him bodily by and by, we shall be like Him even in our bodies.

Such then is the portion of the Christian by grace; and here is the moral consequence: “Every one that hath this hope on him” — founded on Him — “purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” Thus for the Christian it is not any longer a law that demands this thing or that. There is the full operation of the Spirit by the entire word of God, no part of scripture being excluded from the enjoyment, instruction, and admonition of the Christian. At the same time, what gives all scripture its fulness of application to the believer is the possession and knowledge of Christ Himself. Without Him you cannot understand any part of the Bible spiritually — that is, neither certainly nor thoroughly. It is Christ, who not only gives us

intelligence, but gives it power by the Spirit over and in us.

Then John proceeds naturally to trace the difference between the two families: “Every one that committeth sin committeth also lawlessness.” I give you the sense rather more exactly than it stands in our common version. There is no allusion to transgressing the law. Perhaps there is hardly a worse translation than this in the New Testament, nor one as to which even scholars seem duller. Sin is declared to be lawlessness. Beyond a shadow of doubt it may be asserted that the apostle does not define sin as “the transgression of the law.” It is a false version which nothing can justify, and I am perfectly persuaded the more any man understands either the word of God in general or the language in which John wrote, with the less hesitation he will confess this. That a person who is only spelling out his Greek, and learning to render by the help of the Authorized Version, may make difficulties about the matter is intelligible; but it is hard to see how an unbiassed honest man who knows the language could have the slightest question about it. Do I insinuate that our translators were not men of integrity, able, erudite, and pious? They were under no small difficulties, but they tried to do their best. Possibly their attention was never drawn to the point. Even intelligent men were considerably muddled as yet from the past as well as the actual struggles of that day, But instead of either finding fault with them or endorsing all they said, what we have to do is to profit by whatever is good and true, and at the same time to be warned by whatever mistakes others have made.

Now I maintain, not only that the word (

ἀνομία) will not bear such a meaning, but that it is altogether foreign to the scope of the passage and the drift of the apostle's reasoning. He is not speaking of particular acts, but about nature manifesting itself in our ways. "Every one that committeth sin committeth also lawlessness." A man who sins shows his will alienated from God — an evil nature derived from him who fell through Satan. Here the apostle regards man as doing nothing else but his own will, which is exactly what the natural man does. He acts independently of God, and, as far as he is concerned, never does anything but his own will. John is not speaking of positive overt acts, but of the man's habitual bent and character — his life and nature. The sinner, then, sins, and in this merely shows out his state and the moral roots of his nature as a sinner (namely, lawlessness). He has neither heart nor conscience towards God: he does what he likes as far as he can. He practises lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.

What makes it of practical as well as dogmatic importance is, that the common view entails the accompanying error that the law is always in force for all the necessary expression of God's mind and will. But this we know from many scriptures is not true. The Bible is thoroughly explicit, that one particular nation was said to be under law, and that the rest of mankind had no such position, though responsible on their own ground. (See Rom. 2:12-15; Rom. 3:19.) Here, therefore, the translation cannot be correct which contradicts other passages of undoubted holy writ; for if the common version of 1 John 3:4 held good, the rest of mankind outside the Jews could not have been sinners at all, because they were not under law. Thus, evidently, this error throws the whole doctrine of what sin is and of

God’s dealings with men into hopeless confusion. It necessarily darkens some vitally momentous parts of God’s word as to past, present, and future. For instance, according to the scripture already referred to, in the day of judgment God will by Jesus Christ deal with the Jew according to the law, with the Gentiles that have it not according to conscience; and, by parity of principle, with professing Christians according to gospel light. There is no hint of judging all by the measure which was given to Israel. The idea springs from a source no better than traditional ignorance.

Again, taking Romans 4:15; and Rom. 5:13, 14, it would perplex all to bring in the common version of 1 John 3:4; for it would follow thence that there was no sin, because it had not the form of a transgression of law between Adam, who had a law, and Moses, by whom the law was given. So fatal may be a mis-translation of scripture. In fact, practically, it lowers the sense of what sin is throughout the length and breadth of Christendom, others having fallen into an error similar to that of our own translators. It is therefore as certain as it is important to see that sin embraces much more than a transgression of the law. In this case there could be no such thing as sin without the law, and all would be judged alike as under the law and transgressors of it, contrary to the express word of God. Our version is wrong. Sin is not the transgression of the law, though every transgression of the law is a sin. The true meaning, as I have said, is, “sin is lawlessness.”

As for the Christian, then, to resume our sketch, all is different (not conduct only but rather a new nature) from man as such. We know that He (Christ) was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him is no sin.

“Whosoever abideth in him” — and this is the consequence of really knowing Christ — “sinneth not.” Such is the life of the Christian that this is the consequence of abiding in Him. If grace has turned my soul to Him, if I am resting on Christ as my Saviour and Lord, my life and righteousness, I shall also by grace abide in Him, and “Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not. In fact, who ever sinned with Christ before his eyes? When a Christian is drawn aside, another object usurps the place of Christ, and his own will exposes him to the wiles of Satan working on his fleshly nature through the world. And “Whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.” He evidently speaks of one unconverted — a man in his natural state. If he had only seen and known Christ, how changed all would be!

“Little children, let no man deceive you.” This the false teachers and antichrists were doing. They had invented the awful theory that the great blessing of Christ had swept away all need of self-judgment and holiness — that sin was gone in every sense. Hence a believer might take his ease in the world. If Christ had taken away all sin, why talk more about it? What need of repentance or confession, as the croakers talked who refused to go on to higher life and truth? “Little Children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that doeth sin is of the devil.”

Here we see the ground for saying that John traces all up to two distinct families-the family of God and that of the devil. “The devil sinneth from the beginning:” such is his character, though he is not under law. “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil.” That was His character,

and the result of His appearing and work in this world. “Every one that has been born of God doth not sin.” Such is the deduction: “for his seed remaineth in him;” — the life that God has given through faith, Christ Himself being the source and expression of it — “and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.” There is shown the new nature. It is a matter of course that every one lives according to his nature: only the Christian, having two, must mortify the evil and walk according to the good. Take the simplest animal, — the bird above, or the reptile below, or any other around us, — every creature lives according to its nature. So does the sinner. He lives according to that nature which is now under Satan’s power. The believer lives in Christ. John is not here looking at modifications through circumstances, it is to be observed. He is not here looking at particular cases of unfaithfulness. John as a rule does not occupy himself with the details of fact. He looks at truth in its own proper abstract character apart from passing circumstances; and if you do not read John’s writings thus, especially the epistle before us, I am afraid that there is little prospect that you will ever understand them.

Having shown this, he now brings in the other test, that is, not simply righteousness but love. “This is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain” — no love was there. “Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother.” There is the connection He has brought in the wicked one and his family. Man now is not only a sinner, but especially shows his character in this, that he exhibits no love. By love he means what is of God, and this exclusively. He does not of course deny

natural affection, but insists on love as divine. Cain had no love, and proved it by slaying his own brother. “And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous.” He here traces the link that binds righteousness with love. We have had righteousness separately as well as love: now he shows that the two things are intertwined, and are found only in the same persons. But here too, as in Christ was no sin, so in Him we behold perfect love, and in the world hatred. Ought we then to be surprised at the world’s hatred? Hence, “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Every one that hateth his brother is a murderer.”

Thus things are followed to their full result, as we have seen them traced to their hidden sources before God. How different was all with Christ! “Hereby perceive we the love”… To add “of God” spoils the sentence. There is no ground for interpolating any words. But One showed such love, and He was man as surely as God. “Hereby perceive we the love, because he laid down his life for us.” If you want to know what love is, look here. This was love indeed. “And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” The same life of which we live was in Him: ought it not to be exercised in similar love? We may not often be called to lay down our life for our brethren; but are there not plain, simple, common ways by which it may be tested every day? My brother may have need: it is no use talking about readiness to die for my brother, if I at once shrink back from meeting his ordinary and perhaps urgent necessity? There is nothing great here; it is homely, but how practical! How it puts

the heart to the test, and one that might be presented any day of the week!

“Whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.” He here puts before them the great danger of trifling with the practical consequences of the truth. Suppose that a man knows what God says and wishes, and yet does not act upon it, what is the consequence? He must get into consciousness of distance from God. “To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin,” says James. So we have the same question here. The point is not a man’s losing his place in Christ, but his ground of confidence with God. Communion is almost as strikingly a characteristic point of John, as life in Christ, and the love from which both flow. He is not satisfied that men should be simply Christians, but that they should enjoy Christ practically. An idle word, a passing thought unjudged, might disturb this.

“Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.” Looking up, a simple soul goes on with the Lord. “Then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.” It is the beginning of everything good, and goes right through to the end, as I need not say. There is the one

and only starting-point in the mind of the Holy Ghost, who always gives Christ His own primary place. To be saved even is not put as the first duty, but to “believe on his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him.”

Here we come to a very important expression, which we find more particularly in 1 John 4. It is not simply our dwelling in Him: this we had already in 1 John 1 (and abiding in Him is the same word); but He dwells in us. Wonderful truth! This is here applied to one of these two things. “Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Holy Spirit which he hath given us.” The Holy Ghost given to us is the palmary proof that God abides in us. He dwells in us by His Spirit. This does not necessarily involve our abiding in God; but if God gives His Spirit to any believer, He abides in that man. We shall find more than this in what follows; but before these truths are explained more fully, John cautions the saints.

Hence 1 John 4 begins with this warning. He is going to tell us about the Spirit of God and His abiding in us, but he would have us on our guard because there are evil spirits, as certainly as the Holy Spirit, and this as proved by the false prophets that have gone out into the world. “Believe not every spirit.” There is nothing that exposes the believer (and it has always been so) to greater danger, than severing the Holy Spirit from Christ. The apostle ever binds His power with Christ’s name. We shall be kept in the truth if we remember that the one object of the Holy Ghost is to glorify Christ, and this therefore becomes the test in practice: the Spirit of God must ever operate to keep Christ before our eyes. If not, we are not far from snare. Connect the Spirit with the

church merely, and then you will have popery; connect Him simply with individuals, and you will have fanaticism. He is a free and evident witness to Christ. There is the truth. The Holy Ghost is sent down to take of the things of Christ, and to show them to us. He is come to glorify (not a priest nor even the church, but) Christ Himself. This, I admit, is the truest glory of the saint and the church — their greatest blessedness and joy. In Christ's name the church is formed by the Holy Ghost; through Him also the Holy Ghost dwells in the believer. This is not doubted; but all this, and the testimony and ways of each and all are invariably for exalting our God by Christ Himself. If they fail here, the salt has lost its savour.

Take, I will not say the grossness of popery but, the Quaker system, as an instance which painfully reverses the truth. The reason is plain: the Spirit is practically severed from Christ, and the result is that, under colour of humility, their testimony constantly tends to exalt the first man. Every child of Adam is supposed to have the Spirit of God. The consequence is that the truth is darkened, impaired, and destroyed, and all due sense of the ruin of man destroyed by their extreme form of Pelagianism, deifying not ordinances indeed but conscience.

However this may be, here we find the apostle solemnly warning the saints against false prophets. Many such men were gone into the world. We want therefore some sure means of discerning them. It is not a question of deciding who are Christ's and who are not; but rather what sort of spirit it is that acts by this teacher or that. It is not at all the point to pronounce on man's state before God or his destiny. People have always been

prone enough to form and give opinions when the Lord forbids it. It is clear that we are called of the Lord frankly to accept persons as born of God when they render a true testimony to Christ; but, on the other hand, we ought to beware of endorsing those whose testimony in word or deed is against the name of Jesus.

