The Epistles of John the Apostle

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Preface and Introduction

With a new version.

Preface.

The Christian reader will, I trust, bear with a few words rather personal. For no one living has nearer or deeper reasons to praise God for these Epistles than he who presents this exposition. The First of the Three was exceedingly blessed to his soul more than sixty years ago. He had been converted to God without human instrumentality, but was still cast down under the sense of indwelling sin. The witness of God in 1 John 5:9, 10, was suggested by a Christian friend as His answer to the questions which harassed me; and the Holy Spirit used it to give rest thenceforth in the Son of God and His atoning work.

Since then it has been a great delight, first to learn, and as learnt to teach other Christians in my little measure. For almost all the believers I knew found it particularly hard to make this precious portion of Scripture their own. This was not from any difficulty in the language, which is of the simplest, but partly from their own spiritual lack, and partly from the depth of the truth in unfolding the Saviour’s personal dignity and the fulness of His grace toward the children of God. Thus they were slow even to apprehend, still more to enjoy, the fellowship to which the apostle invites with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

After the labours of many a year, and in most parts of Great Britain, and a little abroad also, in helping souls to search especially into these Epistles by the Spirit’s

grace, I am thankful to send out the volume, however short of what one could wish. But He who inspired this written word will not fail to guide into the truth those who wait on Him for it. May the reader count on divine love in Christ, and have his joy made full, as what John wrote was given for this express end.

W.K. London, April 20. 1905.

Introduction.

The First Epistle.

The plan or structure of this short but great Epistle is simple. Its foundation is laid in the four opening verses of 1 John 1, the incarnate Word of life. For the eternal life, the which. was with the Father, was manifested to chosen witnesses in the fullest way possible; and what they had seen and heard they reported to the believers, that they might have the same fellowship as the apostles (Acts 2:42). And indeed that fellowship was without a rival: fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things write “we” (as it were in the name of all) to you, that your joy may be made full.

With this manifestation of God in Christ goes inseparably the message of Christian responsibility in verses 5-10. It brings, God’s character in light to bear on the walk of all who call on the Lord’s name, and shows the radical inconsistency of those who say without doing.

A supplement is added in 1 John 2:1, 2, where the Father’s name, omitted in the testing part of 1 John 1, reappears. For though till are charged not to sin, if anyone does, divine love works to restore; and we have

an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ not only righteous but the propitiation for our sins, and in a more general way for the whole world.

How then is reality in the Christian proved? This is shown in 3-11. Primarily in obedience (3-6), but as necessarily also in love (7-11), evidencing positively the genuine, negatively the spurious.

Next we have an episode on the differing degrees of maturity in the family of God from 12 to 28. They as a whole are the dear children (τεκνία) as in 1 John 2:1, 12, 28, 1 John 3:7, 18, 1 John 5:21, to whom the apostle writes, because their sins, have been forgiven them for the sake of Christ's name. But within this instructive parenthesis the family has (1) "fathers," because they had known Him that is from the beginning, the eternal Word manifested in flesh; (2) "young men," because they were strong with the word of God abiding in them, and they had overcome the wicked one; and (3) "the little children," because they had known the Father. The apostle goes over the ground again, simply repeating the same for the fathers, but enlarging for the young men, and still more for the little children as being specially objects of antichrists seeking to mislead, and therefore specially guarded.

Then from 1 John 2:28 the general address is resumed with exhortation to the "dear children" as a whole to abide in Christ, that if manifested as He surely will be, the labourers with whom the apostle puts himself should have boldness, instead of shame through their defection. Hence righteousness in practice is the witness of being begotten of God (ver. 29). Here again the apostle turns off into a short but seasonable digression in 1 John 3:1-3

on the Father's love, the necessary motive and power to strengthen and cheer the soul in the strait path of practical righteousness. Then fitly follows in verses 4-7 Christ's person and work in absolute separateness from sin, and efficacy in taking our sins away, to impress that everyone that abides in Him sins not, and that everyone that sins has not seen nor known Him. The rest of the chapter is devoted to the contrast with those of the devil, first, of the righteousness in principle and practice of God's children, secondly from ver. 11 of their mutual love, unlike Cain and the world where hatred reigns. Only God looks for reality even to the utmost, and in small things as well as great; as we ought to cherish boldness of our hearts before Him which call only be in obedience and believing the name of His Son Jesus Christ. And where one thus obeys, he abides in God and God in him of which the Spirit given is the power.

Here however is special need of discernment; and the truth is essential that we be not misled. Accordingly the guard is furnished in 1 John 4:1-6. The first test against error is Jesus Christ come in flesh whom the Holy Spirit always glorifies; whereas the spirit that confesses Him not is not of God. The second is not the law and the prophets (divinely inspired is they were), but the new testimony of Christ by apostles and prophets. He that knows God hears us; he that is not of God does not hear us. The New Testament also is indispensable to guard against the spirit of error.

Then from 1 John 4:7 the subject of mutual love is resumed in the fullest flow, as shown to be of God, and inseparable from loving and knowing Him. This brings us the manifestation of God's love in our case, because He has sent His only-begotten Son that we might live

through Him, for we were dead, and yet more that He might die as propitiation for our sins, for we were indeed guilty. Surely then if God so loved us, we ought to love one another: and if we do, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us, instead of being hindered. As Christ at the beginning declared the God that none saw, this is the call on us now. And there is adequate power in that He his given us of His Spirit; and this in every confessor that Jesus is the Son of God, according to the testimony that the Father sent the Son as Saviour of the world: His love in us which we have known and believed. Nor is this its full height. For the love is made perfect with us that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because even as He is, so also we are in this world: a statement all the more amazing when compared with 3:2. Thus is fear expelled by perfect love, and it call be fully said, We love, because He first loved us. The chapter ends with exposing the false pretension to love God and not one's brother: they necessarily go together.

1 John 5:1-5 supposes and answers the question, Who is our brother? "Everyone that believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God." Thus the apostle points to the higher side of the relationship, but he is no less explicit that loving the Father involves loving the child, and that the proof of loving His children is, in loving Him and keeping His commandments. Loving Him is to obey; and His commands are not grievous but good and full of blessing and comfort. Nor need one wonder; for whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world; and faith it is which has gained that victory. Do you ask for more precision? "Who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God."

In verses 6-12 we have the three witnesses and one testimony to Jesus and the truth in Him, the Spirit, the water, and the blood: not purification and atonement only, but the Holy Spirit the realising power. In the first man were sin and death; life eternal is in the Second so as to enjoy in the Spirit, the Father, and the Son; which could only be, because He has given and we have it in His Son.

The conclusion is from verse 13. As the apostle the incarnate Son as the object of faith and means of this wondrous fellowship unto fulness of joy, so he ends with saying that he wrote these things that we might know in our inner consciousness that as believers we have life eternal. He again speaks of the boldness such grace inspires in asking what consists with God’s will; only he excepts the case where a brother is under the discipline of God for sinning in special circumstances, and therefore left no more here below. In the closing words from 18 the apostle meets the rising vapours of Gnosticism, ever learning and never coming to the knowledge of the truth, with the deep and bright inward consciousness of the saints, first in an abstract way in preservation against sin and Satan, for everyone begotten of God; second in our personal knowledge that we are of God, and thus contrasted with the whole world in the power of the wicked one; and third, in the same personal knowledge of the great object of faith, the Son, with the understanding He has given to know the True One, and to be in Him, in His Son Jesus Christ: He is the true God and life eternal. He too is the safeguard from idols.

The Second And Third Epistles.

These are so simple in their object and structure, however important for the truth and those that love it, as to need but few words. The sister, all unnamed lady, is solemnly warned not to receive one untrue to the doctrine of Christ, i.e. of His person, the foundation and the substance of all truth. The brother, who of course is named, is exhorted in the face of personal or party opposition to persevere in the love which had characterised him, to receive faithful souls, though strangers, who went forth for the Name. The wisdom as well as the value of these letters is great. Women in particular might feel no small difficulty in refusing plausible men who seemed zealous in the Lord's work. It might be an evangelist once blessed in winning souls; or an elder like some in Ephesus of whom Paul spoke as getting astray. But when the spirit of error is abroad, truth decides and not office merely can avail. On the other hand the good brother is not to be alarmed by the anger of a Diotrephes but is to welcome such as go forth truly for the Lord's name, and thus encourage a Demetrius who might otherwise be frowned down. How admirably the Holy Spirit led to counsels for guiding us in the evil day!

Address 1 - 1 John 1:1-4

The First Epistle Of John

What was from [the] beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked on, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life (and the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and report to you the eternal life, the which was with the Father and was manifested to us); that which we have seen and have heard we report to you also, that ye also may have fellowship with us; yea, and [or, and also] our fellowship [is] with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things [we] write [to you] that your joy may be made full."1 A nobler opening than this has no Epistle, though that of the Epistle to the Hebrews may fairly stand by its side, however different in style for good reason from all the other Epistles. Those both, and without preface of any kind, at once introduce the incarnate Son, the Word become flesh: the one to fix the eye of faith in the Jews who confessed Jesus as the Christ on His glorified person and His office in heaven, founded on His work of redemption; the other to guard the believers everywhere from all innovation of doctrine or practice by recalling them to "What was from the beginning" in the unchanging grace and glory of His person as He manifested Himself on earth, as truly God as man united in Him for ever. It is the Man ascended to heaven which characterises the one; as God come down in Christ giving life eternal — is no less characteristic of the other. Nevertheless the Epistle to the Hebrews is rich in

its unfolding of His person also, as this First Epistle fully presents His atoning work throughout.

It is notable too that both Epistles dispense with the name of the writer as well as of the persons addressed respectively. For this the supremacy of Christ before their own hearts, and to impress it the more on their readers according to the will of God the Father, may well account, though other reasons too may have concurred. The apostle to the Gentiles had not failed, even in his direct sphere among the nations, to say, and act on it, that the gospel is God's power for salvation to every one that believes, both to Jew first and to Greek; here toward the close he sends his last message to such as believed, and with blessed self-effacement. For as he presents the Lord as Apostle no less than High Priest of the Christian confession (uniting the types of Moses and Aaron, whilst far above them), he speaks neither of the Twelve nor of himself by that designation; and writes throughout rather as a Christian teacher expounding the Old Testament might write, (though none but an inspired man could) than as revealing fresh truths with the authority of an apostle and prophet.

Then, again, his love for his brethren after the flesh might readily, at least at the beginning, suggest keeping his name in the background, knowing their prejudice against one so jealous of any infringement on Gentile liberty; whilst his allusion to Timothy at the end would point to his great friend that wrote the Epistle, when itself had prepared the way, and the truth had filled their hearts with Him who was speaking to them from heaven.

Another consideration may have had its influence: the principle in our Lord's charge (not to the Twelve in Luke

9, but to the Seventy in Luke 10:4), Salute no one on the way. It was a final mission. Times of serious danger and imminent ruin call for urgency, and the amenity of salutation on the way ought to yield to the solemnity of such a message as entails the deepest woe on those who despised it. This, too, may have weighed with these inspired servants of God. For one was giving his last words to his Jewish brethren, in view of the destruction of the city and the temple, that they might henceforth have their hearts set on the heavenly sanctuary, and also go forth unto Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach, before the judicial crisis compelled them. The other wrote to the family of God with quite as great importunity in face not merely of evil flowing in, but of the still more awful character of the “last hour” come for Christians, and “many antichrists” going out in open antagonism who had once been among them, but “not of us, for they would have remained with us.”

However these things may have been, of this every believer is certain that the Holy Spirit had the best reasons for guiding both writers to a course so unusual as withholding each his name from these two Epistles. Let us now turn to the beginning of the Epistle before us.

The first verse implies that the Gospel of John was already written and known to the readers. How else could the Word of Life be understood? Such phraseology as this would be unintelligible if we had not John 1, where a great deal is revealed concerning Him. But if the Gospel alone prepares the way for the opening words of the Epistle, yet there is also a marked difference which is not only full of interest, but of immense value as a testimony to the truth.

In the Gospel we read: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” This unique unfolding of grace and truth was due to, and is worthy of, Him whose glory had never been revealed so simply yet profoundly. The contrast is striking with the philosophic mysticism of Philo, the Alexandrian Jew, contemporary in part with the apostle who is most distinct to the believer. None of the Gospels has an introduction like the first eighteen verses of that chapter. The first title of Christ in it is “the Word.” “In the beginning” (vers. 1, 2) means before creation. This is clearly proved by verse 3, which attributes to the Word the existence of all the universe. He gave all things their existence so absolutely that none existed apart from Him. But go back as far as you may in thought, He was in being with God, yet having His personal subsistence as God, in contrast with every creature. There is no point of duration that could be taken in eternity before the work of creation began, but there He was “in [the] beginning.” The absence of the article in Greek is a nicety for conveying the truth which our own tongue here fails to express. If inserted in Greek, it would have fixed attention on a known point; whereas the very aim is to exclude such a thought and to characterise His uncreated being by a phrase which admits the illimitable. “In the beginning God created,” etc., begins time; “In the beginning the Word was,” leaves the door open for the eternal. It is therefore well said that John 1:1 is before Gen. 1:1. But if we are there told that “In [the] beginning was the Word,” ver. 14 tells us that “the Word became flesh” in time. The First Epistle starts with the fact so wondrous on God’s part, so rich in blessing for saints, and for sinners too as all once were. Not only the Word eternally was, but in due time the Word

became flesh. Consequently, in the Epistle it is not “In the beginning,” but “From the beginning.”

This very expression the inspired Luke employs to give his characteristic exhibition — though, of course, by the Holy Ghost — of the Lord’s life here below. He does not begin, as Mark did, with His ministry of the gospel, the “beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God.” Luke goes farther back, having followed up all things from the outset. Accordingly, he is the one who, beyond any other, brings before us the Lord in His early days of youth. As His holy humanity is specified, so we see the Babe in the manger and in the temple, object of homage to Simeon and Anna, and of testimony to all that looked for Jerusalem’s redemption. Then what a glimpse of His growth at home, before and after the touching scene in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both hearing them and asking them questions! All His hearers, for so it was, were amazed at His understanding and His answers. Thus, in short, Luke presents the Lord “from the very first” as a man on the earth more fully than anyone else. Even if he speaks of others who delivered to us the matters fully believed among us, he describes them as those that were “from the beginning” eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word.

Here then we may next notice a singularly expressive term, “The Word of Life.” It is, indeed, in the closest connection with the main object of the Epistle; but at the first mention not the smallest preparation is made for it, without the introduction of John 1. We are suddenly and at once introduced into the august, the divine, theme that the Holy Spirit deigned to take up and give us. Can we not see what a testimony to the Lord it was, there to begin with the Word, an eternal Name, but now with

manhood entered into His person? The little children, and even the apostle John, must retire, no one must be mentioned save the object of faith for man. The Word, the Word of Life, is at once ushered before the believer's view. Could anything show so well the reverence that filled the apostle's heart, or that is due from ours? But here we begin, remarkable to say, with the Word of Life Man, and, it may be added, as another thing of importance, the Word of Life Man not in the heavens but on the earth. The glorified Man on the throne of God above has its great importance with the apostle Paul. Here, on the other hand, the greatest possible care is taken first to show the Word when He walked here below, not before He was made flesh, as is done in ver. 2, nor after He died and rose again, as elsewhere in the Epistle. Those positions or states of our Lord appear appropriately in their due place; but here he is treating of eternal life manifested on earth with its just and full proofs, and its all-importance for giving fellowship with the Father and the Son, to the fulness of joy of all who share it in the grace of God. Hence it is that he forthwith brings us to hear the report of the Word of Life as the disciples saw and heard Him on the earth.

"What was from the beginning." This was true before any saw Him. "Which we have heard." This was the way in which the tidings of the Lord Jesus reached their ears. The earliest apostles were disciples of the Baptist; and John's privilege (though not here specified) was to be one of the earliest to betake themselves to the Lord Jesus. They, like others also, heard from His herald before they saw Him. In fact, it was the Baptist's testimony to the Lord which led two of his disciples, leaving himself at least afterwards, to follow the Christ.

The other was not Simon Peter, but Andrew, Simon's brother. We need have no doubt or difficulty who his companion was — the writer of the Gospel and of the Epistles. It of course lends no little interest to all when we know that John was so early in the field along with Andrew. He was therefore, though for still better reasons, pre-eminently suited to tell us of the Word of Life. But he was led of the Spirit to speak of "us," the chosen witnesses, in quite general terms: "What we have seen with our eyes." It is exactly what they had heard: "Behold the Lamb of God." They had heard that testimony, they had seen with their eyes that blessed Person; they "followed Jesus" and "abode with Him that day." Such was the beginning of that divine link between the Lord Jesus and the disciples. Who more, and if we take into account his special place in the Lord's affections even among the Twelve, who so suitable to bring all out, in the power of the Holy Spirit, as John in his own peculiar style?

But the delay is also remarkable. For we might have thought that the best time to furnish the saints with such intimate reminiscences was when all was fresh in his heart and memory. But God directed that the truth should be, not indeed hid in his heart, but held back from his pen for fifty years at the least. And His way is ever wisest and best for all, though vain man likes to have his. [It seems, as it is, too empty]. But the Holy Ghost was here to give the more intelligent waiting on God that His will might be done. And it was His time and way that the apostle John who was at the first should abide to be the last witness. It was his lot to convey to the Angel of the church in Ephesus (so bright when the apostle wrote to it late in his day) the Lord's call to

repent and do the first works; else He would remove their lamp except they repented. It was his to convey to the Angel of the church in Laodicea the Lord's threat to spue it out of His mouth, without condition of repentance, though summoning to repentance. It was before the Lord's letters to the Seven churches of Asia were sent that the last apostle writes of the fatal evil rising up, and the "last hour" coming with its "many antichrists."

This gives character to the Epistle before us beyond what we have in those of Peter or James. The antichrist is portrayed in an early epistle of Paul, though not so designated, but as the man of sin, the son of perdition, and the lawless one. The apostle John alone writes of "the antichrist," as of many antichrists already, forerunners of the great coming one, who figures in Rev. 13:11-18, etc., as the Beast of the earth with his two lamb-like horns, the false prophet. We can understand that he who was given to present Christ so vividly in His divine dignity should be given also to set out His human adversary, filled and governed by His spiritual enemy Satan, and under the name of the antichrist. If there was a heart on earth that would resent a blow struck at the Lord Jesus, it was our apostle, who enjoyed His love beyond others, and loved Him, perhaps, beyond all. As a rule, the sinner that feels his sins most deeply enters accordingly into the love of the Saviour, as He proved to and by the man who had no right sense of either: he loves most who has most forgiven. But who can doubt that the beloved disciple had had an exquisite sense of His Lord's love to him personally, and also a correspondingly deep sense of sin? The apostles Peter and Paul estimated and felt His love in another way, but

hardly in the same way. One wonders not therefore that John was chosen to write words to us of fervent love and deep solemnity, words of grace and truth pre-eminently adapted to secure the believer under the worst perils for Christians on earth, the most insidious efforts to subvert and deny the name of Jesus. This is exactly what we are contemplating in these Epistles, especially in the First.

Thus is brought before us the person of the Lord Jesus, and that not as received up in glory. Admirable object before us is the glorified Man for lifting the believer above the false glory of the world, as the power of His resurrection is suited for giving a firm hold against earthly pretensions in religion. Saul of Tarsus was converted by the sight of Christ in glory by the power of the Spirit: this became his distinctive theme, not only in the gospel, but for setting forth Christ as head of the church, the great truth that is found in him beyond any other of the inspired writers. But, for reasons sufficient and wise to the Giver of every good gift, our apostle goes back to Christ down here, as true man as He is true God. His object was not so much to show Him heavenly but to prove that really man He is a divine person. The heavenly Man has given glorious privileges in God’s grace; yet, after all, the heavenly must give place to the divine. Heavenly relationship God uses to deliver the saints from the tendency to be earthly-minded; but divine life in power thoroughly uproots man’s pride, lusts, and will to set himself up, and thus fall under Satan against the Father and the Son. The mind of the flesh not only resists the Lordship of Christ, but is utterly blind to the deeper glory of His person in His own right far above that which was conferred. The apostle Paul dwells more on the glory that was given

Him. John turns peculiarly to the glory that belonged to Him eternally, not as the firstborn from the dead, but as the only-begotten Son. There He is alone. Paul speaks of union with Him for members of His body; John, of the Father's love to those who are even now His children. No wonder that it is now the hour to abandon earthly service, even in the sanctuary of Jerusalem, and as true worshippers to worship the Father in spirit and truth; for also the Father seeketh His worshippers of such a sort.

Let us seek then to be true to the Lord, to keep His word, and not deny His name. Indisputably, as involved in the Lord's personal glory, the truth in the Epistle which we are now entering, on is intended to set out the positive side of life, as in Him, so in those that are His, on the earth. No spiritual person acquainted with error as to this at work of recent years can fail to discern how the truth in the Gospel and the Epistle of John leaves not the smallest excuse for it, but peremptorily excludes it. It is a sorrowful fact that some of us have known two assaults on the Lord, one in the forties, the other in the nineties of last century, as we wait for the blessed hope and the appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

As of old, so now, there is the like urgent ground for children of God to cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart, and to deepen in their consciousness of eternal life in him, so that they may the better help the simplest believers to know it as theirs. Thus is Satan's wile turned to the good of those that love Him, the called according to purpose. Be not deceived by such as try to persuade themselves and others that in what was quite plain one mistook its nature and bearing. Such is ever

the cry when heterodoxy is seen through. Then follows the effort to gloss it over, to disguise the evil, if they cannot deny it wholly, in order to avoid detection and discredit. It is never so where there is honesty before God. If a true-hearted saint was betrayed into error, he would be too thankful to have it laid bare in order to repudiate it with grief and humiliation. But hiding, minimising, and excusing error so fundamental is unworthy of those who once suffered the loss of not a little in this world for the truth. It exposes themselves to the danger of falling into what they tamper with, or the loss of spiritual discernment. Is it not the working of the spirit of error?

The first verse describes our Lord Jesus here below as an object of near and thorough inspection, with the closest familiarity to the disciples. His way was as far as possible from that of the potentates in the East particularly, who affect honour and glory by keeping even their grandees at a distance. It was death, as all know, of old without a summons to approach “the great king.” Life depended on his holding out the golden sceptre that they might touch it and live. But here the Higher than the highest came down in humiliation of grace to the least and lowest. Never sinner that came to Him did He reject. He touched as well as healed the leper. He wept at the grave of him whom He raised from the dead. Who accessible as He always and to all? But what opportunities of seeing with their eyes, of looking on Him, and even of handling Him, He gave those expressly chosen “that they might be with him!” Impossible to doubt that the Holy One of God was veritable man.

Yet it is well to notice “seen and heard” in verse 3: “what we have heard,” in verse 1, precedes “what we have seen.” The truth always comes through the ear first, not the eye. They “heard” and believed. Faith for their own souls was by hearing, not by sight. Nevertheless Christ was to be seen with their eyes, and to be contemplated too for their witness to others, not once in a way but “What we looked upon and our hands handled.” How wonderful the truth, the Creator of heaven and earth becoming a man, and allowing even such evidence of His humanity that their hands should handle Him! He also did so when raised from out of the. dead; not to Mary of Magdala for special reasons, but to the women of Galilee, and to the incredulous apostle Thomas — “Reach hither, etc.” And so it had been when the Lord was here below, because He well knew, and by anticipation provided proof against, the fearful system of evil which dared to deny the reality of His human nature. Therein was His grace even to death for us.

On the other hand, the opposite form of evil is quite as sternly denounced, or more so, which denied that He was God, counting Him but a man endowed with unequalled power but to the exclusion of His Godhead. He was truly God and man, and in one person. Accordingly He is called here “the Word of life.” All the different clauses of verse 1 are “concerning the Word of life.” For “life,” and in this case the highest spiritual life, belongs to God alone. It is distinct from, and higher than, creative power, as we are taught in the comparison of verses 3 and 4 of 1 John 1. Here His designation combines “the Word” and “life” for the scope of the Epistle. “And the life was manifested.” This was the truth to state here. To whom is not said, but the simple

and general fact. It was for anybody to see, for all that beheld Christ our Lord; not believers only, but unbelievers. To the latter it was casual, and without vital effect, because they were not taught of God through their need of Him; for to real purpose and blessing we must come in the truth of our sins; but they could. see how wonderful He was, if not in Himself, in His dealing with every man, woman, or child that drew near Him. Yet to their blind eyes He did not discover God and Himself as to the sinful woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee, to her of Samaria, or to the robber converted on the Cross. They could not fail to discern that there was something far beyond man in Him. Each of them at that crisis of their life was enabled effectually to hear the Word of Life. It seems indubitable, if the first woman was already a believing and repentant soul, then brought to pardon and peace, that the words of the Saviour were what quickened the Samaritan as well as the crucified robber, who discerned the infinite grace and dignity of the Lord Jesus in the hour of His greatest shame and contempt.

“And the life was manifested:” such is the keynote of the Epistle. Here it was manifested, “and we have seen and bear witness, and report to you the eternal life, the which was with the Father, and was manifested to us” (ver. 2). There is nothing said about “hearing” now. It takes for granted that they were already intimate with the Lord, and “we have seen and bear witness.” It is not, as at first, hearing and seeing, but now seeing and bearing witness, and reporting to the saints the eternal life, which had the character of being with the Father [i.e. in eternity], and was manifested to us in time when He lived here below.

Many are aware of a strange effort made to draw a distinction even in the New Testament, between “life” and “eternal life.” Is it not refuted here? While “the Word of life” is the expression in the first verse, and we simply hear of “the life” in the beginning of the second, soon after, in the same verse, we find “the eternal life.” Surely, then, “the life,” and “the eternal life,” denote precisely one and the same thing, looked at in a slightly different way. It is bound up with the person of the Word, and manifested in the Lord Jesus Christ. What can be plainer? In the parenthetical verse 2 we are informed of the other great truth that Eternal Life was with the Father before He was manifested in the flesh here below. He was not only the Word and the Only-begotten Son, but also “the eternal life”; as much the eternal life then as when afterwards He deigned, for God’s glory and man’s redemption and blessedness, to be born of woman, and so display what He gives to the believer.

It is remarkable that here eternal life is expressly predicated of the eternal Word, the Son of God, before He came into the world; but it never became the known portion of the believer till Christ was manifested. When He went up to heaven, this is not manifestation, but, on the contrary, to be hidden in God. No, it was here in the world of sin, sorrow, and misery; it was here where the first man utterly failed unto death, that the second man displayed life eternal, obeying unto death, and by His death defeated Satan, and found an everlasting redemption for all that believe. And those who believe have life eternal in Him, that they may live now of His life, not of their own fallen life.

The manifestation of the life is precisely in this world and nowhere else. Heaven is not the scene of its

manifestation; still less could manifestation be said of it when that life was with the Father. Certainly, as far as men are concerned, the manifestation was when the Son of God became man, and was seen and heard as the faithful and true witness of God the Father. When the Son of God became man, then, and then only, was manifested the eternal life, the which was up till then with the Father. Life was in His concrete and manifested person here below, as hitherto it had been in Him above. A certain chosen number of disciples who heard beheld its presence in Him, under all possible tests of reality, to report to others God in man with the eternal life of Christ in its unsullied perfect excellency manifested among men on earth.

How blessed for us, even though with felt weakness, yet looking to our Lord's grace, we take up the task. Our title is Christ Himself, as good now as for those to whom the Epistle was written. The apostle herein writes to his "dear" or" little children," the family of God now as really as then. Does not the self-same relationship abide as long as the list hour endures? Whatever our shortcoming today we humbly receive the apostle, believe in the love of the Father, confess the grace and the glory of His Son, the Lord Jesus, and reckon on the indwelling Spirit of God, that we may now reap profit by what had been already communicated when that hour began. We acknowledge our deep need and the pitiful goodness of Him who directed them, as He does ourselves, to find in Christ the unfailing reserve of faith and the answer to every want.

"What we have seen and have heard we report to you also that ye also may have fellowship with us." Is not this a precious legacy of divine love in presence of such

declension and danger? Is not the fellowship of the apostles a blessed fellowship or association in such circumstances (compare Acts 2:42)? “And also our fellowship [is] with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (ver. 3). Soon the last apostolic hand would cease; but if he had survived till now, what could be written more comforting and reassuring than that the Pentecostal fellowship of the apostles abides; yea and the fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ abides for our enjoyment by faith today in virtue of life eternal in the Son, both theirs and ours? The declared purpose, then, of this divine communication is that we might have the same fellowship as the apostles had with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ, and the gracious aim thereby to fill our hearts with joy. If such a blessedness at all fail, nothing conceivable could effect that result. Is there not beyond comparison far more to fill our hearts with joy than in any other boon that could be given us? Eternal life manifested in our Lord Jesus as the new and divine nature in us who believe for fellowship with the Father and with His Son, expressly to fill us with a joy that bespeaks itself divine in its source and character! Let us then consider, with the heed that is due, the grace and the truth in Christ set before us in these the opening words of the Epistle. This is its fundamental principle and design.

The central truth of Christianity is here briefly laid down, and its avowed object in the darkest hour is to fill the saints with God’s own joy; when Satan was active as never before in undermining Christ. It is not a summons to guard souls by exposing argumentatively the various heterodoxies and their baneful issue. Still less is it turning the energies of God’s servants to preaching the

gospel to all the nations. Nor yet is it the revelation of woes imminent on Christendom and the world at large, as at length came in the Apocalypse, with the glories to follow, not “the things that are,” but coming judgments. The Old Testament prophets had things communicated, which they learnt were not for themselves but for us (1 Peter 1:12). And so the saints to follow the church will have accordingly the Spirit of prophecy as the testimony of Jesus to them: a remarkable expression, which means the Spirit, not as the power of present fellowship, but “of prophecy,” as of old, casting the saints on the future when Jesus comes in power and glory.

In contrast with that is the action of the Holy Ghost now. What is revealed is revealed to us, and what is revealed to us is for our knowledge of God in the Spirit, and enjoyment of fellowship with the Father and the Son. It is for God’s children not only to enter in but enjoy to the full even in the evil day. Everything revealed to us is intended to fall in a continual shower of blessing on our hearts. To be born again and be forgiven through Christ and His work is the only right start; for we know God by the Spirit thus awakening the conscience. But to abide there, no matter how devoted to spread the glad tidings, falls quite short of God’s mind about us. It is not Christ leading us, on possession of life eternal, into the fellowship here so distinctly announced to fill us with joy. Naturally we are but sinful creatures going blindly on to judgment; but in receiving the Lord Jesus we are born of God, and resting on redemption we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and are thus anointed and sealed. We are thus capacitated by that life and empowered by the Spirit, as acknowledging the Son, to have the Father also. Our bright privilege is to have this fellowship as

ours, with unstinted and joyful assurance by the will and word of God.

Listen not to those who count such blessing beyond you on earth and now. He that had the best robe for the returned prodigal would have you as His child to enjoy communion with Himself and His Son. It is, without doubt, wholly above man's nature. It is for partakers of a divine nature. The love of the Father and the Son is its spring, working by the Holy Spirit sent down to be in us and with us for ever as the power. It therefore peculiarly concerns the Christian; and all the more when the outward aspect of the Christian profession is filled with falsehood and evil. Undoubtedly he that denies the Father and the Son would treat it as a myth and a delusion. But why should you, a Christian, stop short of your proper portion?

The children of God, even the little children or babes of the family, are all included in this blessedness, as truly in their measure as the more vigorous and the most mature. The babes are therefore invited to enter in and enjoy this fellowship to the full. On what ground? Eternal life in Christ. Justification by faith is precious, and conscious salvation, with the question of sins and sin settled for our souls with God; but here the positive side of eternal life is the truth insisted upon. The apostle Paul brings out not only the justification of each believer individually, but membership of the one body of Christ and its heavenly privileges as no one else does. To the apostle John was given in the days of decay to set forth eternal life, as even the great apostle of the uncircumcision did not so fully.

What is the source of the feelings of joy here commended to us by the Spirit of God? What is the basis and the substance of that fellowship with the Father and His Son to which we are called? What is the spring of this divine enjoyment? What gives the Christian to hate evil and to love the good according to God; to have doubts and fears for ever dissipated; to draw near to the Father with full confidence, and to delight in the Son? It could not be without faith in the Saviour's propitiation, but its receptive faculty lies in life, eternal life, the life of Christ.

If we look, however, at the children of God, we see one measure here and another there. If we could survey all the children of God, we should perceive a different measure in each. We are just as different in manifesting our spiritual life, as far as its exercises go, as we are in the natural life of man. It is of course the same in all, but the old life mixes, as it ought not, to produce these differences. Impossible to find satisfaction in a scene so shifting. One may find a little more of what the new life is in this one as compared with that. But for the truth of it one must turn to Christ as eternal life itself without the least alloy or obscurity. There only we behold it in all its perfection, as we follow the Lord Jesus as He is brought before us in the Gospels. There do we not find righteousness and grace, dignity and subjection, gravity and tenderness, burning zeal and lowliness of heart, purity in Himself and pity for others, love to His Father, love to saints, love to sinners, and withal the obedient man yet the divine Word and Son? This then all that shone through the veil of flesh, was the life eternal; and nowhere else can you find its fulness but in Him.

What could be more momentous, if we have life in the Son, than that we should clearly and in all variety of circumstance know what that life really is? For it is our life, and the rule of our life; inasmuch as the Holy Spirit has given it with a particularity beyond parallel in Holy Writ. He would impart to us, in the word of God, the fullest insight into that which formed the delight of the Father, that we might have the joy of knowing in communion that it is our very new life, and also a constant standard for self-judgment as well as example. Thus the joy would be made full, and ourselves made nothing in our own eyes by the sense of our shortcoming. This is what the Christian needs from God; and this is what our Father has provided for us in Christ.

What a lesson for us His maintenance of the bondman character! And this ever going up to His Father as a sweet odour of rest! If there be one thing which never fails in Him, it is obedience; obedience to His Father at all cost; obedience in every word and work, in the smallest as in the greatest. “The zeal of Thy house hath consumed me.” Power others have shared: who but He never did His own will but the Father’s? So in the afflictions, the contempt, the detraction, which try the heart, the meek Lord of glory stooped to the uttermost; and, though He deeply felt the woes which such unbelief entailed, He turns to His Father at the same hour with thanksgiving and entire submission. If the favoured but haughty people blindly refused Him, grace would reveal to the babes what was hid from the self-satisfied wise and prudent. These are the exercises and unfoldings of eternal life. If all were written out one by one as they deserve, not even the whole world itself, as our apostle says in the close of his Gospel, would contain the books

written. The Bible contains the selection made by the Spirit of God. Who else is sufficient for these things? He gives us therein the food of God as our food; for therein we have in fellowship: what the Father has in the Son, and the Son in the Father; and this the fare not of the apostles only, but of the Christian, of the family of God.

Look at Moses, who had a most unusual place in his relation both to Israel's redemption and legislation, and as the writer of the Pentateuch. How little, after all, we know of Moses himself! How he kept himself in the background, the meekest of men till Christ came! But what was Moses in comparison with Him?

Then again Paul fills in unequalled part among the apostles and in the New Testament. Yet we have but glimpses of himself. How much men have wished a more intimate acquaintance! But the strong individuality of him, and of Peter and John, among the more known, separates them from Him in whom every characteristic was in harmony; in them things did stand out singly or distinctively as they did not in Him who was perfect man to God, and perfect God to man, besides as Son in the ineffable circle of the persons of the Godhead.

Eternal life then is not merely Messiah in the perfection of man; — but the Word and Son of God in a body prepared for Him, albeit Son of the Virgin. It was the union of Godhead with the manhood of the Lord Jesus that constituted the wonder of His person here "below, and the blessedness of the manifestation of eternal life in Him. This is the character of the new life to those that believe, to you and me. As we read of Him in the Scriptures of truth, honouring Him as we honour the Father, and finding in Him peculiar grounds of love

which every Christian feels, do we say, as His grace and truth shine into our hearts, This is my life; this is your life, my brother? Have we not thereby fellowship with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ? And does not this incomparable blessing fill our hearts with joy unspeakable and full of glory?

Through faith in Christ it is that we all are common sharers of the blessedness in virtue of life eternal. First there is communion with the Father. How have we this? Because we have His Son Jesus Christ; and the Father's delight is in the Son: so is yours; and so is mine. The Father and His children have the depth of their joy, their joy together, in the Son. The Father hath sent and given us the Son; we have the Son. He that hath the Son hath the life; we have this wondrous life, because we have the Son; and He being what He is must be the delight of those that have life eternal. Only the Father knows perfectly the Son. He therefore appreciates the Son as He deserves. This we dare not say, though we have the Son, and love Him and delight in Him; and all this by the Spirit of God in our measure. And this is fellowship with the Father in the Son Jesus Christ.

But how have we fellowship with His Son? It is in the Father, who is His Father and our Father. The Son was in eternal relationship as such with the Father; and He was pleased in communion with His Father's will and grace to make Him known to us as our Father (compare John 20:17). It was not enough to show us the Father. This would have sufficed the apostle Philip, but not divine love. He would be our Father, and have us His children; and so we are now, and thus have fellowship with the Son by grace, as the Father has the Son in the rights of Deity.

Thus we have fellowship with the Father in the possession of the Son, and fellowship with the Son in the possession of the Father. How could our joy but be full? Even heaven and glory everlasting dwindle in comparison; but we have these too. If we knew of such fellowship, and had it not, could our joy be as full as it is? We do not wait till we depart to be with Christ, or even for the change of our bodies into His image at His coming, to have this fellowship. Only unbelief hinders any child of God from enjoying it now and here on the earth. And we have the Holy Spirit personally given that divine power might effect it in us. Here the Son came down on earth. But for His coming we could not have had it as we have, if at all. With His presence on earth to this end the apostle began his instruction, and laid the basis of the divine fellowship in eternal life, which is the only true and adequate medium of having it as our portion. Without eternal life it had been impossible: else was only the flesh with which there could be no fellowship. Therefore the Lord over and over again announced its present known possession as essential to Christianity, and to this fellowship, its richest boon in virtue of life eternal, which is in Himself, the communicator of it to us.

1 The unlearned reader may be assured that there is no variant in the ancient and best authorities of the least significance doctrinally here. “Also” is added after “to you” in ver. 3, not because it is certain, but in deference to the Uncial MSS. and some of the Old Versions. But it affects emphasis only, as it may be due to the same form in the next clause. There is more doubt as to the emphatic “we” and “to you” in the beginning of ver. 4; but the more common “of you” is retained in the last

clause with excellent witnesses (and the Text. Rec.), though recent critics lean to the well-supported “of us” (with the text of Stephens). Both are certainly in sense true. The question is which suits best the context as helping to decide where the external evidence is nearly balanced. But these pronouns are sometimes confused in the best copies, as they differ by one letter only. — The italics express, not a supplied word (as in the A. V.), but the personal pronouns used with emphasis.

Address 2 - 1 John 1:5-10

“And this is the message which we have heard from him, and announce to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus [Christ]2 his Son cleanseth us from all [or, every] sin. If we say that we have no sin, we mislead ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us the sins, and to cleanse us from all [or, every] unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”

We have already seen that the opening verses give us the manifestation of God, and here expressly as Father, in His Son the Man Christ Jesus, the Word of life. For the utmost care is taken that while implicitly and supremely acknowledged as God, the all-importance of His taking manhood into union with His person should be distinctly laid down. So indeed it must be to reveal His grace, and to lay the needed and full basis for all that we boast in Christ the Lord. This is really Christianity on its positive side; for as yet we have nothing here said of the necessity for His bearing our sins, and God’s condemning sin in the flesh on our behalf. Indeed the difference is striking.