This then is the test of what is or is not of the Holy Ghost. “Hereby ye know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth Jesus Christ come in the flesh is of God.” Let me beg the reader here to leave out a word or two which are not printed in italics. “Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.” The difference is great. As it reads in the Authorised Version, it is altogether inadequate. It may be in the recollection of not a few here that a generation ago there were manifestations of spirits (evil, I doubt not), which did not deny that Jesus came in the flesh. On the contrary, they seemed to lay the greatest stress on the fact of His incarnation, and chid the orthodox for want of heed to this truth if not of faith in it. The point of their own false doctrine lay in maintaining that Jesus took the flesh in the same condition of corruption in which all others are born, and that Jesus showed His perfection in subduing and purifying the flesh. Of course you will understand that my reference is to the Irvingite movement. To confess therefore that Jesus is come in the flesh is not satisfactory.

What then does the apostle say and mean here? Every spirit that confesseth Jesus Christ come in the flesh is of God. This is to confess His person; not His deity alone, still less His humanity alone, but Him who thus came. The one is a bare acknowledgment of a fact; the other is the confession of a divine person, yet a man. Now there

is no demon that ever acknowledges the person of Christ. There is no evil spirit but winces at and refuses to endorse the glory of Christ; whereas the direct object of the Spirit of God is always to maintain His person in all the fulness of His glory, and in all His grace. Let none take it as a statement of His human nature. This is not the meaning. The real humanity of Jesus is contained in it, but it is by no means the whole or chief part of the confession. Take any man — yourself, for instance; who would describe you as having come in the flesh? No man that had common sense; because one might well ask in what other way you could come. Here was the difference between the Son of God and any other that ever was born. All mankind must come in the flesh if they come at all. The wonderful thing was that this divine person should come in the flesh. For what claim had flesh on Him in the slightest degree? Nothing but His grace hindered His coming in His proper divine glory. Had He been thus manifested in this world, of course it must have involved the destruction of all the race. According to the will and counsels of the Godhead He was pleased to come in the flesh. It was not the manifestation of glory save of His person morally and in love, but of that very grace which we have seen from the beginning of this epistle, and which runs through to the end.

The spirits, then, which are not of God refuse (save when divine power bent and broke them) to own the personal glory of Christ, while the Holy Spirit of God loves to own it. Such is the test. If therefore any doctrine undermine the glory of Christ, you have an unequivocal proof that it is of Satan as certainly: whatever exalts Christ, according to the word, is of God.

This leads him to speak of the difference of what is in the world from that which is of God. In the world there is ever at work a restless spirit of contrariety to Christ. It is the spirit of antichrist, which will be manifested fully in its own season. Hence it is said, “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.” These false teachers being of the world, speak of what has their heart, and this attracts the world. There is sympathy between the world and them. “We are of God,” says the apostle, speaking of himself and his fellows raised up to declare the word of God fully. He is peremptory; and this rouses the spirit of unbelief as it meets faith: “He that knoweth God heareth us; and he that is not of God heareth not us.” Here again is a serious test. It is not only the confession of Christ, but that man is proved to be of the world who refuses subjection to the apostolic word. Many a man might profess to acknowledge the literal words of Jesus; many another might own only those of the Old Testament. If you do no more than this now, you cannot be of God. He who is really of God, while thoroughly owning every word He wrote of old, feels especially the blessedness of that which He has now given by His holy apostles and prophets. (Compare Eph. 2, 3) This was of the utmost moment to urge at the time the gospels and epistles appeared. At the same time, though not of course in exactly the same shape and manner, it always abides a grand test, next to the person of Christ. The time hastens which will prove how few among those that

acknowledge the New Testament really hear and believe it. The saddest proof that they do not believe it to be God's word will be their giving it up. Did they believe it, they would no more abandon it than the true mother would allow the child to be cut in twain.

But this brings us to another point — not the truth, but loving one another. The truth comes first, and then love. "For love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God" (whatever may be his pretensions and his talk); "for God is love."

This leads him to speak of the way in which God has shown His love. He brings it out in three forms. First, there is the wondrous manifestation of God in Christ which is the foundation of the gospel; and in a twofold way also He was manifested in Christ — as life, and as propitiation. If we had not Christ as life, we never could understand God. Could we have understood Him by having Christ as our life without propitiation, as His holiness and judgment would have been slighted, so we could. only be intensely miserable. To have the knowledge of what God is and of what we are, and withal not to have our sins borne away, must be alike His dishonour and our everlasting shame and anguish; and so many a quickened soul who is ignorant of the efficacy of redemption proves in its measure. God in His great mercy does not permit any to know it to its depths. But how many of us have known what it is to be converted, and yet for a while ignorant of the judgment of sin, and its absolute removal for us by the cross of Christ! Consequently one had no taste for the world, a horror of sin, a real desire to do God's will, but not the least rest for heart and conscience in Christ before God.

It is a mercy to be thus converted, a misery to abide in this state. What a joy that God does not divorce but unites for us life and propitiation in our Lord and His work! Let not man meddle here. What God has joined let no man put asunder. He has given the same Christ who is life to be also a propitiation for our sins. Such is the teaching of the verses 9, 10, both being the display of the love of God, and in contrast with law (the latter especially), which had no life to give, and could only judge, not put away, sin.

But this is not all. “If God so loved us” (and He has demonstrated it as nothing else could), “we also ought to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.” It is a wonderful word, evidently connecting itself (whether written before or after is of no account) with what is said in John 1:18. There Christ stands the manifestation of God in love. Here the saints are called to be no less. Beloved brethren, how far do we manifest our God and Father by this divine love that never seeks its own, and is at all cost bent on the good of its objects, His children, yea all, even enemies?

“Hereby we know that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.” This goes farther than the last verse of 1 John 3, which said that He dwells in us, not we in Him. But we shall see more of this, and therefore I do not pause on it, now. “And we have seen and testify that the Father hath sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.”

I hardly know anything that concerns us more profoundly affecting than these verses; for what can be

conceived near to God, if it be not dwelling in God and God in us? There is no image that tells out intimacy and mutuality, so to speak, more than this. And when we think who and what God is, as well as what we are, it is indeed a great word to say. Of whom does the apostle say it? Of every Christian; and this too as the simple fruit of the gospel.

But let us look a little at the force of the passage more closely. In the one case we read, “Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit” in the other it is, “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.” It is not now said, “Hereby we know.” In this instance, perhaps, the person may be without objective knowledge of it: this does not hinder the truth of the blessing. If you confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in you, and you in God. He dwells in you, having given His Spirit to be in you.

This is the way in which His dwelling in man is effected; but the consequence of that gift to you is that you make God your refuge and delight. There is no such thing is the dwelling of the Spirit in a saint without bringing the soul to judge itself, as well as to peace with God. To this it seems to me that every Christian comes by grace sooner or later, though not always at first. He will be brought to it in God’s goodness, were it, as it is often, on a death-bed. We do not always judge aright. There may be not seldom hindrances to comfort through bad teaching, as well as through unjudged sin. Of these I do not speak now, nor of defect in intelligence. Still less do I speak of the effects of the Calvinistic system or of Arminianism, both of which are prejudicial to enjoying the grace of God, Calvinists are apt to think an Arminian

cannot have peace. — This is all nonsense: he may enjoy peace with God as really as the Calvinist. Indeed experience would say it is more frequent than with those of the opposite school, though each in a different way look within (I believe, unscripturally). The truth is that peace rests on our faith of Christ and His work. Arminianism is no more to me than Calvinism, and I doubt that I admire one more than the other. As systems they seem to me narrow, unsound, and pernicious. But I thank God that to not a few who are committed to both sides He has given to taste of His own grace in Christ.

Be this as it may, if I confess Jesus the Son of God as Him on whom my soul rests, and on His rich redemption, the Holy Ghost says, “I can dwell there.” He does dwell there; and if so, He is graciously pleased to draw out the heart to confide and repose in God. This is what is meant by dwelling in God. It is to find in God one’s hiding-place, as well as spring of counsel and cheer and strength. One turns to Him in each trial and difficulty as well as joy. I am pretty sure there is not one of us who uses this privilege as he ought. Nor does John speak of degree at all. Such a thought is foreign to the abstract style of the apostle John. He treats of a great fact for the Christian, though it may be more or less realized, and “God dwelleth in him, and he in God.” This is what faith receives and has. The beginning is God making His abode in us; the result is that we dwell in God. But sometimes he puts it in the order of our dwelling in God and God in us. It would seem that he then speaks of experience, where he puts our part first, and then God’s abode in us.

I must briefly point out the third ground, — not the display of love, or its operation in us, but the perfection

of love with us (verse 17). It is not only that we know that we dwell in God and He in us by this, that He has given to us of His Spirit; but herein has love been perfected with us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. It is not a state given to us in the day of judgment; we are so dealt with now; but this gives boldness even with the thought of the day of judgment before us. How could it be otherwise? If I really believe and am sure that God has made me now to be what Christ is, what can the effect of the day of judgment be but to display the perfections, not only of what Christ is for me, but of what you and I are by and in Christ our Lord? And this we are now.

The last chapter (1 John 5) speaks of another thing. Here I must be brief indeed. It is connected with the charge at the end of chapter 4 to love one's brother. The apostle had shown the various displays of divine love, with the falsehood of professing to love God while one hated a brother. But this might elicit the question, who my brother is. We need simplicity, as with our God, so with His children. It is in vain to pretend that this is hard to find out. The Spirit of God does lay down unsparingly and in all their fulness the tests of divine life; but now let the question be raised, who my brother is, and the answer is as plain as possible: "Every one that believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God."

Is it not sweet that after all the fulness of truth had been revealed, after all the display of Christ in glory had been made by the apostle Paul, after the apostle John had set us in presence of the divine nature and eternal life in His person, we have here such a proof of the unchangeable testimony to the Lord Jesus as Christ?

What was the truth that Peter and the rest preached at Pentecost? That Jesus is the Christ. What is the truth with which the epistle of John concludes? That Jesus is the Christ. There is no wavering in what is divine.

No doubt there is the unfolding of truth admirably suited to all the varying needs of the church; but when you come to the question after all — who and what is God's child and my brother? — this is what he is: the man that believes that Jesus is the Christ. I grant you it is the very lowest confession that the Holy Ghost could accept; and it would be a very poor thing if the Christian only believed that Jesus was the Christ. If made exclusive, what an unworthy dealing with all the glory of Jesus] But it is to me a blessed thing that the Holy Ghost maintains to the end the value of what He began with; not that more was not made known, but that this abides in freshness and power. No doubt such a confession might be most unintelligent, but at least there is this divine reality in his soul — he does believe that Jesus is the Christ. That this should be said at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles we can all understand; but it seems to me that none but God would have thought of insisting on it at the end of the Christian testimony; as if, among the last words that the Holy Ghost uttered, He should saying — I have been leading you into all depths and all heights; I have laid open in fresh scriptures the full circle of revealed truth, but I stand to what I began with. Learn the truth, have it developed in your souls, not by the truth developing, but by your growing up into it; but never give up first principles. "Every one that believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him." It is not now loving God only, but His

children; and thus your love is proved to be divine, and that you really love God Himself. But there is another query often put: How am I to know that I do love the children of God? Be sure you are in the right path. Here it is — “By this we know that we love the children of God.” It is not by gratifying them, or going where they go perhaps, or forcing them where you go. You might be totally mistaken; you might hurry souls, or be drawn away by them yourself. There is no love in either one or other, but there is in this — “when we love God and keep his commandments.” If my soul goes out to Him in love, and I show it by unreserved fidelity to His will, there is nothing that is more truly an exercise of love to His children. You may seem to the careless not thinking of them, but you are then loving them best. When you make an object of the children of God, there is no real love. When you are really devoted to God and to His will, you truly love the children of God.