May one not assume that hardly a Christian in the world, if he were writing on Christianity, would not begin at the starting-point of needy and guilty sinners? How infinitely more blessed to commence with Christ in

the fulness of His grace! That is what the Spirit of God does here. He is not writing to let lost sinners know how to be justified in God's sight. The Epistle is to God's children, that they maybe filled with joy; and who or what is there that can fill with such joy as God in Christ produces hereby?

Clearly Christ is presented in this astonishing scripture as the manifestation of eternal life, Himself called personally "the eternal life which was with the Father," as before "the Word of life," because He expressed it to His own, that they too might have life in Him.

Such is the ground for the wondrous privilege of which He speaks — "fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." This is impossible to be had unless we have Christ as our life. So momentous is the cardinal truth of the present possession of eternal life by faith. It is no doubt in Christ. But it is life now bestowed on us; and to deny or even weaken this is to do the enemy's work in a subtle and effective manner.

But the grace, however to our joy, is not all. It is of urgent moment for us never to forget, from the very beginning to know, that He who is our Father is God, and that, however the grace may flow, the truth of His nature, His holy nature, is brought into immediate association with our souls; and if it were not so, what are we? At best sounding brass or clanging cymbal. But this is "the message" which cannot be severed from "the manifestation," the manifestation of God in man in the person of Christ, bringing us into fellowship with the Father and with His Son. Assuredly we cannot have the joy flowing from that fellowship, or the life eternal on which it is grounded, without sharing the moral nature

of God. Grace and truth are come through Christ. And the truth is that He is a God who reveals His hatred of sin, incomparably more now when He is known as Father than when He was adored by His people as Jehovah.

For of old He dwelt in the thick darkness; with many results excellent in exercise, as goodness, and righteousness, besides His power in government, pitiful and long-suffering, promises with blessed predictions and glorious hopes which He will assuredly accomplish in due time. For Jehovah is the everlasting God of Israel, and will make good to the children His promises made to the fathers. But before that day dawns on the earth, comes the total ruin of the Jew and all the world from the rejection of Christ. Christianity supposes this. What proof of ruin could be more complete than in the Lord Jesus slain by Jew and Gentile? Then man turned God in the person of Christ out of His own world, and did so with the utmost hatred and contempt, spitting in His face and nailing Him to the tree. Was not this the world, and the world even at its best? Not Rome, nor Babylon, the golden city of Chaldea, primarily; but Jerusalem. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, now crucifying thine own, Jehovah's own, Messiah!

Yet (on that overwhelming proof that there is no good in man, and that the most guilty of the race which had the best religious privileges for man in the flesh had but turned them to the worst account through their own unbelief) unto all the nations was to be proclaimed in the name of the Lord Jesus repentance and remission of sins, "beginning at Jerusalem." What unfathomable grace to those who deserved condign judgment! Grace is not confined within the small and feeble barriers of

Israel, but now breaking forth on every side to every nation and land and tongue. For God will have His house on high filled with guests in virtue of the manifestation of life eternal that was thenceforth to be made known. The Life Eternal had been there; but how few then knew it! And those that did, knew it most imperfectly. Nosy it was announced plainly when the church indicated in all ways a ruin, as great for it as the world had already shown, though not at all in the gross way to which it has come now, but in a subtle and yet real way. For even the worst was sprouting then; every evil that was afterwards to be developed was there in germ before the apostles slept. For this reason came this blessed Epistle that the hearts of all the faithful might be established in grace and truth, and know that whatever the failure in responsibility, whatever the declension that had set in, Christ abode the same, unchanged and unchangeable, "What was from the beginning" never to fail for faith, whatever the shame to those that compromised His name, whatever the deadly loss to such as turned away. For it is a strange and perilous thing to trifle with Christ. How sad that any one could be so careless, how deplorable that any Christian should be so misled, as to become an instrument of such evil!

But along with the manifestation of perfect grace comes the inseparable message of holiness. This is alike due to God, and necessary for the saints. What does it convey? "This then is the message which we have heard from him." They had heard it from Christ Himself; not exactly "of (περὶ) him," but "from (

ἀπὸ) him," — "and report," for this is the exact word in our tongue — we "report to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." We see the distinctness from

the manifestation, This was about or concerning the Word of life, the unmixed grace of God in Christ. Here it is not “concerning” but “from,” not a manifestation of love, but a message against sin. It is also the first occurrence of the apostle’s habit to mix God with Christ, because He is God. So here, after saying so much of Christ, he gives a message from “Him.” This might mean God, but he had just been speaking of Christ. Such a transition perplexes the commentators; but it is a beauty, not a blemish. The message from Him applies God as light (and this too was in Him) to our standing and state.

Natural enough that the heathen should make Chaos the parent of Erebos and Nyx. Darkness essentially characterised some, moral darkness all that they called their gods. They were indeed divinities of gloom, and lust, and lying. But not so is our God: in Him is no darkness at all. And it is Christianity that brings this out distinctively in essence, principle and fact; Judaism but partially. For there He avowedly dwelt in the thick darkness. Thence He menaced with death him that ventured of himself to approach, or otherwise infringed His law. Yet the law made nothing perfect (Heb. 7:19). We can say without reserve that God is light. He has fully proved His love. What can compare with His grace in Christ, as we read in the prefatory verses? But He is light also. We all know how common it is for men to descant on God as love, even to an extreme exaggeration in effect, not merely that God is love, but that love is God. Much less do we hear of the message that He is light. This, no doubt, is the ultimate folly of man’s mind, that makes a mere idol of God. But if it be a truth that God is love, He is a great deal more than love.

“Light” is a burning word, expressive of His intrinsic and absolute purity of nature; “love” of its sovereign activity to others as well as in Himself. There is no sacrifice of His light to His love; indeed if it were so conceived, it would entail the greatest loss on His children. But it is as untrue, as it is impossible. “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.” Therefore is He intolerant of darkness in His own, who are made free of His presence, and have fellowship with Himself. What could be more contrary to Christ and to Christianity? We are told elsewhere, that we were once darkness who are now children of light. No doubt this did not belong to John; it had been already taught by the apostle Paul.

But what John here says is also of the utmost possible moment, because he proceeds to touch on what is no less than some great inconsistencies of Christendom, and quite opposed to Christianity. There are in verses 6-10 three “if we says,” all of them important in the extreme. First, “If we say that we fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.” Can we name a more evident or flagrant departure from the very nature of Christianity? It is saying, but not doing. This was bad enough in Israel; but how sad when and where, to us begotten by the word of truth, the light and the love have come out so truly and perfectly! “If we say that we have fellowship with him”: in this and the other two cases the word “we” is used in a general manner, whereas in many scriptures it is said of the faithful.

We may learn from this that it is a mistake to found a canon of criticism on the partial use of a word. How many persons, as I have heard many myself, assume it as a matter of fact that “we” must always mean the family of God! So it is often, and we may say generally;

but it is not always true. In Him “we” live and move and have our being, the apostle Paul applied to mankind universally, as he said it of heathen Athenians. Again, there is such a thing as God dealing with persons according to their profession; and the apostle John speaks here of these alienations from the truth which had begun then and pervade the Christendom of our day. Even Christianity admits a profession far more widely than Judaism could. For a man must ordinarily be a Jew to be accredited as such, being an outward fact; whereas one who is not a Christian might long pass himself off as one. Without being a deceiver he might deceive himself, and think he was a Christian. Now the message that the apostle here gives was intended even then to put to the proof the spreading profession of Christianity. Therefore, as they named the Lord’s name, the apostle does not drop the word “we,” but the state of not a few was such as to raise the most serious question of their reality before God.

Hence it is that, in order rightly to interpret the word, we need the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is important too that we take the word with its context, which helps to the meaning that comes out for the most part as satisfactorily as if it were all defined. Thus it is far better for our souls and more to God’s glory than if it were technically determined. Again God deals with us as His sons; for we are now arrived at our majority if we are in the true status of Christians. We are no longer babes at the A B C; we can now not only spell the words, but read them intelligently by grace, when somewhat more advanced in the knowledge of God and of His ways. And He looks for real progress. Is it not then deplorable to find so many Christians content to remain all their life at

the elements, quite satisfied with the hope that their sins are or will be forgiven?

But besides this it is to be feared too often that when souls content themselves with the first privilege of God's grace, they may be gravely self-deceived. The gospel proclaims remission of sins, and faith receives it on God's word. Life eternal is given and the Holy Spirit, when one rests on Christ's redemption, in order that there should be enjoyment of our Father's love to us. And if we live of that life which is Christ, ought there not to be growth in the inner man, shown not only in outward service but in grace and in knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? It is plain that the later Epistles are solemnly occupied with warning against this very danger. But there is no one who takes it up in so profound a manner, as far as I can pretend to judge, as the apostle whose Epistle we are reading, and indeed in this Epistle pre-eminently.

"If we say" — how often only saying! — "If we say that we have fellowship with Him," it is the fruit of receiving Christ and in Him the gift of life. For eternal life is the basis of true fellowship with the Father and with the Son, the enjoyment of which necessarily leads to our souls' appreciation of its virtues, not only for the Christian walk, but in Christian worship, and in Christian converse with the living God is our Father and with His Son. "If we say we have fellowship with Him" claims that we have entered into the new relationship with God in grace, and that we share His nature, His mind and His affections. This is an immense thing where we need His true grace to stand in the light as well as the love of God. It is "God" here: "the Father" was said where the grace was shown out in fullest volume. But

here an utter contradiction to its genuineness appears. “If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness”: what is this? Walking in darkness is what a man of the world does; it is the description of one who is entirely unrenewed. It means a vast deal more than that a person has fallen into a sin, or got into an unhappy state of soul. Thus it was that the Puritans used to interpret this thing. Though they were truly pious men and worthy of all respect, they were rather narrow-minded, and savoured more of the Old Testament than of the New. They were in spirit under the law, which always dims and deranges spiritual judgment. It is only grace that enlarges the heart and that gives the mind, under the Spirit’s guidance, to enter into God’s heavenly counsels, and His ways for the earth. They were short in these weighty respects, and were led into that self-occupation which is the inevitable effect of the law upon a saint.

Here the class described were not at all so occupied; they had never judged themselves before God. They were no doubt baptised; they had come into the Christian association of the church, and they seem to have thought of little more. The failure was not in the good seed, but in the soil. Even if the word were received at once with joy, “such have no root,” says the Lord, because of no divine operation on the conscience. They may believe in a human way for a time, and in time of trial fall away, or if they linger as here, they are dead while they live. Yet as they confessed in a sort the Lord’s name, they were baptised with water for the remission of sins and joined their Christian associates. Was not all finished? Further exercise of soul was laid to rest, and nothing good could be said about them. Even in John’s

day here they were! Even then were persons walking in darkness who claimed nevertheless to have fellowship with God, for this is what the Christian really has. It is the proper confession of a Christian that we are now brought out of sins, and self, and Satan's power; that we have left the darkness behind; that even here we are called into His marvellous light. In that light we walk. These unrenewed souls claimed to be in fellowship with God. "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." Neither baptism nor eucharist can remedy this in the least. They were entirely unawakened; they had never met God in Christ about their sins; their faith was as fleshly as their repentance. Not even conscience before God had wrought, still less any true sense of their need of His grace which faith gives.

Every relationship involves commensurate responsibility. The sayers, who were not doers, had not only responsibility as men which ends in sin and death and judgment, but the immensely greater one of naming the name of the Lord. They were by their walk in darkness denying really the new responsibility of confessing in deed as well as word the second Man, the last Adam, Christ Himself, and could have no fellowship with God as God, to say nothing of fellowship with the Father and with His Son, the high Christian expression of fellowship. For in truth they were walking in darkness; just as if Christianity was only a creed or a dogma which the mind of man is capable of acknowledging and understanding in an outward and natural way. But what total blindness to the word of God! Was darkness compatible with life eternal? Not in the least. Eternal life is that we should know the Father, the only true God,

and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, whom He sent. If you, by God's teaching, know Him, it is divine love bringing you thus into fellowship with them both, with the Father and the Son.

Here were those that pretended to have it, but without any living effect on their daily walk, their objects, ways and ends here below. Have you ever seen Christians of that sort? Have you not seen a great many? Is not this a serious fact for every professor's conscience? Have you yourself thoroughly faced the truth? When God's grace wins the soul, the truth is welcomed, wherever it leads and whatever it costs within and without. Walking in the light, means that you walk henceforward in the presence of God fully revealed; you have so to do with Him in the light at all times. There is undoubtedly danger of inconsistency; and who is not ready to own that we all fail in always walking accordingly. But this is another thing. For be it observed here that it does not say, as many misunderstand, "If we walk according to the light." There was but One who ever did so, and perfectly. He alone when asked "Who art Thou?" could answer, "Absolutely what I also speak to you" (John 8:25). It was the Saviour, the Son of God, yet Man. He walked according to the light; as indeed He was the light, the True Light, the Eternal Life.

But we too who now believe are brought out of darkness into that marvellous light. Is not this predicated of every real Christian? And if you are brought into that marvellous light, does God deprive you of the light because you fall? In no wise. Therein we walk. Thenceforth we shall have the light of life, and not walk in darkness. Through unwatchfulness you may act unworthily of Him; you may be drawn awhile into some

false principle or into wrong conduct; but neither drives into darkness nor takes away the light. if you are real and brought out of darkness, in the light you walk; only you lose the enjoyment of communion for the time, you need also to be restored, as we shortly shall see how. But here were professing Christians, who as a principle claimed to have fellowship with the Father and the Son, with God Himself, and yet were unconcernedly walking in darkness, just like any unconverted man. Yet there might be great differences superficially: some decent and morally respectable; others very much the contrary. Some may claim to be strictly religious, like the Pharisee in the Temple who despised other men, particularly “this publican” (or tax-gatherer). What did God think of the two? What did the Lord pronounce on them? And is not that for us now? We may not be publicans so-called, and we must in faith enter into the holies, if we would approach God; for I do not doubt that an earthly temple is all a mistake, now that Christ is gone up on high, and opened for us the heavenly sanctuary.

But we have to do with the same God, only fully revealed, which was and could not be then, till the veil was rent. But since Christ’s death His love and His light are come out in perfection for the soul’s deliverance, not yet for the world’s, nor even for Israel as a nation, but for the Christian. Here were persons calling themselves Christians, who walked in darkness while they claimed the high and holy privilege of fellowship with God, and yet denied responsibility for the practice of His will. And what does He say about them? He says, if so we do, “we lie, and do not the truth.” The whole life is a lie, because it denies the essential principle and necessary character of a Christian, who not only is the object of divine grace,

but walks in the light of God. You can no more get out of that light really than a man who in the hours of day walks where the light of the sun shines. Such is what real Christianity means.

Next we have, on the contrary, the other and blessed side in verse 7. The apostle states the real place of the Christian, and puts it in a striking point of view. As there are three different ways in which professing Christians may belie Christianity (for this is just what he is showing in these latter verses, and what has come out now near the harvest of what was then only being sown by the enemy), here we find three great and essential marks of the true Christian. First of all is walking in the light — "But if we walk in the light." We may illustrate the truth by the figure here employed. Consider one in an entirely dark room, how he flounders about, fails in what he seeks, and injures himself and the things he knocks against. Let a full light enter, the perplexity ceases, and he walks with ease, comfort and certainty. So it is with the spiritual light which shines on the Christian's walk, and there in Christ it shines. It is here a question not of "how" but "where." Every real Christian by grace walks in the light It is therefore of high moment that all such should be aware (far as it is from the mind of many) that they do so. It is a great universal Christian privilege. It is not a mere sentiment or idea, but a conferred reality; and also a practical reality that God would have appropriated and enjoyed by every Christian. There may be, and there is, falling short in detail as already said; and we are responsible to feel our failures, and to acknowledge them all the more because we walk in the light.

“But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light” (meaning as God is in the light), “we have fellowship one with another.” There is the second distinctive mark. Not merely do we walk in the light, but because of this very thing, we have fellowship with one another in the Christian circle. When we meet with a child of light, if we only heard on the street a few words from a man or a woman which revealed the fact that God had shone into that soul, and that it was no mere dream or theory but one walking in the light as a real Christian, our hearts are at once attracted. We are drawn together more by far than to our own brothers or sisters who do not walk in the light. For many know this sorrow too well. The nearest to them may hate the light, and Him who is it, instead of walking there by grace.

Here clearly it is a second distinctively Christian privilege, the mutual fellowship of the saints, and neither fellowship with the Father and with the Son on the one hand, nor, on the other, what may be called church fellowship. One may be the. basis of all, and the other the consequence in order to the last; but we may not force the meaning. We have nothing ecclesiastical in this Epistle; it is all deeply personal yet eternal truth, the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ. The fellowship here flows from apprehending this in one or another. You may not even know their names perhaps, but you have fellowship. “We have fellowship one with another,” that is, we enjoy exactly the same blessing of grace. In nature if I have a prize, you have it not; and if you have it, it is not mine. But it is wholly different with spiritual privileges as Christians. We all have them fully as our own, yet share them as fully in common; and that you and all other saints have them as much as myself

adds only the more to the joy of love which fills all our hearts.

The privileges of an Englishman or a Frenchman, or anything that men talk so much about, are small and for a little while; but here we begin with fellowship with the Father and with His Son. The Holy Ghost alone can sustain us in enjoying that fellowship, is He gives us by faith to make it our own. To that divine person's work we are not come yet in the Epistle; we shall hear of it abundantly in due course. But here we find the effect of His grace in the believer when he meets ever so casually with a fellow-believer: "We have fellowship one with another." Is not this a blessed victory over the severing power of self? And is it not true, even in the appalling state through which we are passing now, when greater differences scatter, and are perhaps more keenly felt, than even among the Jews, who were for the most part fleshly men? Yet their contentions and their parties were hardly to be named in comparison with that which we witness every day around us, even in this favoured land, and in its chief city.

O beloved friends, we ought to feel the burden of Christendom's state. But there is a deeper burden in realising how little Christians, rising above all failure, appreciate the truth that we have fellowship one with another. Who need doubt that every true Christian has a certain sense of it, and according to the measure of his sense of divine grace he answers to it; but it must be in a feeble manner, unless accompanied by entering into spiritual intelligence of the grace and truth made known in Christ for the very purpose of bringing us all into a manifest state of mutual love now. "We have fellowship

one with another." We recognise the Christ that we have in each other to our deep joy.

There is the third privilege, without which there could be no good permanently possessed, nor anything of power to vanquish and take away the difficulties. For sins are the otherwise insuperable difficulties, "and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" — from every sin, if you will have the exactness of the phrase, which makes it particularly pointed. It is an error to lower its force by reducing it to a question of time. The apostle presents the truth in that abstract form which characterises his writings. He tells us here of the great abiding comfort of the Christian. None could or did know the efficacy of that blood until after the cross. But you have it there and thence. And as the light in all its power of manifesting it shines the brighter, the more it shows the cleansing power. Walking in the light (and there we are brought when we receive Christ), we have mutual fellowship and know the value of Christ's sacrifice. He is the light; and, in consequence of having eternal life, we enjoy fellowship with the Father and the Son; and further we have fellowship one with another. There can be no true fellowship above or below without Christ thus possessed and known. There may be gracious association in a religious society, kindly association in a worldly one; but Christ establishes us in what is not only real but divine, even now on the earth, and in face of ecclesiastical confusion.

The great thing that hinders fellowship is self, the sinful egotism which. pervades every man, woman and child in the world, since, all these are fallen. Do not men instinctively grasp what, as they hope, will meet desires for themselves, for their likings and alas! their

dislikings? This is not fellowship, but its reverse in sinful nature. Yet into this guilty world, this unhappy dying world of sin awaiting judgment, comes He that created it, whose love was before creation, and whose love was made the more manifest when all creation rose up against Him and cast Him out. His love, God's love, has brought us to share all that He has, except what is absolutely divine, and therefore incommunicable. But in unjealous love, He shares with the Christian everything that He can communicate; and as He has all things with the Father, no difference is there too. If we have fellowship with them, we have fellowship one with another. Life eternal was manifested in Christ, who also gave us the same life to be our life. This was the supreme blessing that fitted us for fellowship, guarded and maintained as it is by His death that effaces every sin. Not that Christian responsibility is not maintained here on earth in those who are thus blessed. And for this there is the need of continual dependence: that if living in the Spirit, we may walk in the Spirit; for the Spirit is now given to glorify Christ in all things, as this particularly does. Here is therefore our new responsibility. "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

But here we have our standing in grace; here is presented the three-fold Christian blessing. This triple cord that cannot be broken is walking in the light, fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanseth from all sin.3 From other parts of Scripture we know that for the Christian there is but one offering, but one sacrifice, but one shedding of blood, but one application of blood. Where people err is in not seeing the washing by water as well as by blood. Now

the washing of water needs repetition indefinitely — the blood of Christ was once and for all. Take that perpetuity away from it, and you get into uncertainty. Never otherwise can you have the solid peace of knowing that your sins are completely blotted out before God.

The greatest pains are taken, particularly for the Hebrew saints, to bring out this great truth: the unity of the offering and of the sacrifice, in contrast with the religion of the Jews, who always had the priest standing to present a fresh oblation, etc., day after day. But for us He has taken His seat, not only for ever but without a break. The word that is translated “for ever” (Heb. 10:12, as also in 1 and 14) means continuously.” This is much stronger than merely saying for ever”; because “for ever” might mean in the main, and admit of His being up and down every now and then, though the mercy might last for ever. The word here however means without interruption. Do you think that this is generally believed by the mass of God’s children? The consequence of not knowing it is that they take upon themselves to interpret this verse in a faulty manner. They interpret it to mean that His blood goes on to cleanse as we have fresh recourse to Him. This is not the doctrine of Scripture. In their sense of its cleansing always, in order to meet our fresh need, Christ’s blood is reduced very much to the Levitical sacrifice when the Jew sinned.

The apostle speaks of our privileges in an absolute way. John more than any other was led to put truth in an abstract manner and with an absolute force. Hence, if we apply this to the verse, walking in the light is an abiding reality to the Christian, even if we be here or there inconsistent. “We have fellowship one with

another” no less remains absolutely true, though we may fall now and then; but this is the real abiding principle which we are called to practise. Are we not prepared for it by our common share, not in worldly circumstances, but in eternal blessings? It is just the same thing with the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Cleansing from every sin is what it does. It is not saying when He did it, still less that He is going to do it, or least of all that He is always doing it. Revelation never speaks thus, rather of its complete effect; for by one offering He hath perfected in perpetuity the sanctified. But as to the washing of the water by the word, we need it whenever we fail, and how often, alas, we do fail! This is the feet-washing by the Lord in John 13, which answers to what there will be occasion to consider presently. So we need not enter on it now, as it comes in its own place for a full inquiry. It is only referred to here to clear away positive error and misinterpretation of the word of God.

We may observe too that ecclesiastical fellowship, important as it may be, is in no way meant here. In the declension of the outward profession the apostle speaks of the spiritual fellowship of real Christians, one with another, which ought to survive all failure, and which does as a fact in the measure of our walk in communion with God. Here again it is an abstract truth, which we are bound to reduce to practice.

Now we are come to the second “if we say” of Christian profession. “If we say that we have no sin” is a very astonishing position for a Christian; yet there are those that appear to say it, of whom one should be sorry to think that they are not Christians. In this particular it is not implied that they may not be. It is said that “If we

say that we have no sin, we mislead ourselves.” All! this is easily done We mislead ourselves easily. So thinking we do indeed err. How can those who have life eternal in Christ delude themselves so as to say that they have no sin? If they said that Christ had borne away their sins, it is true; if they said that the old man was crucified, it is also true; if they said that God condemned sin in the flesh, on their behalf, it would be true beyond doubt. But to say they have no sin, to look into their hearts first, and to raise their eyes to heaven afterward, and then say, “Having examined myself, I say that I have no sin,” is strange delusion in a saint of God. In a Pantheist it is intelligible, because he and his god are equally blind. Low thoughts of Christ go with high thoughts of our state. The Pelagians at a later day seem guilty of this error.

Let us weigh the verse. It is not here sin carried out, but inherent sin, which ought to be felt as a constant tendency ever prone to break out; and, when one is unwatchful, sure to appear. For though we have a new life in Christ, we have also our old and evil nature, whose shoots we are bound vigilantly to nip in the bud. We have the blessed basis of comfort that our old man was crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be annulled, that we should no longer serve sin. Yet are we called to mortify by the Spirit the deeds of the body. And God will be with us to strengthen, as He always does when there is dependence and subjection of heart. But to say that we have no sin! It is a self-righteous theory; and the theory can only have an appearance of force by making sin to be something very vague, through self-deceit and ignorance of the truth, into saying that we have no sin. It has been the delusion of many a dear

soul; and as they are much to be pitied, so ought we to prove that it must be an extremely low standard of sin, as well as of truth, for such a theory to get empire over the mind.

There was One indeed of whom it could be said truly: “In Him is no sin;” in every other there is, not excepting one saint that ever lived. For there is still the old nature; and this nature is sure to break out where we do not keep it thoroughly under the power of Christ’s death by the Spirit of God. But here it was a fleshly and false boast. All these “if we says” describe the growing evil among professing Christians. They suppose systematic error in speculative men. “If we say that we have no sin, we mislead ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” This is so strong a statement as to make it doubtful whether those so deluded could be Christians indeed. But “the truth is not in us” appears to be a somewhat different thing from the truth not at all known by us. No doubt every Christian is presumed to know the truth by God’s teaching. At any rate here attention is drawn to the peculiarity of the phrase; for the self-deception is imputed to the truth not being ours inwardly. The truth should be “in us,” not merely believed and owned by us. Who doubts that there are persons not a few who hold these theories, of whom it would be wrong to think that they were not Christians? They mean probably that they never yield to sin: even this however is a bold thing for them to say. At best it evinces a very good opinion of themselves, which is far from what the more spiritual saints have ever felt or uttered.

In verse 9 the apostle puts the believer on wholly different ground, as led by the Spirit of God. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our

sins." "If we say we have no sin," how can we expect self-judgment and confession? There is no need or place for it. A perfectionist dream has a blighting influence on the soul. Here on the contrary we have no "If we say." To confess sins indicated a living reality, just as walking in the light, having fellowship one with another, with the blood that cleanses from every sin. It was not a question of If we say." Those who are real do not parade their portion they enjoy it. Christ lives in them, and as they were begotten by the word of truth, they do the truth. The truth is in them. Is not this what we are all called to, who really have Him as our light and life and the truth?

Here the Christian is characterised by a spirit wholly different from first to last. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from every unrighteousness." If we have been betrayed into sin, what do we do then? It is so at conversion; it remains so throughout when the need arises. For our God cannot bear sins. We do not hide them; we confess them to God, and, where it is necessary or edifying, to man too. Thus the pride of will is broken; and by grace one renounces his own poor reputation. We care for Christ's character whom we bear. It is His name henceforth; and what is ours compared with it? If we confess our sins therefore, He is faithful and righteous to forgive. What an encouraging word this is, and true from the very time of first turning to God! Here again it is in principle true; and there is no limit to particular time here as in other cases. It is a first principle, and a standing one, for the Christian; it is meant to govern his new walk from the start to the end, a living fact always in the Christian.

To go to God about our evil when all was evil became us when in the dust as lost ones. He is the God of all grace, whatever the need, right through. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us,” not merely from every sin, but “from every unrighteousness.” For defilement is the unhappy result from sin; it is the rule apt to make a soul dishonest, and sure to work out if he hides it like Adam. Concealing sin in his own bosom, one gets away farther and farther from God. The only right thing is to cast oneself on Him, and confess the sins at His feet. This remains abidingly true, after we know Him as our Father. For the government of our Father is as true and reliable for the saint as His mercy when we first knew the remission of our sins. And this is the bearing of the petition in the Lord’s prayer, as it is called. It does not properly refer to the ungodly man in conversion; it looks rather at the daily want of the disciple, like the rest that our Lord taught on the Mount. It is important to know that He was in no sense then preaching the gospel to win sinners to God’s grace. But if the believer should sin (John 15:1-10; 1 Peter 1:14-17), it is a matter with which our Father deals in His moral government of our souls. He takes notice of everything because we are His children and Christ’s disciples. His love and honour, His grace and truth are all concerned in it. The word cleansed and cleanses us. But not only does this cleansing mean from sins but from the consequence of sin — from every unrighteousness, from the lack of integrity which sin naturally entails.

Lastly comes the third and closing case of these “if we says.” “If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.” Here is the most

daring form of all. It appears to describe a class debased to this extreme rising against God by a no less extravagant theory. Nowhere are these strange doctrines so rampant as among professing Christians. For the corruption of the best is the worst corruption. It was not so much found even among the Jews, though they abounded in noxious traditions which profoundly defiled them and dishonoured God. But Christendom is a thoroughfare filled with fables piled upon fables, ever rising and provoking God's wrath.

This last "If we say" was one of the filthy dreams which issued in gnosticism, alluded to throughout the Epistle, and not merely so, but by Paul before our apostle. It was only beginning its evil course; and it developed rapidly and more when the apostles were gone. But these unfounded and unhallowed reasonings of man's mind in the things of God trifle with the great foundations of morality; there it is that they betray themselves, and thither all false doctrine tends to work. Not only does it weaken the spring of Christian responsibility, but denies or destroys it altogether.

Here we may notice that the ethics of philosophy, modern and ancient, cannot find a stable footing. They fail to seize the truth that duties flow from relations, and above all from relationship to God. In this irreparable defect they blindly follow the heathen, who, knowing not God, ignored relations with Him and His Son. Here all was still more guiltily wrong with those nominal Christians who even denied their past faith. This in effect left no ground for His grace in Christ. "If we say that we have not sinned." Oh what complete darkness must have enveloped their souls! Oh how the light that was in them had become darkness! And what darkness

can be deeper or more hopeless? So it is still, and in many instances — too many.

The very worst, you must remember, the antichrists, had once their place in the church, and were recognised, while an apostle lived, in the family of God. “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us, but that they might be manifested that none are of us.” If these, in verse 10, were not antichrists, they were adversaries of the truth, even the self-deceivers. But the worst of them are the last; because it is the defiant rejection of God’s word to say that we have not sinned. It was bad enough to say that we have no sin, now that we are Christians; but that we never sinned is flat contradiction of every testimony of God in the Old Testament as well as the New. This is what is denounced here. It is shamelessly to give God the lie. And such persons in Christendom are met with every now and then (thank God but rarely); but such there are who deny there is any such thing as sin, as all Pantheists do as a matter of course. They claim to be part of God, as they say; and accordingly, if so, how could God sin?

This is no doubt spurious and mad philosophy; but the awful thing to the Christian heart, the awful thing in God’s eyes, is that those who began with His Son, the Saviour, and the remission of sins through His blood, should have sunk into, such an abyss as totally to deny their having sinned. “If we, say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.” Had they forgotten their confession, when they first took the place of turning from effete Judaism or the no-gods of Gentilism? But this was not the worst. Oh think of making God a liar! To “mislead ourselves” was bad in

presence of the light that ought to make us manifest; yet it was a trifle compared with making God a liar. There you dare to blaspheme; there you assail God wantonly in the nicest point of His honour. For what is more to God than His veracity or His holiness? “If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”

It is not only the “truth,” which is, one may suppose, the same thing more generally expressed. But here it is a direct rejection of His plain “word,” which could scarcely have found lodgement in such souls. Where His word is in us, how gladly as well as humbly we acknowledge that we have sinned. This will Israel say in the future day, “all Israel that shall be saved” in the day that hastens to the joy of all the earth. And we that, if anything, belong to Christ on high, what do we say? What did we say in emerging from darkness into light? Did not we begin with that? Yes, we began with what we never forget. All truly converted souls say, “We have sinned.” But here the apostle, writing this Epistle very many years after grace and truth came through Jesus Christ, and when the Christian confession was witnessed so long, solemnly tells us of this egregious evil. It is not the Jew nor Gentile, but professing Christians of that day or of any other; certainly unreal, if not yet apostate. “If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”

Here let me correct the error of the Puritans in applying Isa. 1:10 as they did to the Christian. For this directly clashes with what we have had in the first of the apostle’s “If we says,” in vers. 6, 7. The error is still rampant among those called Hyper-Calvinists, not to name others. It is expressed plainly in the “Child of light

walking in darkness" of an old and eminent divine. But in no way is it implied that this divine used the one to contradict the other; nor do I remember that he refers to the apostle at all: he may not have seen that the application involves confusion and error. The fact is that the Puritan had in view cases common enough among souls in the long degenerate state of Christendom, where even real Christians do not possess settled peace, and lose whatever measure they once had through a variety of causes, the most prevalent of which is looking within for that rest which is found only in Christ and His work for us. It is this painful lack of assurance to which that school refer as "a child of light walking in darkness." But this is a third use of the terms "light" and "darkness," quite distinct from either the prophet's or the apostle's. Neither the one nor the other bears on the case, which is the strange fact now and lone, so common, of a believer's yielding to unbelief, instead of judging it as sin against the Spirit's witness, the Saviour's work, and the Father's will. Such souls never duly received the word of truth, the gospel, and need to begin there, whatever else they may have to judge themselves for. If they get before God in the truth of their sins, they will find Him meeting them in the truth of His grace to their deliverance.

Now the prophet spoke, not of the Christian, but of the future godly remnant, in contrast with the apostate mass to perish described in verse 11. "Who is among you that feareth Jehovah, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of Jehovah and stay upon his God." It ought to be self-evident that the Jewish prophet and the

Christian apostle do not employ “darkness” and “light” in the same sense.

The prophet uses the words in reference to the appalling circumstances of that exceptional hour to come, the chastening of their national sins, not only idolatry but their still worse rejection of Messiah. Herein the godly, whether martyred or preserved, suffer extremely, have no light, but await their Deliverer who destroys their adversaries within and without. But the apostle treats of Christian truth, answering to God’s eternal nature in His children, and rises far above a prophetic crisis or dispensational peculiarities. The Christian walks, not necessarily according to the light, but always in the light is God, is in the light revealed by Christ. It is the moral character proper to the new nature, God’s nature, who is light, and in whom is no darkness at all. True, the Christian has the old nature still, but is set free, as having died with Christ, never more by grace to indulge it, but to condemn what God condemned in Christ’s cross at all cost to Himself. For indeed we have a full salvation not only from sins but from sin, justified from the bad fruit (Rom. 5:1), justified from the bad tree (Rom. 6:7).

It was for the apostle Paul to treat of this two-sided justification, unknown to theologians of every school; but our apostle, more thoroughly than any, speaks of life eternal, our new and divine nature, and contrasts its reality in true Christians with its falsity in those whose walk denies that life and the truth. To talk of fellowship with God, while walking In the unremoved darkness of fallen nature, is a living lie or rather the lie of death. The Christian from his start leaves darkness and walks in the light. There is no presumption in this, but faith. “I am

the light of the world" [Israel never did or could say so]: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John, 8:12). He may slip by negligence, he may yield to self-will, or be carried away by lusts of the flesh or of the mind: all sinful and inconsistent with the light. But serious as this is, divine love in Christ that forgave him when an enemy, and saved him when lost, provides restoring grace, as we shall see in next chapter, and never calls any such sad inconsistency "walking in darkness." The relationship abides with our erring children: how much more with God's? Those who walk in darkness, according to our apostle, lie and do not the truth. They have neither life nor light and need to be awakened and quickened. The fallen Christian needs only to repent and have the fellowship restored which was interrupted. Instead of forfeiting the light, it is in the light that he thoroughly humbles himself for his offence.

Ver. 7 is clear as to all this, for therein we are given a grand view of the new ground on which grace sets every real Christian. "If we walk in the light as He is in the light" is what begins and goes on with every one called out of the dark. With the true apprehension of God's nature, whereof such partake, we also "have fellowship one with another," the action of divine life toward our brethren, as the former is toward our God. Then comes the precious basis and support for both in its most necessary privilege, "the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from every sin," without which we could neither receive nor be kept in the wondrous portion of Christians. But it is, as a whole, the status of all such.

To regard the last clause, as is too generally done, as provisional for failure is to ignore its substantive place

and real connection, to divorce it from its fundamental object, and to substitute it for the divinely-given provision of 1 John 2:1, 2. Such a misuse is every way mischievous. The verse (7) is a summary of the general estate of the Christian and, when taken as it stands, is adverse to the end desired. For in order to suit this end, surely it ought rather to run: If we do not walk in the light, etc., and have not fellowship one with another, the blood of Jesus will cleanse us from our particular sin. If this fairly expresses, as I think it does, the provisional notion, it is in manifest opposition to the general and abstract statement of Christian privilege which is the genuine and intended meaning. This sense alone suits its contextual position, the contrast of that bright and full roll of essential Christian privileges with the varied forms of evil profession which dishonour the name of the Lord, depart from the truth, and lead to everlasting ruin. Provision for failure requires, as it has, a wholly different place and treatment.

2 Testimony of weight casts doubt on reading “Christ” here; the usage of John rather favours it.

3 It is sad ignorance of Greek, or English, to think that this tense only expresses historically present time. It has, where required, its abstract sense independently of time. This is what the apostle means in all the three clauses of ver. 7, and in this, the last as well as the rest; it is what Christ’s blood does. It cleanses from every sin. It is no question here of the time when.

Address 3 - 1 John 2:1, 2

My dear children, these things I write to you, that ye may not sin. And if any one sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ [the] righteous; and he is [the] propitiation for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the whole world."

These two verses properly belong to the first chapter; they are its necessary supplement. Though there is the connecting particle in the beginning of the third verse, it loads to a new subject — the application of the truth that is in the first chapter, in ways of the greatest importance and of deep interest, to guard souls from self-deception and error. These verses remain untouched at present. But we have ample matter for our searching into the word, and the meditation of our souls, in the two verses immediately before us.

We have seen that the first chapter consists of two parts: the outflow of the love of the Father in the Incarnate Son flowing from divine grace, without cause from without — save our sins! The energy of His nature is love; and the purity of His nature is conveyed by the expressive figure — word "light." What word could suit His purpose so well? Thus it was written for our instruction, and meant not to be beyond our comprehension under the Holy Spirit's succour. For there is no element which refuses corruption more than light, as it is also in itself absolutely pure; at any rate, the light of God's nature is. Such is the portion in God's grace, His nature, we receive as Christians; and this is what the apostle was led to tell them when the church outwardly was becoming a wreck. Here we see that it was so then: this

Epistle itself proves it. The worst form of evil that can be conceived in Christendom is what is called “antichrist;” and at this time there were “many antichrists.” There are many more now. Thus God took care that at any rate the germ of the very worst evil should be thoroughly out before the last apostle wrote, in order that there might be a divine pronouncement on its evil and its danger. It was not to be left to spiritual judgment alone, although this is surely required for any profit through the word of God. But we have God’s authority expressed in His word: no inference even, no argument of men, no result of the saints’ experience; but what directly commends itself on God’s authority to the conscience and the confidence of every child of His. He by His word therefore took care, in His wisdom, that as all these evils were to be, the very worst of them should be in existence for God to designate and condemn it before His saints.

Hence it is that this Epistle has a very peculiar character. It is not like the Second to the Thessalonians, looking to another epoch which is not present, at that which had not arrived but must be before the day of the Lord — the apostasy or “the falling away.” The apostasy means the abandonment of Christianity altogether, and as this will surely come, one of the evil factors in bringing it to pass is what is strangely called the “higher criticism.” It is the preparation of men for that unbelief which will be far more thorough, complete, and undisguised. And where is the honesty of officials, whose very position is to maintain the authority of God’s word, reaping earthly honour and emolument from the very thing which they are undermining, and which they ought to, if they do not, know they are undermining? But that

apostasy is future; whereas antichrists were already come. It was the “last time,” and the sign of the last time was “many antichrists;” and here they were. It was not merely the future evil. The antichrist is coming, but many antichrists are the precursors of the antichrist.

But in the verses which are now before us it is a much more general evil. It is, alas! what has to be taken into account as to every professing Christian. The flesh is enmity against God, a near and constant danger, because it affords a ready handle to the enemy to act upon, and to act upon it not merely in those that have nothing but flesh, but in those who, although themselves in the Spirit, have the flesh in them. It is true that they are distinctly said not to be in the flesh, that is, they are by faith in Christ delivered from the flesh; they have got another nature altogether new, and are not left helplessly in the old. There is adequate power in the Holy Spirit to keep every saint of God from sinning.

We know as matters of fact that we may sin, and that we all often stumble; but it is our own fault. Hence the believer is the one that ought to be ready, and I might say glad, to vindicate God against himself. It is humiliating, truly; but, dear brethren, have we not derived blessing, and great blessing, from what humbles us? There is not a single trial of the sort, however unhappy it may be, however painful, however unjust sometimes, but, if accepted from God, is by His grace turned for good. “All things work together for good to those that love God, to the called according to purpose.” And we know that as every good gift and every perfect giving come from the Father of lights, so we are inexcusable when we misrepresent Him; for we are His children, and are called to keep up the family character.

Hence therefore the apostle ought not to be mistaken when, in the second part of the first chapter, he shows the marvellous starting-point of the believer. For the seventh verse, so much and widely misunderstood, really refers to the standing of the believer. It is constantly turned to his de facto conduct, to the actuality of his walk; whereas it is the character of the walk that is normal to us, because we have eternal life; and further, because that eternal life has both the powerful guard and the ground of infinite comfort in the sacrifice of Christ. “But if we walk in the light:” it is an abstract statement applicable to the Christian if he is one. This is enough to show the perversity of such an understanding of it. In reality no question is raised of an actual point of time or fact in a believer’s walk, but of its character according to God.

This is precisely what our apostle is so happy in presenting, and so constant in applying to us. “If we walk in the light” means in effect if we are Christians, if we have seen the light of life, if we are following Christ. It is the Lord who says, “He that followeth Him shall not walk in darkness” (John 8:12). Does He mean that this belongs only to some saints? He asserts it to be true of every one that follows Him; “he shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” Great as the privilege is, it is wholly of divine grace, and in no way attainment through our fidelity; it is solely the fruit of God’s incomparable goodness, that even now as believers we have to do directly with God as He is. And where is God known as He is? In the light; certainly not in the dark but in the light. There it is that we not only have eternal life, but along with it we walk in the light, instead of in darkness like a heathen. Fallen man walks

in the darkness necessarily, because he does not know God. The believer walks in the light, because he does know God, having seen Christ, the light of life; and this light of life is not merely a little gleam which soon vanishes away; it is a perfect and a constant light. The true light already shines, and where does it shine? On the Christian, and into his very heart. The apostle Paul even adds “the light of the glory,” because he is occupied with Christ on high; but here it is rather the light of life in Christ, the true light of the divine nature. Hence, when we are converted and rest upon redemption, where are we brought? Not yet to heaven, but “brought to God” (1 Peter 3:18). And is God darkness? “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.” Therein it is that we walk.

People confound walking in the light with walking according to the light; but this is quite another thing. For if you say “we walk according to the light,” it means practical conduct; but if it is said “we walk in the light,” it is where we are brought by our Lord Jesus Christ — to God, walking from that moment till we are with Him where that light has absolutely no hindrance more. Here we are surrounded with till kinds of drawbacks, obstructions, and dangers from the flesh, the world, and the devil. Yet by faith we walk in the light of God’s presence already.

The Enemy has what one may call a personal spite against the Son, the Lord Jesus, in particular. From the first too Satan had a spite against man, as God had a compassionate and tender feeling for man. And no wonder, since it was the purpose of the godhead, that the Son would become Man. But besides mere man was of interest to God. He was a creature of dust only, till

God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life — into man alone, and into no other creature on earth; none but the earthly head received in this immediate way the breath of God. Other creatures began to live without anything of the kind, and consequently they perished in death. But not so man; he in dying certainly returns to dust; but what about the breath of God? Therein is the ground for the immortality of the soul. One is not now speaking of the new life of believers, but of the souls of men. If any person denies the immortality of the soul, is he not thus far (and it goes far) an infidel, because he makes man's soul in this respect no more than a dog's? Can anything be a greater affront as well as unbelief, in face of what God has done even to man and for man? No other animal is made in God's image, or after His likeness. So much the more unbelieving and ungrateful in putting a shameless slight on God and His word — the God who has been so good to him, and put such remarkable honour upon the entire race in its head. Man is made to rule. Not even an angel is allowed any such position; they are all servants. No angel will ever wear a crown or sit on a throne, no matter what poets or theologians dream; but those who believe undoubtedly shall. The saints are to reign with Christ.

There is thus what is extremely important even in the creation of man; and Satan's work is to make him a mere creature for present things, shutting his eyes to all that is coming, and thus denying God's word and judgment. Many no doubt are, especially in our day, the varying degrees of infidelity; but its first degree, we may assume, is denying Scripture as God's word, if it be not rejecting His testimony to Christ in the preached gospel; then lowering his immortal soul to a brute's, effacing

hell and heaven; and so throughout all the ever darkening clouds of infidelity. But here there is also and always a danger of presumption, for the flesh will abuse anything and everything. The flesh most of all strives to pervert grace, and likes to do so unless there be a new nature. And even where there is that nature, the believer is only kept right by dependence upon God in faith of Christ's work.

On the other hand God is active. If light be the moral nature of God, love is the energy of God's nature going out in goodness, and working with the deepest affection and concern. It is not, abstractly speaking, the case with anything but love. Undoubtedly it is an easy thing to abuse love; and we should not only abuse it occasionally, but go on from bad to worse, were it not that God in Christ is not only life and light, but love. Yea, the Saviour in it died for us and shed His blood to make us whiter than snow in the sight of God, as He is the Advocate that we have with the Father, who is holy and righteous.

You may notice here that the writer is not now pursuing the nature of God as in the latter part of the first chapter. We return to His character as Father, the gracious name of relationship with a Christian. For the grace shown to the Christian is the highest grace that God has ever shown or ever will. His word is now complete. No more revelation is given by God, no further revelation has man to gain. Not only has God brought out His last word and deepest in Christ His Son, but also now the Holy Ghost is here to supply present power. We have not to go to Jerusalem or Samaria, to Rome, Canterbury, or anywhere else, to know the word of God or its meaning. As the Scriptures are the sole

standard of the truth, so the Holy Spirit abides in every Christian for this express purpose — to guide into all the truth.

But also this supposes a suited condition of the soul. The high and blessed condition that we find looked at in the early part of the first chapter is fellowship or communion. And Christian communion means sharing the Father's mind and affection, His work, and His purposes, whatever their extent, as concentrated in the object of faith set before us. They are all in the Word personal and in the word written, and they are there for us to apprehend. We learn thus what God has done for us in Christ was what He had in His heart before anything was done; and this as revealed in His own Son, and applied as only the Holy Spirit could. We have the best God could give us, His own everlasting delight in His Son, and that delight now communicated to us. For when He said "This is my beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased," is it not, as another has observed, much more wonderful than to say "In whom you ought to be well pleased?" Even this would have been a great favour as we ought to feel; but there He shares with us the chief joy of His own heart. For God's complacency centres in the Lord Jesus, and all the more because the Son was born of woman, because He deigned to become man — as necessary a thing for our blessing as that He had always been God. There could have been no link with man except through the incarnation of God the Son. And what is it not for God's glory?

It was so not merely that the Lord Jesus Christ came to die. This no doubt is what brings us in, superior to all the disabilities from our sins, and all the consequences of our fallen nature. Yet to enjoy God as He is, to have

fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ, is notoriously left out for the most part by the modern Christian; and is it not the best part? Is it not where believers come short? They think it quite enough if they are saved; or even have a humble hope of being so at last. It is there Calvinism is so incurably hard and selfish. “If I am saved, this is the great matter. To he elect, or not to be, that is the first of questions to be settled.” All circles round self. The first question with God is that I should believe on the Lord Jesus. Then the heart can go out fully, naturally to the Father and the Son in the power of the Spirit, not only to all saints, but to all sinners, that they too may believe and be saved.

No; the first question is not my safety. Blessed as it is to be saved, my safety is a small part of what Christianity really is, and still less of divine glory. It is doubtless essential for the believer to begin with, when he receives Christ; and that beginning suffices to show that he had not the smallest desert for any blessing; God gives it free and full to him. But to enjoy His own love, and His delight in the Son of His love, what could give higher joy than this? What is there in heaven greater than that? There will be the absence of all the bad, and the presence of glory; but nothing in heaven exceeds fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. Is it not an enigma how a Christian could actually put down on paper that we shall have no fellowship in heaven? Of course, “ecclesiastical” fellowship was not meant; for it would be mere idiocy to talk about such a thing in heaven, however precious on earth. He meant what he said, “No fellowship “; and we may leave it to be, weighed. The wonder is that fellowship with the Father and with the Son should be given us on earth; yet

it is only one of God's crowning mercies that we should here be fitted to enjoy it in the Spirit.

But, however blessed the fellowship of the Father and the Son may be, it is easily interrupted; a single foolish thought or word interrupts it. For how could the Father and the Son have fellowship with sin? And we need restoration. For this reason here we have this gracious supplement: "My dear children, these things write I to you that ye may not sin." It was not fear lest they might be lost. There the Calvinist, hard and narrow as he may be, is perfectly right. Life eternal means eternal life, nothing less; but a great deal more than what is commonly drawn from the two words thus put together. They contain far more than many saints and martyrs drew out of these words of God in compass and depth. On the very surface of the words, it is not a question of mere safety. We all know that not a few lively Christians think it is even less than safety; and we are sorry for them. But is there anything too foolish, even if contrary to the word, to gain currency with Christians, save the foundation truth of Christ Himself? God watches as to this the heart and the mind and the tongue of His children. Here it was necessary that there should be no abuse of His incomparable grace, no slight of His adorable person.

The communion with the Father and with His Son, based on eternal life in Christ, fits us for the light, making us capable of walking in the light; and God graciously imparts not merely intelligence but peace, and also fills us with joy. Do you think that most of the children of God really believe that such is their title now, and that this is the mind of their Father about them? Does their practical Christianity at all approach it? "Fulness of joy!"

And it is not only here; the same thing is true of Paul's experience and witness.

Look at that experimental Epistle written to the Philippians; yet none other has such joy overflowing on every hand. The apostle both had it in his own heart, and looked for it in the hearts of these saints so beloved of him as he was of them. Indeed he had carried on the work at Philippi, as one may say, in a prison at midnight, and under a great deal of abuse from man, and suffering and shame inflicted upon himself and Silas. In no place did the gospel work commence so manifestly with triumphant songs to God in the midst of sorrow. And God heard them, not only the prisoners as we are told, but God heard; and he answered by an earthquake, the like of which, one safely presumes, never appeared in any other spot since the world began. The effects that followed had a character altogether unprecedented. It loosed all their bands, yet nevertheless not a prisoner escaped, nor was there a life lost, or a limb injured. But the gaoler, waking up, was awakened not only to learn that all his charge was safe, but to something incomparably better: to the Saviour and his own salvation in sovereign grace. Evidently he was a rough, hard, reckless man, as gaolers so often are naturally, in those days undoubtedly. But there he was, a mighty trophy of divine mercy, and a witness of God's answer, not merely in rebuke of abused authority, but to the patient faith of His servants who sang His praise in the prison. And thence rose up to His ear acceptably their songs of joy, which their many stripes made to be all the sweeter. Surely in ordinary circumstances, and in the midst of all the peaceful enjoyment of divine grace and truth, songs ought to be every moment accompanying

them in spirit. Not that one means every Christian always singing, but praise going up at all times from their hearts; and so it would surely be if saints had Christianity as it was once for all delivered to their faith, and enjoyed in the spirit, themselves separate from the darkening embargoes of unbelief.

Our verses open with the touching appeal to the loving confidence of those at length addressed as “My dear children.” He had abstained from any such endearing term before; now he uses it. “These things write I unto you.” Nor is it any longer the appropriate form of joint testimony, “write we;” but here his speech becomes definitely personal; he was writing to each and all of them, as God led yet from himself individually. No doubt he was inspired just as much to say “We write,” in the first chapter, as “I write” in the second; but in the first chapter it was what chosen witnesses testified by divine grace, and what all the saints were meant to enjoy to the full. If they could speak to Him in songs at midnight, surely they sang their spiritual songs in the light of mid-day also.

But here it is a serious warning that he enjoins These things write I to you that ye may not sin.” Who can wonder that this becomes a personal appeal, and not without need? Why? Sin deeply touches, especially if a saint of His be the one who might thus compromise Him. If we know the gospel, we should believe that eternal life goes right through till time is no more, and eternal life the Christian has, the now communicated life of Christ; as he also has the everlasting redemption of Christ (Heb. 9:12), not temporal as that of Moses of course was in coming out of Egypt. Like our other Christian privileges, ours is everlasting redemption. In 1

John 2:1 it is no question of such a fear arising as for an Israelite. By grace we are made to feel, as alive with Christ's life and character, for what lowers Christ's name, and grieves the Holy Spirit of God in virtue of whom we were sealed for a day of redemption. And we go further here: "the Father" as such is alleged. For not merely have we now partaken of a divine nature, but we stand in the relationship of children to the Father.

If you think of a poor orphan that never livingly knew its own father or mother, seeing with pain its loss of a tie which bound others together, you could better judge the great blank that must be felt there. Here we are precluded from any such feelings. Not only have we a divine nature which is given by grace to abide through every strain and difficulty; but our title holds good as having received Christ to be children of His Father and ours. And what is sin in His sight? Nothing less than a direct stroke at God's nature. The nearness of our relationship only aggravates the insult done to God. It is one acting in his own will, against God's will, for that is the true character of sin; not a transgression of the law, as wrongly in the Authorised Version of 1 John 3:4. So theologians have mistakenly made him say, because they are all apt to sink more or less under the law. What the apostle really wrote there is, that sin is lawlessness. This is both larger and deeper than a breach of the law. Such breaches might be by a Jew under carelessness or provocation without realising God's authority in it; whereas lawlessness has an awful character. Hence Gentiles who know not the law are characteristically thus guilty, so that "lawless" is used to describe them. But this is the definition of sin revealed to the Christian: "Sin is lawlessness." Transgression of the law is sin; but

the converse is not true; for sin has a far wider bearing; it is lawlessness, unrestrained self-will.

Here therefore, after all this unfolding of a divine fellowship and divine nature, the apostle with earnest affection writes to his dear children that they should not sin. If I sin, far from the exercise of life eternal, I affront in the deepest may the love of the Father and of the Son; and I violate the moral nature of God Himself. It is not merely a broach of the law given by Moses to Israel, momentous as this is in itself, and of deep value for everybody that knew it. The commandment is holy, just, and good; but we, even if we had been Christian Jews, died with Christ to the law, and are brought into another standing altogether; for we are under grace, and not under law. Such is the revealed position of the believer since our Lord died and rose. And consequently, as Satan is ever alert to entrap the Christian to His Lord's shame, we read, "These things write I to you that ye may not sin." Few, but very solemn words! and the marked simplicity and tenderness with which they are introduced add to their weight. "And if any one sin." "Man" might give the idea of a generality not at all intended, for there "man" is not expressed in the case at all. "If any one;" if any saint, if any having this relationship and divine nature should sin.

It is supposed to be only an act of sin. It is never contemplated that the Christian deliberately lives in sin. Scripture affords no reason or excuse for such laxity. There may arise in some minds a vicious theory whereby sin is denied to be in us; but, as we have seen, it is ruled to be misleading themselves. The truth is not in those who thus theorise. But to deny that we have sinned goes a great deal farther it evinces a seared conscience, and

a total absence of that divine light which makes manifest our entire life of self-will. What. idea can there be more opposed to the word of God about us? “If any one sin (that is, shall have sinned), we have an Advocate.” Is not this last clause a singularly beautiful expression of a comforting truth? It is not that “he hath an Advocate,” but that “we” have. Nor are we warranted, great as this boon may be, to confine the advocacy of Christ to annulling the sorrow and shame of a believer’s sin.

“Advocate” is a word of much more general value than simply meeting a particular act of sin, though this is the case here raised; and as in a Christian, so much the greater dishonour to God for the Advocate to meet. What did not the bearing of sin and sins cost Christ? It was when “made sin” that He went down under all depths and endured at the hand of God its judgment, that we might not have it to endure. “But if any one sin, we” — the entire Christian company, all the objects of divine grace, “have an Advocate.” There He is on high to meet this need. There as He is for us always, so we too have Him. As we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, as we have eternal life in Him, no less have we Him as Advocate with the Father. It is a wondrous provision of grace. “Advocate” is the same word (παράκλητος) that the apostle John applies in the Gospel to the Holy Spirit, which is conveyed not so correctly there as “the Comforter.” This would require παρακλὴτωρ, as in the Sept. Version of Job 16:2. Whereas the very formation of παράκλητος, and above all its meaning as understood from its application in Scripture, rather signify one called on our behalf who can perfectly do for us what we are and must be incapable of doing. This alone shows that we must not

put a narrow limit to it, and imagine that the only thing for the Advocate is to meet sin; He is also the Comforter, and sees to our every want.

Evidently comfort, though the gracious issue, would be a strangely imperfect way of meeting a Christian's sin; perhaps a human device, and a way that the flesh would like, that is, "Say as little as possible about the sin: spare the feelings of our poor failing brother, who could not help it." An upright soul, on the contrary, wants the sore to be probed, prays that the insidious mischief may be thoroughly sifted out to the bottom, and is self-judged before God because he had been drawn into a wrong so unworthy of the Father and the Son, and such a grief to the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, before the sin was yielded. to, and to turn so sad an occasion to the best account, we have an Advocate with "the Father," Jesus Christ the righteous. It is not in His quality of "God." This would have been properly said, if we had lost our place as Christians; but, sad as the sin was, we do not lose the relationship of grace. We are entitled still to hold it as ours. Indeed, there is no time that we need more to remember our place as Christians than when we have fallen through our folly into sin. For how else could we be made profoundly ashamed of ourselves without despair? How overwhelming that, after having God's incomparable mercy and blessing, we should have tampered with iniquity, guilty of forgetting both the love and holy nature of our Father, and the sin that we have still indulged in, the old man!

For is not indwelling sin like a wild beast within, that must be kept under lock and chain in order that it may not break out? It is indeed a deadly enemy; which, nevertheless, we are entitled to keep under death — the

only efficacious death — the death of Christ and our death with Him. Therefore, what exposes to the fall is a lack not only of watchfulness for ourselves, but of faith in Him, our present exercise of faith in what Christ has done for us on the Cross. For it was not merely to clear away the sins, but also to have sin in the flesh sacrificially condemned in Him whose flesh was altogether holy. God condemned it there, and such is its end to us by grace, to be condemned, not pardoned. Sins need to be pardoned, but sin God condemned in Christ made sin. Sentence was executed on sin in Christ crucified, that we might be set free in Him. And this is what we wanted, and we have it by grace (Rom. 8:3). Therefore are we always to be on our watch, for power to condemn the flesh whenever it shows itself, or consciously works within without being shown to others.

But here it is sin committed. The saint, the child of God, myself, you, or another, has sinned; and what then? The nature of sin is to get worse and worse, to work unto greater ungodliness; and it must do so, were it not that we have such an Advocate. But the Advocate works, and the effect of His working is that we are brought to feel and judge the sin with humiliation before our God and Father. It may seem to many very remarkable that it should be said not if any man “repent,” but “if any one sin, we have an Advocate.” The former, we need not question, is the way in which legalism in its unbelief of grace would put it. For does it not seem right, “If any man repent, we have an Advocate”? But the word is, “If any man sin.” Surely God hates the sin with an infinite hatred; but He loves the saint, and as Father loves His child with a love rising above every difficulty. Further, His object is to bring that saint into His own thoughts,

His own hatred of that very sin. We have an Advocate therefore, and not merely with “God,” as if one had to begin again, and lost everything by the sin. No; but I have brought shame upon His grace and His truth; and He is bringing me to condemn it and judge myself accordingly. And who is He that effects so gracious an end? The Advocate above. He works in us too by another Advocate who is here below, the Holy Spirit.

It will thus be apparent why one ventures to affirm that the right translation in our tongue for the word (παράκλητος) is “Advocate,” and that it is as much required in the Gospel for the Holy Spirit, as here for the Lord Jesus with the Father above. The “Advocate” is meant to cover everything we cannot do ourselves, even in the extreme case of a sin. It answered (as has been often shown as far as a poor earthly illustration might furnish it) to the “Patron” among the early Romans, when they were not so selfish, luxurious, and corrupt as they became afterwards; but when there was among them at any rate a moral feeling strong for heathen people. Their clients could look up to their chiefs, the various members of the family, of the “clan,” as they call it in another part of our country. The “clan” could claim the aid of the “Patron,” and he was bound, by the very fact of being their chief, to take a personal and active interest in every one needing his help that belonged to the clan. At any rate this was the theory; for we must not expect it fully in practice, which is quite another thing in man and this world. But advocacy was the idea. And now in the Lord Jesus, what was an idea greatly failing among men, the Christian finds its perfection.

Nor is it merely in the Advocate with the Father, but also. in the Holy Spirit who has come from the Father

and from the Son to be the advocate within us. Part of His action is that He carries on intercession for saints according to God. It is not precisely in the same way; but there is constantly going on the intercession of the Spirit, as we read in Rom. 8:26, 27, no less than Christ's above in ver. 34. The twofold divine advocacy covers all our need effectually. Wherever we have a difficulty, wherever a trial, a sorrow, the Spirit never fails. Wherever we are weak or ignorant, the Spirit comes to our rescue; working one way or another, not always directly in ourselves, but through one another. Is not this a way most happy? Far be it from us to be independent of one another. We are made now in the power of the Spirit, as members of the one body of Christ, members one of another too. And it is the will of God that we carry this out here below; but how are we doing it? At least we know that the Advocate above never fails, any more than the Advocate below; and thus, in the wonderful grace of God, we are doubly encouraged and cared for, that we may be faithful, however feeble. These two provisions are disclosed one in the Gospel of John and the other in this Epistle of his. Oh, how doubly we are indebted to God for such support!

The apostle Paul did not supply all, though there never was a greater steward of God's mysteries, never a mightier labourer in the gospel and in the church, among those that wrought and lived and suffered for the name of our Lord Jesus. Still the apostle John had a place that none could fill but himself, inspired by the Holy Ghost for it. And no wonder! He did not lie in the bosom of the Lord for nothing. There were grounds and reasons why he should enjoy so blessed a privilege; and we reap blessing through the disciple that Jesus loved,

thus formed and fashioned by divine grace for the work given him to do so many years after, in the most distressful circumstances that the church of God knew till then. What is it now? Are not those distresses heightened, deepened, and multiplied since? Yet abides the Advocate above, and the other Advocate abides in and with us. Do we simply, truly, fully believe in both?

It is important to see the difference between the advocacy and the priesthood of the Lord. We never have him brought forward as Priest by John, at least now for Christians. The Advocate partakes of a more intimate character by a great deal. The Priest had a most necessary place; and it is particularly brought out, where it ought to be as most needed, to the Hebrew Christians, who (many at least) had been hankering after the old priesthood and ritual. The needed truth they were taught, singular to say, by the apostle Paul. He was not their apostle; and his Epistle takes the shape of a teaching, rather than of apostolic authority, brought to bear upon the Hebrews. He effaces himself not giving his name, and will have all the help by passages, wrought with incomparable skill, out of the Old Testament. But that skill was what the Holy Spirit gave him for the purpose. No doubt he too was a suitable vessel for this work of Jesus, the great Priest on high; as John was for the other task we have been looking at — the more intimate form of the advocacy.

But one can see clearly what is very helpful to the difference of these two Epistles, the one to the Hebrews, and this one of John with which we are now occupied; for the distinctive line of truth is not merely in a single point, but runs through each of the Epistles. The Epistle to the Hebrews treats of our approach to God, access to

His sanctuary. It is not relationship to the Father. There is indeed reference in Hebrews 12 to God speaking to His saints as sons, and of fatherly chastening as the Father of spirits reserved to those real. But the character of the Epistle is to speak throughout of “God,” as far as saints are concerned; hence it is a question of how, being what we are, we can approach to God in the holies. Consequently here we have the sacrifice of Christ brought out most strikingly, and in its perfect efficacy. It is shown to be peculiarly marked by one feature, and in constant contrast with Israel — “one offering” accomplished once and for all; for there is the utmost care to stamp unity upon it, and completely exclude all notion of a fresh application of the blood. And why must it be so? Because Christ’s blood has a character that no other blood did or could possess. It does its work perfectly, and therefore once for all. But this truth is exactly what it would be hard now to find anywhere fully and unqualifiedly believed.

Different forms of church government are in evidence, and also different shades of doctrine; but they all agree, even among evangelicals, in maintaining fresh recourse to, or fresh application of, the blood of Christ. Substantially this is to be like a Jew, and it amounts thus far to a revival of Judaism, after being hunted out more particularly by the apostle Paul. Not the least trace of it appears when he wrote to the Thessalonians, Corinthians, Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians or Philippians. To the Jewish believers, the Hebrews, he peremptorily excludes such a thought. As he says in Hebrews 9:26, in such a case He must have suffered often. He was offered once, not often. And there not only the error, but the folly, of the Roman mass betrays itself.

It is avowedly sacrifice without blood; a sacrifice continually repeated day by day for the remission of sins. It is a sacrament which declares that Christ's blood has failed; and that offering of the Mass is needed to effect remission. But it is a mere sham; and an invention of the most blundering kind, the most pretentious for the earthly priest, and the most dishonouring to the Lord Jesus both here and in heaven. But even among the keenest Protestants, are they not all under the mist of a constantly needed recourse to the blood time after time?

Shall I tell you how the error rose, and with what it is connected systematically? Because the washing of water by the word is habitually left out. They do not see this truth, except so far as they apply it to baptism. But Scripture applies it to the constant need of the saint after he rests by faith on the blood of Christ. And that washing of water takes two forms in Scripture. The washing of regeneration we have at or about the same time that we rest upon Christ's blood. This too is never repeated. There is no such thing as re-regeneration. There is no repetition of regeneration any more than of the sacrifice of Christ. It is and can only be once. So too Christ's blood always abides in its efficacy with God and for us; indeed if it did not always so abide, we are lost; Christ cannot die again for us. But after resting upon Christ's death for us, men suppose that its efficacy is interrupted by sin, and that a fresh application of the blood is required to cleanse us. If it be so, where are you to find it? He died once and for all, and its value remains for ever, and even without interruption or in perpetuity (εἰς τὸ διηνεκές). But there is also the washing of water by the word continually, wherever there is need.

The necessity for our being habitually cleansed is set forth in a very striking manner, not in the Hebrews, nor in the Gospels generally, but in that of John only. Our Lord took basin and water and towel, to wash His disciples' feet, showing in that symbol what He is now doing in heaven whenever our feet get defiled here below; as He also intimated that they should understand it afterwards. It is to meet the defilements in the walk of the Christian. There we have the Advocate, as is plain. The Lord gave its sign in stooping down, not to die for them, but to wash their defiled feet, astounding Peter and no doubt the others too. Peter let out their common ignorance, and showed how foolish he was in trusting his thoughts to preserve the honour of his Master. His deepest moral honour is in that humiliation which He accepted in His own love, and that the Father's love should be gratified to the utmost, and for the saints to enjoy fully also. Thus the washing of the feet in John 13 answers to his own words here, "We have an Advocate with the Father." It is not blood but water; and "this is He that came through water and blood, Jesus Christ; not in the power of the water only, but in the water and the blood." So writes our apostle in 1 John 5:6, referring plainly to John 19:34, 35. Christ's death both atones for and morally cleanses the believer: the blood once for all, the water (typifying the word, John 15:3) not only at the first but to the last here below; but the word applying His death for purifying us by faith.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, as explained, access to God is secured by a perfect sacrifice, "the blood of the cross," and by His entrance into the holies as the Great Priest over the house of God, the Forerunner is for us gone in, that we may enter boldly. But His priesthood is

to succour the tempted, and to sympathise with our infirmities, that we may receive mercy, and find grace for seasonable help. In heaven He appears before the face of God for us. Thus He cheers and strengthens us against all the trials of the wilderness, and in our weakness and exposure. But nowhere is His office as Priest above applied to our sins. Here it is that His advocacy applies expressly. If any one sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, the same Jesus, but in a different function, and this to restore the interruption with the Father through sin. It is to restore that communion which is interrupted by a sin.

But there is another thing to which your attention is drawn. The Advocate here is Jesus Christ the righteous. That is very significant. More than that; “and He is the propitiation.” Notice the double ground. First, the advocacy is founded upon His being the righteous One. We had no righteousness; He is the righteous one, and from God made to us, not only wisdom, but righteousness. Secondly, He is the propitiation for our sins, and sent by God the Father for this very end. He bore all that was necessary to expiate our sins in divine judgment once for all. But as Advocate He meets the Christian’s sin that interrupted his enjoyment of communion with the Father and with the Son. This has nothing at all to do with His suffering once in divine judgment (for all that is finished on the cross), but everything to do with restoring communion with the Father and the Son when interrupted, as is easily done. Oh how sad, beloved brethren, when we slight that communion, so as not to feel these interruptions, to which any levity of word or deed in our folly exposes us!

But “we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

Christ is above in all His grace. Righteousness remains in all its undiminished worth; and so does the propitiation through His blood. It is the joy and boast of the Christian that nothing touches either the risen Christ or the efficacy of His work on the cross for us. If the earth is blind and deaf, heaven never forgets what these are for God’s glory and our purification. Only here we have another thing to observe. The apostle says that the propitiation of Christ is not for our sins only. It is also “for the whole world.” Now we never find the propitiation for sins, except definitely for those that believe, as of old; now for those that are God’s children. Christ is a propitiation in a general way for the whole world, but only “for our sins.” There is a marked distinction, when he speaks of the whole world. This makes the putting in of “the sins” objectionable, when the world is in question. It is going beyond Scripture. If the Lord had been the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, the whole world would get its fruit and go to heaven. If He bore their sins in the way He bore ours, what has God against them? He is the propitiation for our sins; He has annulled them for ever, blotting them out with His blood. Were it thus for the world, it would stand clear.

There Calvinism again is shallow, hard, and wrong. Propitiation is not merely a question of God’s children. God Himself had to be glorified as to sin, apart from our salvation, His nature in love vindicated as to His worst enemies. We may see the instruction afforded on the two truths by the type on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16). On that day there were two goats for the people of Israel.

One of those goats was Jehovah's lot; the other was the people's lot. Now it was only in the people's lot that all their sins were confessed. This was not the case with the first goat; and it was sacrificed. In this there appears a marked difference. As to one goat, Jehovah's lot, it was for His glory, tarnished in this world by sin, by His grace, to satisfy the exigencies of His nature. He must needs be glorified about sin. But this did not as yet take up definitely the burden of the sinner. For his remission the sing must be confessed distinctly and positively; and so Aaron did, laying both his hands on the head of the live or second goat, the people's lot. The first goat was killed, and its blood brought into the sanctuary as everywhere, within and without. Here is the propitiation in a typical way, which so far makes it stand good for the whole world, that the glad tidings might be preached to every sinner.

The doctrine is here and elsewhere. The type of it helps to illustrate the marked difference. The sacrifice of Christ has perfectly glorified God's nature, so that He can rise supremely and send forth glad tidings to every creature. But there is something more needed for sinners to be saved. "Christ bore their sins in His body on the tree." This is never said about "the world "; there is always a sufficiently careful guard. But because God has been perfectly glorified as to sin in the sacrifice of Christ, He can by His servants, as it were, beseech and entreat even His enemies: Be reconciled to God. God's love is the spring. Christ's death is the way and basis for the gospel. It does not necessarily save every creature, but declares God is glorified in Christ. If there were not a soul converted, God would be glorified in that sweet savour of Christ.

But it is well to note that the difference is great between the two. If God left all to man, not one could have been saved. It is by grace that we are saved. To the elect He gives faith; and there is where the propitiation for our sins comes in. None with the fear of God thinks all are to be saved, or denies that grace makes the difference between a believer and an unbeliever. The Day of Atonement bore witness that the first thing was to glorify His own nature; and this apart from effacing the sins of His people. It was of still higher moment that His truth should be vindicated, His holiness and His righteousness, His love and His majesty in Christ's cross. Therein as nowhere else good and evil came to issue, for the judgment and defeat of evil, and for the triumph of good, for the reconciliation not only of all believers to God, but of all things (not of all persons), and for new heavens and a new earth throughout eternity. The basis of this was laid in what the slain goat (Jehovah's lot) typified. But in order to extricate the people from their sins, He would show them His great mercy; and so they are in the second place taken up definitely, and their sins laid on the live goat, which carried them away into a land of forgetfulness, that they might be remembered no more. It is the distinction of propitiation and substitution.

Here we read that our Lord is the propitiation for our sins, "and not for ours only, but also for the whole world." Particular care is taken not to identify God's children and the world. Hence it is not said "for [the sins of] the whole world." There the translators were rash.4 There is the danger of adding to Scripture, and the duty of believing Scripture only. Man's addition makes the difficulty; adhering to God's word solves it, while it says

enough to proclaim divine mercy to the whole world. There God's nature and love are vindicated. That He is a Saviour God appears to all men. He sends the message of grace to every creature. He charges all men everywhere to repent. But in order to be saved, first is the effectual call of the sinner according to the divine counsel; secondly, the working of the Holy Ghost, in the heart of the believer in receiving Christ. This is not the case with "the whole world"; and it is vain to deny that which is a fact. But here we have the Scripture that explains it.

When you believe in our Lord Jesus, we too can say, following the word, He bore your sins away; but we are not entitled to say so to the unbeliever, nor to "the whole world." Faith only is entitled to speak thus.

The fact is that this type is only a particular witness to the great principle of Scripture, dogmatically laid down in the clearest terms of the New Testament. Take the distinction between "redemption" (Eph. 1:7) and "purchase" (2 Peter 2:1): the true key, which opens the Calvinistic and Arminian dilemma. For they both confound the two truths, so that each is partially right, and partially wrong. The Lord by His death "bought" all creation, and every man of course, "false teachers" and all. It is at their everlasting peril that they deny His rights and rise up against their Sovereign Master. But none are "redeemed" save those who have through faith in His blood the forgiveness of their trespasses. Hence the Calvinist is as right in holding particular redemption, as the Arminian in maintaining universal purchase. But they are both in error when they fail to distinguish purchase and redemption. By His death on the cross the Lord added to His creator rights, and made

every creature His by that infinite purchase. All are His, and not their own, as the believer only and fully acknowledges. But redemption delivers from Satan and sins: and this is nowhere the portion save by faith.

Take again another form of the truth in Heb. 2:9, 10. Christ by God's grace tasted death for every thing (ὑπὲρ παντὸς), including of course every man (compare vers. 7, 8). All were purchased. But the language quite differs from ver. 10, where we hear of God, in bringing "many sons" to glory, perfecting the Leader of their salvation through sufferings. When the two distinct truths are confused, not only precision is lost, but the truth suffers from the heart's lack of enlargement through knowing universal purchase, and from evaporating into vagueness through ignorance of the speciality of redemption.

May God bless the truth which has been before us for the Lord Jesus's sake.

4 The Revisers give the difference correctly.

Address 4 - 1 John 11:3-6

“And herein we know that we have known (or, have the knowledge of) him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I have known him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily the love of God hath been perfected. Herein we know that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought, even as he walked, himself also to walk.”

Every Christian who reflects must be conscious in reading these words that the verses come in singularly to outward appearance where they do. The word that introduces them might give the semblance of continuance with what went before. There is indeed a vital connection; but it is not in the ordinary way in which men bind their various subjects together; for it speaks clearly of quite a distinct thing from what preceded. Nevertheless there is a link, and a most interesting link, between them. It is expressed by one word, “life.” It is not any longer simply the divine life, but His nature in the absolute purity of the image-word “light,” into which the Christian is brought from his conversion.

This light it is that thenceforth acts powerfully upon the conscience, for not merely it is awakened but purged conscience; and the new nature responds to the light of God, all the more because of being made painfully conscious how evil that old nature is in itself. But one already has a new nature which is of God. We who believe are declared by the apostle Peter to have a divine nature, and this is from the first moment that the

life of God acts in our soul, and it does act from the very time that we are converted to God. We might not have peace yet; it might even be rather long before we enjoy it fully. But there is no little joy in believing that God has solemnly spoken to our souls; and there is immense relief in thoroughly bowing to the light of God which manifests and condemns our life in the past.

But how is this? Because a new life is ours from God, and life in Christ is the light of men. Elsewhere is it called eternal life; but His are not two lives. There is a significance and an impressiveness in “life eternal,” but it is the selfsame life; there is none other for the believer. And we see how fitting it is that so it should be, because Christ is Himself the eternal life, as is spoken of Him in the second verse of the first chapter. Nor does the apostle Paul in his Epistles hesitate to say (Col. 3:4) that Christ is our life. and again (Gal. 2:20) no more I live, but Christ liveth in me. Thus there can be no doubt about the truth. Christ had not two lives, neither has the believer: I say this only of the life spiritual, not denying the natural. In Him was life from eternity; and, coming down from heaven, He gives life, through faith, not to Jew only but to the world (John 6:32). It was to be given to Gentile that believed as fully as to Jew. Hence the believer has that life; and when he is a little more awakened to understand, it is a great joy to know that it is eternal life.

In 1 Peter 1:2 we find the same substantial truth in the sanctification of the Spirit there spoken of. This has been ill understood by the theologians of every school, ancient and modern, Romanist and Protestant, Calvinist and Arminian. They almost universally interpret it of practical holiness, and this in turn misled Beza, for

instance, into the grossest mistranslation. Error once sown ends in a crop of confusion. But the context renders it plain and certain that the Spirit's sanctification here can only mean that setting apart of the believer to God which is effected in his being born of God, because it is "unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" That is, it precedes, instead of following, an obedience like Christ's and His sprinkled blood, in contrast with the law and its sprinkling of blood (Ex. 24). We are called from our first start in the new life, by which the Spirit set us apart to God, to obey as Christ obeyed, sons in all holy liberty, and with the sprinkled blood which proclaims our sins cancelled and forgiven. Israel, on the other hand, began their effort to gain life by obeying the law under penalty of that death which the victims' blood attested, as sprinkled on book and people. The same sense explains why the apostle in 1 Cor. 6:11 puts "washed and sanctified" before "justified," instead of after, as must be if it were here a question of practical holiness. The Spirit's sanctification, of which the two chief apostles treat, means the separation to God which takes place when we are born of God (John's way of speaking) before the sprinkling of Christ's blood applies, and in order to our obeying God as He did. Archbishop Leighton is almost the only one known to me as having an inkling of its real force.

Under the law life was offered to the Israelite conditionally on his obedience. Yet it was not really his, but forfeited, and must pass under the power of death, as the first Adamic life did. It is not said to be under the power of annihilation; for who knows anything of extinction for man, but the contrary? All the power of Satan could not annihilate the feeblest human being. No

doubt there were things created that were not intended to live again. There is but separation of soul and body in man's death. Guilty man must die and be judged; and is it not just that he should suffer for his iniquity against God and man? But believing man learns from God that the eternal life he has here in the Son is the same life that he will have when he is changed or raised from the dead; it is that which fitted him for communion with the Father and the Son while in this world, as it will fit him for enjoying the Father and the Son throughout all eternity.

The Spirit of God too is the divine power as well as person who works for good in this life against all that opposes it. He thus glorifies the same Christ who in grace gave it to us. For we need the Lord Jesus always, as the object and strength of our souls, as we did as the life-giver; and we shall need Him for ever to serve, adore, and enjoy. But in heaven He lives now for us; so that we cannot say that we want Him as if we had Him not. We would ever delight in Him who laid down His life for us; we now would, above all things, please Him; and as we love to carry out God's will on earth, so it will be above when all opposing influences are done with for ever.