“For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.” The law was a yoke so grievous that neither their fathers nor they were able to bear; but it is not so with the truth of God. The law of God was for the punishing as well as testing of the old man; the word of God is the food and directory of the new man. But is not the world a great hindrance? No doubt; but there is a something that overcomes the world; and what is this? Faith. But mark, he does not say that “every one who believeth that Jesus is the Christ” overcomes the world. Perhaps you may see some whom you cannot doubt are the real children of God, but they do not overcome the world. What then will enable them to overcome the world? Believing that Jesus is the Son of God. “The

Christ," I might perhaps say, connects Him with the world, with the Jews and the nations He is to govern; "The Son of God" connects Him with the Father above the world. Such is the difference. Thus, while holding fast and giving all its value to the confession that Jesus is the Christ of God, I am not to be tied to it. We need a growing sense of what Christ is, and of His glory, in order to resist the downward tendency and the ensnaring power of the world around; and true power over the world is by advancing in the knowledge of Christ. There is no other thing that will wear so well. "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"

"This is he that came by (

διὰ) water and blood." John keeps us fully in the consciousness of our deliverance, but also of our responsibility (i.e., as God's children). "This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by (ἐν) water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one." This, and no more here, is genuine scripture. A good deal of the two verses is and ought to be left out, if all legitimate authority is heeded by us.

The historical fact, which becomes the basis of the teaching, is that recorded in the Gospel, John 19:34, to which special attention is drawn in the following verse, as recorded by John who saw it; "and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe." Here, instead of putting that inspired witness forward, the Spirit takes this place, the greatest of all

present witnesses for Christ. The idea of baptism here is as childish for “the water” as the Lord’s Supper is confessed to be for “the blood.” Purification, propitiation, and power answer to the three, all flowing to us in or consequent on the death of Christ, the Son of God.

“If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath witnessed concerning his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not hath made him a liar; because he hath not believed in the witness which God hath witnessed concerning his Son,” etc. That is, God bears His testimony in this wondrous triad — the Spirit, the water, and the blood, — three witnesses, yet only one testimony: namely, that there is no life in the first man at all, and that all the blessing is in the Second; that He it is who by His death expiates my sins and purges me, and that the Holy Ghost gives me the joy of both by faith. The Holy Ghost is come not to bear witness to the first man — He has only to convict him of sin — but He testifies to the glory of the Second man, the riches of God’s grace in Him, and the efficacy of His work in death for the believer. The church was becoming a ruin; but the believer has the witness in himself. Eternal life is superior to all change; and that he has — even Christ — an object of outward testimony, but also by grace in himself.

This is farther pursued, showing that it is in the Son of God. “He that hath the Son hath life;” and if a man has not the Son of God, it does not matter what else he may have, he has not life. It is in the Son, and only in Him.

Then comes the conclusion. “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life,” And there he stops. What is added as the last clause of verse 13 only spoils the verse. It was put in by man. “And this is the confidence,” — it is not a question of life only, but of confidence. “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us.” Thus after life comes confidence, and then the formal close of all follows, as we see in verses 18-21. “And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of him.” But is there not such a thing as sin? Yes. “If any one see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: concerning that I do not say that be should make request. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.”

Let me make a brief remark on this. The “sin unto death” has nothing to do with eternal death, but with the close of this life. It means not some extraordinarily grievous act, but any sin whatever under special circumstances. For instance, when Ananias and Sapphira lied in presence of the grace that the Holy Ghost was then bestowing on the church, this was “sin unto death.” Many a man since then has told a lie which has not been so judged: it was not therefore a “sin unto death.” The circumstances of the case have an important influence in modifying it and giving it character. So with any other sin. I mention this because it is there precisely where spiritual power is necessary very often; and all children of God might not see the bearing of a sin and

its peculiar heinousness under a given state of things; but when once it is shown, they can understand it perfectly, because they have the life of Christ in them, and the Holy Ghost too. “All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not unto death.” We must not think that all sin is unto death; but any sin under peculiar circumstances might be.

And then the last verses sum up the whole matter. “We know that every one that is born of God sinneth not.” We saw that to be born of God, to have life, is the great doctrine of the epistle. Here is its character. Such an one does not sin, “but he that has been born of God keepeth himself, and the wicked one toucheth him not.” Here we have not merely its character, but its source. The character was Christ; the source is God. “We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the wicked one.” This is the other sphere. “And we know that the Son of God hath come.” Now we have the object given. “The Son of God hath come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true; and we are in him that is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols” — objects apt to rise with blinding power between their eyes and Christ.

Appendix On 1 John 5:7, 8.

It is much to be regretted that excellent persons in all ages have been prone to rest some of their defences of the truth on untenable ground. The danger is that when any of these mistakes in proof are set aside, especially by foes of the truth, not only are such uninformed and incautious disputants apt to fight stubbornly for what is indefensible (i.e., really for self), but others, partly

through timidity, partly through ignorance, may dread that the truth itself is imperilled, or be even disposed to stand in doubt of it, confounding the ill-conduct of its advocates with its own impregnable evidence.

Thus one hears with humiliation that any man of learning should seek to shelter the famous passage of the three heavenly witnesses from the reprobation which to say the least an interpolated gloss deserves, and from none so heartily as from pious men jealous for the divine glory of the Lord Jesus. Truth is itself too sacred to admit of giving quarter to that which is spurious, the continued sanction of which is hostile to the authority of the Bible, and in particular to the very point which the suspicions article is meant to support. Let us remember that the study of the authorities on which the Greek Testament rests has greatly developed during the last seventy years, and especially perhaps the last thirty. During this time many fresh manuscripts, some of great value and antiquity, have been brought to light, along with a fuller and more exact collation of all that had been previously known; and this makes an error of the kind less excusable and more painful, if it be in a quarter one respects.

I will not cite, however, from any volume of the day, but confront a sentence of the famous J. Calvin with the facts, that every intelligent Christian who may want information, but values nothing but the truth, may be enabled to judge for himself. “Since, however, the passage flows better when this clause [from “in heaven” to “in earth” inclusively] is added (!) and as I see that it is found in the best and most approved copies (!!) I am inclined to receive it as the true reading.”2 (Calvin, Translation Soc. Comment. on the Cath. Epistles, p. 257.

Edinburgh, 1855.) Then, again, Beza, who ought to have known more of the manuscripts, follows in the wake of his leader. Such statements, I confess, are inexplicable, save on the supposition both of strong prejudice and of surprising inattention to the facts of the case. For so decisive is the testimony of ancient documents (whether manuscripts, versions, or citations by the earliest ecclesiastical writers), that if this portion can be allowed to be scripture against their testimony, a fatal blow is inflicted on all certainty of evidence for the rest of the New Testament; for all the uncials preserve a dead silence as to it, more than 160 cursives, all the lectionaries, all the ancient versions except the Latin, and even of the Latin more than fifty of the oldest and best copies, and of the rest it is in some cases inserted by a later hand, and with that uncertainty of position which often accompanies an interpolation; while it is not once quoted in any genuine remains of the early Greek or even Latin fathers, even where the occasions seem most to call for it. Its supposed citation by Tertullian, Cyprian, Jerome, etc. is an illusion.

Hence Erasmus, in his first (1516) and second (1519) editions of the Greek New Testament, so far faithfully followed his MS, and did not print verse 7. It would seem that the Complutensian editors must have boldly translated the Latin version as it stands in the majority of the extant copies; for in the captious attack now before me (Annotationes Jacobi Lopidis Stunicae contra Erasmus Rot. in defens. translationis N.T. Complut. 1520), the ablest of them does not pretend to diplomatic authority for the Greek they venture to print, but arraigns the Greek MSS. as corrupted, and backs up the common text of the Vulgate by a quotation from

Jerome's (?) - Prologue to the Canonical Epistles. "Sciendum est hoc loco graecorum codices apertissime esse corruptos: nostros (!) vero veritatem ipsam ut a prima origine traducti sunt continere. Quod ex prologo beati Hieronymi super epistolas canonicas manifeste apparet. Ait enim Quae si sic ut ab eis digestae sunt ita quoque ab interpretibus fideliter in latinum verterentur eloquium: nec ambiguitatem legentibus facerent: nec sermonum sese varietas impugnaret illo praecipue loco ubi de unitate trinitatis in prima Ioannis epistola positum legimus, In qua etiam ab infidelibus translatoribus multum erratum esse a fidei veritate comperimus trium tantummodo vocabula hoc est aquae sanguinis et spiritus in ipsa sua editione ponentibus et patris verbique ac spiritus testimonium ommittentibus in quo maxime et fides catholica roboratur et patris et filii et spiritus sancti una divinitatis substantia comprobatur." [I give the quotation as S. cites it, not as it stands in the Benedictine edition of Jerome's works.]

Erasmus had already replied to our notorious countryman, Edward Lee (afterwards Popish archbishop of York), that he did not find in the Greek what was so common in the Latin, and edited accordingly, without expressing approval or blame; that he had at different times seen seven manuscripts, in none of which was anything that answered to the ordinary Vulgate. "Porro quod Hieronymus in Praefatione sua testatur hunc locum ab haereticis depravatum, si velim uti jure meo, possem appellare ab Hieronymi auctoritate, quod Leus facit quoties ipsi commodum est And then he proceeds to expose the exaggeration of Lee, and to propose a conjectural correction in the citation from the prologue. (Desid. Erasmi. Opp. tom. ix., coll. 275, 276.) The truth

is, that, by the common consent of the learned, including the Benedictine and other editors of Jerome's writings, this prologue is confessed not to be his production, but of a much later age, and by an inferior hand. To his Spanish critic he answers, "Hic ex auctoritate Hieronymi [which we have just seen is no authority at all, being a forgery], docet Stunica Graecos codices palam esse depravatos. Sed interim ubi dormit codex ille Rhodiensis? Porro nos non susceperamus negotium emendandi Graecos codices, sed quod in illis esset, bona fide reddendi." Then, after a long argument intended to neutralize the alleged statement of Jerome's (which Erasmus says, and no wonder, he does not quite understand), he adds, "Cum Stunica meus toties jactet Rhodiensem codicem, cui tantum tribuit auctoritatis, mirum est, non hic adduxisse illius oraculum, praesertim cum ita fere consentiat cum nostris codicibus, ut videri possit Lesbia requla. Veruntamen ne quid dissimulem, repertus est apud Anglos Graecus codex unus, in quo habetur, quod in vulgatis deest. Scriptum est enim hunc ad modum · Ὅτι τρεῖς εἰσὶν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες ἐν τῳ οὐρανῳ, Πατὴρ, Λόγος, καὶ Πνεῦμα [ἅγιον is omitted], καὶ οὗτοι οἱ τρεῖς ἓν εἰσίν. καὶ τρεῖς εἰσὶν [

οἱ is omitted]

μαρτυροῦντες ἐν τῃ γῃ, πνεῦμα, ὕδωρ, καὶ αἷμα, εἰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, etc. Quanquam hand scio an casu factum sit, ut hoc loco non repetatur, quod est in Graecis nostris, καὶ οἱ τρεῖς εἰς τὸ ἓν εἰσίν. Ex hoc igitur codice Britannico reposuimus, quod in nostris dicebatur deesse: ne cui sit causa calumniandi. Quanquam et hunc suspicor ad Latinorum codices fuisse castigatum. Posteaquam enim Graeci concordiam inierunt cum

Ecclesia Romana, studuerunt et hac in parte cum Romanis consentire." (Ib. coll. 351-353.)

Therefore Erasmus in his third edition (1522) inserted verse 7, correcting two errors and supplying the omission at the end of verse 8 in what he called the Cod. Brit. (or Montfort MS.), which probably had the Acts and Epistles added about this very time to the Gospels written a few years before, as the Revelation was added by another hand later still — copied, it would seem, from the well-known Leicester MS. Erasmus put in the passage to keep his promise, not because he counted it genuine. Is it too strong to fear that a document so framed, which cannot be traced beyond a friar named Froy, and which came in so opportunely to supply an apparent authority for a Greek text (of which more presently) for the three heavenly witnesses, points to a dishonest source?

It is remarkable too, as Sir I. Newton noticed long ago, that there is a marginal note by the side of this passage in the Complut. Polyglot, as in 1 Cor. 15:51 and Matt. 6:13, where the Vulgate is in conflict with the Greek MSS. It is a pity, however, that they were not as explicit on 1 John 5:7 as there, and that they did not cleave to the Greek against the Latin, as they did in rejecting its absurd misrepresentation of 1 Cor. 15. 51. They do indeed cite Thomas Aquinas for 1 John 5:7. "Now to make Thomas thus in a few words do all the work was very artificial" (says Sir I. N., Works, vol. V. P. 522); "and in Spain, where Thomas is of apostolical authority, it might pass for a very judicious and substantial defence of the printed Greek. But to us Thomas Aquinas is no apostle. We are seeking for the authority of Greek manuscripts."