But we begin here already with what is eternal while we are in the world of time. Is not this blessed for us, not to look at eternity as merely the future, but to know from God that he who has eternal life has in a real sense entered on what goes on for ever? We look not at the things that are seen, which are but for a time; we are privileged to look at the things that are not seen, the eternal things. The unseen things faith knows to be much more real and unchanging than all we see.

Evidently the link of our association is that the same Person who is Himself Eternal Life is our life; and how is this life to be known? Here we know that Satan often endeavours to bring one down into what a believer ought never to allow — a doubt. But we who believe God's revelation ought to treat doubt as a sin. For what is the doubt about? Surely not about ourselves. Till we heard the voice of the Son of God, were we anything but sinners? As such we were lost: so scripture tells us. Neither, again, is there any doubt about God's love. The proof is — Christ given for us, yea, and crucified; not merely in all the value of His blood to blot out our sins but risen and in glory, where He is not ashamed of us but owns us as His brethren. By grace we have Christ now, and Christ evermore: so at least He assures us (John 10:28).

Life eternal is like everlasting redemption, the wondrous boon in Christ that remains essentially unchanged. Christ went down under death to give it the blessed character of being life risen and not only eternal. Quickened together with Him, we know that our offences are all forgiven (Col. 2:13). "Risen with" means that He who died is alive again for evermore; and we now are entitled to stand according to His position, and to know that grace makes it our present portion. But if challenged by the Devil, we give him occasion by our negligence, unwatchfulness, lack of prayer and of making the word our daily food. People feel the need of meals for the body; but has not the soul as much need or yet more, to say nothing of its incomparable importance?

What then is the bread of life? It is Christ revealed by the word; the word making Christ our food in the Spirit.

Nothing save Christ so feeds the soul. Still, when a soul has yielded to temptation, and fallen into sin, then is the enemy's opportunity. This he generally uses for dragging one down to doubt God's word, under the frequent plea of doubting himself. But in truth it is doubting God. It is to doubt His grace in Christ. How shameful such doubts are, though the Lord stands evidently crucified before our eyes! There He is, presented in God's word to our faith as the crucified One, to completely abolish doubt. Was it not for ungodly and powerless enemies that He died (Rom. 5:6-10)? Indeed if we were not so bad as we are, we should not have needed such a divine Saviour. In point of fact it is because we were so bad that it is difficult to conceive we could be worse. Moreover we know the treacherousness of the flesh in the believer. This it is which troubles many a saint: not what he did in the days of his darkness and death, but his too often failing in grace and truth, in outbreaks of self-will or folly, in vanity, pride, or worldliness, or whatever else may grieve the Holy Spirit, after all the mercy God has shown him. How sad, after experiencing grace so plenteous, to be sharp and unkind, or careless and light-hearted! Thus it is that the failure of the believer produces difficulties in his soul about himself before God. Nor this only; but if one compromises the Lord by sin of which other people know, they are ready enough sometimes to raise a question.

Therefore, after the doctrinal basis of the Epistle was laid down in the first chapter, with the supplemental two verses of the second chapter, we have the question broached: How can I ascertain the true tests of life? Certainly the philosophers say much but know little about natural life: why wonder if Satan can readily raise

doubts about spiritual life, particularly after one has been ensnared and the conscience is not clear?

From verse 3 we have searching tests applied in order to make plain to ourselves, and to others also, how life manifests its reality or its absence. The object of faith was first fully presented in Christ; next the necessary working of God's nature in such as are His; then (after the brief supplement of grace to restore the fallen) we come to the revealed tests of life. Verses 3-6 furnish the first test. What is this primary test for any soul? That which distinctly and at once, from the very beginning, stamps a man as having life, and which, if he lack it, means the absence of life, is obedience. "And herein we have known (or have the knowledge of) Him; (it is a continuous result that we have the knowledge) if we keep His commandments." This is none other than obedience. It is not the only form in which the spirit of obedience is proved; but as a rule it is the earliest. It begins without delay. It suits the youngest saint. He is sure to be forthwith tested by the question of obedience. And it is exactly what the new life prompts to.

Observe this in him that was to become the great apostle of the Gentiles. Directly that the voice of the Lord reached his soul, and identified the true God with Him who died on the cross, He could not but cry, "Lord, what wouldst Thou have me do?" He judges his error, and wants to obey This is the instant spiritual instinct of life. Converted in heart, his mind is to obey Him whom he without hesitation calls the Lord. Accordingly, if we look at it throughout the word of God, we see how comprehensive obedience is, and how all-important. Take the case of the soul's submission to the righteousness of God: it is what is called in the Epistle to

the Romans “obedience of faith;” by which is meant, not the practical obedience which faith produces in the walk, but the prime act of believing God’s word. This is really the heart’s obedience. It is the person’s obeying the truth, the soul’s acceptance of God’s testimony to His Son. The man hitherto ungodly owns it truly, bows to the word of God, accepts the truth of Christ’s person and work, and is justified. Therefore is the gospel preached to all nations, not like Israel for obedience of law, but for faith-obedience. Such is the true force in order to make the scope somewhat more clear: not an obedience produced by faith, but submission to the gospel in faith. And this is in many forms carried out throughout the Scriptures.

But there are other signs and proofs of its importance; and we do well to look to the very beginning of mankind. What have you there? The first Adam, the father of the race. Alas! the beginning of man’s moral history was the fact that he disobeyed. For the command in Eden was simply and entirely a test of obedience under penalty of death. Eating of the tree of knowing good and evil was not an intrinsically moral or criminal act like stealing, murder, covetousness, or any of the various breaches of the Ten Commandments. These prohibitions suppose an innate evil proclivity; but it was not so then. Adam was as yet innocent and upright; and God told him not to eat of the fruit of that tree. This prohibition had nothing at all to do with the quality of its produce, nor implied in the least that the fruit was a poison. This is the way that man likes to look at it: how would it affect himself? But the command asserted the LORD God’s authority. It was meant to test man’s obedience, his trust in God’s word and goodness, in short, his absolute submission as a

creature of God. For Adam as yet could not be called by grace a child of God. He was son of God like the Athenians, the offspring of God. That is, he was not a mere natural animal without reason, a brute beast; he had from the first his soul from God's inbreathing, an immortal soul. In that sense of course he was God's offspring; but he was not yet a child of God born of Him by grace through faith. Such a birth is never the fruit of anything but of His grace in Christ. Thus only one receives the life in His Son; and Adam had nothing of that kind, whilst simply an innocent man in the paradise of Eden.

But the plain fact which quickly appears and characterises his ruin is his disobedience. He disobeyed unto death; the grand contrast of which is the Second man, the Last Adam, who became obedient unto death. Yet in His eternal being, in His proper position, in His inalienable personal dignity, the Son was a divine person, and, as such, had nothing to do with obedience. For this very reason it is said in Heb. 5:8, that He learned obedience from (or, by) the things which He suffered. He did not know what it was to obey till He came down to be man. He knew perfectly well what it was for others, for every creature; but He was no creature but Creator. Nevertheless, having become man, He loyally undertook the duties of man; and the very first duty of man is to obey God.

The Lord manifested obedience as no one ever did, and glorified His Father in every feeling of His heart, as well as in every word of His mouth, and in every step of His way. He overruled John the Baptist by "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." He met Satan's temptations by nothing but obedience. This indeed is the

profound difference between the Lord Jesus as Man and every other man. Never was there another who invariably obeyed. This is a much greater distinction than working miracles: anybody could do miracles if God gave him the power. Judas wrought miracles; and many will say to the Lord in that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by Thy name, and by Thy name cast out demons, and by Thy name do many works of power? And then will I avow to them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work, lawlessness” (Matt. 7:21-23). To work miracles only is in no way a necessary sign of moral excellence. As a general rule it did go with those righteous servants of God who inaugurated His revealed will, or vindicated it when apostasy betrayed itself. But God, for His own wise purpose, shows us the most wicked of men working great signs, even the traitor to the Lord Jesus, as already mentioned. Another indeed is to be referred to presently but the first one of those called “the son of perdition” unmistakably showed that he had not the slightest appreciation of Christ. He was invested with power, but there was neither obedience nor the faith that leads to it.

Therefore one naturally looks from that first son of perdition to the last — the antichrist. And what is it that stamps the antichrist, what is it that fits him to be a vehicle for Satan’s taking possession of him to the most exceptional degree? Nothing could be a greater affront to God than the way in which Judas showed his revolt in betraying the Beloved of God. So the antichrist will be the ruin of both Jews and Gentiles beyond any man that ever lived. What is it that marks him before that power of Satan is allowed to work in him so mightily for a little while? What prepares him for it? His self-will, the spring

of disobedience. He is described therefore as the king that shall do according to his will (Dan. 11:36), not the will of God but his own and Satan's. He is "the man of sin," the "lawless one" (2 Thess. 2:3, 8). Alas! whenever you do your own will you become Satan's slave; but he pre-eminently will be so.

Thus we see in the most opposite way what an essential place obedience has from first to last. At the beginning the first man abandons it, and all ruin follows. And then the Second Man, when He came here, is just the obedient man, Who brings in not only blessing, for man, freely and fully, but also atonement and peace by the blood of His cross. For He blots out the sins of sinners on faith completely and perfectly; and from heaven is sent the Holy Spirit as the witness of Himself and His work for everlasting redemption, and the reconciliation of the universe when He comes again. Hence obedience is the soul's bent and resolve and joy when Jesus is known and confessed. The proud, careless, dark heart is arrested by the word and the Spirit of God, who fills him with horror at his wickedness, presents Christ with the goodness of God in giving Christ for his soul, and he bows to his Lord and Saviour, earnest to obey from that moment. As the all-importance of obedience from the first beginning of life in the soul is evident, so it is in all the public ways of God, as we have. seen even to the future antichrist at the end of this age.

The principle is thus shown to be of the widest extent and of the deepest moment for God's glory and for man, and indeed far beyond man. Consider that the angels who fell were once heavenly beings. It was through their disobedience, through their pride, that they left the place God had given them, and assumed another that

God gave them not. Obedience of God, on the other hand, is everywhere and always true blessing.

Therefore we cannot be surprised that the Spirit of God introduces it at once in our Epistle and in this part of it. If a man doubts his relationship to God, or if other people doubt him, the Spirit applies obedience as the first great test. Has that soul the spirit of obedience as his own? In our dark days we know how justly we were described as “the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2); but when the turning-point of conversion to God comes, we become “children of obedience” (1 Peter 1:14). It is from the first the real expression of the heart purified by faith. Thenceforth the inward and fixed desire is to obey God, long perhaps before one may have solid peace; though this might come in a comparatively short time. There is the hatred of sin, the judgment of self, and the grace of Christ making one not only desirous but capable; because nobody is ever converted without some little gleam of grace. Alarm will never convert, though it may arrest and point the way. No terror ever converted a soul, though it may induce one to hear the gospel. There must be more and other than such fear to win us to God. It may be ever so little of Christ, but there is this, as we doubt not, in order that faith should have divine light and eternal life. And this life works in obedience; and shows its reality by the inner man set on obeying God, as a law of liberty, not of bondage. The life of Christ in us, as in Him perfectly, delights to do His will and nothing else.

Hence the remarkable divergence, as it might appear, from the previous part of the Epistle. But to press obedience here is just in its right place. We have seen the divine source of the blessing in the Father made

known by the Son, and fellowship with them becoming ours. We have had the message from Him of the character of God in all its purity accompanying this necessarily. If we receive the blessing, we cannot avoid but welcome the responsibility of having the light of God, and walking there. How is this effected in us? The eternal life which He was in Himself is also the life to us. And both light and life show themselves in obedience. And as obedience shone all through Christ's walk, so it is essential in the saint, and holds the first place as a test here below. "And herein we know that we have known him, if we keep His commandments."

It is not zeal in preaching. This is often put forward in modern practice. Directly a soul is converted, the person wants sometimes to become a preacher; perhaps he is only a little boy; and it appears that there is a young boy parading in this capacity just now. Nor is it cultivating what some call "a gift of prayer," and especially in public, where a keen observation of others suggests a fluent rehearsal of wants to be supplied and faults to be corrected all over the world. However these things may be, altogether different are the revealed ways of God. We know that, in particular, preaching is a snare to the vain. It seems to be a service that many covet, if one may judge from the prevalence of the desire without the power. But where there is the gift, it is an admirable work of faith and love. Only there should be a proper basis for it, and love. of souls rather than of preaching impels, after God has wrought in the heart to know what we really are, and, above all, what God is in Christ toward the lost.

Here the apostle begins with obedience; what is more due to God, more meet for us? It is distinctly personal; it

applies to everything and always. It demands and maintains lowliness while it gives firmness. It requires dependence on God, and guards against self and undue influence of other creatures. There must be a personal dealing of the soul with God to have real value and avoid self-deception. But we have first the form of “keeping His commandments.” This brings in a notable feature of the Epistle before us. Very frequently you cannot tell whether “He” is God or Christ. The apostle glides from the one to the other: and the reason is because both are true for though Christ became man, He never ceased to be God. And, therefore, if you say “God’s commandments” it includes Christ’s. Often, if he clearly begins with Christ, he as clearly passes on to speak of God. But Christ is God, and the Word of God, the One who personally brings out the mind of God, as His great declarer, in deed as in word. The Holy Ghost, as He ever wrought in Christ, makes it real in the believer also; that it should not be merely his own mind, still less his will taking all up, but that he be guided of God; for such is the function of the Holy Spirit in this and more also.

Thus we begin to learn, so far as babes naturally do in this life. They may understand little at first; but it is of the greatest moment that, before they understand fully, they should learn to obey. And if they are taught to obey, it must be in a plain manner to suit their opening mind. You cannot expect a child to apprehend easily an abstract principle. Nor can one look for the force of example to tell always on a child. It might be quick enough to say, “That is all very well for mama or papa, for this man or that woman;” but it is another thing to see how it concerns its own little self.

Accordingly the first form of obedience is simply, properly, and necessarily — bowing to His commandments. Yet they do not mean the Ten Commandments of the Law. This is never what John refers to when he speaks about commandments as here. For it is all connected with Christ, vitally bound up with Himself. One may briefly say that the difference between the trial by the law, and the test of these commandments, lies in this: that the law was the proof of what man is; whereas the gospel is the revelation of what God in Christ is. Under law, therefore, man was put to the proof whether he would give up his own will and do God's demands in order to get life. Life was proposed to those under law on their obedience of the law. But this is a contrast with what God now gives the believer. The life is supposed to be already possessed on faith, as truly as the life was in Christ before He came into the world. He was the eternal life with the Father; and, when He took manhood, He was the eternal life still. And here He was manifested not only as a divine person come to show love as the true God and God's Son, but as life eternal to give life to those that have nothing but death, and sin which brought death in. It is thus manifest that the commandments here direct the given new life, instead of being a moral standard to obey in order to gain life. They are the exercise of the life in Christ which grace has already imparted to the believer. But the form of obedience first taken is, "If we keep His commandments."

God graciously puts things in an authoritative manner in order that the child, the babe-like child of grace, should feel the solemnity, the importance and the need of it. God therefore in many cases lays it down, one perhaps

may call it, peremptorily, certainly with all plainness and authority. Is not this good and right? How could any thoughtful or sober creature imagine that God could speak otherwise than with absolute authority, or that God's authority is not concerned in all that He thus imposes upon man? Do not assume that the commandment of God is always something for man to do. Has He nothing that He has done for man to believe? In 1 John 3:23 to believe the name of His Son is made a matter of commandment, no less than to love one another. That is, He commands people to believe the gospel in fact, as well as the saints to love each other. Thus He makes it a matter of commandment, so as to show how thoroughly His authority is concerned, not only His love but His title to command. It is evident that obedience is incumbent on man according to God.

Take another instance: the apostle Paul, in Acts 17:30, told the Athenians that God enjoins men that they all everywhere shall repent This corresponds with believing on His Son Jesus Christ. It is not a question of Nineveh's escaping destruction, but of sinners to be rescued from hell. Neither Jonah nor the men of Nineveh thought of deliverance from eternal judgment, or of receiving life eternal to enjoy fellowship with the Father and the Son now, and to be with Christ for ever on high. But we have His commandment now to this express end, and with a right state of soul it would have and has the greatest possible weight. For thereby is shown how earnest God is about us. And is it not good news to a soul in dust and ashes about his sins, to know He is in earnest to bless freely and fully of His own grace one that so deeply needs to repent and believe? At the same time His own majesty is concerned: this He cannot give up to please

vain man, as poor as he is proud. Men must be utterly blind to their own sins and enmity against God through their whole life, and thoroughly vicious in their self-will, to find fault with God — the God who gave His Son to save the vilest.

Where we love a person, we delight to do what might be put in the form of a command; and where there is authority, a command is the shape that it takes even among men. But how much more so with the God who never lies nor in the least deceives, the God who is full of goodness, mercy, and long-suffering, even to the careless and rebellious? Here it is for the soul's blessing, and for ever, if we keep His commandments. Indeed the sinner long inured to evil needs everything that is good. The whole course of life is meant to be changed when one really repents toward God and believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. And God graciously makes His will and mind to be clearly and positively stated. But this care on His part makes man's self-will and indifference to His commandments the more evil, especially if he bear the Lord's name professedly.

In the next verse (5), the apostle opens to us something deeper. "But whoso keepeth His word." This is a different thing from His "commandments." It advances the nature and scope of obedience. For it supposes spiritual progress to have been made, and that there is growing intelligence as well as purpose in exercise; so that it is not merely a plain "commandment" that governs the soul's obedience, but "His word." His word might not take the shape of a definite command, but would undoubtedly disclose what pleased Him, what He valued. It would therefore, where the spirit of obedience was strong, be sufficient intimation to be faithful in this

also, even though He uttered nothing like an express command in the matter.

Is it not painfully curious how the legalism of the heart works in the opposite direction? In Christendom, and among Baptists in particular, what is more prevalent than to reckon Baptism and the Lord's Supper as His commands? But they are nothing of the kind. Where is His command to the person to be baptised or to take the Lord's Supper? A command puts things altogether in a wrong point of view. Christian baptism is a favour conferred upon the soul on the authority of the Lord Jesus. The Ethiopian asks, "What hindereth my being baptised"? and Peter in the case of Cornelius, etc., says, "Can any man forbid water"? It would be strange to talk thus if it were a command. Who would think of hindering or forbidding a command of the Lord? But here they of the circumcision did vehemently contend against it. Nevertheless, search where you will, it is never presented as a command. No doubt he who had the case of the Christian confessor in hand might baptise or direct the candidate to be baptised. But this is not their meaning: they make it the command of the Lord Jesus to the candidate. But the Lord does not put it thus. It is a favour that He is pleased to confer according to His own word, and therefore it is no question of a command in the moral or legal sense. It is the same with the Lord's Supper. The Lord says, "Take, eat." Does this make it a command? Suppose me to be dying, and some dear friend came by the bedside, where my Bible lay, and I said, "Take, and keep my Bible." If you call this a command, you must be simple-minded or perhaps crooked-minded. It is not a command; but a mark of love. No doubt it has the effect of a command, yet a

great deal more and different. It is associated with the affections and the remembrance of one that was loved long and tenderly till his departure. So it was given from a dying bed, and it was taken in that spirit, and so must it be understood by men of discernment.

A case which I have often used before will perhaps make it to be clearer. We will suppose a humble little family dependent on daily labour. The head of the family, the breadwinner, has to go to his work very early in the morning. I am not at all sure that it is a common demand in these easy-going days; but it used to be so at any rate. Let us however suppose that he has to leave early in order to reach his factory or wherever else he toils. But the mother of the family is on a, sick-bed, suddenly taken ill. Then occurs a great difficulty. She that used to rise so gladly to prepare his breakfast, and perhaps also what he needed in the course of the day, is too sick even to be spoken to. What is to be done at this sudden strait? One child of that family appreciates the dilemma at once. She has not been commanded in any way, yet she sees through it all; she knows that circumstances are quite changed; and as there is no mother to take the lead, she does. She had often helped her mother, and now she takes the initiative. herself. Accordingly she is up early, makes the fire for the father, puts the kettle on, and has the coffee or the tea all ready hot for him, with the other necessaries for the time of his absence from home. Here too there was no command; but it helps to illustrate “His word.” As the word though not a command expresses the will of God, so she knew what was wanted to do the will of her mother, if she had been able to speak. The father was so overwhelmed with the illness of the wife that he could do little or nothing

toward his meals; and yet he was bound to work as usual. She understood it all, and without more ado there she is doing the work that her mother would have done. This was not keeping a commandment, but it shows what “keeping His word” means.

Thus the believer grows in the knowledge of God, and delights in pleasing Him. It is not merely what is put in the shape of a command; but if we know what the good will of God is in any way, this is enough for the obedient heart. It is not seeking a director of one’s conscience without, any more than consulting something that is within you. No: I am called to be subject to God, and this by keeping His word. I am to do the will of God; and this is now given in His written word, the Scriptures. They are written for our admonition as well as our comfort. So the apostle commended those who were no more to see his face to God and the word of His grace. If we seek that all saints should do the will of God, let us see to it that we humbly begin and do it ourselves. There it is all plainly laid down in His word. The best of all means for reading it aright is to see Christ Himself as God’s object throughout. It does not mean merely what Christ said, though this is immense; nor what He commanded, which is of the highest worth; but what Christ manifested every hour. There you find Him up, before it was day, with God. Has this no voice for you or for me? Observe Him how, when something serious had to be done on the morrow, He was in prayer all night to God. Surely this ought to tell on our souls. We may not, ought not, to think we can carry it out in such a way as Christ did; but who can deny that in this He was leaving an example? An example is not a command; but none the less is it

meant to act powerfully on the soul's heed and obedience.

Accordingly "He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (ver. 4). There is the total absence of the spirit of obedience. It is not merely that he does not keep His word; he does not even keep His commandments. He violates his obligations; he sets aside divine injunctions, and this not merely in the Old Testament, but — what particularly bears upon him — the New. For these new commandments are the first form of the prescribed test of his Christian profession. And if he has no conscience to keep His commandments, we need not inquire how he treats Christ or the New Testament as a whole.

In ver. 5 we come to quite another step. "But whoso keepeth His word, in him verily is the love of God perfected." Therein is evident heed to the whole mind of God, and it is carried out, because His word is loved. It is a heart that proves its obedience by keeping not merely His commandments but also His word. The word is not only authoritative and energetic on the soul, but precious. All the word is therefore sought into with delight and profit; and, where this is the case, John does not hesitate to say that the love of God is perfected in such a man.

This again affords opportunity to remark in a general way about the manner of the apostle not in this Epistle only, but indeed in all his writings. He looks at things according to the revealed divine principle, without occupying himself with hindrances and shortcomings according to the man's state and behaviour. He does not treat of the failures that are incident to our

carelessness. When the genuine Christian is before him, he regards him as carrying out God's mind. He therefore does not impair and weaken principle by bringing in a little drawback here and a little caution there. He says plainly out what is pleasing to God and becomes His child; and this even for the youngest is to keep "His commandments;" whereas for those that are no longer immature but spiritually experienced, it is not merely His commandments but "His word" generally, that which fully and in any form expresses His will.

Therefore it is that we read, looking at our Lord again, "Lo! I come to do thy" — Law? No. Thy commandment? No. Yet He assuredly kept His law and did His commandment; but withal He honoured, vindicated, and gave such a scope to His law as none else ever did. But He came to do God's "will." Nor does He merely say thus much, but, "In the volume of the book it was written of Me." It was the roll of a book (for God figuratively uses the terms of human habit) that only the Father, the Son, and the Spirit knew; there it was, in His secret counsels, the mind of God; what afterwards was written in the Book of Psalms. What is said is rather in contrast with the law and its ordinances; but there it was always. And when He came as man, this is what He came to do — the will of God. And the will of God went far beyond what people knew as the Ten Words or Commandments. Ineffable grace was its announcement. Nor was His work merely doing but suffering the will of God. For He obeyed unto death, even the death of the Cross. When did the law ever ask or look for such a sacrifice as that from the righteous? Did it even think, or conceive, such a thing as the Holy One of God dying for

the unrighteous? But no less than this was the will of God; and He knew it before time began.

It was useless to talk of creature sacrifice and offering. God says in effect, that “These will never do.” The blood of ox, sheep, or goat, cannot take away sins, can effect no escape from the lake of hell-fire, cannot deliver a wicked man from the judgment of God. No rite can ever change a bad man into good or bring him without a spot to God, as white as the snow. What then? “It is written of Me.” And so it was that He even abolished the first, the law, and established the second, the will of God. The will of God in infinite grace here is to save the worst of sinners through the death of the Lord Jesus. Does not this show what wonderful power there is in that which God has given in the Scriptures? It was therefore a cherished purpose of God before everything. And the Lord knew it in eternity, and, when the fulness of the time arrived, came to do it, and in doing it suffered to the uttermost. No work of power, however great, could suffice for it. Was He willing that God should make Him sin, and endure all the consequences in order to glorify God even about sin, and make it just on God’s part to grant plenary forgiveness, yea, to justify and glorify us? He must suffer for sins under the holy hand of God Himself, armed against sin, and dealing out what sin deserved. Yet He bore it all with perfect submission, whatever it cost Himself. Thus between law and grace is the complete difference most marked.

For the Christian it is the same principle as for Christ, save only that He is God and wrought atonement for us. We have life too before we enter on practice, as the Lord had it in Him throughout eternity. Ours is therefore acting from life, not for life as a man under the law.

Christian walk is the exercise of the new life, impossible for any who have not life, and only possible for the one who has that life by his eye being fixed upon Jesus. Otherwise the eye is no longer single; it may be occupied with this one or that thing, when the walk can no longer be according to the light. “If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light”; and it is only Christ that makes the eye single.

This is intimated clearly enough here, but John adds more. “Herein we know,” not “that we know Him” only, but “that we are in Him.” This supposes a great accession of privilege; and such is the way in which God encourages those that are truly obedient in spirit. Not only do they know Him, but that they are in Him. Oh what a wonderful thing for a saint to be assured that he is in Christ! He infinite, we finite and very feeble, however blessed of grace. Life here hangs in dependence on God and His Son. And the Spirit of God strengthens the sense of dependence, and uses the word to confirm us in that very attitude. And what do such words show? His pleasure in assuring the obedient saints that they may know they are in Him. What happiness then for us, knowing what He is to us and has been for us! What cheer and strength does it not give in our sense of weakness!

If we compare John 14:20, we learn that to be in Christ is part of the rich cluster of Christian privilege which He assured to the disciples in and from the day that the Holy Spirit was given to be in and with them after He went on high to the Father. “In that day ye shall know that I [am] in my Father, and ye in Me, and I in you.” There is first the wondrous yet righteous position of the risen Lord in His Father, not wondrous that He the Only

begotten Son should be there, for this was inherently His in the Godhead, but now first disclosed to them as true of the risen Man as He was and will never cease to be. It is His place on ascension, His righteous award on the world's rejection of Him (John 16:10); and we who believe know by the Spirit of the Father in His name that He is in His Father there, a position far transcending His place as Messiah on David's throne or even as Son of man ruling all the nations of the earth in the future kingdom. This is His place and could be His only as a divine person one with the Father, yet risen man after accomplishing redemption; and this gives Christianity its unique grandeur.

But next they should know that they were in Him. It is not only that, in virtue of His death and resurrection, they were to be part of the much fruit springing from the grain of wheat that fell into the ground and died. They should have intimate and heavenly position in Him as far as this was possible to the creature, not risen life only but the place of assured nearness in Him there, known as ours now while on the earth. And again they should know Christ in them: a truth as characteristic of the Epistle to the Colossians (Col. 1:27), as their being in Christ is of that to the Ephesians (Eph. 1:3, Eph. 2:6, 10, etc.), save that the apostle treats it as individually true, Paul as connected with the unity of Christ's body, the church. It is the portion of every genuine Christian; and not to know it is the disgrace of unbelief in Christendom. This alas! clouds the apprehension of many a saint now, and almost ever since the apostle's death, who shows here that its realisation depends on keeping Christ's word, and God's love perfected within. But this is no more than what becomes every Christian,

and the lack of it grieves the Holy Spirit of God by whom we were sealed into redemption's day, that is, the body's redemption. Lack of faith or fidelity dims the spiritual eye to our best privileges.

"He that saith he abideth in Him." Here is a further thing which might be only a boast, and an empty boast. This he meets in a way quite different from that in which he dealt with the careless despiser of God's authority. For he pronounced him a liar and the truth not in him. He was stamped as having nothing of God really. But where the profession of abiding in Him is made, how quiet and yet how conclusive is the inference! Do you say that you abide in Him? Then you ought to walk as He walked. Here is no pretence of having no sin. But if we say that we abide in Christ, the effect of abiding in Christ is immediate and powerful on the walk. The walk is the expression of life in the light of God; and if I abide in Him that is the Life and the Light, what is there to hinder my walking as Christ walked? In His presence we do not sin; out of the sense of it we do. By grace it is the same principle of walk, though far from the presumption of the same measure. Not the law but Christ is the standard.

Now we know as a matter of fact how easy it is to slip out; how readily we forget the Lord for a little; how apt to allow the activity of our own nature. This is not abiding in Him; but the apostle does not turn aside to bring in these modifications. He looks at principle; and a principle is absolute. As for any who refuse to look at the absolute truth because man is in a mixed condition, it is to give up faith for feeling and sense. How can such understand the truth of Christ here and elsewhere? It must be absolute in Christ and in His work. Grace must

be absolute for a ruined sinner to profit by it. If God gives me justification, it is not a questionable one. If God justifies the ungodly, it is as absolute as His giving eternal life in Christ. And the believer has eternal life in order to obey as well as to enjoy fellowship with the Father and His Son. So here we read, “He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked.” He leaves this to act upon the conscience; for no higher claim is here made than to say that one abides in Christ. It is not the blessedness of knowing that I am in Him, but that I profess to make Him the home of my soul for every joy and sorrow, for every danger and difficulty. For this is to abide in Him. If it be verily thus with me, I ought to walk as He walked. But is it so in deed and in truth? The failure in real abiding in Him is shown in the shortcoming of our walk. But as Christians, we own Christ as our true standard, however it may humble us. Nor do we pretend that one ever walks in the measure of Christ’s walk, but seeks by grace to walk after that manner.

Address 5 - 1 John 2:7-11

“Beloved,5 no new commandment I write to you, but an old commandment, which ye had from [the] beginning: the old commandment is the word which ye heard.6 Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in him and in you; because the darkness is passing, and the true light already shineth. He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in the darkness until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is no occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in the darkness, and walketh in the darkness, and knoweth not where he goeth, because the darkness blinded his eyes.”

We have already seen in the verses preceding these, that obedience is the first and most essential sign of possessing divine life. Its essence is not merely doing what is right in itself but doing it on God’s authority and to please Him. One need not hesitate to say that, if a man were always to do what is right simply because it is right, he is always doing wrong; because he leaves out the most important element of all for God Himself and the believer too as His child. The first of all rights is that God should have His rights; whereas to leave out God is exactly what a man does if he acts only because he himself judges what is right. Who, in such a question, is he? What is man to be accounted of? No; God’s will is in question, and therefore the fear of God is always the beginning of spiritual wisdom. Obedience accordingly is the first test of the new and divine life, as just given by the apostle, and particularly in view of lawlessness at work even then among the Christian professors. When

man considers himself to be the person to judge, forgetful of the God that is not seen, the entire ground of sure and holy judgment is abandoned. For even supposing him decently moral and correct outwardly, a man walking simply on his own judgment of what comes before him is necessarily without obedience rendered to God. And without obeying Him all is wrong, and radically inconsistent with the responsibility of a Christian.

But there is another moral principle that comes after that in point of treatment here, but goes along with it also from the first. The reason is plain: both flow from Christ. For He is the life; and Christ's expression of it here below in word and deed gives the standard for knowing what life eternal really is, but does not speak merely of a theory or a doctrine. Life is the most intimate of all things for the creature, the most absolutely necessary in order to feel or judge, be anything, or do anything in spontaneous existence. All men have the natural life of man fallen under the power of sin and death; what can this avail with God or for us? It may do a deal of evil, but it can never lead to what will please God. Christ alone and always pleased Him perfectly; and it is the life of Christ which is our life now. He is the giver of life to everyone who believes with the heart. The first man brought in death; the Second Man is a quickening spirit. It was in the eternal Word; and as man He received from the Father to have life in Himself, but He gives life to those that receive Him. He quickens equally with the Father.

There is nothing that more characterises God than creating and giving life; but the philosophers that lack faith have not yet got to know what life is, or where it is.

Some are looking with eager desire for its trace in the crucible. They expect to learn the secret from chemical experiments. Metaphysicians are not a whit wiser in interrogating reason, excellent for testing inference, but incapable of discovering the truth. But these and the like devices of men may be all well enough in matters elemental which belong to the material or the mental domain. But think of life, and what the judgment is worth that expects or at least longs to discover it as the result of any such research!

No; the life of man originally and immediately came from God; it was given by the inbreathing of God. This is the reason why he alone has an immortal soul. Other animals had a suited soul and life, but this did not come from God's breath; it was merely of God's will and power. He allowed their temporary existence; but this is wholly different from breathing personally into the nostrils of man, a way never applied to any other creature on the earth. Man only was thus favoured. The recognition of this difference clears up the ground of man's moral being and accountability; namely, the immortality of his soul.

But there is a privilege immeasurably greater than simply being immortal in the sense of the soul's perpetual existence. For it may have an issue unspeakably awful. Think of a perpetual existence in the lake of fire! Every one must come under the everlasting judgment of God, if he reject His Son: never-ceasing existence to suffer, and to suffer at the hand of God, because one stubbornly and wilfully refuses to believe that He in grace suffered thus judicially that the guilty might never suffer from Him, but only be blessed for ever! How rich God's mercy to proclaim salvation to the

lost because Christ bore sin's judgment on the cross! And if I believe not on Him, nor in the glad tidings of what God wrought by Him, where am I? Under the power of Satan, the unrelenting power of the enemy that hates both God and man. But man cannot have non-existence. This becomes the terrible guilt of the sinner who would if he could make himself non-existent. He may commit suicide; but he must give account of it to God. For God gave him life; and who gave him licence to make away with that life by his own hand? How could such wicked folly work for any good? If murder in any shape be such as to denote a dark and deadly crime, self-murder is one of its worst forms, and a direct and extreme insult to God. As Jesus was ever the perfectly obedient One, it flowed from a life expressly eternal. In us who believe this does not always act, because flesh may work to our shame; but the new life, being eternal, always remains for due activity. The old life may break forth through unguardedness and lack of watching to prayer; for the old life, or mind of the flesh, is there too, and enmity against God (Rom. 8:7). It is man's own will; and whom is he obeying then? Satan. For man's will surely becomes Satan's service. Such is man's boasted free-will.

We must never cease to reiterate that life eternal every believer receives at once from Christ. Its first breath in us is when faith begins in the soul: when the sinner bows to Christ as given of God's grace. Even this, as we have seen, He makes a matter of obedience to our God. It is pointedly His commandment that I shall believe the gospel as well as repent. There is thus true subjection to God in the soul; obedience in this case does not refer to what I am henceforth to do for Him, but from the first

time my soul bows to God as a Saviour God through His Son. How blessedly He is giving me life! How wondrously He makes me the object of His love! And what love could be greater than giving His Son to live here for me, that I might have life eternal, except it be giving me the same One who was eternal life to die for my sins, that they might all be completely effaced by an everlasting redemption?

But this new life is the spring not only of obedience but of divine love. For the love here looked for is not merely to God. This last cannot but be when the soul really knows that God in sovereign grace has given him both eternal life, and propitiation too for his sins, in His Only-begotten and beloved Son. But loving one another is what is pressed here, the love of our fellow-Christians.

When saints are young and like the Corinthian Christians not spiritual, they think it an easy thing to love one another. One could wish that they would only try in earnest day by day. If they would but search themselves before God, they might soon learn how much passes for love that is only with word and tongue. It is all easy enough perhaps where everything goes smoothly the right way in our eyes; but when things go contrary to our wishes, there is the rub for such as count it easy to love. This kind of love you may find in any amiable human being, nay in a dog or a cat; but there is nothing divine whatever. But loving our brethren is in the face of a vast deal in us to hinder, and a great deal, it may be quite as much, in them too. It is not with the Christian as it was with Christ. “In Him is no sin.” Sin is exactly what now is in us by nature. It is a pity for any who do not believe it; for they are living in a fool’s paradise about themselves, when fancying themselves

perfect now in the practical sense. They are far from perfect in this way. They have not even learnt the Christian perfection of abandoning self, and of finding everything in Christ; and still more when you come to practice every day. We shall never have perfection in ourselves till absolutely conformed to His image. When we judge ourselves in the light, we soon have to grieve over our failure, and with good reason.

Nevertheless the Lord laid it as a solemn injunction on His disciples to love one another. Faith in Him did not stand up for the Jews more than the disparagement of all nations. The love of one's own people has no small pride in it. We identify ourselves with what we consider peculiar merits, and shining honours. Certainly the Jews were as proud as any nation could be; nor can it be disproved that they had far better appearance for it than their foes. The truth is that no man has any just reason to be proud, but in the dust for his sins against God.

If one may abundantly wonder at what God has wrought, without doubt Israel had incomparably more than any other people. But the truth remains, that the moment we regard things in the light of God, if faithful, we cannot but be humbled for our unworthiness before Him. We find sin in ourselves and in one another. Therefore it must be of the Spirit of God to lift one above all that provokes and tries, all that is contrary not only to what we like but to what we seriously judge to be wrong.

Then comes the severe test of love. Do we persevere in loving even so? We ought not to be indifferent to Christ's dishonour, nor to the betrayal of God's truth, nor to unrighteousness, or to any other form of overt sin. But we are called to bear and to forbear, strong in the grace

that is in Christ Jesus, to suffer hardness as His good soldiers, to endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. And this is what love really does. There is a rising up to share God's patience, what Christ proved to the uttermost, as He showed it every day, in almost everything through the day. This did not hinder His denouncing evil against God; nor was this any failure in love. Not to have hated evil would have wronged God's nature and word; for indifference to evil is the very reverse of holiness. The love of what is good, and the honour of what is righteous, is part of the practical holiness of everyone who is born of God.

But love rises superior to that which is ever so trying to us personally, ever so opposed to our mind or wish. This we in faith can leave to God, and ought to leave it in love. We may reprove, and ought to reprove, what is wrong, save in cases where our doing so would be uncomely; but no matter what may be deplorable, we are called to keep ourselves in the love of God (Jude 21). Nor is this for our own spirits only, but will assuredly flow also toward one another.

It may be also just mentioned that the first word here shows the tendency of man to slip away from the exactness of the word of God. In our Authorised Version the seventh verse begins with "Brethren." But the apostle does not bring in that designation yet. He will and does say "Brethren" time enough, and but once (1 John 3:13). Our mutual relationship is not his prevailing thought. "Dear children" and "beloved" are his common terms. Here his word of address is exquisitely adapted to the love of which he is going to descant. The true reading means "Beloved." "Beloved, I write no new

commandment.” Can we not see the propriety of it? He is going to speak not of their relationship one to another, though of course this is true in its place; but the form here employed reminds them that they are beloved. It is not necessary to say by whom, though indeed grace had made them dear to the apostle. God Himself also loved them, as Christ manifested it; they were objects of His love who changes not. What so mighty for drawing out love toward one another, the objects of the same love! “Beloved, I write no new commandment, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning.”