To what then is the passage due? It is as clear as anything of the sort can be, that what we call verse 7 sprang from Augustine's remarks on what now stands as verse 8, possibly suggested by words of Cyprian to a similar effect. Compare his treatise contra Maximinum Arian. Episcop. 1. ii. c. 22. (Tom. viii. col. 725, ed. Ben.) Not that the celebrated bishop of Hippo cites the passage: what he says is professedly his comment or gloss on the words spirit, water, and blood. "Si vero ea, quae his significata sunt, velimus inquirere, non absurde occurrit ipsa Trinitas, qui unus, solus, verus, summus est Deus, Pater, et Filius et Spiritus sanctus, de quibus verissime dici potuit, Tres sunt testes, et tres unum sunt: ut nomine Spiritus significatum accipiamus Deum Patrem: de ipso quippe adorando loquebatur Dominus ubi ait, Spiritus est Deus. (Id. iv. 24.) Nomine autem sanguinis Filium quia, verbum caro factum est. (Id. i. 14.) Spiritum sanctum," etc. From the reputation of Augustine this fanciful idea at first gained currency and acceptance, though not always in precisely the original shape; then it seems to have been inserted in the margin as a gloss, till at length, through the ignorance of the transcribers and the clergy in general, it positively crept3 into that text which the Council of Trent, with a temerity as amazing as the lack of knowledge it betrays, pronounced authentic. Hence the danger of demoralising Roman Catholic scholars, some of whom, like R. Simon, were doomed to do a perpetual violence to their conscience, while others, bolder in evil, misdirect every weapon that ingenuity can devise to make the worse appear the better reason. Most, no doubt, entrench themselves with a sort of blind honesty in their last stronghold: they believe what the church

believes — a pitiful answer where it is a question of revealed truth.

As to internal evidence, it is equally conclusive against the passage foisted in. To bear witness “in heaven” is nonsense; to say “on earth” is superfluous; for earth is the constant scene of testimony. Again, the Father and the Son are the true scriptural correlatives — never the Father and the Word, which last is in correlation with God, as we see in John 1. Further, since Pentecost the Holy Ghost is distinctively said to be sent down from heaven, and this with a view to the testimony of the gospel, instead of bearing record in heaven with the Father and the Son. Lastly, those who adopt the passage as it stands in the vulgar Latin copies are led to lower the character of the witness borne; for as they of course treat the first three as divine, so they regard the last three as earthly and created witnesses, making the πνεῦμα to be no other than “the created soul of Christ which he breathed forth on the cross, thus witnessing that he was true man.” It would be awkward to make the same Spirit witness both in heaven and on earth.

Objections to the omission of verse 7 have been imagined, as many are aware, for various reasons, all of which seem to me weakness itself. 1. As to the supposed breach of connection, one has only to read verse 6 in order to be convinced that, on the contrary, the three heavenly witnesses come in most strangely between the water and the blood and the Spirit, of which that verse treated, and verse 8, which pursues the same subject. Internally therefore, as much as externally, verse 7 can only be viewed as an intrusion. The Trinity (fundamental a truth as it is, and without it Christianity is a myth) has no possible link with the context. Christ in death, yet

withal life eternal, is the point on which the three witnesses converge with their one testimony. 2. The expression οἱ μαρτυροῦντες, said of the Spirit, the water, and the blood, is no difficulty without verse 7, because they are evidently personified. 3. The wonder is great how Bishop Middleton, the able investigator of the usage of the Greek article, could have so palpably erred as to say that the τὸ before ἓν in verse 8 presupposes ἓν in verse 7, and therefore that both verses stand or fall together. Previous reference is only one of the sources of the article. Ἓν, I grant, might be used of the persons in the Trinity (compare John 10:30 for the Father and the Son); but τὸ ἓν is absolutely necessary for the Spirit, the water, and the blood, where identity of nature is not in question but unity of scope. Compare Phil. 2:2. Other arguments, such as that founded on two editions of the Epistle, or on the influence of Arians, or on the negligence of transcribers, do not call for a detailed consideration in this place if at all.

Of the state and manner in which the passage is found in the few real or factitious Greek manuscripts that contain it, we may observe, (1) that both in the Graeco-Latin Cod. Ottobon. (Vat. 298) and in the Greek Cod. Montfort. (Trin. Coll. Dubl. G. 97) the three heavenly witnesses are set down without the Greek article to any one of them (πατὴρ, λόγος, καὶ πνεῦμα ἅγιον)! — a construction which indicates not obscurely the hand of one used to Latin (which has no article) and grossly ignorant of Greek; (2) that the same Cod. Ottobon. gives ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, translated in the corresponding Latin by in celo, though not ἀπὸ, as Scholz has strangely read, but, ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς; (3) that whilst the Cod. Ottobon. represents that the Father, Word, and Holy Spirit (εἰς τὸ ἓν εἰσὶ)

“are to one purpose,” or agree in one, (translated by itself unum sunt!) the Cod. Montfort. says ἓν εἰσὶ, “are one;” and both (like the Complut. Polyglot) leave out the grand point of the genuine scripture; for neither gives the smallest hint of the revelation that the three witnesses, the Spirit and the water and the blood, conspire in one testimony. I may say that the Montfort MS. unquestionably Latinizes elsewhere in 1 John, and in the immediate context, in opposition to all other Greek manuscripts.

As for the only other documents as yet produced in favour of the amplified text, suffice it to say that the Codex Ravianus of Berlin is now (as well as one of those at Wolfenbüttel) acknowledged to be a forgery, copying the very characters (in themselves peculiar) of the Complutensian Polyglot, and even repeating some of its misprints! That which Scholz cited as 173 in his list is the Codex Regius Neapolitanus, which in the text really confirms the truth, but adds on the margin in more recent characters the disputed clause. Here only, as compared with Codd. Ottobon. and Montfort., the article is duly inserted; but there is this unfortunate flaw in its value, that while the manuscript was written in the eleventh century, the addition cannot claim a higher antiquity than the sixteenth, if indeed so high. Such evidence as this might be easily multiplied by dishonest hands; but the weight of it all would be nil.

It may be worth while to mention, as corroborating the testimony to the source of this mistake, not without fraud, that its earliest known occurrence in Greek is in the Greek version of the Acts of the fourth Lateran Council (in 1215), where it stands thus - ὅτι τρεῖς εἰσὶν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες ἐν οὐρανῷ ὁ πατὴρ, λόγος, καὶ πνεῦμα

ἅγιον· καὶ τοῦτοι (sic!) οἱ τρεῖς ἓν εἰσίν. εὐθύς τε προστίθησι... καθῶς ἐν τισὶ κώδηξιν (sic = ἀντιγράφοις)

εὑρίσκεται. So the passage stands both in Hardouin's Collection (tom. vii. p. 18) and in Mansi's (tom. xxii. p. 984).I can hardly doubt that this it was which encouraged the Complutensian editors to venture on their daring importation into the Greek New Testament of a passage which, however well meant doctrinally, bears the indelible trace of human infirmity, even after Stunica and his companions did their best to make decent Greek of it by inserting τῳ before οὐρανῶ, ὁ before λόγος, and τὸ before (not πν. but)

ἅγιον πνεῦμα,4 correcting also

τοῦτοι, which was no doubt a blunder for

οὗτοι. But they went a little too far when they changed ἓν into εἰς τὸ ἓν after the first three, and left out εἰς τὸ ἓν after τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ καὶ τὸ αἷμα where these words beyond controversy ought to be. No doubt they were guided by Latin copies made since Th. Aquinas' day and that council. They refer in their marginal note to the perverse doctrine of Joachim on the Trinity, which was condemned at this very council of the Lateran.

If we turn to Thomas Aquinas, as referred to, the erroneous statement is sufficiently startling. He cites verse 7 as it stands in the later Latin copies, and reasons on the heterodoxy of Joachim, who applied the unity there, not to essence, but to affection and consent. Then, quoting verse 8, he says, "In quibusdam Libris attexitur: et hi tres unum sunt; sed hoc in veris exemplaribus non habetur (!), sed in quibusdam Libris dicitur esse appositum ab haereticis Arianis ad pervertendum intellectum sanum auctoritatis praemissae de unitate

essentiali trium personarum (!!).” (Divi Thomae Aquinatis. Opera, tom. viii., p. 83, Venetiis, 1776.) This probably accounts for the omission of the clause that concludes verse 8 in the Complutensian Polyglot, as well as in some of the Greek copies manufactured after the fourth Lateran Council. Some excuse may be allowed for one like the “angelic doctor,” who was unacquainted with the Greek scriptures; but why then did he dogmatise on so serious a subject? Total ignorance is the only conceivable palliation of his assertions, which are notoriously opposed to truth. And what can one think of the deliberate sanction given to all this by Cardinal Ximenes and his editors in the renowned Polyglot of Alcala? Are we to shelter them also under such a plea? If not, what then?

Again, what can one judge of the knowledge or the moral integrity of keeping up such a note to 1 John 5:7 in modern reprints of Jerome’s works (e.g. the Abbé Migne’s, Paris, 1845) as the following? “Caeterum nota sunt pro ejus versiculi germanitate testimonia Patrum Africanorum, Tertulliani, Cypriani, Eugenii, Fulgentii, Vigilii, Victoris, e[t]quatuor centum Episcoporum in fidei professione, quam Vandalorum regi obtulerunt. Major omni exceptione est Cassiodorus,” etc. (Patrologiae Curs., tom. xxix., coll. 846.) Not to speak of the silence of the Greek fathers on a question of the Greek text, it has been proved repeatedly and minutely that not one of these could have read the passage in the Greek as it now appears in the Vulgate. All that can be fairly drawn from Victor Vitensis’ story of the symbol of faith presented by the African bishops to Hunneric is that the three heavenly witnesses must have been then read in their Latin copies. But it is certainly not so in the oldest

and best Latin manuscripts that are extant, as all intelligent Romanists must know.

2 John

There is this peculiarity about the second Epistle of John, that it alone of all the inspired communications is directly addressed to a woman, and not this only but also to her children. There are certainly good but special reasons for a course so exceptional. We know how much the word of God, not to speak of every spiritual instinct, would lead a Christian woman however gifted to seek a place of retirement and of unobtrusive service.

We feel how all that is blessed of God's grace, and I may add of God's gift, is only so much the more set off when woman, while thoroughly using whatever the grace of the Lord entrusts to her, understands nevertheless the place in which it has pleased Him to put her here below. Yet here we have one of the most stringent epistles the Holy Ghost ever wrote addressed to a woman — the elect lady — and to her children, as the immediate objects of it, — not to an extraordinary apostolic commissioner, nor an elder, nor an assembly, still less an assembly with bishops and deacons. Why so? Because there was a question before the Holy Ghost of such unspeakable urgency and magnitude that all considerations must give way to it. God so ordered things that the Epistle should be sent to a woman originally, for the very purpose of showing that, whatever may be the ordinary ways of God in His church, there are occasions and seasons in which the very foundation of His grace and of His moral glory must be maintained at all cost. Wherever this ' is the case, no excuse can be tolerated on the score of sex or youth. Do

not tell me that it is only a child or a woman. If Christ is in the question, all else must give way. Nor is this a sacrifice but real gain.

What has been remarked may serve to show us the all-absorbing consequence of what the Holy Ghost here takes in hand. Christ was undermined by those who held His name. It was a question of a true or of a false Christ. Sex was nothing now, youth not more to be considered — all very important when things flow on regularly and in their ordinary channels. We all know how unbecoming it would be for either the one or the other to be put forward, still more to put themselves there; but the Holy Ghost addresses Himself to them here. And we shall see, as is always the case, that what might seem an anomaly in the word of God, when properly looked into, will prove to be full of grave instruction for all our souls. No other conceivable address would have been so appropriate for the second Epistle of John.