This old commandment we have in the Gospel of this inspired writer. It is he that brings it out more than any other, if not he only in terms. The. Lord laid it as His fervent injunction on the disciples that they should love one another. This He enjoined in the first of those remarkable chapters of the Gospel wherein He speaks to His disciples in view of His quitting the earth and going to the Father. In John 13:34, 35, we have the new commandment. Let us refer to the context for a moment. “Little (dear) children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said to the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you.” His going away is a necessary condition of Christianity. The absence of Christ is from earth in heaven. Till then Christianity did not properly begin, as far as the relationship of the disciples was concerned; though the root of the blessing was in Himself. But their true position as to the Lord and everyone else consequently, their full relationship, was new and learnt consciously after the Lord died, rose, and ascended.

As He intimates His leaving them, He expresses what He desired to be in them and from them. “A new

commandment I give unto you" (plainly the reference is direct to the Gospel of John), "that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all [men] know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." That is what is applied here in the Epistle. The Lord gave a commandment which John had already made known in the Gospel. It was given by our Lord when here. Thus we see the ample confirmation of what was said in expounding the first words of the Epistle, that "from the beginning" is altogether distinct from "in the beginning." Yet there could have been no such "from the beginning," unless there had been first the Word and Son "in the beginning" before the heavens and the earth. But "from the beginning" means from the time that the eternal Word was here, and in fulness of grace and truth with the disciples, the Word become flesh and tabernacling or dwelling among them. He refers to that very time, "an old commandment which ye had from the beginning." "The old commandment is the word which ye had from the beginning." "The word which ye heard" certainly was not "in the beginning."

They heard it from Christ. There never was such a command given before. It was not loving one's neighbour; the measure and manner as different as its objects, whatever its source. His was divine love going out from and to those that had received life eternal in Christ, and were about to obtain everlasting redemption through His death, objects alike of this divine love. It was a new company, the individuals of which were being prepared for all that was to be theirs, formed as far as could be then in accordance with the eternal life which each possessed in Him. But there was imperative need

of His death and resurrection to give it a divine basis which would meet all difficulties and wants, and warrant all privileges whatsoever. But these counsels and ways of God are not particularly the province given to our apostle: we must search the Epistles of Paul for them. John looks at the abstract principles for saints personally and without modification, though modification there is to some extent because of what we are, and because of what the world is. The principles abide however in their own place, and John fully leads the faithful into them. He insists on the divinely given principles to which we are intended to hold fast; and we must depend on a faithful God to get all the difficulties solved by the word through him who wrote for this purpose, chiefly the apostle Paul.

Here our apostle takes his stand on the command to love after the pattern of Christ's love to us. It was "an old commandment," because before the death and resurrection of Christ He was still alive and with them on earth. They were as yet Jews; but they had received in their souls that which was infinitely above Judaism. Outwardly they continued going up to the temple. They might offer sacrifice and pay vows Levitical. The disciples went on in that way for a long time after — many, if not all, in Jerusalem. We even read of the chief apostles (after receiving the Holy Spirit of promise on the day of Pentecost) going up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, just as they used to do before and after they followed the Lord on earth.

"The old commandment is the word which ye heard" ["from the beginning" being rightly not repeated here]. This cannot refer to eternity. It was not commanded "in the beginning"; nobody heard it in

eternity. It would have been altogether out of time, place and person, when there was nobody to love then existing. In short it is an evident mistake to confound “from the beginning” with “in the beginning,” as so many perversely do.

But now in the next or eighth verse we read what sounds somewhat paradoxical. John never minds this, because what seems a paradox may be perfectly true. The uncircumcised ear counts it intolerable and contradictory. But the way to understand the Scriptures is always to believe them; then we begin to understand. If we do not believe them, how can we understand? It is simply the natural mind which prefers self to God, and refuses to learn what is immeasurably above its span. It is wholly incompatible with faith in God’s inspiration to prefer our own mind, our own way, and our own word, to God’s word.

The only thing that becomes the believer is resolutely to take his side with God and His word. He may feel that he cannot explain this difficulty or that. He believes God and distrusts himself. Therefore he waits. He believes the Lord will give him light on the enigma if it be good for him. If the light never comes, he is confident that the Lord has excellent reason for that. God, he is sure, is always right; but as to himself, how has he not been wrong! Here then the apostle says, “A new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in him and in you.” What looks hard at first sight explains all exactly. One has not long to wait, nor far to seek, to understand how the old commandment could be the new commandment. Very probably the mere scholars could never find out the sense till doomsday. They would understand without believing; and consequently they

remain dark and dull, no matter what their learning may be. The old commandment was true in Christ. When He said it, He loved them all, as none could love but God. He loved them perfectly. Do you conceive that they loved one another at that time? Were they not as jealous of each other as you could well imagine pious people to be? We find them ever apt to quarrel, certainly and keenly striving which of them should be greatest. Was there any love in this? Such rivalry is the antithesis to love, and indicates the activity of flesh.

Love would have felt that it was for God to decide the place of each. And scripture shows that God sets in the church as it pleases Him. But they each. and all wanted to be greatest, which of course they could not be. Can any desire be more opposed to love than everyone to be greatest, wanting the best place for himself? How contrary to the mind of Christ as set out in Phil. 2!

Here then it is shown that what was the old commandment when He was there is now a new commandment, because now it is true not only in Him but in them. And what was it that made it to be true in them? The death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. This it is that makes all things new. Resurrection could not be without death; nor could the old things pass away without Christ's death, any more than the new things come without His resurrection. But He is the resurrection and the life. And such is the great and glorious principle of Christianity. It all turns upon the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. This it is that made the old new; this made it true in them as in Him. He indeed was and is the truth; but how is it with me or you? Are we in the Spirit? Or am I still looking out for myself? If so, it is neither Christ nor love.

How blessed that the old commandment is now new, and true in Him and in His own! And why so? Because Christians all stand alike, as having life in Him; but now that evils are dealt with on His cross, all things that hinder the working of divine life, the exercise of it in love, and its free display one with another — those evils have been all judged in the cross of Christ; and as the word reveals this, so the Spirit makes it good in each. The apostle speaks here again according to the principle. He does not take into account any passing qualification through the particular state of a Christian; which has its own corrective in the word elsewhere. But John gives us the true principle in all its absoluteness for faith to enjoy, and by grace reduce to practice in the measure of our spirituality. He declares it is true in us, that is, in all Christians as well as in Christ.

This is a cheering, yea, astonishing fact in the spiritual realm; but never is the blessing of it effectually known unless it is believed on God's word, and believed about others as well as about one's own soul. "Which thing is true in Him and in you." The old commandment was powerless till He died and rose; but when He died and rose, the fulness of the blessing being shown in Himself, it was then communicated to His disciples. The corn of wheat abode alone until it fell into the ground and died; but if it die, said the Lord, it beareth much fruit. And where is that "much fruit"? In all Christians, in everyone that is real. Modifications may come in sadly to hinder; and it is important that we should learn how the things that hinder us can be overcome, and how we may and ought to rise above them. Never should we allow ourselves quiet, never seek any relaxation of earnest crying to God, and of using the means that His word and

Spirit supply to meet the difficulty in ourselves, or, it may be, in others. For Christ has given us the example: we also ought to wash one another's feet.

Here then we have the principle, Christ's commandment in power. It was ever perfect in Christ. When it was but the old commandment, He alone carried it out. But when He died and rose, behold the difference among them. "Then stood up Peter with the eleven," just like one man: no more carnal strife, rivalry, or self-seeking. We never hear of this before; never was such a change during the days of our Lord's ministry in the flesh, or what is called here "from the beginning." It was only true in Him. Now through His resurrection power it was true in them as well as in Christ. See the reason given: "Because the darkness is" not exactly past. Here again one must regret to appear critical; but bear with me if it is the truth, which I know and declare it to be. For it is no mere guess or subjective feeling or opinion. The word which the Spirit of God employs here means "quite passing," but not "past." To say the darkness is past says a great deal too much. The darkness will never be past till Christ comes again. "Arise, shine! for thy light is come." Then shall be light for all the earth. It may be more brilliant in Jerusalem, but it will reach the whole world, as His glory shall fill all the earth.

It is clear that such is far from being the case now. There is and will be heathenism and Mohammedanism in the present age. There will be Babylon as there is now, even Rome, besides all kinds of special enormities even in Christendom. And worst of all the lawless one impends, who will sit in God's temple, showing himself that he is God. Even now think of the scepticism that is preached every Sunday in London, and this notoriously

in the Anglican body, among Baptists, Independents, and Wesleyan Methodists, etc; and not by eccentricities but by some of their most eminent men. And there are few to say a decided word against this guilty trash, except some troublesome people who make themselves more and more disliked by their sounding the trumpet of alarm. For no matter how separately and simply they conduct themselves, their testimony is that all this unbelief is the deception of the devil, and the harbinger of the coming apostasy, and of the man of sin to be destroyed by the Lord's appearing in glory.

The darkness then is not past, indeed far from it; but it is passing. Where? In every added Christian. There might be some to believe in Kamtschatka; there might be more in Japan, or even in poor and proud, tricky and aggressive Russia. But wherever grace acts, and no matter where, if there be fresh saints of God, the darkness so far passes away. It passes effectually in every Christian. The apostle here too looks at the principle. He is not examining how far it has been realised; for this is not his work. He looks at things as they ought to be in the Christian, acting and carrying out the divine principle that his soul has received.

But he adds, "and the true light already shineth," to give the force as exactly as possible. There are Christians who do not like accuracy. But is it not better to have the truth as simply and clearly and fully as any can help? The important point here to remark is that this comes in after Christ's death and resurrection. Did not the world quench that light in His death? As far as it could, so it sought. But His resurrection gave the lie to the world's effort; for the light shines more powerfully than ever. "The true light already shineth." The saints, so weak

before, become strong, and forget themselves and their follies in their joy at the risen Saviour. The Spirit given thereon is one of power and love and sobriety. Hence we may see how true the command to love is in Him and in them. For “in them” lay the difficulty. It was undeniably in Him, but how could it be true in them too? Risen to bear much fruit we see the darkness quite passing away and the true light already shining. Christ banishes the darkness for each Christian, and Christ is already shining for and in them all more than ever.

Accordingly in ver. 9 the reply is to him who says he is in the light, and yet hates his brother. “Saying” has a bad character in this Epistle. The true saint of God does not talk lightly of being in the light. He knows he is, he blesses God for it, but he is serious about what is so solemn. He leaves it to others to say boastingly — “I am in the light” when he means of a real saint, “You are in the dark.” What can be more derogatory to the Lord, or less worthy of a Christian? The right and true course is not saying but manifesting that one walks in the light by a godly conversation. “He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother” manifests that he is not in the light. The hatred toward his brother is incompatible, not only with love, but with light and life. For these all go together and cannot be separated. The life is shown in obedience, but so it is in love; and the true light which already shines makes such darkness visible. Certainly if a brother be hard, impatient, or otherwise faulty, this is meant to test yourself: be all the more careful, if anything in him is grievous in your eyes. But why should not your heart go out to win him? Why give up love where it is so much needed? You ought also to pity, if you believe a brother has done serious wrong. Should he

not be an object for your earnest supplication to God, however you may reprobate the evil?

“He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.” How summary and trenchant! So it is with loving John; nobody more tender, but who more decided? Here is the bright contrast with indifference. He does not say, “I love my brother;” but he does love him. “He that loveth his brother abideth in the light;” and he loves, even though there were painful inconsistencies to make a heavy demand on his love. Thereby love is only the more proved; “and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.” It was a trying case; but he loved. Such a one “abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.” Had retaliation wrought, or ungracious desire of evil to one that had failed, there would be an occasion of stumbling. Such is under provocation the natural feeling of a man, but it is the negation of Christ, and consequently of the Christian.

“But he that hateth his brother” (ver. 10). Here we have the evil thoroughly shown out in its violent character. “He that hateth his brother is in the darkness.” This is his state, which really decides the matter. One that hates his brother is a murderer in principle, as John shows afterwards (1 John 3:15). “He that hateth his brother is in the darkness.” It is not merely what he does or how he walks, but he is in darkness. This he manifests by his ruthless behaviour. Words and deeds proclaim his state. What are his words? “He hateth his brother.” And what his deeds? “He hateth his brother.” “He walketh in the darkness.” The walk brings in the reality of the man, just as it flows out of being in the light that we walk in the light. It is not a theory but a deep reality. Nothing less is

conveyed by the word “walk.” “And knoweth not where he goeth.” He deceives himself. Unhappy but seared, he does not realise that he is a prey to the enemy. He is not aware that he is going into perdition. But there he is bound; and all the more, because he blindly took the place of a Christian. For if nothing can be more blessed than to be a Christian, nothing is more miserable than to take the place without being one truly; yet how many are thus misleading souls today?

How then can one be sure? I am sure that I am a lost sinner; and I am sure that God welcomes the lost sinner in the name of Jesus; for God gave the Son of God to be the Son of Man, to seek and to save the lost. I need Christ for my salvation, and believe on Him because of God’s word concerning Him. Am I not entitled therefore to take the place of a Christian? If we receive Christ, we receive His life; and He is to faith the only propitiation for our sins. The title is thus given, children of God, to those that believe on Christ’s name. Only He secures to all such the Christian portion and blessing. All the privileges of grace in Him come practically together.

On the contrary, if one merely takes up the Lord’s name lightly, without just consideration of one’s sins and the abject need of deliverance and salvation, clearly one walks in darkness all the while. It is to be in darkness and to walk in darkness and not to know whither one goes because the darkness has blinded one’s eyes; and all the worse because of taking the place of a Christian. “For if the light that is in thee be darkness, then how great the darkness!” saith the Lord. One is born, not of blood, nor of flesh’s will, nor of man’s will, but of God. It is through living faith in Jesus.

This is not said to discourage the weakest believer. Why should it? There is not a word in all the New Testament, or the Old either, to make persons doubt; everything is said to engage them to believe. If they believe, if they submit to God's revelation — the word of His truth and of His grace, the blessing is theirs. The word of truth is the gospel of salvation. Only there you have that which lays you bare as a wretched sinner, at the same time that it removes every stain, blots out your every sin, and gives you to stand consciously possessed of life eternal, and justified before God. It is not self that justifies me; I condemn myself. God justifies the believer in the Lord Jesus. It is only Christ that could make my deliverance from all condemnation a reality. If I have Christ, I can let myself go altogether; everything of which I was vain or proud, whatever may have been the form of my folly, I dismiss it all as utterly false and wrong. Oh the bliss of finding that all God's blessing is in Christ, and that He gives it all of His own free grace! not of works, lest any man should boast. But here is a person that ventured under that holy Name without any real sense either of his sins or of God's grace. It was mere presumption and self-deceit; or nowadays clerical pressure on giddy masses and classes. He passes somehow into the brotherhood but fails entirely; he hates his brother. He is just a natural man, and so is in the darkness; and he walks in the darkness and knows not where he goes, because, as it is said, "the darkness blinded his eyes."

But we see clear after we believe. Faith in Christ takes away our blindness, as it removes every other impediment. For the grace of God gives us Christ not merely as life and propitiation, but for every day's walk and for every day's danger or difficulty. Oh what

encouragement there is in the simplest yet deepest way in which the apostle urges those two tests or signs of the real Christian: first obedience, and then love; in both no longer walking in darkness like the world, but having the light of life; because we follow Christ believingly and obediently, we also walk in love.

Accordingly we learnt first of all that obeying God is the primary and most essential mark of the Christian. To obey is meant to cover every act of our life, connecting what is set before us with our intentions or our wishes, or the like, and judging them all by this standard, Is it God's will? would it please God? In this is God calling me to do or bear, whatever it may be?

To be subject to His word settles all questions; and so Christ ever walked. Absolute submission to His Father's will makes it sweet for us. As He says, "Take My yoke on you and learn from Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest for your souls; for My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." My brother, do you accept it loyally? Oh how comforting! For what makes it easy? Nothing but Christ. If the eye be upon Him, His yoke is easy if the eye be off Christ, whether on myself or on anything else, His burden becomes intolerable, and under unbelief one wholly breaks down.

We can see also the Spirit's wisdom in giving both tests, and in the order in which they stand; first obedience, then love. You may generally find as I have done, that when Christians talk about one another, they are apt to give love the first place in their practical scheme of Christianity. Their confidence rests on their opinion that such a one is a most loving brother. It would be wretched indeed not to be a loving brother; but what

about his obedience? Is he, once self-willed, now marked by obeying God?

All may recollect in the early trial of the apostles (Acts 4, 5) this was their one plea — they must obey. Their preaching and teaching Jesus as the Christ gave great offence to the Jewish high-priest and the Scribes, the Elders, and the Sadducees. Hence they were commanded not to speak in that Name. But God appeared for them when imprisoned to the astonishment of all that had their charge. For out of prison an angel brought them, and commanded them to speak again in the temple. It was not like Peter alone led out, wonderful as that miracle was. But previously the whole of the twelve were rescued, whilst the guards walked up and down without the least perception of what God was doing. For well He knows how to blind eyes, and rescue from bonds if it pleases Him. Directed to the temple, there they delivered His message; yet, insensible even to this sign, Jewish leaders insisted on their silence. But the apostle Peter could say that God must be obeyed rather than men. This is the all-important claim of God, and the Christian's inalienable duty — obedience. If we do not obey God, we do Him utter wrong.

It is allowed that there are those here below who are entitled to command, as there are those who ought to obey. A child for instance should obey its parents; and every soul is to be subject to the civil authority. But their obedience differs greatly from the character of obedience here laid down for the Christian. External or natural obedience may be rendered in spite of repugnance. This never entered the obedience of Christ, nor ought it ever to be in the Christian's. He is sanctified to Christ's, obedience. He is exhorted to fix his view on a

perfect law of liberty, as having a new nature which loves to do God's will as revealed in His word, in contrast with Israel under a law of bondage and the penalty of death. The new nature finds its motives in God's will, as Christ was the perfect pattern.

We may suffer for obeying God, but this is then an honour; as the apostles were scourged because they were resolute to obey God, and meekly bore the consequence. It was counted a great disgrace for a Jew to be whipped in the council. But they bore it quietly, and went out even rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be dishonoured for the Name. This was not "passive resistance" but saintly obedience, and suffering the consequence without a murmur and full of joy. Obedience then supposes the will broken and submissive to God's word, and thus to Himself. There is no true lowliness without it; yet it arms the soul against all counter-attractions, and gives firmness to the weakest against every adversary. So we see in Christ Himself, who honoured Scripture as none ever did before, and fashions the Christian after His own model. It concentrates the moral mind on God's will, and is jealous to maintain His authority in whatever fell from His mouth, knowing that He has that divine perfection of majesty, holiness, truth, faithfulness, which was fully displayed in Christ, His image.

But love is not that purity of nature though altogether consistent with it, which light expresses so vividly, which manifests itself and manifests everyone and everything else where it shines. Love is the energy of the Godhead in intrinsic goodness, not only where relationship and congeniality with Himself exists, but rising and going out actively above all barriers, and in sovereign grace

rescuing the vilest who receive Christ from the worst evils by virtue of redemption through His blood, and with eternal life, which is in the Son but given to the believer as his new life, with the Holy Spirit henceforth to guide him as a son of God, and to work in and by him in the unity of Christ's body, the church, as he awaits His coming to receive him to Himself, and introduce him, with all heavenly saints, into His Father's house on high. It one may be allowed the phrase, as obedience in the light is the centripetal force, of the Christian, love is the centrifugal, in being imitators of God as beloved children, and walking in love, according as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, an offering and sacrifice to God for an odour of sweet smell.

May the Lord grant that not merely this, the first mark, may be true in us, but also the second mark, even love, the energetic principle of the divine nature. It will be borne in mind that the Thessalonian saints were young in the faith. Yet the apostle told them, "Concerning brotherly love ye have no need that we should write to you, for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another" (1 Thess. 4:9). We have been ranch longer in the way than they. The Lord give us grace that we, taught of God, may abound in love still more. Thankfulness always accompanies love. Anything else is but "good-nature," as people call it, a kindly benevolent spirit that does not like to trouble or be troubled, and is willing to let everyone have his own way; and this is accounted love! May the Lord enable us to discern the things of the Spirit of God.

5 The best authorities in every kind warrant this reading, not "brethren," as in many later manuscripts.

6 So it is here also. The preponderance of weight rejects the addition. The sense is implied as in the previous clause.

Address 6 - 1 John 2:12, 13

“I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven you for his name’s sake. I write to you, fathers, because ye have known him [that is] from [the] beginning; I write to you, young men, because ye have overcome the wick one; I write7 to you, little children, because ye have known the Father.”

Here we have an evident departure from the course of the tests applied to the question of spiritual reality as to life eternal, and fellowship with the Father and the Son. For it is evident that an analogous line is resumed in another form from the 28th verse of this chapter. There we have a strain substantially akin to that which was before us from 1 John 2:3 to ver. 11 in discussion of the two grand principles that distinguish a real Christian from everybody else. The first, as already seen, is obedience, and the second, love — both of them capital and indispensable. They are not wisely comparable for a moment one with another, except that obedience properly takes the first place; because it means obeying God and He must and ought to have the pre-eminence. The love, on the other hand, that is looked for here is not love to God, but love of our brethren. Though this is a cardinal principle of Christianity, and its absence fatal to anyone’s Christian profession, nevertheless obeying God has a necessarily prior claim to loving our brethren, and in certain circumstances may seriously affect its claims. In point of fact they both begin at the same moment, when the soul receives life eternal through faith in our Lord Jesus. From that beginning it is no

longer the old “I” that lives, but Christ who lives in me, which is true of every Christian without exception.

But here we turn, after the introductory ver. 12, to the spiritual gradation between Christians; and this is pursued from ver. 13 down to the end of ver. 27. First of all he carefully prepares the way by setting all on a common platform by saying “I write to you, dear children.” Thus he addresses them altogether, and purposely brings in their universal privilege as introductory to the different classes among believers, because of their varying development spiritually. For although the word of God is now complete, and there can be no development in Christ who is absolutely perfect, there may and ought to be growth in the Christian by the knowledge of God. But in the spirit of grace, before entering on these special differences among Christians, we are shown the necessary foundation on which the faith of the gospel puts us, where we are all alike, and this too from the very threshold of our confession of Christ. Surely it is helpful and interesting to see what is laid down as the first step that the believer takes after he has received life, and has had the principles of obedience and of love implanted in his soul, along with life and in fact of essence inseparably involved in it. Who that knows the Lord Christ can doubt that He was always obedient, and always walked in love? Now the Christian cannot in principle be separated from Christ, being one spirit with the Lord. He owes everything to Him, and Christ is his all, and in all (Col. 3:11).

Now there is a privilege of the greatest moment which ought to be known and enjoyed from the earliest days. This may not always be from various causes, though the

gospel proclaims present and complete forgiveness to the believer through faith in Christ and His work. Yet many saints fail herein, as we too well know; and so it has been for very many years, one might say ever since the apostles left the earth. The grace of God in salvation soon yielded here to human reasoning, and so to legal conditions; thus to impair even the plenary forgiveness of sins, and gradually make it the end for the Christian instead of his starting-point. In short the Galatian error, in spite of the Epistle that denounces and refutes it, overspread the Christian profession; and the gospel fell under law, which always presents life as something for which we must work in order to earn or keep the blessing. On that ground one retrogrades to Judaism, having abandoned the distinctive grace of the gospel. For it is God's glad-tidings that a Christian starts with divine grace, giving to faith both life in Christ and also His propitiation for our sins. If the life cannot be extinguished, the exercise and enjoyment of it may be much hindered by the error which puts off or hides the forgiveness of sins by making people labour for it, and groan because they have not got it, and are troubled with natural doubts and fears.

"Am I His? or am I not?" is unworthy of Christ and deplorable for the Christian. Yet, singular to say, it is held by earnest Christians. And it is surprising that not merely Arminians cherish this hesitation about it, but the highest Calvinists also. There are those who go as far as to say, "If you do not doubt about yourself, I doubt about you." Can there be a narrower or more extreme school? One hardly conceives of a Roman Catholic darker in his thoughts than that. Yet some of these are hyper-Calvinists, pre-occupied with self-inspection and

judging every one save themselves. But the fact really is that, if they did judge themselves, they would be forced to fall back on the grace of the Lord Jesus, and forget themselves in the riches of God's goodness in Him.

His grace does strengthen as nothing else can under the Spirit's teaching of the soul. The forgiveness of our sins Christ has secured to us by His blood which cleanses us from every sin. This is what the gospel proclaims to every creature that he may believe. The worst sinners on the earth can be truly and righteously, earnestly, lovingly, and perseveringly addressed with a call to believe on Christ and His precious blood for the remission of their sins. Scripture declares this to be through Christ's work, not God's grace only but His righteousness. Yet as a matter of fact there are very many Christians who do believe in the Lord Jesus, but do not apprehend that His work on the cross entitles them to present and full forgiveness. Believing in Him they put their sins between Christ and themselves. Besides and in particular they are troubled by the sense of indwelling sin. The latter one readily understands: sin in the flesh is a great difficulty to believers at and after the start. They find that, though truly converted, their experience is of a deeper evil within than they ever suspected before. They are surprised that then should be the time when they realise it with grief. Yet it is the light of life in their soul, which makes them conscious of that self which inheres intimately in their old nature.

The soul by grace comes to the knowledge then, as he is led on, that there is not only the new man which he expected to be alone in him, but the old too, and lively. For it constantly seeks to break out, and needs therefore to be kept by faith in the place of death to it, the cross of

Christ, wherein God condemned it. Nothing else could completely settle the account of the old man; only Christ's death. When His blood is spoken of, it is rather applied to our sins or our guilt; but Christ's sacrificial death covers far more than acts of sin. There the mind of the flesh was judicially dealt with. There sin in the flesh had God executing sentence on it by sacrifice for sin; not for sins only but sin indwelling. This is learnt not only by faith but experimentally also.

For many, when they are converted, perhaps almost all more or less, are shocked to find indwelling sin after they believe in Christ. Full of joy at having received a perfect Saviour, they do not apprehend that their sins are completely blotted out, and they have to experience an evil within which never so troubled them before. But if it is not met by the death of Christ, what is there to add for it? What more fully dealt with sin? There is a powerful examination of Christ's work in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the gist of which is that, as there is but one divine Saviour, so there is only one efficacious sacrifice; if more be required, He must suffer often. But this seem to subvert and deny the truth of Christ's cross; it annuls His work who died once for all. "Death hath no more dominion over Him;" as sin never had. But sin, that dwells in us, even after we believe by grace, had to be and was condemned in His cross. What is needed for sin indwelling is God's condemnation of it; and this we have in Christ's death on the cross. The fire of judgment in the sacrifice for sin must consume sin before God according to the well-known figure. The New Testament gives us the full truth of what the Old Testament gave partially in the type. All these figures, with a great deal

more that no figure could set forth, centre in Christ and His work.

The apostle alleges a blessed issue in plenary forgiveness as his reason for writing the Epistle, on which he builds much more. He does not call it his only reason, but it is his reason for writing to them; and we may add, that his reason for writing to them remains in all its profit to us. All Christian doctrine, all teaching of the saints, is grounded on this basis: that we have by grace the forgiveness of sins. We are not on proper Christian ground till we accept from God that in virtue of Christ our sins are forgiven. “I write to you, dear children” (thereby embracing the entire family of God, of which there is a good deal to say presently), “because your sins have been forgiven you for His name’s sake.” Can anything be more simple? In order to be fully blest there is nothing, to begin with, more necessary to know personally. It is for the Christian to begin the day with it, and with it to go through each day, and to retain its comfortable certainty as our last waking thought. For indeed our sins are forgiven for His name’s sake. There is no miserable fear that something remains in the dark or uncertainty to cloud: the glad tidings which we received in our ungodly state declared on God’s part our sins remitted on our faith. Hence it is a great slight to the gospel, and a very great dishonour to the Lord Jesus, to doubt it. Clearly such a feeling sets aside the plain words of God; for what can be clearer than what is before us? Does not this ground abide? Are we under temporal and conditional promises like Israel of old in the law?

Peter proclaimed the forgiveness of sins in early days. “To him bear all the prophets witness that every one

that believeth on him shall receive through his name remission of sins'; and the gift of the Holy Spirit was given to all that believed among the Gentiles, as before on Jews. There is indeed no reception of that divine seal without the known forgiveness of sins (compare Acts 11:17). Somewhat later and in the synagogue of Antioch in Pisidia Paul preached just the same. "Be it known to you therefore, brethren, that through this man is preached to you remission of sins, and from all things from which ye could not be justified in the law of Moses by (or in) him every one that believeth is justified." Thus the two great apostles, of circumcision no less than of uncircumcision, thoroughly corroborate what the last surviving apostle propounds at the close to counteract the seducers growingly at their evil work. It is not even that he announces the privilege for them to learn it, that their sins were forgiven for the sake of Christ's name; he writes the Epistle to them, because their sins are forgiven them. If they were not forgiven, the ground presupposed and essential for the Christian is taken away. Without its known certainty there could be no peace with God, nor fitness of soul to receive or profit by further divine communications.

There is no "if" brought in here. The "ifs" in Scripture are important, and not to be explained away where they occur. But here there is no "if;" because an "if" in the gospel would bring entire ruin on its nature, character and aim. For the blessing of redemption (whatever the grace it brings, and the new responsibility it creates) depends not on the redeemed but on the Redeemer. Nothing can be simpler than this truth, which seems its essence in a few words; and faith receives what God declares about it. He has taken the greatest pains, not

only by the two great apostles Peter and Paul, one of the circumcision and the other of the uncircumcision, but here also by John, the last of all. The truth of the gospel remains “in the last hour,” as fresh to the end as at the beginning. In scripture it is entirely unimpaired by the practical ruin of the church and by the awful intimation which the apostle Paul gave comparatively early, that there is to be “the falling away” before the day of the Lord in judgment. This was made known in one of his earliest Epistles, the second to the Thessalonians, the first to them being the earliest of all his Epistles. The second was written not long after, perhaps within the same year; and there is predicted the awful climax of lawlessness, apostasy from the truth, and this not for Jews nor for heathen, but sad to say for Christendom. If reunion come, this will be its character.

The Jews had already apostatised when they gave up the Lord God of their fathers for idols, and crowned it with the rejection of their Messiah, the Lord Jesus. This we may call their apostasy, though they will proceed to greater enormity before the end. The heathen had been always in a state of apostasy from God from the time that they set up false gods. But the awful end disclosed in the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians is, that the apostasy is to fall on Christendom before the day of the Lord comes. And you have only to look at the daily papers, or the monthlies or the quarterlies of our time, and you will find evidence in the religious organs as much as in the worldly journals, that the apostasy is impending. They cannot hide but betray the preparation for it.

“Higher criticism,” falsely so called, is the devil’s device to throw dust in people’s eyes about scripture. Where is

the word of God left for faith? If scripture be denied to be the word of God, where is the church, the believer, or the lost sinner? Where is Christ the Lord, or God's testimony to His grace and truth? No ground at all abides for faith. Make it an uncertain thing, the word of man (Elohists and Jehovists senior and junior, with redactors too!) really rather than the word of God, and you lose God's saying love, grace, and controlling power which kept infirm and erring man from a single error, that there should not be a flaw in all Scripture as originally given of Him. This is what God intended;. as it is what the apostle Paul pronounces authoritatively in his latest Epistle (2 Tim.). That too was the proper time for it. He says that not merely all Scripture in a general way is given by inspiration of God, but "every scripture," every part of the Bible, each part of the Old Testament, and each of the New Testament, every bit of it is God-breathed. Blessed be God that so it is. Can God lie? Has God any need to repent, or alter His mind?

Oh the wickedness of man, and in particular of Christendom! For it is most distressing to see this scepticism unjudged in all the denominations, great and small. Not one of them escapes its withering influence more or less, and especially in their leading or energetic men.

Here then, in ver. 12, we have the commonplace or initial privilege which every Christian is supposed to possess. It is not merely to have life, for all the Old Testament saints had life; but none of these, though having life, could say, "Our sins have been forgiven for His name's sake." Christ had not yet come, and still less had He yet suffered. The atoning work was not yet done; the full proclamation of grace could not yet be made.

Now all things are ready, even for Him to judge living and dead; and “I write to you, dear children, because your sins are (have been and are) forgiven you for His name’s sake.” It could not be before He came. The words “His name’s sake” are all-important. It was not necessary to express more fully who “He” was; every Christian understands it at once. They particularly apply when He is not here. The revelation of His grace and truth is come and abides. “His name” means what God has revealed of Him and His work. It takes in not only what the Lord was when here, but what He suffered and accomplished before leaving the world for the Father. And the Spirit of God came down at His request, and also on the Father’s part, not only for rich blessing of the saints but to His glory, that the proclamation of the gospel might go forth to every creature in His power. Nobody was shut out from its blessed sound. Many individuals, through their hostility or their carelessness, might refuse to bear. This is their sad affair, for which they must give account. But it goes out to all: Jew or Greek, circumcision or uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond or free; not one is excluded from God’s word of reconciliation. It is His righteousness and not grace only; whereas conscience work, if we stray, is a question of holiness in the soul’s state and practice. One needs to have the fellowship restored which sin interrupted. Nevertheless none derive effectual blessing from the reconciliation except they believe on Christ by divine grace; and this requires the action of the Spirit of God in conscience and heart. Yet it is by the faith of God’s word that the Holy Spirit thus works livingly.

But among the saints in the church of God, wherever it may be, it is ever assumed that all within knew their sins

forgiven. How else could there be happiness individually before God? How else singleness of eye to discern His will and courage to do it in the face of all the snares from the world, the flesh, and the devil'? How could there be real fellowship in worship? How fitness to take their part in the assembly's obligation to deal with evil, and in the last resort to purge it out? They could not otherwise bear to know, and firmly act on it, that "a little leaven leavens the whole lump." For the lack of enjoyed forgiveness implies not merely a bad conscience, but one never in fact purged from dead works to worship a living God, so that spiritual power falls and uncertainty cannot but darken and enfeeble the soul. When the grace that gives the cleansing by Christ's blood is seized by faith, the Holy Spirit makes it known as a primary corporate duty to "purge out the old leaven that ye may be a new lump, according as ye are unleavened." Practice must be ruled by divine principle: else the assembly becomes an offence to the Name, and exists only to deny and disgrace it. "For also our passover, Christ, hath been sacrificed. Wherefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with leaven of malice and wickedness, but with unleavened [bread] of sincerity and truth." There might be sad failure where, as among the Corinthians, there was no question that all Christians have, through the faith of the gospel, their sins forgiven; but without that forgiveness the Epistles in general fail to apply. The unforgiven are not addressed in them. They are not on the ground of Christianity, still less of the church.

Where is even this now insisted on? The Reformation did not require it for the assembly (if we can speak of "the assembly" then); for it did not in the least set things in

church order. It did what was a far more needed and important work; for it gave people the Bible, which had been taken away, particularly by the proudest of those religious corporations which call themselves churches without the right to it. Scripture had long been hidden away. A priest might give leave, but he rarely cared to give leave; and people could not get it otherwise.

A person in London was extremely anxious to read the New Testament. Being a Romanist and what is called “a good Catholic,” he would not break the law of “the church,” which as the rule forbade it. But it did not forbid reading the Greek Testament; and so he in a roundabout way attained his end. Although foreman in a factory (and you know what such a post implies, what a responsibility rests on his shoulders and how his time is taken up), the man learnt Greek for the express purpose of enjoying God’s word direct in the New Testament. The fact was told me by the master, who was a well-known and respected Christian and had all confidence in his zealous and conscientious servant. It was Christian feeling in a Romanist struggling against the impious and tyrannous zeal of its misbegotten authority. If he had not light to judge the wickedness, it is evident that he had a conscientious desire after God’s latest word; and he took no little trouble to get it; and we may hope it was blessed to his soul. No more can I say than was told me, except that in all his workmen none was more reliable than the poor Romanist who learned Greek in order to enjoy the New Testament as it came from God. Who can wonder that he feared God and loved His word?

At length we come to the different grades, after being shown what is common to them all. The first is, “I write to you, fathers,” that is, the most mature in spiritual

power and knowledge. Is it not worthy of our grave attention? What saith the Scripture? Notions of government or of doctrine have nothing to do with this. It is depth of spiritual entrance into the mind of God about Christ. It is a higher measure of apprehending the Lord Jesus which constitutes a father spiritually, the first of the three classes in God's family distinguished by the apostle. First there were "fathers"; secondly "young men"; and thirdly "little children." As "dear children" correctly rendered includes all the three, it is necessary to use some such word as "little children," or "babes" definitely for those least mature. For it must be remembered that quite different words are employed and kept up throughout. In the 12th verse the term "dear children" (tekniva), as is invariable, means all the family; and as this word introduces the parenthetic portion, so in the 28th verse the selfsame word introduces the resumption of what follows all these various classes. For, this done, he again turns to the ordinary course which was interrupted in order to show that, on the same ground-work of grace, differences there are among the children of God in spiritual maturity, the only kind of difference that is recognised. But within the parenthesis (viz. the last part of verse 13), "I write to you, little children" (παιδία), it is a different word.8 This occurs nowhere else in the Epistle except here, and a second time at the beginning of ver. 18, where its repetition commences. There are just these two occasions. Our Lord in a general way used both these terms, as given in John's Gospel; but we do not enter into that now, as it seems to have no bearing on the special usage of the First Epistle, of which the importance is made perfectly plain. No man is asked to give an opinion when God has told us the truth with all

clearness. There need therefore be no doubt about it. Nor can one allow the validity of, or room for, difference of judgment; because God in His word is, and ought to be, the end of all controversy.

Here then in verse 13, as in 18 only, the “little children mean the babes of the family. After the “fathers” and “young men” come the “little children,” if one may so render, this being the triple division of the “dear children” or God’s family in general. It is necessary in some way to distinguish them; and all the more, because the lack of it has exposed excellent and learned men to error here. It must ever be so where erudition is not subject to the revealed truth, and consequently does not enjoy the guidance of the Holy Ghost according to the word. Where this is unhappily the case, learning instead of being useful may do a great deal of harm, and can do no good. For where is the good spiritually of anything into which the Spirit of God does not enter and guide? But if the Spirit of God speaks in words taught of Himself, we must be submissive to the word. Then we have the blessed certainty of revelation, but not otherwise.

It is obvious how far reaching this verse is, and like the one preceding in the simplest and clearest form. Here the three distinct classes stand out with remarkable brevity. But the Spirit of God goes over the ground again, when He enlarges, with one marked exception, in a truly instructive manner, which will come before us in its own place.

Now let us be content to take the few words which the Spirit of God gives on their distinctive differences.

The “fathers” are so designated here “because ye have known him that is from the beginning.” Who can mistake Him? It is Christ, and none other. But He is not here called by His usual name. He was the Word and Son, before the time described as “from the beginning.” He was Only-begotten of the Father through all eternity. The Eternal Son of the Eternal Father no human mind can fathom; and the incarnation necessarily adds to its inscrutability. But this is not the least ground for not believing what is infinitely above and beyond us; it is revealed without a doubt. And the reason why men break down upon it all is that they reason from man up to God, which is always false. You must reason down from God to man, if you are to be in the truth; for who knows the truth but God? And who can reveal the truth but God, as He has done in Christ? In the Gospel John is most careful to say that “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” It matters not how far one essays back in thought into the depths of eternity. Imagine millions of years! These are not the beginning, though of course one cannot with propriety talk of “years” before the measures of time apply. But go back in imagination into these unmeasured depths, there He subsisted. No beginning had He who is eternal, and in His own personality also He was “with God.”

Again, not only was He with God as a distinct person from the Father and the Spirit; but He was God. Nor is there any property of God more distinctive than His being eternal; if not eternal, not God.