Had the present been written in general terms, like the first Epistle, much would have been lost; just as, on the other hand, I could scarcely, for my own part, imagine the first Epistle written to the elect lady and her children. All is precisely as it should be. There we find points of universal interest to the children of God, and it is a question of addressing all this family, fathers, young men, and babes. But here, where the tide of evil was now setting in strongly, where searching enquiries must be on foot, where not the ordinary evils only were increasing in an ever and rapidly accumulating volume, but the deepest peril for the basis of all our hopes, the warning is addressed fittingly both to the family and to individuals. Where the first Epistle noticed these things in a general way to all, here we come to greater

precision in the evil, and here too we have to do with particular persons.

How often one has heard it urged that it is not for a woman to take upon herself to judge, and that no wise man can mean to say that these are questions for children — that they are points of delicacy which most of all require deep theological knowledge and mature judgment; and would you expect the assembly of God to judge such matters? But the Holy Ghost here appeals to a woman and her children, and they are bound to judge; if they do not, Christ is set at nought for their own ease. It was now a question of Christ — the Christ of God. We shall see all this more clearly as we proceed. I am only now endeavouring to show the beautiful appropriateness of that which to a superficial eye might. seem somewhat out of order in the address of this Epistle. “The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth.”

This is another very characteristic point in the second Epistle of John. Indeed it runs all through John. In the Gospel, as we know, Christ Himself is set forth expressly as the truth; and then his Epistles, as we have seen and may yet see, abound in the same tenacity to what was revealed by and in Christ. Here we find it still. It is interwoven into the very salutation of the epistle — “The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth.” At once the issue is understood. What was at stake is here before the mind of those who read so remarkable an address. If Mary, about to become the mother of Jesus, might wonder at the singularity of the angel’s salutation, assuredly this was meant to search the conscience and stir the souls of the elect lady and

her children, when an inspired apostle addresses to them a communication of unwonted solemnity. How great the grace of Christ, and infinite the condescension, that shows how precious is every believer to Him! We find nothing like this in any of the preceding epistles, as to the Galatians or the Romans, the Corinthians or the Ephesians, yet I do affirm that this is precisely what was wanted here. It was a more fundamental question, and the error more fatal. It was no defence or assertion of justification by faith. John is not setting forth the proper order of the assembly of God; nor is he leading the saint into the heavenly privileges of the individual or the body. Christ was in question or nothing. Nothing, did I say? Worse than nothing. It was either the Christ of God in all His divine glory, or the greatest evil into which a man can possibly be plunged by the enemy. It was, in short, war to the knife — the great controversy between Christ and antichrist. Solemn to think and say, the self-same crisis affects every soul now present!

I remember years ago reading a book by a celebrated character, who has now passed away from the scene, in which he dared to raise the question whether there was any particular sign in 2 or 3 John,5 why they should be accepted as divinely inspired, more than such compositions as the pastoral letters of Ignatius. It was not that the writer took the place of being an infidel: in fact he was Rector of the English College at Rome, and since a Cardinal in this country. This dreadful feature of ecclesiasticism is not so uncommon to find; namely, an infidel argument under the cowl of a monk or in the lips of their most learned professors. Therefore one must not be surprised if one ever so eminent ecclesiastically gave the plainest evidence that he had no faith in the word of

God, that he did not participate in its power. Thus the strongest form of the assertion of church authority may really betray under its robes no better than vulgar infidelity. He asked6 how you would demonstrate from internal facts the inspiration of the second and third Epistles of St. John, finding in them neither a prophecy nor anything else which could not have been written by a very holy and pious magi, without any aid whatsoever from inspiration! The same poisonous argument taints in a still baser and more audacious form Dr. Milner's "End of Controversy:" indeed it pervades Romanism as a whole, and proves its essentially infidel character.

I think, my brethren, that our experience might supply ample ground for an answer, though probably not of such a character as would satisfy one who could make such an objection. There is a day coming when judgment will decide; but conscience, acted upon by the Holy Ghost, can form a conviction now — not of course infallibly, for God alone is or can be infallible — but adequately for the need of the soul. I do say, that the loss would have been immense if we had not had even these two Epistles, putting the matter on no higher ground than this. I need not say that I refuse to treat a question of scripture on a mere ground of utility. Still, we are certain that God has written nothing in vain; and if in a grave crisis of late any one scripture was needed and must have been missed, without which we might have found ourselves at a loss how to act firmly under as trying circumstances as ever befell any soul in this room, or any other, it would have been precisely the second Epistle of John.

The apostle then lets them know that he loved them all in the truth; for a believer, young or old, man, woman, or

child, is best loved, just for the sake of the truth. He that departs from the truth, what is he? A rebel. But they that walk in the truth, even were they children or ever so lowly, are precious to God; and His Spirit waits on such, and writes to them, and lays on them to decide before God, in their own sphere of duty, this most grave question: “Is my soul in communion with God about His own Son? Whatever may be the reputation of others, whatever my own weakness and call to walk humbly, do I feel that the one thine, which is to determine all others for me is the truth, the truth of Christ Himself?” If it be so, all else will in the main be right. Hence John writes to this effect to the elect lady, whom he loved in truth, and to her children. Nor was this affection of a personal or circumstantial character: “Whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth.” The revelation of God in Christ does, by the Holy Spirit, bind together in love all who know the truth. It was on account of the truth that he now wrote — as it is said, “for the truth’s sake.”

How unweariedly he puts forward that which was now to test them severally! (verse 2.) “For the truth’s sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever. Grace be with you, mercy and peace.” As has been often and truly remarked, where individuals are thus before the mind of the Spirit of God, the need of “mercy” is supposed and shown. “From God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love” — an expression found, as far as I remember, nowhere else. It was just in its right place here. Satan was undermining the glory of “the Son of the Father.” But if He be not this, how can I go to Him? How rest my

soul, my all, on Him? How can God look to Him and His work for every soul that is brought to Himself?

Hence the apostle's source of joy. "I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father." Walking in truth is the result of having the truth. The truth produces truthfulness. The man who has not got the truth cannot possibly walk in truth, and will not long wear the semblance of it. To walk thus was the effect of the truth itself known: they walked in truth, "according as we received commandment from the Father."

"And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another." It was the old, but ever new word: old, because it was manifested in Christ Himself; new, because it is true in us as in Him. Divine love flows from love, and reproduces itself in all who know Christ the truth. But what is love? "And this is love:" not independency of each other, not agreeing to differ, or any of those inventions of men which are not only a departure from the truth, but in point of fact morally evil and injurious. "This is love, that we walk after his commandments." You cannot separate it from Christ; you cannot separate it from obedience. It is love in exercise, and it is also love that is communicated by faith in Jesus. "This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it."

Now he gives the reason why he writes thus solemnly to this lady and her children. "For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not Jesus Christ coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist." "Many deceivers are entered into the

world;” and therefore it is needful, yea imperative, to press the claims of the truth of God. “Who confess not Jesus Christ coming in the flesh.” It is put here rather differently from its shape in the first Epistle. There the allusion was to the fact, but this as stamping a permanent character on Christ — the Christ that came. Here it is not so much a question of His having come, but, as it seems to me, indicating if possible a deeper shade of infidelity. No doubt the same persons are referred to, but it would seem as having developed their infidelity rather more. For there is the rejection not only of the fact, but even of its possibility. They conceived the thought that in some way or another it was derogatory to Him. They denied, some His deity, some His humanity.

In commenting on 1 John 4, I have already remarked that “Jesus Christ come in the flesh” supposes neither His deity alone, nor His humanity only, but both, There is no propriety in the expression, it appears to me, unless it means both united in the same person. In point of fact it is the veering to one side or the other — choosing a part of the truth of Christ so as to set aside the rest’ that is so fruitful a source of error here and everywhere, though here most fatally. “This is the deceiver and the antichrist.” It is far worse than bringing in division and offence, bad as these are; nay, it is far more serious than even the undermining of morality, ruinous as this must be. To sap or corrupt morality is no doubt to destroy oneself, and perhaps often others; but this is to defame and degrade Christ, the Son of the Father. This, then, is a bolder effort of Satan, and therefore John calls one guilty of it not only “the deceiver” (every false teacher is more or less a deceiver), but in this case also “the antichrist.”

Hence he calls them to look at home diligently lest they should stray. For God alone keeps the soul, and this by and in the truth. “Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought,” (of which the apostles had been the instrument,) “but that we receive a full reward.”

Then he lays down the great principle in verse 9: — Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.” It is a larger principle than simply denying Christ coming in the flesh. No matter where it is, or how it is, if you overthrow the person of Christ, you transgress the doctrine of Christ. In the seventh verse we had a particular case; but from it the Spirit of God rises up to this statement of truth which meets every such cue. “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ” (that is, in the teaching which the Holy Ghost has given in His word about Christ, not about His work, but about His person), “hath not God” in any sense or measure, now that Christ is preached.

The greatest error about His work is not so directly fatal to the soul, because it does not so immediately assail the personal glory of the Lord Jesus. Here it is the doctrine of Christ Himself; and as one must beware of straying at first, let him also beware of not continuing in the doctrine of Christ. A man might have professed His name, and gone on some time with the assembly of God, accepted as a believer, or even a teacher; but if he does not abide in the truth of Christ, it does not signify what he may have been, it matters not in the least how much he may seemingly have been blessed, it is all over with him if he does not abide in the doctrine of Christ, and it

becomes a necessity, not merely for the safety of oneself and others, but for God's glory, which is concerned here more sensitively than anywhere else. "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God."

It might be said that at any rate a man might have the truth of the Old Testament, as there were such before Christ was manifested in the world; and if the person fails to enter into all the truth that Christianity has told out, can he be worse off than those who lived and died before Jesus came? The answer is that such special pleading is all in vain; he is incomparably guiltier and worse off, because now the standard is not what God once gave, but what He is giving now in a Christ fully revealed. Therefore it will not do to talk of what others knew not. This is an important practical criterion; because, although not to the same extent, it does meet the difficulty which people constantly allege founded on what their forefathers did — possibly excellent men — two or three hundred years ago. What is that to the present moment? If God by His Spirit causes His truth to reach us in a form and power suited to this day, if God brings it home more clearly on this point or that, these are the things which put the soul under a fresh responsibility; and this seems indicated in the form in which the Spirit of God deals with the error here. "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God." It is not only that he lacks the blessedness of the Christian revelation, but he has not God — he has no part nor lot with God at all. The Old Testament saints had God variously revealed. They received His word and rejoiced, according to the measure of their faith, in the truth as God then made it

known to them. But now that Christ is come, now that the Holy Ghost has been sent down, now that the unfolding of Christ's personal glory, of His exaltation, and of the infinite grace of His work, has been proclaimed, it is altogether hopeless to seek a cover of present unbelief under the ignorance of past years. It is the present unfolding of God's mind that puts every soul to the test. Therefore not to accept it, and not to abide in it when it is received, to go back from it or to transgress, swerving to one side or the other, or abandoning it, comes to the same substantial sin and ruin.

On the other hand, here. is the comfort for the elect lady and her children, and for any one else who cleaves to the truth. "He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son." There is great blessedness in thus abiding, brethren; it is a grand thing not to be easily shaken, not to be moved to and fro by every wind of doctrine, more particularly in anything about Christ. Beware of this. Weigh seriously every thought, no matter from whom it may come — any word that even seems to turn you away from what you have, and to weaken the assurance you have from God. Never allow yourself to be shaken from old truth, if indeed you have it and know it. At the same time always hold your soul open for more; and take care that you do not confound notions you have gathered (perhaps from tradition, possibly from your own mind) with the truth of Christ, lest, when the tradition is touched, you may begin to yield to the spirit of unbelief, and either give up truth you used (or seemed at least) to hold, or burst out against the truth of God in others who know it better than yourself.

In these things assuredly we need to have the promised guidance of the Holy Ghost. We cannot start or go on without it, nor would we do so even if we could. It is the very blessedness of our souls to be kept by so holy a guide and in safe companionship. But then, just as in our ordinary walk, if we live in the Spirit, we must walk in the Spirit; so also, if we have been taught of the Spirit, we must go forward and persevere in the Spirit. This does not in the smallest degree clash with “abiding.” The only way to be kept is holding fast what God has really taught us, yet using this as the groundwork for making progress. Such is the true way to “abide.” “He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.”

Now that the doctrine of Christ is fully brought out in the word of God, the more sure it is that there is nothing to add. Impossible to discover a truth of God that is not already in the Bible. But there is not a little to learn which, I am persuaded, is there already. We must not confound these two things. Who would assume that you and I know all that is in the Bible? If then a line of truth be pointed out anywhere in scripture, do not calumniously pretend that it is some further development, because you have been so dull as not to see it. It is the very point of faith to know that as God Himself is infinite, so His word contains boundless riches for us. There is that which may by the Holy Ghost be always apprehended more and more fully; and yet after all it is the same holy deposit as was given to the Christian from the beginning.

The apostle now comes to the practical consequence. He has laid down the principle in the ninth verse: now comes the practice. “If there come any unto you, and

bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." Mark how it is put. It is not — bring not the true humanity, or the proper Deity; because Satan might change the doctrine somewhat, so as to save appearances for the simple. Therefore it would not do merely to specify some one particular form of error, because then the devil would have only to evade that form, and there would be no resource. But here it stands firm yet comprehensive: if a man come to you, and does not bring this doctrine (that is, the doctrine of Christ do not you receive him. No matter what may be the particular manner in which the enemy has warped his soul, and through him dishonoured Christ; no matter what may be the peculiar nature of the false doctrine, — if a man come to you, and bring not the divinely revealed doctrine, the Holy Ghost's teaching of Christ in the written word, — "receive him not into your house, neither bid him greeting." That is to say, do not bid him a common salutation. There is nothing about "God speed" in the word (χαίρειν), though "good speed" might be tolerable. The stronger terms are merely put in by the English translators. It was the ordinary form of courteous greeting every day.

This is to my mind a serious thought. Do you think, my brethren, that we all follow this out as we ought? Are we not conscious of shrinking from the cost, and of a fear if not anxiety lest we should be counted uncourteous? I can speak for one certainly; and I doubt much whether in general we are sufficiently alive to the solemnity of what Satan is always pursuing. More particularly let me add, that we stand in a position, failure in which tends to

expose all God's children to the efforts of the enemy. There are none, I presume, whom he would so much desire to drag into the mire, and thus defile the name of Jesus.

If then such an one come, of course without the doctrine, yet taking the ground of truth, you are to receive him not. Where? To the Lord's table? No; this could not have been said to the elect lady and her children. The exhortation is quite independent of public fellowship. The question of the Lord's table is not even raised. They are not even to receive him into their private house, nor to accost him with common greeting. Why this most severe and peremptory exclusion? "For he that biddeth him greeting" (not so much as receiving him into the house, but interchanging words of courtesy with such a man, knowingly, of course, and deliberately) "is a partaker of his evil deeds." You, as a confessor of Christ, put your sanction on this denier of Christ. You could not do worse except deny Christ yourself; indeed, in a certain sense you are more guilty than even if you were drawn for a time into the abominable thing yourself, because then you would be honestly acting out what you had been deceived by Satan into believing; but the more you hold the true Christ, if you tamper with those who do not, the more shameless you are in unfaithfulness to Christ.

To some this may seem strong; but who has written it? who urges it? Is it a man without God? Is it not the Spirit of God who charges us in the name of the Lord Jesus thus sensitively to feel for the truth of Christ? Let us not be deaf to such a claim from such a person. Let us not reserve our warm feelings for our friends, and leave only indifference for the name of Jesus. He that greets kindly

the man that brings not the doctrine of Christ is a traitor to Christ.

Let me here repeat that it is not “God speed,” for this might give a false idea. It sounds as if we were wishing him well in his work. This would be commonly inferred by one unaccustomed to read the language of the Holy Ghost. But it conveys nothing of the sort — merely a Greek “good morning” — what would pass in the current language of the day among one’s fellows.

He then who has anything to say to the defamer of Christ which could be fairly interpreted as a sanction, let it be ever so small, becomes a partaker of his evil deeds. It is not a question of being a partner in his evil doctrine. The elect lady and her children were of course believed to hold sound doctrine; but they are here peremptorily called to refuse any measure of countenance to one who did not bring the doctrine of Christ — not only not to receive him into the house, but not to salute him outside it. It was a part of the loyalty they owed to Christ.

John concludes thus: “Having many things to write to you, I would not with paper and ink: but I hope to come to you, and speak mouth to mouth, that your joy may be full. The children of thine elect sister greet thee.” There was hearty love, but it was only in the truth, of which Christ alone is the test and obedience the effect.

3 John

THE THIRD EPISTLE OF JOHN again calls us to weigh the Lord’s admirable wisdom in its address, — “The elder unto the well-beloved Gaius,” — as we have, I trust, been satisfied of the same in the second Epistle’s

address to “the elect lady and her children.” Without the third Epistle we should have an immense loss; for here too we may meet the unbelieving slight already noticed in a scribe of this age by a direct assertion of its living value. A precious and needed supplement is supplied especially for these evil days. If we had only the second without the third Epistle of John, we should have the negative side without the positive — the evil warned against rather than the good enforced. Both are most needful. What would have been the effect of the second Epistle of John, if that alone of the two had been ours at the present moment? I have sought to show how admirable it is — matchless for its own purpose — and impossible to supply its place from any other part of scripture, yet in thorough accordance with it all. It is admitted that the principle of the Epistle is found all through the New Testament; but the strength of the application, the incisive edge of its holy jealousy for Christ, is only to be found there. Yet, supposing we had not the third of John, what would be the too sure effect? I am persuaded we should be in danger of becoming painfully narrow; we should be in constant dread of an antichrist in those that surrounded us; we should do little but search with suspicion, lest each new comer to the house should not bring the doctrine of Christ.

Now we are not called to be thus on the watch for another’s evil. We ought never to be suspicious. It is not faith, but flesh that expects iniquity. On the other hand, if a man comes and does not bring the doctrine of Christ, it is not to be branded as suspicion or want of love if one regard him as antichrist. It is according to the truth we love, and is the wisdom that comes from above; nay, it is real obedience and loyalty to Christ. But

to allow doubts and questions of one who neither in himself nor in his associations makes light of Christ's glory is inexcusable. Here comes one bearing the Lord's name, not without a Barnabas who knows and can commend him: to indulge in surmises, if without the least evidence of this or that about him, is clearly not according to Christ. It is here, I think, that we may learn more of the value and special function of this third Epistle of John, which is as decided in the cherishing of warm affections towards the faithful servants of the Lord, as the second Epistle was peremptory in its warning against the allowance of the profession of Christ's name, to shut our eyes to the fact that there are men who abuse that name to overthrow His person and truth.

The third Epistle accordingly is not addressed to a lady and her children. This would not suit its object. Too often, as we know, ladies and their children want no exhortation to go forth with sufficiently warm affection after preachers. This is notorious. There are few more common snares in the church of God than the undue influence which some exercise, if they do not seek, over females and young people. I do not speak of such as seek the conversion of souls, but of those whose zeal goes forth in unedifying questions which form parties, chiefly through the medium of women and children. Undoubtedly this has always been the case. If you search through the history of the church, you will invariably find that where men have wrong purposes in view, they do not seek intelligent men, — those who can take and keep their ground, still less those to whom God has given grace as faithful servants of independent judgment: they shrink from these, and avoid a

conference which might be profitable, getting into holes and corners, where they can at leisure indoctrinate their little coteries with the doctrines that they bring in privily.

Of all this and more we have had sorrowful experience. It is not a thing we have merely read about others in bygone days. We have seen and known it ourselves: its grief we have bitterly felt; and we ought to mention this snare, and could not refrain, if indeed we have love for the children of God and jealousy for the glory of Christ. Undoubtedly then it remains true that there is the solemn fact of Satan's enmity, and of his using those who bear the name of Christ to overthrow His glory, as far as he can. It is the Holy Ghost who warns of this, though the word and experience prove how mighty He is in behalf of the love and glory of Christ. For indeed there are men faithful and true to that name; and we are as much bound to go forth with loving desire and succour, to cheer and help them in every way, showing honour to them, as again we are responsible that no circumstances, no past reputation, no present amiability, no ties of flesh and blood, no consideration of any human sort, shall weaken our solemn separation from and abhorrence of that which overthrows Jesus.

This third Epistle then is addressed to Gaius — no doubt a truly hospitable and gracious man. We all know too well that men are apt to be somewhat selfish. Women, as we must be aware, are even by nature characterised by affection. Men, if they have what one looks for from them, ought to have a little judgment; but then their judgment may be warped by selfishness, though no doubt this may be often concealed, perhaps from themselves, by pleas of prudence and so forth. Women,

as a class, have warmer and quicker affections, Here then the wisdom of God is very observable. The kindest of men require to be stirred up, and need to be exhorted strongly as to what they owe to those who go forth in the name of the Lord Jesus. With women this is hardly to be pressed. On the contrary, as a general rule, they rather call for a little cooling down. But as for men, I have rarely seen the man that was not in want of an occasional admonition or encouragement in this kind of love. Do we not recognize in a new form the wisdom of our God? “The elder unto the well-beloved Gains, whom I love in the truth.” He was already a large-hearted man, but he was none the worse for being somewhat cheered on. There is a danger of being disheartened in these labours of love. There are many difficulties and many disappointments, and there is no man who may not sometimes need a word from God to keep his courage up, and his confidence in the Lord, that the springs of his love may flow fresh and strong.

Here we have the fact that to the “well-beloved Gains” the apostle writes with this intent. He loved him also in the truth. Whether it was the elect lady and her children, or the well-beloved Gaius, it is all the same thing. It was not because of his hospitality, but “whom I love in the truth.” No doubt the apostle did much value his generosity and care; but even in matters wholly different from those of his second Epistle, the distinguishing feature which presses on his soul was this: — “whom I love in the truth.” “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.” He was not indifferent even as to the bodily well-being of Gains. The Holy Ghost thus inspires him to write it. It is not a

private letter, nor was it an uninspired codicil added to what was inspired; but here it stands in a genuine apostolic epistle, written by John the elder to his brother. He wished that he might prosper and be in health, even as his soul prospered. “For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.” It was sweet to the apostle to hear such a testimony to the steadfastness of Gaius in the truth, as it was to hear of all he loved.

“Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and this7 strangers.” The common text and our English version seem a little peculiar in the phraseology here, conveying the idea that these strangers were not brethren. This clearly was not the intention. He has before his mind brethren that were strangers. It was not merely brethren that lived in the place where Gains was: this might be a manifest token of happy friendship. But there was a greater proof of love and hospitality in the kindness he practised to stranger brethren, to Christians whom he did not know. “Which have borne witness of thy love before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey worthily of God, thou shalt do well: for on account of the name they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to take up such, that we might be fellow-helpers to the truth.”

This was a special claim on brethren. They did not throw themselves on man, on the world, on nature, but on Christ only. It was for His name’s sake they went forth. They looked nowhere else; and the apostle says, “We therefore ought to take up such” — not ye but “we.”

How beautifully he who lay on Jesus' bosom puts himself along with Gaius! Had the apostle been placed in the same circumstances as Gains, no doubt he would have done so; but his place as apostle did not absolve him from the practical manifestation of love to servants of the Lord who might be in a position altogether different from his own. That this is the case is most evident, because in the verse but, one before he says "thou;" in the verse after he says "I." Unquestionably then, when he changes the "thou" either to "we" or to "I," he means what he says.