But quite a different thing is referred to here. It is not knowing Him that was in the beginning with God, but knowing “Him that is from the beginning.” It is the

beginning of His taking flesh, the incarnate Word, in this world Such is the absolutely new fact. From the beginning is reckoned from His manifesting Himself as Emmanuel, the God-Man. This was He whom the "fathers" knew. What can you know about the Son in eternity except that He was the Only-begotten Son in the Father's bosom, the object of His everlasting delight as even Prov. 8 tells us? Such He was when not a creature existed above or below, neither angel nor man nor lower being. There was only the blessed God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as we know now; and there were divine counsels which were afterwards to be divulged to us who now believe. What do we know more than this? But if we look at "Him that is from the beginning" there is, one may say, almost everything to learn and know.

And where do we find this illimitable subject? In the New Testament generally, in the Gospels particularly. There we have Him on earth, there shown as man, not a mere human being, but God and man in one person, truly a divine person. There was He born of the Virgin, not only Messiah but God's Son, Elohim and Jehovah (Matt. 1:21, 23). Oh what a deal there is to learn even at His birth! For we here only touch the fact of His person when He became incarnate. If we are told a good deal about Him as a babe, we have even more about Him when He was a child twelve years old. And what significant silence is kept over all the years thence to thirty! There were no trumpets blown, no beating of drums, no pomp or ceremony, no such thing as the birthday remembered by a single soul except His real mother and His legal father, and perhaps their acquaintance; nothing of further recognition now; just

as at the inn there was no room for Him at His birth. Who takes a shrewder worldly measure of a person of consequence than a waiter at an hotel? He soon appraises the person that appears; he guesses well who is good pay for the house. No; the manger will do very well enough for such folk. The stable is at hand, but “no room for them in the inn.”

One wonder is the entire obscurity in which He moved who was the Father’s delight, when simply working at the carpenter’s bench with His legal father. But there and then He was doing the will of God. “Must I not be in my Father’s things?” And here He was in the temple, hearing the teachers, and asking them questions. He did not mount a chair to preach, like some of the foolish boys put forward by more foolish men and women. But there He was, in the most lowly and lovely manner, hearing them and asking them questions, with far more knowledge than all His teachers. And was it not a testimony to their consciences, to learn how this could be? For there was no pretension: become man He remained as yet simply a boy, but this boy the Lord God, the Creator of the world. Such was the One on whom the Father looked down to find what met all His mind and His affections, not merely as a divine person but peculiarly a divine person become man. Become man! The Word become flesh! What? Entered the family of man! Yet man as he is and has long been is the most wicked, the vainest, the proudest of all creatures in God’s creation. Other animals stick to their habits from the time that man’s sin wrought havoc even with them. But man only goes out of one wickedness into another, always getting worse and worse as time went on; and

the more light they received outwardly, the more they perverted it really.

After much, when the world as a whole was at the worst point at which it had ever arrived, the Lord was born in the fulness of time. And when He entered upon His public service, what did every day disclose to Him! What lessons fell from His lips and His life! With men, women and children, He was familiarly conversant; with elders and lawyers, with Scribes and Pharisees, and with Herodians and Sadducees, with hypocrites and with the self-righteous, with wicked women and wicked men, and habitually with pious men and pious women. For the Lord had to do with every class. Never was any one brought more variously into contact, never one taking such loving pains with everybody, none showing divine grace and truth as He to everyone that came. Nothing is here said about His miracles, wonderful as they were, and signs of yet deeper things. Nor need one now enlarge on His words; though He spoke as never man did. He could say, when asked who He was, "Absolutely (κατ᾽

ἀρχὴν) that which I also speak to you" (John 8:25). He was what He said. He is the truth, as no other man. And who are those that relish all this, who enjoy it, who appreciate Him thus presented and know how to apply it? The "fathers." "No one hath seen God at any time: the Only-begotten Son that is in the bosom of the Father — He declared [Him]." He too showed the Father. Their hearts were filled with Christ.

As you know well, this is not what generally satisfies even real Christians, nor can it be expected as things have been since primitive days. Without a total breach

with man and the world it can never be for the Christian, who must have personally and in the Spirit gone through all kinds of difficulty in himself and all outside him. How often the Lord's work becomes all-absorbing to some devoted souls; as the church becomes to others, though by no means so frequently. But Christ, known as He was, detects and disperses all that is undue, and abides better known and with deepening sense of the fulness that dwelt in Him bodily.

Of course the "father" had once been "a babe," and "a young man," before he could be a "father." He had fully tasted the early joys in all their freshness; he had taken part in the conflicts which demand spiritual energy and courage. But after passing through every kind of experience as a man of faith and love, the result of it all is this: nothing but Christ, and Christ all. But, let it be repeated, it was knowing "Him that was from the beginning." It was not merely the Son in heaven throughout eternity, however owning the eternity of His person, but He, man on earth among men. What particularly characterises the fathers is knowing the Son incarnate, the Christ as He was seen and heard every day of His public service in Galilee, Judea, or Samaria. It was Himself, God and man, God in man, the Son revealing the Father in all He said and did. This is what won and fixed and filled their hearts. It is what delighted God's heart. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I found my delight" or "my complacency." It was here in His grace (Matt. 3) and in the witness of the coming glory (Matt. 17) that the Father's voice was thus heard; and it is in Him manifested here that a "father" enjoys fellowship with Him. For they had truly fellowship with

the Father and the Son, and in the most profound and practical way. Those are the “fathers.”

One might have a great gift, and not at all be a “father.” One might be not only a great preacher of the gospel but also a powerful teacher, yet not a “father.” It depends not on gift in any way, but on that spirituality which has learned the valuelessness of everything but Christ. Profit there had been by other things; profit even by what humbled and inflicted the keenest pain. One might have entered with wonder, joy, and gratitude into our blessing in Christ in the heavenly places, members of His body who is the Head at God’s right hand; into union also with all the saints which flows from our union with Him. But the issue of all that mystery, and of all profitable experience is to find that the all is in Christ Himself; in the Christ that our Father loves and honours. The same is He who occupies and delights our hearts too; and this, as He was manifested in the world. This is to know “Him that is from the beginning,” the last and the best portion of the “fathers.”

The apostle turns to the second class. He says, “I write to you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one.” They are characterised by energy, energy that went out in faith and love. They had thoroughly discerned and judged sin, to which they knew they died with Christ. They knew that they were also risen with Him, to set their mind on Him and His things above, and to mortify their members on the earth. They had got beyond occupation with self. They had learned the power of Satan, and they faced it. They resisted the devil, and he fled from them. Thus they overcame the wicked one. But they were in the midst of that kind of conflict, and they were strong. They too had profited by

the first place. Everyone of course begins as a “babe,” and goes on perhaps to be a “young man;” but very few reach the place of a “father.” Perhaps it may be allowed me to say that, knowing a great many Christians, I have known few “fathers” in my pilgrimage, nor have I even heard of them except very rarely. But “young men” happily it is not so uncommon to find. But it is very little if at all found in the religious world. Indeed even the full and proper character cannot be developed where the world necessarily exercises the influence it does there. Hence it is, as it remains to be shown that not even babes have the proper stamp of “little child” as affixed by the apostle. How sad not even to possess or recognise distinctly the signature that God gives the “little child!”

But we have had the second class sufficiently defined, we may hope, for every Christian to appreciate and understand, even if he can hardly claim it himself. It is vigorous Christianity, upright and decided, and knowing well that contention with flesh and blood, with which most are familiar, is short of what Satan’s power is. They need the whole armour of God, and they put it on as essential to such warfare. They know both how to withstand, and, having done all, to stand. They have overcome the wicked one. Their conflict is clear enough in a general way. They are not ignorant of the enemy’s devices, but resist him resolutely and are enabled to overcome. It is a vigorous Christianity with power in faith and in practice. Here too gifts are not in question. It is purely spiritual attainment. The forgiveness of sins has nothing to do with attainment, any more than the possession of life and light in Christ. It is a matter simply of faith in the gospel. But the world and man

being what they are, the believer, when he receives the privileges of grace, cannot be without the experience of self and the world, and of Satan also put to the proof and silenced. They are not deceived by the secrecy or the silence of the great enemy. But they set themselves firmly by grace on the ground of His unaided victory who is their Saviour and Lord, and thank God who gives us the victory by our Lord Jesus Christ. We thus prove that in all the things which seem against us we more than conquer through Him that loved us. Thus have the young men overcome the wicked one.

Thence we come to the very interesting and far more numerous third class — the “little children.” “I write to you, little children,” that is, the least ones of the “dear children” (in ver. 12, as in 1 and 28), “because ye have known (or, have the knowledge of) the Father.” Have you ever tested how far this character belongs to the children of God whom you have known? It is to be supposed that many of us have met not a few children of God in the course of the Christian life. But if you had made it a point to ask, “Have you known the Father,” what answer would be most frequent? Is one going too far to anticipate that most would feel it too much to claim? “Know the Father! Alas! I could not presume to say such a thing of myself.” Most Christians evidently think that this would be a really wonderful attainment on earth — to have the knowledge of the Father! Who can have such knowledge in this life and world? For it means that they do know themselves to be His children now; that they have no hesitation about it; that it is a truth received from God, settled and sure in their souls, not because of dreams, feelings, or ideas; and as far as possible from any merit on their own part. This they

have been taught of God, and they gratefully believe it for their own souls. They already knew their sins forgiven, as we have seen. They could not know the Father without resting on redemption in Christ. But how few saints thus rest always in peace on His redemption!

Holding the soundest doctrine on redemption is in no way your soul at God's word resting on Christ's redemption. It is very possible to receive the truth of redemption abstractly, and to say "I have no hold of it before God for my sins. Sometimes I have a humble hope; but at other times I am utterly cast down as to my soul." Clearly this is not real peace; still less, settled peace. Settled peace is that which, being founded upon the blood of His cross, never changes, because its ground never changes. There is also the known relationship to the Father, which is by the Holy Spirit given because we are sons. Even the babe is characterised by more than known forgiveness of sins. This is a vital truth of Christianity. Plenary remission of sins through the blood, no matter how assuredly realised by faith, does not constitute what the "babe" in God's family is expected to know. Were this all, he is without the essential blessing of relationship, and of known relationship, to the Father.

Hence another apostle (Gal. 3:26) insists to the Galatians, "Ye are all God's sons by faith in Christ Jesus;" as here our apostle says, "I write to you, babes, because ye have known the Father." This they could only know. because they were sons, and God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into their hearts, crying, Abba, Father (Gal. 4:6). None can so feel and utter it to God, unless they have received, not a spirit of bondage unto fear, but a Spirit of adoption. Then as divine power works the

sense and affections in us as in that intimate relationship, so the duties flow out of it toward our Father and according to His will. Thus is this blessed privilege given and stated with all simplicity. Many in our day have faith in Christ Jesus, who are afraid to believe that they are sons of God, and that they abide so. The Holy Spirit is grieved at such unbelief, and can but reprove it while it lasts, instead of giving them the joyful liberty proper to such a relationship.

But here you have the youngest portion of the family of God in known relationship with the Father. Never can any one have this constant sense of being a son of God unless he have the Holy Ghost sealing him. There He dwells, because our sins have been forgiven us for Christ's name sake, and thereby the babes know the Father. So the apostle says to the Ephesian saints (Eph. 1:13), "in whom ye also, having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise." These were not then advanced Christians. They had not as yet made progress in the truth. They had only just received the truth of the gospel as God sent it to them. They believed. in the efficacy of Christ's death, and accepted the fulness of His grace; and that fulness included both their sins blotted out, and themselves made sons of God, and receiving the Holy Spirit, so as at all times to cry, Abba, Father. And Christian blessing is not conditional or temporary like a Jew's. Legal thoughts swamp Christ's work for us under the Spirit's in us, and thus shake the peace made through the blood of His cross.

Assuredly that is a wondrous place for one to enter by faith who had been, perhaps a short time before,

nothing but a lost sinner. Now by virtue of Christ's redemption the believer has the knowledge of the Father. This changes all to him, and leads him to the confiding intercourse of a son with his Father. If a father after the flesh is dear to his children, particularly if he is an affectionate and faithful father, there is near and bright intercourse. There can be no doubt about the Father. There all is blessed and considerate; for He is as tender as He is true and faithful. There follows then loving intercourse between the sons and the Father. And who is sufficient for these things? Our sufficiency is of God. It is not merely crying, Abba, Father; but as many as are led by God's Spirit, they are sons of God. And the Spirit bears witness with their spirit that they are children of God. Thereby too they taste the comfort and the certainty that their Father loves and blesses them day by day, though if need be chastising for profit, that they may partake of His holiness, called to His everlasting glory in Christ Jesus. Thus then we see the babes of His family; and in this way they are characterised, "They have known and knew the Father."

It is not merely that you look in vain through Christendom for "fathers" in Christ, and that very few "young men" appear with the true stamp of God; but where can we find the "little children" or "babes" thus according to revealed truth? Is it not most saddening? For when were men more self-satisfied? How one would hail "little children" such as the apostle describes, and seek to cheer them on their way, to become valiant against the foe, and to learn more and more of Him who suffered unspeakably for our sakes! But it is hard to find them. From the first century, if we may judge from the earliest Fathers, things got sadly wrong; and one plain

proof of the departure is the want of fully appropriating even the truths that “Your sins have been forgiven you for His name’s sake,” and “I write to you, little children, because ye have known the Father.”

Take the prevalent idea of a frequent recourse to the blood of Christ to restore from failures. How could men speak thus if they believed that Christ obtained everlasting redemption? or that the worshippers once purged have no longer conscience of sins? They cannot have the truth of the gospel in their soul, else they never would think after such a fashion. Christ bore our sins in His body on the tree, not merely those before we believed; His blood cleanses from every sin, not from some only. The saints ought to know that there is the washing of water by the word to meet any defilement in the Christian by the way, but no annulling of redemption through Christ’s blood. “For by one offering He (Christ) hath perfected” not only for ever but continuously (εἰς τὸ διηνεκές) the sanctified. There is no such thought in God’s gospel as our needing a fresh propitiation through His blood after the first; for it was plenary and all-sufficient. But we need to have our defiled feet cleansed by Christ’s word and advocacy. And we confess any sin wherever we act inconsistently with Him; we confess our sin in that particular to God, and judge in ourselves that which exposed us so to fail. That is quite true and right; but not to shake the ground of His one sacrifice and of redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our offences.

If our sins were not all effaced, what would be the value of any? If only one were not forgiven, it would be fatal. But to the believer, forgiveness or remission of our sins means a complete clearance of the sad burden. Only if

one should sin, conscience acts under the Spirit's dealing, and there follows a real humbling of ourselves due on any failure; for every such thing is a shame to us and a grief to the Holy Spirit of God whereby we were sealed unto the day of redemption. This however cannot touch the accepted work of our Lord Jesus. Author as He is of everlasting salvation. So also the knowledge of the Father and of our relationship as His children are quite unshaken. For "we have an Advocate with the Father" who is on high expressly to meet effectually all these difficulties, otherwise insuperable. We are thus ever indebted to Christ; but His advocacy is not His bloodshedding, nor is His blood again His advocacy. Risen and in heaven with the Father, He lives to intercede for us. His blood had quite a different aim and effect. His sacrifice has done its own work perfectly; and His advocacy has its proper place for our need afterwards; and woe to all those that ignorantly unsettle the truth, and insinuate what undermines the gospel of Christ, even though they believe in His person!

7 There is preponderant witness for "I wrote" here, as there is occasionally for as evident blunders of early date in copyists. So it is here, where the context utterly forbids it, and its introduction brings in nothing but confusion, as is abundantly clear from the commentary of Dean Alford swayed by it.

8 It is extraordinary that any Christian of the least intelligence should blunder, as Dean Alford did here. In the third edition of his last volume p. 440, he still talks of "three classes of readers, denoted the first time by τεκνία, πατέρες, νεανίσκοι, and the second time by παιδία, πατέρες, νεανίσκοι. But this is mere oversight of the common portion of the τεκνία, followed by the three

divisions into πατέρες, νεανίσκοι, παιδία, which is repeated with greater detail (except for the πατέρες) in verses 14 to 17 for the νεανίσκοι, and in verses 18 to 27 for the παιδία. Afterward τεκνία is the address to all from verse 28, as he addressed all in verse 12. What misled Alford was one of those mistakes (too often in the oldest uncials, A B C L P, etc.) which give ἔγραφα in the last clause of verse 13, from the scribe's confusion with what follows. It is not even true in fact; for the apostle had not written yet to the παιδία. The true reading, though not so well supported, is γράφω, for all three on the first mention, ἔγραφα, for all three on the second. Muddle is the result for the exposition founded on an evident misreading. To say that παιδία is here "addressed to all the readers" is to ignore words, context and sense.

Address 7 - 1 John 2:14-27

“I wrote (or, write, the epistolary aorist) to you, fathers, because ye have known Him [that is] from [the] beginning.

“I wrote to you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one. Love not the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loveth the world, the love of the Father is not in him: because all that [is] in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride (or, boasting) of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world is passing, and its lust; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

“Little children, it is [the] last hour, and even as ye heard that antichrist cometh, even now many antichrists have come, whence we know that it is [the] last hour. From us they went out, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have abode with us, but [they went out] that they might be manifested that none are of us. And ye have anointing from the Holy One, and know all things. I wrote not to you, because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that [or, because] no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is the antichrist that denieth the Father and the Son. Every one that denieth the Son hath not the Father either; he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also.9 As for you, let10 what ye heard from [the] beginning abide in you: if what ye heard from the beginning abide in you, ye also shall abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise which He promised us, life eternal. These things I wrote to you

concerning those that lead you astray. And as for you, the anointing which ye received from Him abideth in you, and ye have no need that anyone should teach you; but as the same anointing teacheth you, and is true, and is no lie, and even as it taught you, ye (or, do ye, or, ye shall) abide11 in Him."

Here we have clearly the same ground trodden again: the different stages in spiritual growth which mark the family of God. Their threefold distinction is here enlarged on. But the remarkable fact that meets us at the start is this: that the fathers, whom we might think properly entitled to have what concerned them still more fully stated, as being able beyond the others to enjoy the truth of God, have just the some words said over again. This is the more striking because repetition is in no way a rule in Scripture. There are some cases where similar or the same words are repeated, but they are quite exceptional, and this is one of them.

The reason is of a very touching kind. In verse 13 we read, "I write to you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning" — Christ as He was manifested here. He does not enter into divine counsels from all eternity, nor look forward to future glories of Christ, or even to His place at the right hand of God which is a central truth for the apostle Paul. But the beloved disciple was directed to meet the declension which had set in, and to minister best to the fathers, the most advanced of all spiritually, by simply repeating "I wrote (or, write) to you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning." There is not one word different but in the verbal form: in verse 13 he says I "write," and in verse 14 he says "wrote," referring to what he had already said. And why this? Why has he no

more to say to them? Because not emanations from God as men conceived, but here all the fulness of the Godhead dwelt bodily. It was now in Him, a Man, that God embodied and manifested the fulness of His grace and truth in a way that never had been, and as it never needed to be here again. The very notion of something more denied that fulness, and was a lie of Satan.

Here we are in presence of that which is infinite. And having the infinite, not merely in the divine nature of the Godhead, but in the divine person of the Son become man, we find therein its chief wonder; for it is His manhood that has given its necessary element to the wonder. It would have been little indeed without the Godhead; but God, as really manifesting Himself in man and as man, presented that which is above all other marvels, unless it be His death and this in atonement. In Him it was that the “fathers” found their all. Characteristically they had been once “babes” as knowing the Father; they had been “young men” in the vigour of spiritual power, a new, intimate and blessed privilege, which, it is needless to say, is never lost; for through this experience they reaped a blessing which does not pass away. But after passing through difficulties and dangers of all kinds, leaving its rich profit of growth by the true knowledge of God, that which most attracted them, and fixed their affections for ever, was the Lord as He walked up and down, spoke and wrought, manifesting God and His Father in every motive and act, in every word and deed of His life here below. Such is the force of knowing “Him that is from the beginning.” We can find outside Christ thus proved nothing so deep and real, we can learn nothing so high and holy and immediate. It is not the exalted Man in

heavenly glory; which is Paul's special teaching, and of all moment for spiritual energy. Here it is God manifest in the flesh here below, Jesus full of grace and truth in the midst of evil to separate us from it, and to act according to Him in us by the Holy Spirit's power.

Then we come to the second stage — the "young men and here the Spirit of God does enlarge somewhat. "I wrote (or, write) to you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one."

Observe, first of all, that there is an addition not found in the 13th verse, giving the real secret of their strength. The word of God abides in them. This is a weighty truth, which yields immense courage and spiritual power. It is not merely repairing to the word on emergency under pressure of difficulty and trial, but His revelation they had always abiding in them. This is exactly and perfectly what we find in the Lord Jesus. It did not matter whether one was friend or foe; it made no difference whether he appeared high or low: what people heard from Him was God's word. Even if the devil tempted Himself, the word was His answer; and if the enemy quoted it for evil, He replied with scripture for good and truth. If the disciples needed to learn what they were to expect, He brought out the word of God. Never was one who showed the word of God abiding in Him at all times, and for all persons and circumstances, like the Lord Jesus.

We do not find it so even in the apostles, though there were apostles, as John himself, who treasured the word most deeply; and Peter too with his abundant and fervent love; but none like the Lord, not even the apostle

Paul, though we may be perfectly sure there never was any mere man that honoured God's word more than he. Notwithstanding in this respect as in others no one equalled the Lord Jesus. Indeed subjection to the word characterised Him peculiarly, and makes therefore the Gospels, which show the Lord in daily life, so richly profitable and humbling, and for this reason beyond most of the children of God in their actual state.

Most when converted are apt to betake themselves to the Epistles to the Romans and to the Galatians, and some of them never advance much into Romans either. They are attracted by and delighted with the strong foundation which God has given in its earlier chapters; they wonder if they find that it is not only His grace but His righteousness. They stand on the ground of accomplished righteousness. They apprehend Christ Himself as their righteousness. For they are taught to distinguish this as their standing, from their holiness in practice. This is what the Spirit of God works in us because we are Christ's. But righteousness is what the unrighteous sinner needs, as well as the mercy that assures of the remission of his sins; and in Christ it is in all its fulness for him. He has only to take the place of a lost sinner, and cast himself on the Lord Jesus, who is made to him righteousness. This he can take to the very throne of God; he can henceforward in faith stand securely there; and while he condemns himself utterly for all Ins sins, he has in Him a righteousness that satisfies and glorifies God. For it is His own justifying righteousness, because of what Christ has done and suffered for the poorest of sinners; and he is one of them. Perhaps he like the tax-gatherer might say, "I am 'the' sinner, if ever there was one"; but even so the

apostle did say that he was chief; and this was true. The very fact of his legal righteousness made him to be more abundantly the Lord's enemy, and the hater of all that called upon His name. It was purely the religion of man in the flesh, to use his own phraseology. It was a Hebrew of Hebrews assuming his competency to keep it, and walking most conscientiously according to his darkness, which made him so bitter against the Lord Jesus and all that were His. What could be more opposed to the righteousness of God in Christ?

In John 16 is shown that it is not the question now of the law for either sin or righteousness or judgment. So great is the change of standard created by His presence and rejection, that, as He tells us, the Spirit when come will make proof to the world in respect of sin, righteousness, and judgment: of sin, because they believe not on Me; of righteousness because I go to the Father, and ye shall behold Me no more; and of judgment, because the prince of this world hath been judged. The proof of judgment is not in some outward display of divine retribution as in Egypt, Canaan, Babylon, or Rome. It is in the judgment pronounced on him that led the world to crucify the Lord of glory. Thereby has the prince of this world been judged: execution is deferred, but the case is decided finally. The great sin is not to believe on Him; the true righteousness is in the rejected One going to be with the Father. The world has lost Jesus. He came into the world to win sinners wherever He went; and they would not have Him; and the worst in refusing Him were His own people. This ended in the Cross; and because of the Cross not only is God exalted, but in receiving Him into glory is the real righteousness against man, Satan and the world with Israel to boot.

The next display of God's righteousness is in His glad tidings of salvation to the poor sinner coming in His name, the only name given under heaven whereby we must be saved. Therein is God's righteousness manifested through faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all those that believe. After justification begins practical holiness. For life is given in His name as well as the forgiveness of sins; and this new life is that which produces good fruit. This however is a matter of holiness. What meets and saves us as sinners is Christ and Christ's work for us with God; but what works in our souls self-judgment and honouring God by confessing our sins thoroughly is part of his holiness who is now accounted righteous in Christ and for Christ's sake.

Here then we have the secret of these young men being characterised by vigour. It was not natural energy, for there is nothing of grace in that. It was spiritual courage and power; and what maintained and regulated it was the word of God abiding in them. They so loved the word that they had it always not merely by them but abiding in them. They never pretended to what one has heard some dear brethren say: to spend an hour or two over the word. These had the word always over them. This is the true way, not ourselves sitting over the word which often ends in a good deal of talk; but the word over us puts an end to our thoughts, and strengthens as much as it governs us, and rebukes our presumption. Thus were the young men marked, as we have read, by the word abiding in them. It was not the mere searching of it, nor looking into it for curious questions, nor trying to know what perhaps is not the will of God for us to know just yet, if ever in this present time. But there they were, subject to all the word. Depend upon it that the

Scriptures were pondered prayerfully from beginning to end as far as they had them; for it was a more difficult thing then than in our day. But in our day, if you look at any one's Bible, you may find it is well marked in a few parts, but rather too clean in others. Is this the word abiding in us? In such a case all the word is valued and diligently sought, for we never know what word we may want next. Therefore the pious, wise, and due thing is to have the word abiding in us.

But more than this follows. "Love not the world." Why is this warning particularly laid on them? It is not said either to the fathers or to "the babes." We shall find a great deal else said to the babes, but to the "fathers" not a word more than to repeat what he first said. Their special characteristic was like Mary's to sit at the Lord's feet and hear His word. Was not this to be absorbed and filled with Christ? The word of Christ dwelt in them richly in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. But it was not merely that. Christ Himself, as He was manifested here, was habitually before them as the prime object of delight and of fellowship with the Father. But these young men are warned "Love not the world." Does this seem strange for souls spiritually so vigorous? Nay, this very vigour, albeit spiritual vigour, creates a danger. They went forth earnestly desiring to spread the truth; fearlessly testifying of Christ by the word that abides in them, and in the Holy Spirit working through them. The very victories won prove a danger, and commerce with men exposes to loving the world before knowing where they had got. For we are not to suppose that loving the world is merely a taste for show and pleasure, music, or the drama, hunting, shooting, horse-

racing, gambling, or perhaps what is even grosser than any of these things.

The world is a subtle snare far more so than the flesh. For many lusts of the flesh a man despises himself, and others that are intensely devoted to the world might be ashamed of such ways. But worldly lust is quite another thing. It looks eminently respectable; for is it not what is done by everybody of consequence? It is to covet what society likes; what is thought by those of light and leading and sweetness to be the proper thing for men and women. This has an immense influence, especially on the young and the vigorous young who know the Lord, and have sincerely at heart to spread the knowledge of the truth. But this leads them boldly to venture here and there, thinking that they can go anywhere, one may say, because they have got such glad news to tell. At least they know the Saviour who is not known; and where may they not go? In this zeal they are guarded particularly as to the world.

But not in that sense had God made the world. “The world,” morally speaking, was what the devil made after man fell. The first beginning of “the world” was in Cain and his line. For what do we see in Cain? Sentenced to be a wanderer and a fugitive on the earth, he strives to efface it, and built a city: not content one to live here and another there, they must all herd together. Union is strength, say men. Besides, a man of ability soon manages to get at the top; and this many a man hopes to get some day or somehow, at any rate in a measure. God and sin are easily forgotten in such efforts. Accordingly Cain builds a city, and calls it after the name of his son. Pride comes in directly, and self-pleasing or pleasing others without a thought of Him. In that family began

the great inventions. A man of spirit none found in Abel; nor yet in Seth who is substituted for Abel, but abundantly in Cain and his progeny. There the verses of society commenced — Lamech writing in tasteful form to his wives; for the same man brought in polygamy, and justified killing in self-defence in what we may call a sonnet to the objects of his affection. Not God was in his thoughts even at such a sad event, but his wives; and the dealing with Cain he made not an apology alone but a ground for sanction in his own case. Again there we find the bold nomad life originated, and the more civilised delights of wind and stringed musical instruments: so very early was “the world” at work. Is not this “the world”? Undoubtedly many conveniences found in the world can be used by a Christian. But one black mark stamps it — the absence of a despised but all the more beloved Christ. Tell me one thing of it that Christ puts His sanction on. Where is all that Christ valued? all that Christ lived in and loved?

There is the criterion which will prove sharp enough to cut off a great deal, as, on the other hand, all that is outside Christ can be an object for the heart of fallen man; and such is the world. Some as we know take up science; some prefer literature; some affect politics. Alas! it is possible even to take up religion, the work and the worship of the Lord in a worldly spirit and a selfish manner, seeking either profit or fame out of it; and in how many ways do not men court popularity therein! Is not this too the world? The Lord’s name apart from His will and glory carries no safeguard with it. This has been done by some of the wickedest poets that ever lived. They have written on scriptural subjects, but were none

the better for it, as they still remained altogether without God, and often enemies of Christ without doubt.

Therefore it became a serious peril for the spiritually young, vigorous as they might be, if they did not retain an ever-growing sense of their relationship to the Father; for this knowledge even the babes had. They were characterised by the sense of that blessed relationship, and they enjoyed it. They as all had the assurance of forgiveness. Even as babes they added to this joy that they knew the Father, which is indeed a precious privilege, as we may see from so many Christians who think themselves and are thought advanced, yet not venturing to take any such way. They are not quite sure; and for the most part they call upon God, but not as Father in the fullest way, but as the Almighty, as Jehovah, and as the God of Abraham, etc., just as if they were Jews. All ought to see such is the state of Christendom now, especially in those who boast in antiquity and multitudinous religion. It has a Jewish character. But Christ in Christianity takes one out of everything that is earthly, whether of Jews or of Gentiles, and stamps His name on him from the beginning of his new life and throughout its course. As He says Himself of the men given Him by the Father, They are not of the world as He is not. Therefore it was the spiritually “young men” in particular who were to beware of the world, lest, in their ardour, it might become a valued object. They might say that they only wanted to win the world to Christ; that their motive was making Christ and His gospel known to the world. But do you not need dependence on Him and His Spirit’s guidance when and where and how you go? It is not enough that our design or aim should be ever so good.

The chief danger we have to watch against is in the manner of doing things. In “how” we do it we are apt to fail. The object may be right, but the means too must be according to God’s will and word. And who can guide us and guard us in the means to be adopted? Only He to whom we belong, working in us by His word and Spirit.

Now it is not merely in general that we find the “young men” put on their guard another caution to them follows. They are told to love not the things that are in the world.” This may be even more insidious and subtle than the world itself. Take the religion of the world, of the multitude, of the great, the noble, the wise, the learned.. What natural man avoids this snare, unless he be utterly profane? Even Cain had his worship no less than his world in his darkness and his distance from God. And is not this most ensnaring to many a saint, and inviting to his vigour? For many a Christian would say, “I dare not love the world; but here is an eligible offer whereby I may be enabled to do very much more good anywhere and everywhen, and even be allowed to speak, no matter what the circumstances or the company may be.” But it involves compromise of the truth. It is therefore one of the things “that are in the world” which we are not to love. Again, what more common than the mistake of having a peculiar object that attracts us, a hobby of one kind or another, which has no real link with Christ? All such things become idols, because, along with known duties and relationship, Christ is entitled to supreme love.

Christ is the object our Father sets before us; and if we have the eye single to Him, we may be quite sure that the body will be full of light. It is impossible for a soul to be true in looking to Christ and making Christ the object

of his everyday work and walk, if he take up that which He does not approve. The word of God must abide in him. If one is content to undertake only what pleases Him, He would surely help. But there may be the world's blinding influence, and zeal may run into self-importance and our own will. Hence real earnestness lays us open to danger; and therefore they are cautioned, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world," followed by a most solemn warning, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." John loves to present a thing in its absolute principle without noticing circumstances which modify. In laying down, "If any one love the world," he introduces no alleviation. There stands the principle; and if loving the world be your principle and practice, the love of the Father can hardly be yours as a reality.

But in having to do with Christians, as they now walk, there is often a sad mixture. There may be good and bad motives at work. Here we do not look at such a picture. Other parts of God's word may deal with it; but the particular task assigned here is to present the thoroughly right principle, and the thoroughly wrong one. Hence it is settled that if one love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. This is sound and true; because it supposes the principle on either side carried out. Then he comes to the special differences of the desires after the world. "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh" (what works in one's self), "the lust of the eyes" (what attracts me outside myself), with the third snare, "the pride, or boasting, of life." It may be the maintenance of station and habits and feelings belonging to it, in the world. Supposing, for instance, one a nobleman or a gentleman, or of the much larger

class that would like to be such. Where such is the case, where is Christ? Is it assumed that Christ sanctions in His disciples the natural rank or the place that one may acquire somehow or other? What did the Lord mean when He said, They are not of the world as I am not of the world? Is the world what the Christian is to preserve as an offering acceptable to Christ?

Many a Christian thus keeps his dignity, and gives it, as he says, to Christ, as if He valued it! Is this what our Lord laid down, or how the apostles and other faithful walked? To the unsophisticated heart purified by faith what so appeals in practice as Christ's separateness from the world to the Father? That the very reverse is seen in many Christians is but too well known, as it has ever been a deep sorrow and burden to those who feel for His name and word. The pride of life in a Christian is heartless to man and hateful to the Father. It was not so that He sought high and low in the midst of sins and follies, vanity and pride, or whatever else ruled men; not so did Christ meet us but to uproot and put sentence of death on all vanity. Was any one of these things spared in His Cross? Hence His servant says here that not one of them in particular, still less as a whole, is of the Father, but is of the world which hated Him and His Son. What pleasure has the Father in any of the things which men think so much of, and adhere to with such tenacity, whether envying them in others or seeking them for themselves? In few words the pride of life is not of the Father; but, what is more, it is of His enemy, the world.

For what is the world? It is the system that Satan planted amongst fallen men to blot out the memory of a lost paradise; and it has gone on enlarging, embellishing, and progressing ever since, in spite of the

awful catastrophe of the deluge, until it rose up rebelliously against the Son of God and crucified Him on the tree. This is at length what the world did, with all its arts and letters, its religion and philosophy. The world then consisted of both Jew and Gentile. They both loved the world, and they both united in rejecting with the utmost ignominy the Lord of glory. Is the world then an object for a Christian's love? or anything that is part and parcel of the world? anything that is its boast and its delight? Is it not treason against the Father and the Son?

But the world here has another characteristic that is pressed. It is evanescent, having God's sentence of death upon it. It is wholly to pass away. It is passing and its lust, for who can keep it? It does not matter whether it be riches or rank, pleasure, power, or aught else; it comes to nothing — its pride sometimes even in this age finding itself in a workhouse. For all that, men are devoured with the desire to be something greater than they are, so that under the surface lies unhappiness which pleasure cannot dispel.

"The world passeth away and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." It is not only that the word abideth for ever, but he that does God's will. This is of far more importance than any doctrine deduced by men, any article of faith, as it is called. It is no doubt needful to oppose what is false and evil, and we are bound to submit to the revealed word and will of God. But error easily glides into the doctrines which the best men formulate, against or for which men contend. But here we are told that the doer of God's will abides for ever. This none does without cleaving to Christ, and loving the Father. Surely "the Son abideth for ever." The

Christian may fall asleep, but he abideth for ever. The Lord is coming to wake him up from the sleep of death, or to change him if he then survive, into His glorious likeness manifestly then for over. But he is called to recognise it now, and to act on it every day, that he be not drawn into the defiling paths of the world that are thought so pleasant, but are, on the contrary, each and all covered and filled with evil and ungodliness.

Now we come to “the little children” in verse 18. It is not the whole family, but an inexcusable error to confound the family with that particular part, the youngest class or grade of the whole, the babes. Yet these, the least mature group of God’s family, are they who are said to know the Father. Think how far saints now are fallen from such knowledge! And is it not worthy of note that for them the Spirit of God takes the fuller room to enlarge? There was not a word more for “the fathers”; there was but little more for the “young men”; but far the most for “the babes.” Can we not feel the good way of grace therein? It is not the manner of man; but God by His Spirit enters most of all into the requirement of the “little children.” They need it most, and they have most. It is with them that the Spirit of God dwells with a great deal more detail than even with the young men. The little ones were exposed to great danger.

“Little children, it is the last hour,” for is it not well to keep to literality here? Evidently this is beyond “latter times” (1 Tim. 4:1), and “last days” (2 Tim. 3:1). Yes, it is a “last hour:” a very long hour doubtless; and the reason is not delay but the long-suffering of God not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Grace has some more souls to save and

bless, some more to make members of Christ's body; and therefore God waits. But from the apostle's day it is the "last hour." What made it so? Not Christ known, but "many antichrists." Christ's coming the first time is said to be "at the end of these days," the days that began with God's dealings with His people on earth, and at the end of them, in the consummation of the ages, Christ. So we read in Heb. 1:2, 9:26, "when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth His Son."

Here it is a peculiarly solemn phrase: it is the "last hour." The time is short. The Lord is at hand. He is ready to judge the quick and the dead, as the apostle Peter said; ready not merely to take us up to heaven, but, as far as He is concerned, to execute judgment on the quick and the dead. But even so God prolongs His blessed grace in saving more. When the last member of Christ is added in, what then? The Lord will come and take on high those that are His, and then begin to work among Jews and Gentiles too as such, and especially to prepare His people for their place on the earth. They were unprepared the first time; the Lord will accomplish it the second time. There will then be a people made ready for the Lord and His Kingdom. He will do what John the Baptist failed to do; He will do what the church has not done; He will turn the heart of Israel to welcome their long-rejected Messiah, whom to their amazement and grief they find to be none other than Him whom they crucified. Therefore in that day will Jehovah assign Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong; whereas now it is the foolish and the weak and the base things of the world that God chose to exalt His grace in Christ. But in the day of His appearing He will have mercy on the long-abased Zion,

and the nations shall fear the name of Jehovah, and all the kings of the earth His glory. Some may anticipate that discovery; others will learn it when He appears; for there will be differences among them.

But now is the “last hour” for us: not the prevalence of Christianity, nor the mission of the gospel of the kingdom to all the nations, but the arrival of many antichrists. There is to be a mission of converted Jews to all the Gentiles; and they will find their way where Christians did not (for divine grace will strengthen them); and then the end of the age will come.

But is this the Christian hope? It is not for the end that we are waiting, but for Christ, and for Christ to take us up to be where He is now. They also await the Lord to come down and bless the earth, as He surely will. But this is another and an after thing. It may not be long, but still there is a little interval between the two parts of His coming — the heavenly part and the earthly.

Here it is the solemn announcement that the last hour is come. “Little children, it is the last hour.” How this must have sounded in their souls and made them wonder! Many think that such truth is not at all the right food for babes. It is much to be wished that Christians would read their Bible, and not only read but in all simple confidence believe it. What they will find there puts an end to these human thoughts and theories. “Little children, it is the last hour; and as ye heard that antichrist cometh, even now are come many antichrists.” This stamps it as the “last hour.” No evil is so flagrant as antichrist. It is direct, personal, antagonism to the Lord. He may imitate the Lord Jesus, yet to oppose Him; he may claim what belongs only to God, but to exalt himself

and deny God. Certainly it is the worst and most audacious of all evil against Himself; “and even now are come many antichrists.” There are many antichrists in London, as throughout Christendom; and they preach and teach there with crowds to hear them, who have no suspicion that they listen not to Christianity but to anti-christianity. The reason that real Christians take all this lightly is that the Bible is so little pondered with the Spirit of God working in them.