Thus we find that if there was sorrow expressed in the second Epistle at finding the deceivers and the antichrist seeking an entrance among the simple, in the third Epistle there is the joy of welcoming these faithful brethren who went forth for Christ, and his loving hospitable heart who is thus praised by the Holy Ghost, and his name indelibly recorded in the scriptures of truth with theirs as fellow-labourers.

But the bright picture has its shade. "I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church."

We have another evil designated very clearly here. Diotrephes is the scriptural example of the clerical tribe, as contra-distinguished from the ministry of Christ There is no service, because there is no love. He is the representative of the spirit which opposes the free

action of the Holy Ghost, setting itself even against apostolic authority in order to gain or maintain his own individual pre-eminence. Self-importance, jealousy of those over us, impatience of others equally called to serve, scorn of the assembly, yet sometimes humouring the least worthy for its own ends — such are the characteristics of clericalism. I do not mean in clergymen only; for there are men of God incomparably better than their position tends to make them; as on the other hand this evil thing is nowhere so offensive as where the truth that is owned wholly condemns it.

If Diotrephes had been called to serve the Lord, of which there is little appearance, were there not hundreds and thousands not less truly called to the same work as servants of Christ by a title from Christ not less real than what he held himself? Was he not bound to respect the title of others? You cannot plead the title of Christ for yourself without maintaining the authority of Christ for another. He who does so honestly and truly could not possibly claim an exclusive title. This was precisely what Diotrephes did, and it is the distinctive point of the clerical system. It is not a question of ministry, nor even of what people call “stated ministry.” Who doubts stated ministry? At the same time who can deny that God uses servants of His who are not stated? I believe that He maintains His own title in the church of God to raise a man up to say a word, and it may be an important word, who might not be called on to speak again, — only used for a particular purpose. God of old reserved such a right, and certainly He has not given it up now.. no doubt there is a variety of ways in which He employs those who may not have any well defined place in the church of God. To abolish all these to a dead level for

himself to lead and govern was the unchecked desire of Diotrephes. It is nothing more, if not less, than we often see now. Supposing persons have large gifts, the more can they afford to give the fullest scope to the lesser gifts; nor is there any surer sign of weakness in one's work than any unwillingness to accredit the work of others. He that values his own call on the Lord's part to serve Him is bound by all means to hold in His name the door open for every one that is called to labour. But so Diotrephes did not. Did he profess to desire only what edified most, and so set himself against lesser gifts? He dared to rise up against the apostle himself. The truth is, he cared for himself, and loved to have the pre-eminence. We have no reason to gather that he loved anything or anybody else. Such was the man who had ventured to oppose John; and, as we see, the apostle says he would remember him. The Lord did not forget it.

But he could not close the Epistle with anything so painful. Turning to a happier theme, he says, "Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God."

How the key-note of the first Epistle is heard right through the last! If there were self-exalting men with and without gift, office, or influence, others there are of a different mind. "Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is true."

Then with the salutation he closes. "I had many things to write to thee, but I wish not with ink and pen to write to thee: but I hope to see thee, and we will speak mouth to mouth soon. Peace be to thee. The friends salute thee.

Greet the friends by name." There are minute differences of interest between this conclusion and that of the second Epistle, but I avoid details and pass on.

1 *The first "know" is in the present, this (the second) in the perfect, ἐγνώκαμεν, which means (not "have known," but) "have the knowledge of."

2 * "Quia tamen optime fluit contextus si hoc membrum addatur, et video in optimis ac probatissimis fidei codicibus haberi, ego quoque libenter amplecter." — Comm. in loc. Ed. Genev. p. 74.

3 * Jerome (Epist. cvi. ad Sunn. et Fret.) speaks of a similar course of mistake in copying his own version. "Et miror quomodo e latere Adnotationem nostram nescio quis temerarius scribendam in corpore putaverit, quam nos pro eruditione legentis scripsimus hoc modo," etc. (S. Hieronymi Opp. tom. i. p. 659, Ed. Ben.) But we need not go outside the commonly received text of the Greek New Testament in order to find another instance of what was first a marginal gloss, which at length crept into the text; for such seems to be the history of Acts 8:37. It is curious that here the conditions are reversed as between Erasmus and the Complutensian editors; for he owns the verse wanting in his Greek copies, yet inserts it in deference to the Latin, whilst they follow the Greek spite of the Latin.

4 * Hence Calecas in the fourteenth century, and Bryennius in the fifteenth, as Bishop Marsh noticed, being native Greeks, and feeling the deficiency of the Lateran Acts in Greek, wrote ὁ λόγος καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον. The copyist of the Montfort MS. omitted the article even before πατὴρ, not to speak of the other words which require it.

5 *"I would ask you, for instance, how you would demonstrate (I will not speak now of the books of the Old Testament; I will take that for granted, from the historical evidence, that our Saviour and His apostles received them as sufficient to satisfy you with regard to them; but Christians are more particularly interested in the New Testament) how you would demonstrate from internal facts the inspiration of the second and third Epistles of St. John, finding in them neither a prophecy nor any thing else that could not have been written by a very holy and pious man, without any aid from inspiration. In some, indeed, of the Epistles of St. Paul you will find it exceedingly difficult to discover passages so decidedly proving a divine assistance in him who wrote them as to satisfy you that they were inspired." — Lectures (p. 28) on the Doctrines and Practices of the Roman Catholic Church, etc. By the Rev. Nicholas Wiseman, D.D., etc. London: Hodson, Fleet Street. 1836.

6 In the corrected edition of this lecture I find, "What internal mark of inspiration can we discover in the third epistle of St. John to show that the inspiration sometimes must have been granted here? Is there anything in that epistle which a good and pious pastor of the primitive ages might not have written? anything superior (!) in sentiment or doctrine (!!) to what an Ignatius or a Polycarp might have indited?" (Lect. ii. p. 38, ed. 1836.) Truly "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God... neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

7 * The reading of the most ancient and best MSS. and Versions is τοῦτο (and not as in Text. Rec.

εἰς τοὺς) ξ.

Jude

We enter now on the last of those letters as they stand in the common Bible, THE EPISTLE OF JUDE. I will take this opportunity of instituting briefly a comparison with part of the second Epistle of Peter, which, you may remember, I passed over with a partial notice when discoursing on that subject. Doubts have been entertained, as most are aware, by men of some learning. From their similarity in various ways they have conceived that Peter must have borrowed from Judas or Judas from Peter; and that, in point of fact, if one is inspired, the other cannot be.

Brethren, this sort of thought and speech is the result of nothing but unbelieving speculation. And I will go even farther (for it is a serious thing thus to treat scripture): I say that the speculation is as shallow as it is unbelieving. Although no doubt there are those who consider themselves to show their superior wisdom by their doubts, I must take the liberty of saying that to dispute the inspiration of either 2 Peter or Judas demonstrates their ignorance of both. I do not mean at all to affirm that those guilty of such license are ignorant on every subject. Far from it. A person drawn into such views may be possessed of large and superior information in what has occupied his life, and there may be even certain portions of the word of God in which he is really taught of the Spirit of God. But for all that these doubts are as unfounded as they are dangerous, and dishonouring to the Holy Ghost. I am aware that some names of great weight among Protestants, as well as others quite opposed in position, have yielded to these

unworthy questionings of scripture. To this I refer that those who are present may understand that it is not for want of examining their objections, and weighing well what they say against the truth, that I have ventured to express a severe judgment on their opinion.

I hope to show that Judas has not borrowed from Peter any more than Peter from Judas, but that both were inspired men, who wrote in the direct order and power of the Holy Spirit. I do not at all mean to imply by this that one did not write before the other, and that one may not have read what the other wrote. Whether this were so or not matters little really to the question. It is plain and demonstrable that the Spirit of God, if one did know of the other's communication, has taken good care, while giving a great deal that is common to both, to give points of difference of the most essential kind. In point of fact, therefore, the criticism that comes to the conclusion that the one is borrowed from the other simply betrays its own blind incompetence. The differences are as striking at least as the resemblances, and abundantly show that Judas has not borrowed from Peter, and that Peter has a line as peculiarly his own as that of Judas, and not more so.

We have seen in the Epistles of Peter that the leading truth, besides the bringing out of the grace of Christ, is the righteous government of God under which the saints are placed. We have seen that this righteous dealing does not merely affect the saints, but will most seriously bring the world under its weight before God has closed the matter. Thus in the second Epistle of Peter, naturally, where we see the future judgment carried on even to the end of the thousand years, with the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness, the point

from which the Holy Ghost views matters is men judged according to the principles of God's righteous government. In the case of Christians all of course flows from and through grace; but those that have despised the grace of God will not be able longer to despise His government.

The second Epistle, accordingly takes this up, and shows that as among the Jews there were false prophets, so now there are false teachers. Of these the Spirit of God gives some very solemn traits. It is said that they have brought in damnable heresies, even denying the sovereign Master that bought them. A word on this may relieve the minds of persons, to whom it often seems harsh that the Lord had bought false teachers avid heretics. You must distinguish between being bought and being redeemed.

It is never taught in Scripture that the Lord redeemed a heretic, or any other man that was not saved. There is not a syllable in God's word that enfeebles the certainty of eternal life for the believer; but it is none the less clearly taught there that the Lord has "bought" every man whatever, saved or not, and believer or not. The result for man has nothing to do with the Lord's purchase. He has bought the world and everything that belongs to it. This is the doctrine everywhere, whether in parable or in doctrine, whether in gospel or epistle; and this is the constant statement of the Spirit. Of course, therefore, these bad people were bought as well as the rest.

But redemption is another thought, and so far from purchase being the same as redemption, the two things are decidedly in contrast. The object of redemption is to

deliver a person from the power of the adversary, to bring one who is a captive out of slavery, to set him free by the ransom paid. This is only true of the believer; he alone is brought out of captivity and made free. It is an efficacious not a nominal deliverance, and belongs only to faith. It is not merely that there is purchase-money; this is not enough for redemption, which is a question of setting a slave or prisoner free, and this is never the case unless a soul believes in Christ. But it is a different thing with purchase: you may buy that which is inanimate, and that which is bought belongs to you indeed, but possibly for harm and shame. Supposing you could purchase a person, what is the effect of the transaction You make him a slave: thus it is the very reverse of redemption. Redemption makes the slave free, but purchase makes what you buy your property or your slave.

These two facts are both true of Christians, and meet in Christ's blood. The Christian is both redeemed and purchased., but he alone is redeemed. But besides being redeemed, he is bought by the blood of Christ, and therefore it is that he becomes Christ's slave. He is a bondman of Christ Jesus. Perfectly freed by redemption, he is made thoroughly a slave by purchase; and this is precisely the anomaly the natural man never understands. As for the theologians, some of them are not natural men; but one might ask in despair, what it is they ever seem to understand? The fact is that they have so confused the two things as to make the subject hopeless in their hands.

It is clear that the dispute between those called Calvinists and the so-called Arminians turns much on this point, which is then very important. Both of them

agree in the error that redemption and purchase mean the same thing. The consequence is that they never can settle the question. The Calvinist is quite right in his premise that redemption belongs solely to the household of faith; the Arminian is no less right in his premise that purchase belongs to every creature under the effects of sin. But they are both equally mistaken in assuming them to be the same thing; and there they wrangle, as they might for ever, without advancing an inch toward settling the matter, because each holds a truth that the other denies. The truth in this question, as in many others which have distracted Christendom, is that faith receives that which the contending parties lose in the dispute; faith bows to the whole truth, instead of being shut up to a part of it. Here then in 2 Peter 2 it will be seen that it is only a question of purchase, which does not imply that these men were ever born of God.

In the next place we are given to see the effects of their teaching and conduct: — “And many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.” Next their covetousness is brought before us, and, more than this, the certainty that sure judgment awaits them — that their destruction does not slumber, but is near and sure. Then Peter says (mark the expression), “For if God spared not angels that sinned” — it is simply a question of sinning in this epistle, of righteousness and unrighteousness — “but cast them down to hell, and delivered them to chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and spared not the old world, but saved Noah, one of eight, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly,” etc. These are the topics with Peter, even sin and unrighteousness. Hence he speaks of God who,

“turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; and delivered just Lot” (it is righteousness again), “distressed with the filthy conversation of the godless: (for the righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their lawless deeds).” Nor is this more than the beginning, not the end. They were accordingly reserved for a still greater punishment by and by. This is what is traced more particularly throughout the Epistle on the vastest scale, and finally in the next chapter.

But in Judas we may see a wholly different character of evil. “Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to the called that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ mercy to you, and peace, and love, be multiplied.” Though professedly the epistle of Judas is to the saints at large, the Holy Ghost brings in the same wish of mercy as is more usually addressed to an individual soul. In fact this Epistle does individualize the saints, and it is of the utmost importance to look at truth for the individual in this place, and to lay hold of it for our own souls. “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write to you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints.” This is not so much the case with Peter; he does not speak of any such contention. “For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old marked out for this sentence, ungodly men.” Mark, it is not merely sin, or unrighteousness: here are seen “ungodly men, turning the grace of our God;” for it is not men’s righteousness

here, nor His righteous government. The evil is “turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying” the only Sovereign Master, “and our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Thus the measure of likeness makes the real difference between the Epistles far more striking than if this Epistle had been written without any points of contact with the other. Of one thing we may be sure, that whether or not Peter referred to Judas, or Judas to Peter, the Holy Ghost had both in view, and distributed to each as He would; and there are no finer samples of the action of the Holy Ghost in the touching of similar lines of truth, and at the same time of converging with the most consummate wisdom, and the most admirable delicacy of expression as well as of truth, than these two Epistles, that treat of the existent and coming evil under different points of view. Supposing two persons take totally different lines, it is evident that nothing is easier than for each to pursue his own line; but supposing they come continually close together, it is plain that there is far more difficulty to preserve intact the truth that is given to each. The latter is the case with Peter and Judas: but the Holy Ghost has done the work to perfection.

“I will therefore put you in remembrance, though once for all knowing all things, how that the Lord, having saved a people out of the land of Egypt, in the second place destroyed them that believed not.”

There is not a word about this in Peter. Why here? Because what the apostle Judas is showing is not merely unrighteousness in conduct, but the abandonment of a position of grace, and the virtual turning it into lasciviousness. In fact the grand subject of Peter in his

second Epistle is unrighteousness; the distinctive subject of Judas is not this but apostacy (that is, a departure from the place that the grace of God gives at any given time to His own people). Accordingly the warning is founded on a saved people in the next place destroyed, as with Israel brought out of Egypt. It was not persons that behaved badly, but a deadlier evil; they did not believe; they abandoned His truth and ways. “And angels who kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath in keeping in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.”

There again it is the same principle. This makes it all the more striking, inasmuch as Peter speaks of angels too, but not at all from the same point of view. In Peter’s case it is simply said that God spared not the angels who sinned, without a word about leaving their first estate or not keeping it. Judas speaks of “angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation.” They apostatized also, and in this case the terms are excessively strong, as the guilt is yet worse.

And now comes another example from among men, and this too used by Peter. When I say used by Peter, I do not pretend to attempt to decide the time when the two Epistles were written; nor does it signify that I am aware of. Peter says, “And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly.” Whereas Judas has it: “Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after other flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the judgment of eternal fire.” In this case it is evident that it is a breaking out, not merely into sin, but

into that which was beyond measure flagrant, not evil alone, but contrary even to fallen nature. This is what is spoken of here. The very same persons are described in a different manner, according to the object of the Holy Ghost.

So again as to the conduct of the angels. By Peter it is said, “Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord.” Judas gives us the more specific charge rather than their general delinquency: “Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities. Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.”

Thus it is evident that in every instance Peter takes up the broad ground of righteousness and unrighteousness, while Judas singles out the special character of departure from the truth and perversion of the grace of God (that is, apostacy in short).

But there is another difference too. They both treat of the coming of the Lord: only Peter, true to his character, takes the largest and most expansive aspect possible. He, and he alone, embraces within the day of the Lord the whole of the millennium, and even that which is just before the millennium, and that which is just after it. He looks at what immediately precedes the millennium, because that day really includes divine judgments in Jerusalem and neighbouring and even distant lands, as various steps of the preliminary judgment of the quick (or men found in more or less open rebellion against the Lord, and despite of His people) before the reign for a

thousand years, properly speaking, begins. The millennium follows this epoch, — it may be only a little while after, but still it is after. So again the dissolution of the heavens and the earth does not fall within the millennium but afterwards. There will be a short subsequent space, during which Satan will muster all born during the thousand years who are not born of God. Fire will devour the assembled rebels, — the bursting forth of divine judgment once more on man, until the eternal judgment takes its final course, and the heavens and the earth, then completely consumed, have given place to the new heavens and the new earth in their fullest sense. All these vast events are comprehended within (not the millennium, but) the day of the Lord, either a little before it in the one case, or a little after it in the other.

This illustrates the immense breadth of Peter. So he treats moral questions and dispensational changes, regarding all in this extensive way. But it is otherwise with Judas, whose pen makes every thing precise, just as he, and he alone, gives us in a few brief words the very gall and venom, as it were, of the apostacy. “Woe to them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and run greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and. perished in the gainsaying of Core.”

The only part of this evil that Peter takes up, because he merely looks at it broadly and as a question of righteous government, is the following of Balaam, who loved the wages of unrighteousness. But here, although Judas seems to give us more, it is in point of fact all defined with the greatest possible nicety, the brief moral history of the apostacy. “These are spots (more probably, sunken rocks) in your feasts of love, when they feast with you,

feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried along by winds; trees of late autumn, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots: raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shames: wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for eternity. And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied as to these, saying, Behold, the Lord came with his holy myriads, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all the ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodlily committed, and of all the hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him. These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage. But ye, beloved, remember the words spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, walking after their own lusts of ungodliness."

Thus it is not the day of the Lord as in the very comprehensive application of Peter; but the fact of His coming and executing judgment on those seized as it were in flagrant sin, caught in the very act. Judas looks at a dealing suited and due to apostates.

But there is another point of precision that, absent from 2 Peter, is peculiar to Judas. He does not merely resent the mocking taunt, "Where is the promise of his presence?" nor explain the delay by His long suffering and saving of sinners; he does not merely call on the saints to walk becomingly in holy conversation and godliness, waiting for the new and eternal scene wherein dwells righteousness. The characteristic word of Judas savours of special grace. "But ye, beloved,

building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." This is distinct Christian privilege, and not merely the necessary godliness which is always binding.

"And of some have compassion, making a difference."1 Some complain if there be a making a difference. I believe, brethren, that, though grace and wisdom be eminently needed for it, yet there can be no sounder principle than this. I repeat, however, that necessarily spiritual discrimination is wanted for each case. God is faithful, who withholds no good thing, and to the humble gives more grace. In the long run divinely-given wisdom becomes more and more apparent in these matters. "But others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh."

In verse 25

μόνῳ (without

σόφῳ brought in from Rom. 16:29) is the right reading, with the very important additions of δ.ὰ

Ἰ.Χ. τ. κ. ἡ., and

πρὸ π. τ. αἰ. Copyists are apt to enlarge and assimilate; they do not so often, as here, omit.

Then he winds all up by bringing before us our own blessed position in a manner altogether different from Peter. "But to him that is able to keep you2 from falling." It is not merely that He is able to bring us into the new heavens and the new earth, which of course is common to all the people of God, to the righteous of all times; but here we have the special inner blessedness of those that wait for Christ, and are caught up to be with Him where

He is. “But to him that is able to keep you (?) from falling, and to present faultless before his glory with exultation, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, might, and authority, from before all eternity, and now and to all the ages. Amen.”

This is the Lord, not coming to deal with the wicked, but to take us up to be with Himself. It is not the judgment of the unrighteous, nor the righteous government of the nations on the earth, but specifically the coming of our Lord Jesus for His saints. Now he understood how Jesus could manifest Himself to His own as He does not to the world, not only in the power. of the Holy Ghost while He is away (compare John 14:22), but when He comes again to receive us to Himself, to be where He is in the Father’s house.

I have thus closed this sketch of the so-called Catholic or general Epistles, which, I may be allowed to say, seems a not very appropriate classification; for James expressly addressed the twelve tribes who are in the dispersion, as Peter the elect sojourners scattered in Asia Minor, his second Epistle being expressly said to be written to the same as the first. Then what is called the first Epistle general of John has more the air of a treatise than of an epistle; nor is it clear that it too did not primarily contemplate believers from among the Jews, though undoubtedly, like the rest, meant for the direct instruction of the entire assembly of God. His second and third Epistles are as distinctly personal in address as the Epistle of Paul to Philemon. This may have been Calvin’s reason for not including them in his exposition of the Catholic Epistles: why he did not write on them at all is less intelligible. It is certainly not because they are

not worthy in themselves, or of slight value to the Christian, not to speak of the homage due to the revealed word of our God. Why he did not write on the Revelation is plain enough: neither he nor any of the Reformers had any real understanding of the book as a whole, though they were not wrong in applying Babylon to Rome, and this in good earnest. The Epistle of Judas is in itself at least as general as any of those so classed; but there seems no reason to doubt that he, like his brother James, and like Peter, had the circumcision for the immediate circle of his ministry. John affords most ground for the inference that the Lord employed him to be the vehicle of divine messages among the Gentiles also. (See Rev. 1-3)

May the Lord bless His own word, and enable us to prize every tittle of it; and may it have both attraction and authority over our souls, who desire to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Himself!

1 It is right to notice, if only in a note, that the manuscripts here are singularly in conflict as to the readings. The Sinai and the Vatican, with the corrector of the Rescript of Paris, read ἐλεᾶτε, which is only another form of the common reading ἐλεεῖτε, “compassionate.” But there is the awkward repetition of the same word again as a later clause; for the older manuscripts present a threefold division in the sentence. According to the weightiest authorities, it would seem, on the whole, that it should stand thus: καὶ οὓς μὲν ἐλέγχετε διακρινομένους, οὓς δὲ σώζετε ἐκ πυρὸς ἁρπάζοντες, οὓς δὲ ἐλεᾶτε ἐν φόβῳ, μισοῦντες καὶ τὸν ἀπὸ τῆς σαρκὸς ἐσπιλωμένον χιτῶμα. “And some convict when contending, but others save, snatching them from the fire, and others compassionate in fear,

hating even the garment that is spotted by the flesh." It is curious that Dr. E. Wells, in his "Help for the more easy and clear understanding of the Holy Scriptures" (the part containing these Epistles being published at Oxford, in 1715), adopted this text substantially, which he thus translated: "And some being wavering, rebuke; and others save, pulling them out of the fire; and of others have compassion with fear," etc. he rejected the twofold division, and. corrected the form of single words mainly on the authority of the Alexandrian MS., with some others of less weight, confirmed by the Vulgate, the Syriac, and the Ethiopic Versions. With the exception of the error already pointed out, the oldest uncials agree, we may say, in the text here presented, save that the Vatican makes, to my mind, a mess by omitting the first οὓς δὲ, which seems to have been an unintentional slip, as the clause is thereby rendered scarce translatable or intelligible. Insert the words with the Sinai and other ancient MSS., and all is plain. Hence this is the form of the sentence preferred by Tischendorf and other modern editors. The nom. διακρινόμενοι of the received text (which the English Version follows) can hardly be traced higher than the ninth century: if it were preferable, the meaning would be as given there. But if the more ancient reading in the accusative stand, verse 9 of this Epistle supplies the probable sense here.

2 Those who idolise a few of the most ancient MSS., to the practical exclusion of other witnesses and internal evidence, would do well to ponder the fact that the Sinai MS. here joins the Parisian Rescript, and the Passionei MS. with very many cursives and most versions in reading ὑμᾶς, "you;" whilst the Alexandrian reads ἡμᾶς,

“us,” and the Vatican and the Moscow MS. of Matthaei with more than thirty cursives give αὐτοὺς, “them,” to which modern editors. incline.