What helps on this evil is the German adoption of old English Deism; for this much of the “higher criticism” is. It is old English Deism, drummed out of the country some 200 years ago, but of late come back again burnished and brightened up by German ingenuity and show of learning. This is what people swallow as something new, great, and advanced. Alas! it has taken captive alike the old and the new seats of learning, and made them a citadel against the Lord Jesus, centres for propagating unbelief to ruin with its poison the young men destined as many are to be the clergy or ministers of one sort or another. For there is little difference as to this among the denominations. Broad-churchism and Dissent are perhaps equally corrupt in this matter, and becoming more and more destructive. High church, which with Pusey, etc., once resisted, now caves in. People do not believe this, and the consequence is they too get corrupted in all directions. Even believers are deeply injured thereby. But the Lord knows how to deliver, as He works to clear dim eyes, and will make them sensible of the snare. For it is plain enough that learning is no check to nor barrier against the evil. Yet God will guard “the babes” in His grace. To this their knowledge of the Father supplies a blessed foundation.

What do those critics care for this? Have they the word of God abiding in them? Do they look to the Spirit of God for power to receive His truth and to walk in it? How could this be in those who deny Scripture to be His word? Yes, many antichrists have come, “Whereby we know that it is the last hour.”

What intelligent Christian does not know this now? Many can remember the time when there was no such prevalence as there is now, nor anything to be compared with it. Incredulity is rapidly growing. But its germ at the least has shown itself ever since the apostle was here. “They went out from us, but they were not of us.” For this is its apostate character Some of the leaders of present antichristianity were once professing Christians. One or more of them was known among us — a clever and scholarly man, eminent since in this religious scepticism; yet (what commended him to many) a vegetarian, a moral man, a teetotaller, and a revolutionary. How ready many are apt to think there must be something good in such a person! But no, it is an antichrist.

“For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that they might be manifest that they were not all of us.”

This last is a very strange and incorrect rendering: “they were not all of us.” But really it has no just meaning whatever. It should be regarded as only a slovenly translation, or rather mistranslation. For what the Greek text actually says is that “they all were not of us”; and the English idiom of this is that “none of them were of us.” But if you say, “they were not all of us,” it would imply that some were. Some of these antichrists were of

us! This the apostle expressly contradicts. The fact is that we see in this how the most learned men, when they come to the Bible, seem to close their eyes. It might be interesting to search into the cause which exposed men of piety and learning to so strange all error. But it suffices to say positively that the only right sense is the quite different thought that none of them — none of these antichrists — “were of us.” The unlearned reader may be assured that such is the true meaning on the strictest grammatical ground, which scholars certainly ought not to fail in, as they sometimes do and have ever done.

“But ye have anointing from the Holy One.” This is their new endowment from on high, which even the “little children” possessed, on whom a dead set was made by one or other of the many antichrists. They were anointed by the Spirit of God given to them, an unction from the Holy One, even the Lord Jesus. But what about you that read? For you it is of great moment whether you are thus anointed. For this is distinctive of the Christian, not only to be established in Christ but anointed by the Spirit, as we read in 2 Cor. 1:21. Immature as the little children were, this was true of them. Is it so with you? Do not waste your time in thinking about others till you know this privilege yours from the Holy One; then with good conscience and happy heart you are fully entitled to seek their good. But if we are safely and wisely and zealously to labour for others, let us first consider our own need and state before God.

Here take notice that “ye” is emphatic, though addressed to the spiritually youngest of Christians, which of course proves it to be the privilege of them all. “And ye have anointing from the Holy One, and know all

things.” Is not this a very remarkable word to say about “the little children “? But why should it be doubted when we recollect that they were members of God’s family? They were God’s children who had received already in common with all the rest the blessed certainty that their sins were forgiven. This removed guilt and dread, the necessary hindrance of happiness and progress. Till our sins are known to be forgiven, how can we enter into all the truth? Only with an unpurged conscience. Even men admit that a bad conscience makes cowards of us all. The conscience once divinely purged gives boldness. See it in Peter, who was known to have denied his Master. Yet when restored and resting on redemption, he could charge the unpurged Jews, “Ye… denied Him in presence of Pilate, when he judged to let Him go.” The soul being sin-laden shrinks from hearing, the truth which must condemn self more and more. We must be consciously clear before God before we can grow by the knowledge of Him, or have true courage with others.

Hence the Epistle was written to all, because their sins are (or, have been) forgiven for His name’s sake. It was not to make it known first. They knew it since they believed the glad tidings. Christ had procured it for them through His blood; and thus it is a settled state for all saints. It is in vain to reason and talk about forgiving all your sins before conversion. What then becomes of any sins committed afterwards? The Lord is surely not to suffer again; nor did He suffer for some of our sins merely but for all; and this is the meaning of the remission of sins. Christ’s sacrifice availed not to a certain point but for the entire body of our sins, which once and for ever were borne by Him. This indeed constitutes the blessedness of that primary boon of

divine grace. It is not a doctrine hung up as a prize to be attained, or a truth outside to be rehearsed publicly or to admire, but a personal privilege of faith taken home to our own conscience, applied to our own soul, and received from God as His incomparable favour with which we start on our Christian confession.

But, as we have expressed it, “the little children” were characterised by an advance on that which was the common portion of all Christians. The very speciality that they began with was the knowledge of the Father. They were His children. It was not merely that they knew (or had known) God as Creator; or as the Almighty God that cares for poor pilgrims, or Jehovah God as the Governor; but they knew Him as the Father. The risen Lord Jesus had made Him known as His Father and theirs. They knew that He was their Father and their God, as truly as His Father and His God. And they had it on His own word, as well as in the power of the Holy Ghost sent into their hearts, crying, Abba, Father. How can Christians overlook a truth so nearly concerning them, which runs through the greater part of the New Testament? It is distinctive of Christianity. Through Christ all the evil gone is judged in His cross; and unworthy as a Christian may be, he is from that early moment of faith in the gospel given to know Him as His Father. Even the babes knew that this is no temporary blessing, such as the law held out on obedience to Israel. In the gospel God gives to faith an abiding gift. This is what the law could not do. The law is conditional: “If you obey the law of God, you shall live, and not die.” But the gospel is not that if I love God He will be faithful to me (on which ground no sinner could be saved); but that “God so loved the world, that He gave His only-

begotten Son, that whoever believeth on Him should not perish but have eternal life."

There is the great spiritual fact confronting all; and if I disbelieve God as to His Son, I ensure perdition for my soul: the wrath of God abides upon me. But if I receive that immense and direly needed boon, God's love in giving the believer eternal life, and thus bringing me not merely into the pardon of my sins but into the relationship of His son by faith in Christ Jesus, I am on the only and truly Christian ground as a babe. Yet here, as being babes, they are warned of their danger. There abound seducers and antichrists. We shall find a little about the special features of their leading astray lower down; but let us proceed with what comes before it, the gracious provision to forewarn and forearm. "I have not written to you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth."

Without anointing from the Holy One (i.e., the Spirit of God from the Holy One, Christ), they could have had no fitness to withstand snares so subtle and perilous. The gift of the Spirit characterises the Christian. The Lord spoke of it as "living water," which He would give the believer. It was not Himself only. He gives the Holy Spirit as the continually fresh source of living water within us springing up, not exactly "a well" but "a fountain" of water springing up into life eternal. Thus it is not only that we have life eternal at the beginning of faith; but we have in us for a glorious condition the power of the Spirit which we have now in a condition of grace.

The apostle, having here shown that this divine privilege already exists, tells the "little children" that they "know

all things." How can this be said of them? They have Christ as their life, who is the power of God, and the wisdom of God. "They shall be all taught of God." To have Christ is to have the key to open all things. More than this, they are anointed by the Holy Spirit to realise the truth, making it their own with all certainty and liberty. And wherefore such favour as this? To separate us from the world unto the Father above its human thoughts, and our own among the rest. For what are we apart from Christ and dependence on Him?

"I wrote not to you, because ye know not the truth but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth." How full of cheer and comfort! The teaching of tradition is ever vague, and leaves the soul uncertain, even as to what we most need — assurance in order to abiding peace with God. But the pretension to new truth where Christ is simply received and fully enjoyed opens the door to the evil one; and he soon appears. This is a sign for the babes to beware: because no lie is of the truth, and one manifest lie may betray the falsehood of the entire system, as the truth is a consistent whole; and God makes it known even to the babes. But these misleaders denied any such knowledge to them; they themselves alone knew the truth. "We have the new light, you have no more than the elements we have quite left behind. All that you have from your old teachers is but the scraping of the instruments for the concert; but now we have the music in earnest: no tuning more; but the full score and chorus." Such is the self-complacent spirit which the men always feel who yield to the deceit of the enemy. "Who is the liar?" says the indignant apostle. "Who is the liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?" In one or another way they undermined and

destroyed His person. How awful that such a lie should be counted a new and great truth among those who once confessed Him! For “the liar” here is not Satan, but such as once passed for a Christian. They now deny that Jesus is the Christ.

But the apostle traces the lie farther. “He is antichrist that, [not only denies Jesus to be the Christ, which he does, but] denieth the Father and the Son.” An antichrist supposes more truth abandoned than Jews knew. In a general way even the Jew, that heard of but rejected the Lord Jesus, might be “the liar.” The Law, the Psalms, the Prophets all pointed to Jesus. But the Jew would not have a Messiah who, instead of establishing His world-kingdom, suffered for sins on the cross; he preferred what the devil offered and the Messiah then refused. The pseudo-Christian might be the liar in a subtler way. But there is more in “the antichrist.” His place had once been with the Christian profession. He had heard the truth of the Father and the Son, but now rejected and denied it.

No Jew ever hears anything of the eternal relationship in the Godhead, but remains a stranger and an antagonist to the truth and privileges of Christianity. For its principle is involved in those words, and indeed more explicitly in the words expressed in Christian baptism, the only authoritative formula for which is “unto the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Not that one would leave out the name of the Lord Jesus; but the right form is so clearly stated by our Lord that one may doubt that their omission leaves valid baptism. It appears anything but the reverence due to the words of our risen Lord. The argument founded on the historic mention of baptism throughout the Acts of

the Apostles is without bearing, because none of these professes to give the actual formula employed. The only apparent exception which ostensibly supplies it has not the smallest authority. For it is certain and commonly acknowledged that Acts 8:37 is spurious. There at least Philip is supposed to ask of the Ethiopian treasurer a confession of his faith, which the latter renders. But all this must be given up as a gloss of an imaginary kind, and not really in the ancient MSS. It was probably a marginal note which crept into the text by a later scribe who fancied it to be part of the original. But in the Acts of the Apostles there is really no formula of baptism, and therefore no right ground for dispensing with our Lord's injunction. And the hypothesis of its being provided for a future Jewish remnant consists neither with "all the nations" concerned as said immediately before, nor with the spiritual condition of that remnant whose knowledge it quite transcends.

Here he that professes Christ denies the Father and the Son; doubtless he had too much contempt for the Spirit to need a word said about it. But he denies the Father and the Son: to spiritual souls no greater mark of antichrist. And the solemn announcement is that out of the Christian body came these antichrists. None should wonder therefore that where grace has given a large and special measure of truth, and zeal too in making it known, and in carrying it out practically, if it be lost by yielding to notions subversive of it, such wanderers are beyond the common. As runs the well-known adage, the corruption of the best is the worst. What can be so terrible as to apostatise from the highest and fullest truth? This characterises the antichrists.

But if we have the warning that “Everyone that denieth the Son hath not the Father either,” there follows also the cheer to “the little children” that “He that confesseth the Son hath the Father also.” This, on each side, is much to be weighed both for its own importance, and for the light cast on the wiles of the devil. The Unitarians profess to honour the Father, but they deny the Son; the consequence is that their profession of the Father, according to the scripture before us, is utterly worthless. Not the Father is the test of the truth, but the Son. Therefore, if one acknowledges the Son, he hath the Father also. They go together; but the Son is the sole criterion, and the one Mediator. If you deny the Son, the Father rejects altogether your acknowledgement of Him to the dishonour of the Son. The Father owes the vindication of His glory to the Son who emptied Himself of the glory due to Him, and humbled Himself not only to become man and a bondman, but to the death of the cross. Therefore whoever slights Him does it at his penalty for eternity. For ample testimony has been given by God to man who is without excuse.

It may here be added that the words printed in italics (in the latter half of ver. 23) are authentic and genuine scripture.12 It is the more remarkable, because, in 1 John 5:7, 8, the words from “in heaven” to “in earth” have no real warrant, as is well known to those versed in the grounds of the text. Thus the Epistle suffered doubly from the faulty text which our translators had before them; for they did not know the true readings here when they made the Authorised Version of 1611. The italicised words in this verse are real scripture; whilst the words indicated in 1 John 5 have no authority worth notice and

are beyond doubt spurious. But this last awaits fuller explanation in its own place.

Next we come to a point of some interest, on which a word must be said here. “Let that therefore abide in you, which ye heard from the beginning.” It is not “Him that is from the beginning,” but “what (or, that which) ye heard from the beginning.” He goes back so far to the opening words of the first chapter. The difference between “Him that was from the beginning” and “that which,” etc., is very small; and in point of fact they are both true, each perfect in its own place. But there is an emphasis lost in the Auth. V. which ought to be reproduced at the beginning of ver. 24 in some such way as the Revisers and others do. “As for you, let that which ye heard from the beginning abide in you.” What he presses is this: abiding in what they heard from the beginning.

There is no new thing admissible. If new, it is not Christianity: development is Satan’s work. Whatever is added to the revelation of God in Christ is a falsehood. Man hates to be subject to God’s word. Hence the effort to get rid of divine authority not only in the Old Testament but in the New. The “higher criticism” is mere rubbish, and even worse; it is poisonous and destructive to the faith. Take also the opposite school who talk of “the church teaching”; though some combine the two errors. But where in scripture have we any such thing? The church teaching! According to God’s word the church is taught through apostles and prophets, and then ordinarily through teachers, etc., the gifts given by Christ the Head for the purpose. The church is taught, but never teaches; it believes, and enjoys the truth, and is responsible to walk and worship in truth. The church

hid better see whether itself believes the truth in these days of incredulity.

But it is a dangerous phantom that the church teaches. We are bound to hear the church in discipline. But teaching is quite another thing. The church needs the truth. but the idea of the church teaching soon leads to men hearing what is not revealed in the scriptures. Thereby are they given up to the working of their own mind and imagination in human theories or in legendary additions to the Bible; in dreams about the Virgin and the saints, apparitions and the like; or in rationalistic hypotheses, on which sceptical men live or rather on which they die. But God is the sole infallible teacher; as His prophets wrote, His children, believers, shall be all taught of God whom the Word declared, without the church pretending to teach. There is no development of that which was heard from the beginning. All such "development," which is now the rage of the day in religion as well as in science, is a myth and a very bad one, particularly on the religious side. One scientific myth we may leave to die by the hand of the next which succeeds to its place; but religious lies have a Satanic power, not only of corruption but of permanence over souls.

Where then is the truth, and what? It is Christ; and it is Christ as He was manifested here. How can there be development of Him? or of God's written word which reveals Him? Nothing can be added to make the truth more perfect than it is; nor can anything be plainer than what they heard when our Lord was here, or the Holy Spirit wrote beyond what they could then bear. For all was spoken, not in words taught by human wisdom but in those taught by the Spirit, communicating spirituals

by spiritual (i.e. the truths and the words equally of the Spirit). How blessed the result practically! It is the same word. “If what ye heard from the beginning abideth in you, ye also shall abide in the Son and the Father.” The truth is inseparable from Christ, and from Christ as God had revealed Him in His word. “And this is the promise which he promised us, life eternal,” and this in as impressive a phrase here as is used about its personal source in 1 John 1:1, 2.

“These things I wrote (or, I write) to you concerning those that lead you astray.” The babes need and receive the most vigilant caution against innovators that subvert the truth by promises as false as God’s promise is true. Take the contemptible error against which so many of us had to contend, and all true-hearted saints felt so deeply, during the last decade and more. Is it not about this very thing — life eternal? The recent seducers endeavoured to persuade themselves and others that, instead of having (really having now) eternal life in the Son, they can only receive it at the resurrection. But this is to forget and abandon what we heard from the beginning; it was a lie, and no lie is of the truth. The passage before us shows that these and all novel ideas about it are untrue; the Lord’s word proves them to be false; for this is “that which we (the inspired witnesses) heard from the beginning.” What can be more sure or momentous? The seducers therefore are not dead but still go on to reproduce the falsehood, whether they pretend or not to apostolic succession (Rev. 2:2).

But the anointing which ye received of him abideth in you.” The “ye” is emphatic, as in vers. 20 and 24. He had said that the word heard was to abide in them: the sole and written standard of the truth. Now he repeats the

other blessed truth. The holy unction, the Spirit given to them, abides. His anointing abideth in you, “little children”: this He faithfully continues. Now the anointing of the Spirit is to understand and enjoy in power the truth of God in Christ.

“And ye need not that any one teach you.” They had received Christ, the truth no less than the way and the life. They knew it already from God the Father by the Holy Spirit. “But as the same anointing teacheth you about all things, and is true, and is no lie, and even as it taught you, abide ye (or, ye abide) in him.” It is not merely what they had; but there He was in them to teach all else which the word contained in detail and application, by God’s gracious care over the babes. They need not heed or fear seducers. They did not depend upon men who were only preaching themselves and not the Lord Jesus. Oh what assurance, what blessing even for the spiritually young of God’s family! It was for them to abide in Christ as He taught from the beginning.

9 The last clause is unquestionable scripture, and sustained by the best witnesses. It was probably omitted from having the same ending as the clause before; a common source of error in the MSS.

10 “Therefore” should here be dropped, as relying on inadequate testimony.

11 The best MSS. and Vv. give “abide ye,” or “ye abide,” rather than “ye shall abide.”

12 The oldest MSS. (technically designated A B C, P) and some 35 cursives with the better ancient versions, and ample citation by the early ecclesiastical writers, leave no doubt as to it.

Address 8 - 1 John 2:28-3:6

And now, dear children, abide in him that, if he be manifested, we may have boldness, and not be put to shame from before him at his coming. If ye know that he is righteous, know that every one that doeth righteousness hath been begotten of him.

“See what (or what manner of) love the Father hath given us, that we should be called children of God [and we are]. For this reason, the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we God’s children, and not yet was it manifested what we shall be. 13We know that if he should be manifested we shall be like him, because we shall see him even as he is. And everyone that hath this hope on him purifieth himself even as he is pure.

“Every one that doeth sin doeth also lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. And ye know that he was manifested that he might take away our sins; and in him is no sin. Every one that abideth in him sinneth not; every one that sinneth hath not seen him, nor known him.”

We return to the general doctrine of the Epistle. After the remarkable parenthesis of the varieties among God’s children, we come to His children all grouped together. So it was before the parenthesis introduced by ver. 12, and now in what addresses them all; ver. 28 leads us forward again into the ordinary and regular course of the Epistle. The word to all here is, “And now, dear children, abide in him.”

This is the true condition of Christian practice. It is faith in His person, which leads to abiding in Him; not merely

in truth, work or doctrine, but in the living and divine person of Christ. For it is all the more magnetic (if one may so say), because He is Man as well as God. Yet it is not in the way some are disposed to look at it, that when He is man, it is apart from His Godhead, or when He is spoken of as God, that it is apart from His manhood. There is in truth but one person, two natures united in His person: herein lies its immense peculiarity; for this makes it impossible for man to sound its depth. He Himself tells us, "No one knoweth really (ἐπιγινώσκει) the Son but the Father." Let us remark indeed that it is not so said of the Father, though the Father never became man as the Son did. But the Son reveals the Father; yet it is not said that the Father reveals the Son. Compare Matt. 11:27; Luke 10:22: John 17:3 means process of learning. In the Lord Jesus is the inscrutable; and therein is the peril for the mind of man, in all else proud and daring, and particularly so where it is irreverent presumption, in the things of God — the very realm in which the first man is nowhere; without righteousness, without understanding, not even seeking after God. Therefore man as he is only flounders about from one error into worse. "For who of men hath known the things of a man, except the spirit of the man which is in him? Thus also the things of God knoweth no one except the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:11). And the Holy Spirit is given us as believers in Christ to glorify Him. For the Lord Jesus is the truth; and the Lord in this two-fold way, God and man yet in one person. If we believe, our wisdom, our happiness, our power for service or worship, our very safety is to "abide in Him."

No divine person was revealed when God constituted Israel as a people. There were commands which came

out from the majesty of God, suitable to the terror that God inspired in an earthly people, for the most part not even converted. Yet the law was for every one of them; but in it was no such thing as the revelation of a person. Righteous commandments came from Him; and institutions were established by Him. Rites and ceremonies were imposed of a most impressive and important kind, which spell the name, offices and work of the Lord Jesus. Still there was no revelation yet of any divine person. The law stood on the authority of God who dwelt in the thick darkness. But the essential truth of Christianity lies in that the Son of God comes to man from the Father. We know the things freely given us by God in One who is Himself God and man, He might thoroughly represent man as he ought to be to God, and thoroughly make known God as He is to man; and that He might, after redemption, send the Holy Ghost. Is not this sovereign grace?

Such is the incalculable blessedness dependent on the Lord Jesus. It was not the law, though He came under it. It was not promise, though He was the accomplishment and accomplisher of promise. It was Himself, the Son, and the Son deigning to be veritable man. Only, as is said later in this Epistle, “In Him is no sin;” not merely that He did not commit sin, or as 2 Cor. 5:21 says, He knew no sin but no sin was in Him. His nature was holy and in no wise sinful. He was therefore born in a manner altogether singular. Without doubt He was born of the Virgin, but not this made Him sinless: for the Virgin was in herself sinful like any other. She was however a believer of remarkable simplicity too and purity of character; yet she needed a Saviour, and she had the same Saviour as we in her own Son. But well she knew

that her Son was unlike any other son in the way in which He became flesh. It was by the power of the Holy Ghost. He, not she, was therefore immaculate. It is well to adhere to the truth. For in daring to add to revealed truth, superstition only invents a falsehood which gives Christ's unique place to another; and God will surely judge the blasphemy.

There was a miracle about the incarnation of stupendous nature; as there was another about His death and resurrection. There is nothing more human than being born and dying; for this is the condition of man as he is now. And the Lord knew these conditions, but in all God was manifested. On the cross He was pleased to lay down His life: none could have taken it, if He were not pleased. He laid down His life; like Him nobody else could. If you or I were to lay down our life, it would be a great sin; but in the Lord Jesus it was most precious grace in vindication of God against all sin. Thus in the two things wherein He most approaches man He is infinitely above him, as became a divine person. Here man's intellect entirely fails, because his self-confidence and ignorance of God make him reluctant to own that there is any mystery above him. He assumes his own competency for any difficulty, and likes it, urged on by the great enemy to trust himself and not God, who would humble him into the dust as a sinner, and calls him to look only to the Lord Jesus; for all blessing flows to faith through Him. But this is exactly what man's pride resents to the rejection of God's grace in Christ. Faith is the gift of God.

Here then having shown who and what this wonderful person is, He that was from the beginning, He that united God and man in one person, the apostle says

“abide in Him.” And indeed we do not know any One for such as we are to abide in except in Him who is the truth, that is, Christ. The Spirit of God dwells in us to give power; but the revealed object of faith all through is the same One with whom we begin. Hence it is that the “little children,” as we saw, have anointing from the Holy One. It was not merely that they were converted. A Christian is a good deal more than a soul quickened and turned to God. An Old Testament saint was simply thus converted: he did not receive the Holy Spirit, for this peculiar Christian gift followed known redemption. Christ received the Holy Spirit without redemption, without propitiation; because He only was the Holy One of God, the righteous One. But we needed redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Hence, after we are converted, and believe the gospel, we receive the Holy Spirit. It is then properly that we become Christians (compare Acts 11:17). The gift of the Spirit is the real and distinctive mark — “anointing from the Holy One.” We must not confound with it our being born of the Spirit. Now he says, Ye [not those antichrists] have this great gift from the Holy One; and as Christ is the One from Whom the unction comes, “Abide in him.”

Was there anything abiding for the Israelite under law? They had no divine person manifested. The object of the law was to await redemption (save in figure); they had not received Christ, still less His propitiation. The mission of the Lord Jesus was to manifest God and the Father to the believer in the Son, and the gift of the Spirit was only after He died and rose and ascended to send Him from heaven. It was therefore altogether unprecedented even for converted men. In general too false religions do not even pretend to it. Whatever

playing into lusts and passions, with high-flown rhapsodies there may be in the Koran of Mahomet, there is no revelation of God Himself; there is the revelation of a bundle of lies. So it was in all the ancient “Vedas,” as Hindus call their sacred books; and still more with the Buddhists, who were atheists though trifling with polytheists. Brahmanism is polytheistic; but Buddhism is a system of atheism in its pantheistic form, and therefore avowedly has no personal God to reveal any more than its rival has the one true God.

But Christianity is essentially God revealed in His Son; and that too as Man walking in holy love on the earth, above all the evil and falsehood which surrounded Him, that it might not be merely a revelation in word but in deed and in truth. All His ways and His words revealed God the Father; all His miracles made Him known in a way far beyond others, be they who they might. There might be signs as well as powers; but they were of a different nature when wrought by Moses, Elijah, Elisha, or by any other. But here we have the unique Christ Jesus, the one Mediator between God and man; and now therefore as they had received Him, they were to “Abide in Him.” There alone is safety and blessing; there alone is the light of God and the love of God, and the known life eternal that God bestows on the believer. It is all in Him and inseparable from Him.

People have talked lately of our not having life in ourselves. Let them beware of over-shooting scripture in their thoughts. So far as they insist that life is in the Son, it is perfectly true; indeed it is its precious peculiarity that eternal life is in Him. And God be thanked that so it is; for thus it is that it remains safe, immaculate and unchanging. In Him it is and abides

perfectly secured, but also given, to every believer to be his new life. If we had it severed from Him, should we not soon lose or turn it to the same sad account as we have our other favours from God? That we have it, and that we have it in Him, are both true, the latter enhancing the former. But He is our life.

But we proceed “And now, dear children, abide in him” — the whole family of God — “that, if he be manifested, we may have boldness, and not be put to shame from before him at his coming.” This is a sentence we ought to consider, as it is often misunderstood. In general, those who make use of the verse think that it means that we, or any other Christians, should not be thus put to shame. What the apostle really says is, Abide “ye” in him, that “we” may not be ashamed, those of whom they were the work in the Lord. For it would have been no small affront to the truth, and a very great pain to the workman, that any who had appeared to receive the truth should give it up. He therefore puts it in the form of an appeal to their affection. If the apostle personally had so wrought, he would have been still the blessed and holy and faithful apostle; but in itself it is a shame to the labourer when those supposed to be brought into the truth abandon it.

Remember that this departure was then going on. It began with Judas, or, if not exactly with Judas, with many of His disciples who went away back and walked no more with Him from the time He disclosed His incarnation and His death as the indispensable food of faith, long before the apostasy of Judas. There were also many among the rulers who believed but because of the Pharisees did not confess Him; for they loved glory from men rather than glory from God. O beloved friends,

beware of this! Confess Him if you believe; confess Him if your hearts rest on Him for life eternal. And not merely confess Him, but, whatever the pressure, abide in Him. The apostle here puts it in a way exceedingly tender: “That if he be manifested,.. we may not be ashamed from before him at his coming.” Would not their defection be a shame to us rather than an honour in that day?

But there are other suggestions also of much instruction from the verse. Observe that there are two terms used which are not precisely the same. “That, if (the correct word, not “when” as in the Received Text) he shall be manifested.” This last is one of them; the other is, “at His coming.” “Coming” here, as often elsewhere, is not precisely the word that expresses “coming” and nothing else, as in John 14:3, 1 Cor. 11:26, and Rev. very often. He says, “I am coming (ἔρχομαι) again.” This means the act of coming. But there is not merely this act, but the fact or state of His presence (παρουσία). It is His presence when He comes, and therefore it may lawfully be translated “coming”; but it often means not exactly when He was coming, but the state that ensued after He came. Take for instance the resurrection of those saints who were put to death in the early and in the later times of the Apocalypse; two classes of saints that are to be raised even after the Lord appears judicially in glory (Rev. 20:4). These form part of “those that are Christ’s” raised at His coming. “At His coming” would there mean not the act of coming but the state of His being present instead of absent. There is another difference between them. The word “presence” or “coming” in that sense may be either for the heavenly people or for the earthly. For instance in the Epistle of James “the coming of the

Lord draweth nigh" is the earthly side, as when the Lord says "The Son of man at his coming." The connection of His presence with "The Son of man" decides this in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke; and so with the Epistle of James who says "The judge standeth at the door." This relation of the Lord must be connected with His day or appearing. His "manifestation" also is that further effect of His presence, and His "revelation" too.

But the word "presence" does embrace the act of His coming to receive us to Himself for the Father's house before He is manifested; in other words, when the term παρουσία is not qualified by anything that indicates manifestation, it is the Lord gathering us to Himself above by His presence, as in 1 Thess. 4, 2 Thess. 2:1. Unmodified, it is applied simply to His presence in grace; for this is indeed sovereign grace. But where our responsibility comes in, there is always not merely the coming but the appearing or manifestation. So it is in this verse, only both terms are employed; for the manifestation supposes also His presence, but His presence may not yet be His manifestation.

Observe another thing. It is not exactly "when" He shall be manifested, but is "if," though the reverse of a doubt. This may sound a little strange to those not used to read Scripture as God has revealed; but we may always expect that His way is the best. What God says is sure to be the most accurate form in which it could be notified to us. Now the word "if" does not refer to the time "when" but to its reality, whenever the time comes for Christ's manifestation; for there is no doubt about the future fact. It is not a question in suspense whether it is to be. But if He be manifested as surely as it must be, He would have the saints to abide in Him, instead of

being turned aside, that we may have boldness and not be ashamed from before Him at His coming. It is the apostle's feeling about it, expressive of his love for those that bore the name of Jesus, and therefore a pain that any should be carried away from the truth. Whatever his love even to children in the faith, he loved Christ's name even better than the saints. and so must seek that none should be a source of shame to him at that blessed time.

"If ye know that he is righteous, know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him." Like obedience, it flows from life. As He is righteous, so every one that doeth righteousness hath been begotten of Him. There is thus the communication of righteousness because of the new nature. Here we come to the question of practical righteousness about to be discussed in the verses that follow, with a slight exception to be also pointed out. It is not now love, nor yet is it obedience is such, already treated in this 1 John 2:3-6 and 7-11. In the latter part of 1 John 3 we have, after righteousness, love again, just as in 1 John 2 we had obedience first and then love in the general course of the Epistle. There is thus an important link between obedience and righteousness respectively with love; which is indeed the bond of perfectness, as we read in Col. 3:14.

It is interesting to inquire what is the difference between our obedience and our righteousness. Yet is not the answer sufficiently plain? Although righteousness is always obedient, in itself it is an expression not only of submission to divine authority but of consistency with relationship. This seems to define its own proper meaning. Even if the force of God's righteousness be sought, it is no less applicable than else. where; it

means the consistency of God with His relationship; just as it is with Christ's righteousness or with man's righteousness, greatly as they all may differ otherwise. In His case there is the perfection of Christ's consistency with His relationship; in our own case we have to lament the shortcoming of our consistency with ours as Christians.

Is not this a solemn reflection for each one of us? Yet God's grace in Christ has left no ground whatever for distrust; and the main object here was to establish the saints in Christ. Not a word is said anywhere to create questions or doubts personally. This seducers do yet more than other unbelievers, in order to propagate their own errors and lead astray the simple who enjoy the truth of God. And we have just seen that one of the great objects of the Epistle is to arm even the youngest believers against their evil and dangerous arts; just as one way wherein these seducers went to work was to make the immature doubt whether they had the full truth. The antichrists maintained that there was much altogether beyond what was known before, and that this new light of theirs was the grand prize, the lack of which raised the question whether they could be real Christians at all.

On the contrary the object of the apostle was that the young saints should be assured that they themselves were anointed by the Spirit, and that for themselves they let abide in them that which they heard from the beginning. They were to judge, young though they were, every pretension to new light by the old truth. Therefore the talk about new light ought to be a danger signal to every saint, especially to the young; for they are too apt to believe the promise of something very fine and high

which other people have not got. But suppose that it turns out to be a lie; what then? This is exactly what one ought rather to expect — a lie of the enemy, because God has nothing new to tell us about His Son; He has brought it all out already; and they had received the truth in His Son from the beginning. He is the truth, which consequently was complete in Him. Therefore all the promise of new truth was a mere deceit of Satan. Some of us have seen the spirit of error at work more than once even in our lifetime; and we had not to go far to find it.

Here then he presses the subject of practical righteousness as being deeply momentous, because it is based on relationship. Is not this a very great lesson to learn? Christians in general are but feeble therein. They do not appreciate the new relationships in which grace has set us. Who but the Lord Jesus brought in these new privileges? To whom on the higher side belong these relationships? To Himself and to His Father, the Holy Spirit being come as the divine power of our realising them by His indwelling in us who believe. We shall find that this last begins to be taken up at the end of 1 John 3, and carried forward in the chapter that follows; so that the Epistle is evidently and strictly systematic, though couched in the simplest language, but with the utmost depth of thought and feeling according to the grace and truth of God.

Some may remember the time when “system” used to be freely condemned amongst us. What drew it out was the contrast of stiff denominational innovation with the holy liberty of the Spirit as seen in the church of the scriptures. There may have been some wildness in the denouncing of “system” throughout Christendom;

because it gave the idea that the only right thing was to have no system. Assuredly those who had no system were to be pitied, if it really came to that. The true question was and is, What is God's system? Man's must be wrong. Far from us, that we should not bow to God's system. It does not matter wherein it may be; for He has always a system of His own, and man always misses it. Only His word can exhibit and only His Spirit can enable us to carry it out. Assuredly we must feel and acknowledge that nothing but His grace by the mighty working of His Spirit through scripture enabled us to find His way out of the labyrinth of error, ancient and modern, outside man's traditions and his inventions. To those who are therein entangled God's way looks hard, uncertain, narrow, Pharisaical, and one knows not what else. But what largeness of heart it gives, what liberty and boldness with humility before Him, when we truly judge man's systems in the light of God's system! for this is what we have revealed in the word. So a blessed system runs through every book and chapter in the Bible, as it remarkably characterises this Epistle of John, and all the more as not lying on the surface, yet deeply interwoven. It is the same everywhere for its own purpose; but the purpose here is very penetrating and of peculiar interest in, and leading us into, the heights and depths of truth in Christ's life, such as is rarely if ever found elsewhere even in the New Testament.

"If ye know that he is righteous, know that every one that doeth righteousness hath been begotten of him." The righteous practice proves the source of the new life that so walks. We may ask, who is "He"? Probably there is not a Christian here but would say "Christ," and surely he is quite right. But there have been not a few

who answer that here it is “God” who is called “righteous,” because to be born of Him in the same connection points naturally to God. Nor can one deny that the reason ordinarily would have great weight, as none denies that God is righteous. But it has been overlooked that a very striking peculiarity of this Epistle is that one cannot absolutely say whether it is God or Christ; and the ground of this is very precious, because Christ is God. There is no exclusion of the Father, but the divine nature is shared by the Son equally with the Father, which no Christian denies. Therefore the apostle, who above all others dwells and delights in the nature of God, keeps, if one may say it reverently, moving in that adorable circle from Christ to God, and from God to Christ, then to God, in his use of “He” or “Him” throughout the Epistle, We have found it already in the early part of 1 John 2. Here we see it again toward the close, as it occurs again in the beginning of 1 John 3, and so on to the last; where he does not hesitate to say of Christ, “This is the true God, and life eternal.” It may look confused to an erudite though unawakened eye; it is the beauty of truth to those who know that it is and could only be because Christ is the Son, equally God with the Father. Hence in John 5:23 the Lord Himself points to the Father’s doing, “that all may honour the Son, even as they honour the Father.” It is just because Deity characterised both, that it is impossible to lay it down in an absolute manner whether it be either the one or the other. As both are persons in the Godhead and active in love, the apostle purposely thus passes imperceptibly as it were from one to the other. “If ye know that He is righteous, know that every one that doeth righteousness is begotten of Him.” Granted that we simply incline in the beginning of the sentence to say

“He” is Christ, with equal simplicity we would say at the end that by “Him” is meant God.

Such an unusual style of writing must have a divine motive in the inspired writer, as it is not a casual circumstance, but a habit in the Epistle so pursued as to prove that it is done purposely. No hesitation is shown We know it is what any careful writer on usual topics would sedulously avoid. The man of letters prides himself as the rule on his style being so pellucid that even a dullard cannot well confound one “him” with another in the same sentence. And the apostle was far from the affectation of such as write darkly in order to appear very profound. But his ground, one cannot doubt, was the Deity which was equally shared by the Father and the Son. On this truth, where is sage, scribe, or disputer of this age? John would not put the Only-begotten Son on a level with a mere man, just because He is God. Though He became man in infinite grace, he would not draw the line definitely; but by his apparent confusion and real intermixture he leads us to see how he loved to present God and Christ so joined that man cannot sever them in his language.

“If ye know that he is righteous, know that every one that doeth righteousness hath been begotten of him.” How can he thus speak? Because the saint has been begotten of God; he has the life of Christ. This is the constant underlying truth of the whole Epistle. From Christ giving us His own life results “Christ our life.” One of the marked characteristics of life in Christ, as manifested in all His walk, is absolutely perfect righteousness; and His is the life that became our life, the only life that we dare boast of. It is divine life, because it is from God in His infinite grace who has

given us the very best life, the highest, dearest, most perfect life that ever was. It was from all eternity in the Son; and He imparts that life to us now, that as He is righteous, so everyone that does righteousness shows its source to be in Himself.

It is sad to know that there are those who doubt this; but it is really to doubt Christianity. For this in practice is what it means. And it is no use to make excuses, because the error is too plain as well as fundamental to be explained away as defect of style, or a different side of the truth which others mistook. It is an error so deep and deadly as to demand repudiation, and to call for earnest seeking to deliver every one drawn into so destructive a snare. Here, in righteous walk, life is shown to be derived from community of moral nature with Christ; that if He is righteous, those that walk righteously are said to be begotten of God. For all can see that it is no question of being justified in the verse; it is practical righteousness here. That, in virtue of God making Christ sin for us sacrificially, we become by faith the righteousness of God in Christ is absolutely true; but it is our standing by grace. In our text it is conduct when thus justified. The apostle is pressing, as a matter of all importance, that practical righteousness is consistency with Christ and inseparable from being born of God.

Such is the character and nature of the new relationship that is brought before us. We are born of God, we are His children; and can you conceive such a thing as the smallest unrighteousness either in God or Christ? As whosoever doeth righteousness is born of God, so we may say that whosoever is born of God doeth righteousness. It is a question of doing, not of mere saying or profession. It is not at all a position formed by

a sign or rite, but what grace secures by a new nature in our conduct which points to that source and no other. What could more effectually act on the conscience, where there was a new life from God? And it was written for faith, not doubt, though assuredly intended to act on the conscience strongly. For righteousness means consistency with a relationship which admits of no trifling with sin.

But the very next verse shows that we need grace of the fullest kind. The more the conscience is meant to act freely and truly, the more we need the rest given by perfect grace. Here it is brought in with apparent abruptness, but in order to set out our new relationship in the Father's love. It is not merely to lay the requisite basis of our relationship for conduct; this relationship is also for enjoying His love beyond all thought of man, even to its most glorious results. Hence, though it may seem an abrupt transition as we sometimes find in the writings of our apostle, it is divinely wise and just what we ourselves need every day. "See what manner of love the Father hath given to us." It is not only the measure but the manner of it which are so wonderful. For it shows itself in this, that the Father has given to us this illimitable love "that we should be called children of God." "Children" is the correct term, not "sons." John regularly uses the word "son" only about Christ. Not only is it because he is jealous for the glory of the Son, but his God-given care for the truth revealed led him to say that we are God's children rather than to speak of our sonship. After all to be a child of the family is more intimate than the position of an adopted son. We are sons by adoption, but we are children by the nearest family tie to the Father, though both are through the

Son. This wondrous manner of love then has been given to us that we should be called children of God.

“Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not” (verse 1). What an honour for us to share with Christ the world’s ignorance! Our place and nature and nearness to God are unintelligible to the world. Perhaps it is well to say that some of the oldest manuscripts that are known agree in the addition “and we are” after “we should be called God’s children.” This small clause is not given in the Authorised version, nor am I prepared to speak with decision about it. Of many things one may judge with certainty; but I do not presume to speak so in this case. Only we may note this, that these very old manuscripts occasionally join in what is certainly wrong. There is however a peculiarity in this clause unlike their erratic readings. What they convey here is “that we should be called children of God; and we are (so).” Now this last is in itself certainly true, and in fact said with emphasis at the beginning of verse 2. Sometimes their readings, where they differ from others, are certainly false; but this at least is true. The only question is whether it is drawn from the next verse and put in here as a gloss of man.

But there seems enough importance in it to deserve a notice. It is remarkable enough that the Latin Vulgate, which, you may know, is accepted by the Romanists as authentic Scripture though only a translation, is here in error. It gives the clause like the old Greek Uncials, but goes wrong where they speak consistently with truth. But in this case it gives a natural thought “That we should be called the sons of God, and should be” (or, may we be). The Latin is not “we are,” but that we “may, or should, be.” Now this is not true; because it denies

that we are now children of God, and seeks it as a future thing (perhaps it is to be supposed dependent on our good behaviour), inconsistent with what follows, and intrinsically indefensible and untrue.

So, without recounting many such instances, in Luke 2:14 very ancient copies read “in men of good will,” a class hard to find in this world; and a strange gospel that peace on earth is for men of goodwill, glad tidings for such as He has nothing to find fault with. Where are these to be found? Surely this is a prodigious reading, hanging on one added letter, and accepted, not by Rome only, but by Alford, Lachmann, Tischendorf, Tregelles, Westcott and Hort, and others.

But, however this may be, the clause here is indisputably true in itself. Whether it is an actually inspired part of the text is an open question. But its statement stands at the beginning of the next verse.

“Beloved, now are we children of God,” an assurance important for souls to know, and going beyond the questionable clause; for “now” is highly significant. It is not merely “we are,” but “now are we,” which is well worthy of our heed, as that immediately before it, “For this cause the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.” What a striking identification with the Lord this imports! The world did not understand Christ, nor does it the Christian. Man never can truly comprehend Him, however he may pretend to it. None but the Father knows Him perfectly. But the world knew enough from His lips and from His life to hate Him. He was, for this reason and others, unknown to the world as an object of reverence, honour, and love. He was to it a mere nobody; and such is the way in which it regards the

faithful Christian. Grace gives us His relation to the Father; and consequently we share His nothingness here below. As He was an unknown power in the world, so are we: ought we not to esteem it a high honour?

The world, all know, struggles exceedingly for its power and fame, Its ease and pleasure. What is there that most people value more than much money or somewhat of the world's honour? Is it harsh to say that so it is with too many Christians? Christ never did; not only did He never seek but He always refused it. He was always the true Servant here below, and could say, "As the living Father sent me, and I live," not "by" but "on account of the Father, he also that eateth me [the food of faith] shall live on account of me" (John 6:57). Hence the love of the Father is directly opposed to the love of the world. Where the love of the Father is not, there is the love of the world; and where the love of the Father abides, the love of the world is excluded. The world ignored Him; and so it does the faithful, as God's children should surely be. Could the world's feeling be more simply or strongly expressed than by completely ignoring? The world believes itself perfectly able to do without Him and His: they are really and only a trouble to the world.

"Beloved," for the word is again used significantly, as we saw it before. He is treating of our present high relationship, and our future glorious hope, which nothing short of the Father's love could bestow. "Beloved, now are we children of God, and it was not yet manifested what we shall be. But we know that, if he were manifested, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (ver. 2). There we have "if" again; it is not "when" but a different word; which it would be hard to show ever means "when" under any circumstances.

But the word “if,” though it may sound a little strange from lack of use, will be found exact. For instance here “When He shall appear” might give a wrong idea as to the time of our being like Him. Many, one may venture to say, may have been embarrassed by it. For we know from 1 Cor. 15:51, 52; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17; 2 Thess. 2:1, that our change will be at the moment of His coming or His presence for us. Then is our body conformed to His, and we become like Him. And if we become like Him at His presence, we shall certainly, or à fortiori, be so when He appears or is manifested. This is what is here said and meant. The world will see us manifested with Him and like Him. The manifestation in the same glory will be for all the world to see (John 17:22, 23; Col. 3:4), and when this manifestation takes place, we shall be with Him and like Him. But the change was not at that time but before it. There lies the importance of the change from “when” to “if.” And this is not said in the least in order to assume anything which ought to be proved by Scripture, but simply because it is the meaning of the particle: If He be, as He surely will be, manifested, we shall be like Him. From elsewhere as cited we learn that we are to be like Him, before He brings us to heaven, and even to the Father’s house. For He comes out of heaven with these saints following Him; and when thus manifested, we shall be like Him, yet not for the first time but when we saw Him coming for us. Thus the word “when” in this case might seriously mislead. We shall be like Him for entering heaven as well as for coming out.

What privileges these are, beloved brethren! What can we say of our fidelity and devotedness now? Yet our heart’s decision is, hearing His voice, to follow Him;

meanwhile transformed by the Holy Spirit, as we behold Christ by faith and are occupied with Him. But we are never said to be like Him now. We may imitate Him who suffered for us, leaving an example that we should follow in His steps; and the apostle Paul, as far is he imitated Christ, we are called to imitate; but we are never said to be like Christ yet. We shall be like Him when we are changed and caught up, not before. It is a great presumption to talk of anyone being like Christ now; by-and-by what is perfect will then have come for us, and we shall be in His glorified estate, and unlike Him in no way. It is therefore a very full and rich expression of the great change that awaits Christians when the Lord comes for us; and if He be manifested, as He surely will be, so will it be with us, for we are to be manifested in the same glory. All the world will see it then; but we are changed when we see Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Is it not clear that our seeing Him was not in the day of His manifestation to the world, but when, as the first stage of His presence, He came to receive us to Himself on high? Then we see Him as He is; then too we shall be like Him. But when He is manifested, and we with Him, in glory, it will be for every eye.

Yet there is a present spiritual effect of this hope that is here manifested, the importance of which for the Christian cannot be too deeply sought or urged. “And everyone that hath this hope on Him purifieth himself even as He is pure” (ver. 3). It does not mean hope in the man, but on (ἐπὶ) Christ, this hope founded upon Christ. For the word, properly speaking, is “upon” Him, not precisely in Him. It is a hope directed to Him and settled on Him. Thereby the Christian “purifieth himself.” This

very result shows that we are not like Him yet. Christ never had to purify Himself. He sanctified or set Himself apart in heaven, in order to be the great model for us on earth, that we too might be set apart to the Father by or in truth (John 17:19). But we have also to purify ourselves here below, because, besides having the life of Christ, we have what is natural to contend with, to mortify and keep down, that it shall not break out into its evil ways. We have therefore to purify ourselves from defilement through unwatchfulness and failure in prayer, and "even as He is pure," for Christ is the standard. He always was absolutely pure. This again is perfectly applicable to God, for God is light, purity itself, as no believer call doubt. But Christ here meant is pure too; and this is the more wonderful, however certain, because He was truly man. In spite of being born of woman, He is pure in the highest degree. A great deal is lost to all who do not apply it to Christ, and take away a little from the honour due to Him by denying Him in this place as learned and pious men have done.

This leads into the very opposite of purity, the grave and important discussion of what sin really is (ver. 4). One hardly knows a verse of the New Testament more perverted if one may so call it, or more productive of widespread misapprehension. Take the generally excellent Authorised Version for a plain and painful departure from the evident mind of God in its only legitimate meaning. The reason that led to the error, and gave to it general acceptance, was the prevalent Judaising of Christendom. Do not all its differing sections regard the law of Moses is the rule of Christian life? This Christ is really, and His word for every detail. Does not John 1:17 contrast with law "the grace and

truth which came through Jesus Christ "? The law, on the contrary, is the ministry of death and condemnation (2 Cor. 3:7-9). It is the rule of death to a sinner, and so it proved to the Israelite; not the ceremonial only but expressly the ten words graven in stone, as the apostle Paul says.

But the fact is, as a question of rendering, there is nothing about transgressing the law in the verse; whereas there exists not perhaps a single catechism, no matter what its source, which, misdirected by this wrong rendering, does not define sin to be the "transgression of the law." But it is all entirely false definition, and not at all what the apostle says. Lawlessness is a great deal deeper and subtler and wider than violating the law; not wicked work merely but the activity of an ill-willed nature, which therefore fully applies to such as never even heard of the law. They yield to their evil will without restraint. How can you speak of people transgressing the law who never so much as heard of its existence? Their evil can hardly be called "transgression"; for this surely means violation of a known law. The fact is, however we may look at it, that "transgression of the law" is expressed by its own proper phrase, and quite distinct from "lawlessness," the only right rendering here, whilst the former misleads.

It is to be presumed that almost every intelligent Christian has heard what the real sense is, for many servants of God have insisted upon it for more than seventy years. Sin goes beyond the fleshly and worldly lusts warned against in 1 John 2:16. The sentence here is reciprocal: "sin is lawlessness," and "lawlessness is sin." It is self-will, whether ignorant, or regardless, of

God’s will. The meaning of verse 4 is “Everyone that doeth sin doeth also lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.” This is its unadulterated and simple force. Some for “doeth” prefer the word “practiseth”; but, without insisting on that change of rendering here, it may be enough to say “do,” if understood in much the same sense of practice, which one can hardly doubt to be its real meaning. It is not committing a sin but “doing” sin. It is what a sinner always does. If a man is a sinner, what can he do but sin? How avoid it so long as he remains simply a sinner? because sin is the state of his nature. Now that he is fallen and no more, he only sins. He does not do righteousness; he is as far as he can be from holiness; he does nothing but sin. “Everyone that doeth sin” says he, (whether he be a Jew or a Gentile, it makes no difference here) “doeth lawlessness.” The Jew added to his guilt because he violated the law also; but the Gentile did lawlessness and thus was a sinner, though he knew nothing of the law and could not fairly be called a transgressor of the law. Scripture does not call them so, but “sinners of the Gentiles.” Where are they ever called transgressors of the law, as the Jews were? But they were all guilty; they all did their own will, and this is the essence of lawlessness. It is leaving God altogether out of the case, and a man just doing what he pleases and because he likes it. Who is he to speak against God? But God is not mocked, and He will bring him into judgment for it. This he may close his ears to now; but it will be unutterably awful for him another day.

Thus “lawlessness,” as it is the true mind of God, gives a far reaching sense to the word that is commonly rendered here “transgression of the law.” It is quite a

different expression and differently applied. Transgression of the law does occur in Scripture, as, for instance, in Rom. 2:23 (translated “breaking the law” in the English Bible), and “transgression” in the same sense without “the law” is expressed in Rom. 4:15, Gal. 3:19, Heb. 2:2, Heb. 9:15. But the word in our verse is “lawlessness” simply with a sense distinct from “transgression of the law.”

The end of the verse makes this sense plain, as it takes in every sinful person and all his life. It is a course of lawlessness. But such evil was the exact opposite of Christ, who, in verse 5, is therefore brought in without naming Him. “And ye know that He” (emphatically) “was manifested that He might take away our sins;” not “bore,” as in 1 Peter 2:24, but “take away,” and both by one act totally. There can be no doubt who He was that thus suffered. It was not God the Father; but exclusively the Son, the Lord Jesus. He only, He for ever, bore and took away our sins on the cross. A prolonged action over His life is precluded: it was a transient act but of everlasting efficacy. “And in Him is no sin.” This applied to His person all His life from His birth till He died and rose and went into heavenly glory.

There could be no question of it in His simply divine estate as the Son throughout all eternity. Doubts alas! have been raised because of His being born of Mary, and in spite of the miracle of the incarnation (Luke 1:35). But “in Him is no sin” — never was and never can be. In Christ here below we have the exact opposite of what the sinner is. The sinner has nothing but sin. Even in his affections God is not in his thoughts but himself. This is not the love that was in God and in Christ, from whom Christians derive it. That kind of amiable affection you

share with even a dog or a cat; for some are truly amiable dogs and cats, they are not all spitfires. The immortal soul gives affection a higher nature in man; but man is sinful, which brutes are not! Yes, man has an immortal soul, no matter what he or she may be; and for that reason will surely come into judgment; which no dog, or cat, or other animal will — man only of earth. One does not speak of angels, though the fallen ones will be judged too; but of beings on the earth man is the only one so constituted, and directly responsible to God.

Here then we have this true and unique picture of Christ. He not only had no sin in Himself, but came at all costs to take away our sins. What then do we not owe Him? and what practice consists with the relationships of grace which are ours now? “Every one that abides in him sinneth not;” but if a man does not there abide but turns aside to devious paths, can we wonder that he sins? He is not walking as a Christian, if he does not abide in Christ. Nobody sins who thus enjoys conscious dependence and confidence and delight in the Son of God. What else can keep us so surely from sinning? “Every one that sinneth hath not seen Him nor yet known Him.” Here he is speaking of the nature and the character: he looks at the man solely according to his new nature. The other, the old, nature is his shame and sorrow; he utterly condemns any allowance of it in himself or in fellow Christians. But the new nature is characterised by Christ, and does not, cannot sin.

“Every one that sinneth hath not seen Him, nor yet known Him.” Sinning is incompatible with truly loving Christ. Sin is supposed to be a state that mere man lives in: what he does is to sin habitually. But the sinner has neither seen Christ nor known Him. Had he really

received Him as the Son of God, he would have believed in Him. If he had thus known Him, he would have received life in Him, and hence would have hated sin; he, possessed of that new and holy nature, would have looked to and depended on Christ to keep him from evil, righteous even as He is. Apart from Him, one can do nothing, can bear no fruit Godward. A converted soul may be in bondage, weak and wretched, as in Rom. 7:7-24; but when by grace he gives self up as utterly and hopelessly bad for Christ in His delivering power, he is freed from the law of sin and death into Christian liberty. The apostle Paul alone enters into the emancipating process. Our Epistle passes it by, and views all the family of God as having settled peace and on proper Christian ground, even the babes. The new life in Christ is the main theme.

Hence the precious aspect in the apostle John's testimony is what he gives from our Lord in John 14:20: — "At that day [now come since Pentecost] ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." Now, when this is really our known portion, it is the new "I," no longer in the flesh and dreading judgment because of my failure, but Christ risen is my life in the Spirit. But we must beware of thinking that this change is only an apprehension of the mind; it is a real possession of the mind of the Spirit. Still less is it the law demanding what is right from me; but the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus which freed me from the law of sin and of death.

It is evident that our apostle in these verses goes beyond the lusts and the vainglory of men without Christ, as traced in the chapter before. Christ is set before all the saints in His absolute sinlessness, and in His work of taking away our sins. So also the root of sin is

thoroughly laid bare, the personal chief of sin being therefore brought forward with all directness, whose pride and rebellious independence of God is reproduced in those who are said to be “of the devil” (ver. 8). He that was manifested to take away the sins of those that are His was no less manifested to destroy the works of the devil, an undoing which goes far beyond man’s sins and includes all malicious energy in dishonouring God and injuring man. We cannot overlook that here the Son of God is opposed personally to the evil one; as in 1 John 2 the love of the world stands in manifest antagonism to the love of the Father.

In ver. 9 the secret cause of the radical difference comes to view. “Every one that is (or, hath been) begotten of God doeth not sin, because his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is (or, hath been) begotten of God.” It is in no way a question of the first man, of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man. Flesh and blood have nothing in them to be a source of the new life. Moral suasion is as powerless as a religious ordinance; for “that which is born of the flesh is flesh.” One must be born of God; but this is through faith in His Son objectively, and by the operation of His Spirit through His word livingly. Thus is the believer born of the Spirit; and here it is equally true that what is born of the Spirit is spirit (John 3:6). There is no interchange, no ameliorating, no modifying: each nature remains according to its source.

Thus it is no question only of being justified by faith, nor yet only of purifying the heart thereby. The atoning work of the Lord for the sinner, and the work of the Holy Spirit in him, are most true and real; but there is also a new life, not of the first man but of the Second, then for

the first time communicated to his soul, dead spiritually as he had been till then, as the Lord clearly taught in John 5:24, 25. It is this which explains the apostle's language here, how the begotten of God does not sin. He is regarded according to a divine nature of which grace had made him a partaker (2 Peter 1:4); and he is assumed to abhor his old self of sin, and to live of the new life which he has in the Son, on his guard against the wiles, temptations, and instigations of the devil in every form to act on the old man.

As having Christ's life, his responsibility is and must be to discern, hate, and disallow the working of the old. Here however it is not responsibility urged, but a nature true to itself, as natures are made to be. And as the new nature is his now from God, so he lives accordingly. It is doubtless wholly different from the old fallen creation; but his faith recognises that it is no less real and incomparably more momentous. On this ground, and it is most true, it is said not only that "he doeth not sin," but that "he cannot sin, because he hath been begotten of God." The reason is given why he does not sin, "because his seed remaineth in him," the life of Christ communicated by God's gracious power, which is not subject like the old creation to decay and death; it is his seed and remaineth in him. The new nature is incapable of sin, and he who has it in Christ is characterised by it only, sin in the flesh being here wholly ignored, as already condemned of God on his behalf in Christ made a sacrifice for it on the cross. But of this way of divine deliverance, nothing is here said any more than of our sinful nature. We only hear of the believer characterised by the new man. But the new man lives in and by dependence on Him who is its source. When the believer

ceases to walk by faith, leaning on the Lord, the old nature slips or breaks out into sin.

Yet whilst we have life only in Christ, it is of all moment and interest to see the care which the Holy Spirit takes to keep the Son before us objectively, so as to guard us from mysticism and self-admiration, so prevalent a snare for pious souls. He fixes our eyes on the supreme hope of being like Christ when we shall see Him as He is; which certainly was not when Jerusalem fell, the fantastic and unholy dream of the J. S. Russell school, however important an event providentially. See too the emphatic statement “In Him is no sin”; so precious to the believer’s heart as he looks on the Man, Christ Jesus, the bright contrast with every other. How abhorrent to his spirit the effort of Satan to found a pretended sympathy with us on the lying assumption that Christ was peccable because He, the true God, deigned to unite human nature with His Deity! Sin in His nature was a most wicked insinuation; but was it any better to teach that He was by birth of woman in a necessary relation of distance to God? Both the mother error and the daughter are incompatible, not only with true atonement but with His divine person.

13 “But” here lacks authority.

Address 9 - 1 John 3:7-10

“Dear children, let no one lead you astray: he that doeth righteousness is righteous even as he is righteous. He that doeth sin is of the devil, for from [the] beginning the devil sinneth. To this end was manifested the Son of God that he might undo the works of the devil. Every one that hath been born of God doeth not sin, because his seed abideth in him: and he cannot sin, because he hath been begotten of God. Herein are manifest the children of God and the children of the devil.”

The opportunity is here taken to review briefly what was last considered with the verses before us, in order to set forth its great principles more fully and less cumbered with detail. On every side they are of immense importance, though the manner in which the apostle brings in the second of the two seems peculiar; but it is in the wisdom of God. Only our ignorance makes it appear strange. What God does or says, we may be perfectly assured, must be the best way for either.

We have seen that, in the last verse of the chapter before, is first introduced the subject of our righteousness. For here begins our righteousness in principle and practice: because we have had God righteous in 1 John 1:9; and a wonderful truth it is that God is there declared faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from every unrighteousness. Man’s notion of His righteousness would be His strictness in condemning evil. But Christ has changed everything for the believer by His atoning death, and made it not merely a question of grace in God but of righteousness to forgive him. The ground of this is

Himself — Jesus Christ the righteous, and His death for our sins; the effect of which is that God is able to act not merely graciously in our favour when we do not deserve it, but righteously to forgive that which is so offensive to Him as sins. It is true that when born of God we too abjure sins; we have learnt to condemn sin itself, and ourselves for having been guilty of sins. Is it not verified in the believer from his first turning to God? He abhors himself and his sins as before Him. He knows very little, but he knows it personally and truly by God's teaching. When the work of the Lord Jesus is received in the Spirit's power as well as His person, then even the young believer sees things clearly as they are in the sight of God. He begins to know not only things in God's sight, but God Himself in His feeling of perfect love towards those that are His.

Here however our righteousness is asserted as inseparable from our new birth. This often alarms any one immature in faith; because he at once naturally turns to look within. He does not find ground for satisfaction there, and, what is more, he never can. What we have to do is in the first place to rest on Christ made to us righteousness. This therefore is the direction of faith. There is no object of faith in looking at ourselves; it brings experience of our utter weakness. Only when Christ fills the spiritual eye is His strength made perfect in our weakness. Then indeed follows practical righteousness.

Now this is the part in which he returns to the whole family of God, laying down the principle that, "If ye know that He is righteous, know (or, ye know) that every one that doeth righteousness is begotten of Him." It has been already remarked that righteousness, in respect

whether of God supremely or of ourselves as begotten of God in our little measure, is in every case consistency with the relationship. For this very reason, although in the last verse he had introduced righteousness, he immediately seems to turn away from it in the opening verses of 1 John 3, where he suddenly bursts out into those wonderful words, “See what manner of love the Father hath given to us,” etc. Thus he takes in the Father’s present love, and the future glory in the same surpassing favour to the children of God in being like Christ, “because we shall see Him as He is. And every one that hath this hope in Him” (Christ), founded on Him, “purifieth himself, even as He (Christ) is pure.” It is clearly not the Christian pure, else he should not require to purify himself; but Christ being the standard, and He being absolutely pure, the incongruity of impurity in a follower of Christ, that is in one having Christ as his life and his righteousness, makes him feel that he cannot but purify himself from all unworthy of Him. Needless to say, that when we look into daily conversation, there is failure too often. But John is not occupied with the shortcoming as a general rule, but with the principle, and therefore he puts it in all its simplicity as he was entitled to do.

For this is the true way to look at a principle, apart from possible or actual complications. If we get into paring away on the right and the left and all round, we can never face a principle really. It is apt to be lost in our looking at the circumstances. But a principle is above all circumstances if it is a principle of grace, and a principle of grace made ours in Christ whilst here below. Does not this help us to see why he turns to the unfolding of the richest grace and glory after beginning on practical

righteousness. “See what manner of love!” Why does he so speak here? Because all that grace is needed for practical righteousness. For how could this righteousness hold on its even way without that mighty spring? How could the Christian find adequate cheer, in the midst of the world without and the flesh within, to persevere in God’s will with joy and confidence, unless he had the assurance of His perfect love? His wondrous love is brought in exactly at the right time and place, though it may seem a singular departure from the righteousness of which he had been speaking before. It is to supply in the Father’s love what best strengthens practical righteousness.

We never perform our duties rightly to God or any other unless we are by grace above our duties. If you sink under your duties, you will always fail. There will necessarily in that case be something that you cannot reach. And many saints are content to jog on in that shambling way. They are quite satisfied if they can fairly hope they shall not be lost. “By God’s mercy I humbly trust that He will not cast me into hell; I hope for Christ’s sake to get to heaven.” With this he goes on quietly, as if the gospel gave no more. But is this consistent with the child’s relationship to his Father? How utterly short of what is here revealed to faith and meant to fill the Christian with unwavering delight and fulness of joy even now? A Christian is entitled to nothing less. Why? Christ! Everything turns upon Him for the believer. Consequently it is an appeal to his faith, and so it ought to be. Through no other channel have we ever derived any blessing Godward since sin came into the world. Who ever obtained testimony except from faith in what God in Christ is; and what God is in Him to

the believer is a delivering God. Only He delivers, but never will He consent to deliver in any other way than through the Lord Jesus; and the Holy Spirit, who glorifies Christ, works in the Christian to make him realise it. For the truth, however blessed in itself, is outside of him without the indwelling power of the Spirit of God. But the Holy Spirit, if one rests on Christ and His redemption, makes it to be real internally, turning even the severest affliction to our exceeding joy. We are not to suppose that it was a privilege peculiar to the early Christians that they could have fellowship with the apostle Paul when he bids them “Rejoice in the Lord always: again I will say, Rejoice.” Little of this is now tasted by the children of God; but we do well to challenge our own souls whether we do. Let us seek that what we read in the word may be verified in us and our brethren, according to the grace of Christ both theirs and ours.

Hence then we find the new relationship glowingly urged, and to what does it amount? Is it merely that we are become strangers and pilgrims like Abraham? No; we are, or ought to be such, but is there not far beyond that measure? Abraham was separated from the nations because they were idolatrous. He and his family were called to walk apart to God. They required for this no small bulwark, to have Himself for their shield in the midst of enemies that hated them because of their separation to His name. If they had only intermarried with them like decent fellow-citizens, and entered into community of pursuits, taking their part in their friendships and their wars, it would have been all well! The same principle applies now. But Christians have lost immensely by association with the world, excited no less

than worldly men by the Boers and the Germans, by the Japanese and about the Russians, and such like. What have we to do with such associations? If we were only Englishmen, we might and ought to have a great deal to do with it all. If only men in the flesh, it is a natural duty clearly, as far as one can talk about the duty of a sinful, guilty, and lost man. Now as Christians we are not our own but bought with a price; we are saved and brought to God for the purpose of living no longer to ourselves, but to Him who for us died and was raised. We are called to do God's will during the little while we are here on earth in the midst of an evil world. Consequently we have a relationship far superior.

Abraham needed protection, and Abraham had it in God with the blessed name of the "Almighty." What a suitable name of relationship for him and his! His enemies were all near and around him, it would easily leak out that his seed were to dispossess the Amorite and the rest. No doubt many an Israelite might report that God gave Canaan to the fathers and their line for ever. At the least the very fact of Abraham's coming and settling in that land must have been an omen to the Canaanites and the rest that were there. Was it not notice to quit, and a warning of judgment? Do you suppose they would take this quietly? The chosen race were long but few, but the truth would make itself felt as they increased and got stronger; more particularly after the mighty work of their deliverance out of Egypt, where their numbers multiplied in spite of all the efforts of the wicked king to destroy the males.

Next the sons of Israel were brought to Sinai; and indeed even before they reached it, in the process of their being redeemed out of Egypt — externally of

course — God intimated that He was going to give Himself a new name. What He gave to Israel was the name of Jehovah. “Father” would not have been true, because the great nation for the most part consisted of unconverted men. It was not at all a question of renewal by grace. They were as a people taken up by God to govern; and government does not necessarily require that people should have divine life in them. Government supposes evil to be repressed; and God took the name of a divine governor, the God of their fathers but also now “Jehovah.” At Sinai as His nation they undertook to obey His law as the condition of their standing and of His blessing. But He well knew that they would not be subject, but depart more and more into rebellion. Alas! the fleshly mind has but the principle of self-will and is never subject to God. On the contrary it is enmity against Him and dislikes His will. Therefore it was as certain as possible — and Moses was quite conscious of it — that all would go to ruin; that they would abandon Jehovah and follow greedily strange gods; so that they must be chased out of the goodly land. How solemn to all the nations the lesson of a people which once had God doing the mightiest and kindest things for them, but now become not rebels only but apostates and consequently punished in the most severe and public manner before all the world under their worst enemies the instrument of their degradation!

But all this was brought out in Jehovah’s dealings with the Jews’ relationship till the Son of God appeared; and more soon followed, and still more is yet to be fulfilled. But He appeared as Man, the only way in which He could appear in grace and to purpose; the way in which, according to scripture, it was absolutely necessary He

should appear. For in that nature, which constantly and in every form in others had wrought evil, He came not merely to bring God into the world but to put sin out of it. Only in fact this was not all to be done at once. Meanwhile still worse was to be the display of the unbelieving wickedness of the Jews in refusing Jesus as Jehovah's Messiah; whereas He had given them overwhelming proofs of the truth. Nevertheless their inveterate and rebellious self-will would not have it. They were therefore the chief instruments in bringing Him to the cross. The idolatrous Romans even did not wish it. Pilate's name had been known for a name of hardness and severity even among Roman governors; but Pilate quite shines in comparison with the High Priest of the Jews, their elders and scribes and all the rest of them. Masses and classes made no difference; they were all full of enmity and spite against their own Messiah, blinded by fleshly will. Such is what people call "free will."

Yes, it is Satan's and the sinner's free will. As a man, what possible title can he have to a free will? Is he not bound, as an intelligent creature, to be a servant of God? Consequently the claim to exercise free will is really preposterous. As fallen, is he not a slave of Satan? And is not this the condition of what you and I and all other men were born and lived in till God gave us to take the place of the sentence of death for our souls, and to receive by faith a new life in Him that came down from heaven? And He, the Son of God and Son of man, made known to His disciples while He was ministering on earth, that there was a new name which God reveals as His to believers, the same name as He knew and

loved Himself not only then but from all eternity — the Father; He in divine right, and we by sovereign grace.

Such is the fruit of the love that has reached to our once dark hearts which is here referred to: not merely that we should be forgiven and justified, but that we should be called children of God. The second verse, if not the first, distinctly says that we are so now. It is not only a name that will be made good in heaven or in the resurrection state. “Now are we” children of God. It has been already pointed out that “sons” is not the term that the apostle here applies to us, but “children.” Our translators were admirable scholars; but we require the truth in our soul to translate scripture properly, and constant dependence on the same Spirit who wrote it. If they had had to do with any other book, they would have translated it correctly; but their theological prejudices hampered them here and there as to the Bible. Their mistakes seem to have chiefly arisen out of habit. Their failure lay not in lack of learning but in traditional bias. They had found others of name before them translating in a certain way, and they followed in the same rut. “Children of God” — what can be a nearer relationship to Him? Man could not make a stranger outside himself to be his child God can, and this is what He does. Such is now the relationship of grace. It is not only that Christ called God His Father, but His Father is our Father; and He adds that “His God is our God,” after He had borne atoningly the judgment of our sins and rose from out of the dead. For it is full of interest that Christ did not speak ordinarily to Him as God but as Father. When He rose from the dead, the work of redemption being accomplished, He says not merely “your Father” but “your God.” The force is made exceedingly striking by

comparison with the time when the Lord said “My God, My God.” In the days of His flesh, and before this on the cross, it was always “Father” whether He spoke of Him or to Him. After being made sin, and hence forsaken by God, He comes to the “Father” again, even before death, that we might know that all against us was settled. For He had gone down with our sins laid on Him under that infinite judgment; and in His spirit He had the consciousness that it was finished and accepted so that He could say “Father” before the moment of death, because it was virtually ended. The resurrection was the public proof that all was peace; but before He departed, He said “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.”

Accordingly here we have this wondrous privilege, “The Father hath given us” the title of “children of God.” There we have its character; and to make it more plain that it is a really given nature and not merely a title, he adds, “Beloved, now are we children of God.” In a general way it was said before that the righteous one, as He is righteous, is “born of God.”

This is all exceedingly important in order to lay a firm and sure basis for our righteousness; for it is not at all that certain duties have to be fulfilled in order to our attaining righteousness. This was the ground of an Israelite. The law set before him certain duties that he was bound to accomplish to gain life. Nevertheless these he never fulfilled. The law therefore could only condemn him. It is altogether a different thing with the Christian. This is made plain when we are assured that we are children of God, and that He is our Father according to the way in which Christ knew Him; He in the right of His own divine person, we solely by grace. But have we no duties of ours? and what are they? They are the duties of

children of God. We are brought into a relationship higher than any duties. What can we accomplish by any fulfilment of duty comparable with the place of a child of God? We are therefore always above our duties. We are brought into a nearness to God which no duty done by us could ever gain. We received the title by sovereign grace when we were at our worst, children of wrath even as others. He gave us life in the Son.

This for many is a blessed truth to learn, that our duties flow out of an existing relationship, instead of being done to win it. Our duties do not bring its into the relationship; but the relationship decides the kind of duties which become it and are owing to it. Our near and blessed relationship — and we could have none nearer — flows out of our being now His children. It is a standing fact which nothing can alter, except when one who has professed to be a Christian shows that there was no root of the matter in him, because he has given Christ up; even then it will tell against him in the judgment. But evidently it is a general principle and easily understood by looking at natural duties. Hence the world is always wrong in its ethical notions, because they do not at all base duty upon relationship. On the contrary they make duty to flow from the man’s moral power. They suppose that man is able to do his duty if he will; and therefore there is nothing in a man’s duty but what he can do if he choose. The sorrowful fact certainly is that man fails in his Godward duties utterly; but philosophers think little of that. The error shows how the system of ethics has no source in revelation but is merely of fallen man. There is neither the truth of God nor the reality of man, as in His sight.

Look, for illustration, at a parent. What is it that is the ground of the child's duty to the parents? It is the relationship. It is because he is the child of his father that he is bound to love him who begat him, and to obey him. No other can stand in a father's place. Should the child begin to regard others as equally near with his father, or to let them usurp his place, it is clear all must be false and wrong. There is again the relationship of a husband and wife; and here what more evident? The man's duty is to love her, as is due to none else, though she may be sometimes a little trying; and it is the woman's duty to obey him, though doubtless she may have to endure sometimes.

Duties are quite independent of mere passing circumstances. Nor are they a question of the man's will or of the woman's. Whatever be their thoughts or their feelings, the obligation of duty flows out of the relationship. Whether one does the duty or not, relationship is what creates and calls for it. In a servant there is a little of the same principle, but more distant and feeble from its nature, especially in our day when they are prone to getting tired of their masters, as the masters and mistresses are not at all unwilling to part with their servants, sometimes on small occasions. In itself it is indeed, as we read in John 8, not an abiding but a temporary relationship. But the others abide for this life, and therefore they can better illustrate the relationships which grace has established never to end.

We are entitled by God's word to believe this. But while the flesh remains in us, we need grace,("but He giveth more grace") to accomplish the duties proper to our relationship whether to God or between us and our brethren. The least one involves corresponding duty. But

the all-important depend on the supreme rights of God. And here God has taken the place of incomparable love: “See what manner of love.” It is entirely beyond any affection that man ever conceives. It was only possible for God; and He gives to us under the Father’s name, as the Lord Jesus knew Him and communicated after He died and rose, not more truly His than ours. Therefore the blessing, above all thought of man, being ours now encourages us to fulfil the obligations which that relationship calls into being.

Has not the relationship then a great deal to do with righteousness? If so, cannot one perceive at once the great propriety and beauty as well as the peculiar force thereby given to sustain righteousness — that is, our consistency with our relationship? For here if anywhere the relationship is brought out in all its reality, and its present rich grace; also carried right through to the presence of the Lord, when we seeing Him as He is shall be like Him. Thus it furnishes a very complete and divine light on the subject, and in a way as unexpected as indispensable, meant and adapted to give energy to the duty of practical righteousness, and to minister unfailing joy and comfort under all circumstances.

Take the danger that ensues when we give up our relationship and begin to doubt whether we are children of God: are we not ripe for the world, for indulgence in sin? No wonder that we should turn into evil ways if we do not enjoy present, living, and everlasting relationship with God; but if we do, there is no excuse for sin. There is the new nature, the near tie, and the love of the most powerful kind as the motive. For the new nature may be viewed in connection with relationship, or as it acts by itself apart from it. But the full and proper way is to

bring both nature and relationship to bear on our conversation in this connection; and this is what our apostle is doing in his own remarkable manner in the parenthesis of these three verses between the first and the renewed treatment of righteousness.

Having thus brought in the Father's love and our relationship as children, with its bright hope, he turns again to the moral side and probes sin to its root, as he had not yet done. He does not call sin "the transgression of the law," and for the best of all reasons. He is going to treat it in a far larger way than in connection with the law or the Jews. They were accustomed to unrighteousness or righteousness in a measure, although they superficially misunderstood it through their unbelief. Still they read of it habitually in their Scriptures; and they could but wonder at the depth of the word of righteousness from the Lord Himself as He the true light shone when here.

But the heathen, what did they know about righteousness? They had no conscious relationship with God who was to them an unknown God. If they had any moral feeling in the presence of their spurious objects of veneration, it was fear. But they had not the smallest idea that God was a God of love. Their gods were patrons of vice and villainy, never rising above selfishness. If ever they came down to the earth to man, it was perhaps to make a pet of this one or that one, and it might be something far worse than a pet; because they were really disgraceful in their immoral ways. Did Hellenism ever attain to anything in religion higher than disgraceful gods, without a particle of either holiness or love? Which of them was not bad from Zeus down to the lowest of them? Their gods were just the exaggerated

reflection of themselves. But here we have the truth of God, and that truth working in the way of sovereign grace to bless us without the smallest desert on our part. The Christian can only take the ground of utter ruin and evil in the first man, and of perfect righteousness and grace in Christ. All the virtue, efficacy, and blessing came from God who gives all freely to faith in Christ. What could our God and Father do so well to the believer for renouncing self and every hindrance, as to confess the name of his Lord and Saviour, and to enjoy the blessed nearness of his relationship to the Father, in a new life given by grace?

That the believer is righteous as being born of God, and consequently sharing with Christ God's hatred of sin, was much; for doing follows being. And every one that doeth righteousness is born of God, and thus knows that he has nearness of relationship from being the object of the Father's spontaneous and perfect love. Thus the nature and the relationship join hands and go together, and this is what the apostle here explains to us. But now, having brought in all the bright side, and alike its present reality and its surpassing hope also, he proceeds to insist on the necessary contrariety of God's nature, whether in Christ or in us, to all sin.

"Whosoever doeth sin doeth also lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness" (ver. 4). "Committing sin" is generally used for a particular act, as when one says that a man has committed a sin. But "doing sin" as here means that it is both the principle of the man and his practice too; for there is nothing else really but the man's doing sin. It is his nature. Of whom does he speak? Of every man naturally. This is exactly what man does as in God's sight. It is not merely the Gentile but the Jew; for in that

light there was no difference, though they might ever so much oppose one another, and habitually indulge in mutual hate and scorn. Before God fully revealed in Christ what possible room for any thought of pride? Man's place is in the dust as a sinner.

Who then is the sinner but every man as such in his natural state? Was not this your life and mine before we learned Christ? God was unknown to our souls except in a certain dread of Him — a fear that He would cast us into hell some day. If God was not in our thoughts, sin was. What is its true character then? Lawlessness, the principle of self-will and of total independence of God. Man finds it not so easy now to be independent of his fellow; he has no difficulty in being thoroughly indifferent to God. How mad, wicked, awful a state! God is in none of his thoughts; this is sin. The moment you bring in such a definition of sin as is here revealed, it applies to everybody whether Jew or Gentile. The Jew had a claim of righteousness, because he was under law; but the consequence if he sinned was the additional guilt of breaking a known law, and that law the law of God. He was therefore a "transgressor," which the Gentile could not be, because the Gentile knew nothing about the law as a general rule; most of them had not even heard of it. it would be therefore quite a misapplication of terms to talk about the Gentiles as if they were transgressors. Scripture never does so speak, but calls them lawless or sinners; as for instance Gal. 2:15 says, "sinners of the Gentiles."

But now we have lawlessness brought to bear upon the Jew, and if he believed not on Christ, he also was lawless with all his boast in the law, because his sinning proved him to be really living without God. While the temple

stood, he went up and brought his offering; any Jew might do that. Men, even the worst of them, like to have a little bit of religion. Cain had not merely the world to love as he began it, but he had the world's religion in man's idea. He was not at all one of the sort that have no church or chapel of their own. He was strict in bringing an offering of his particular device to the Lord; but there was nothing in it except a real insult to Him who alone can say how He is to be worshipped, with an absolute ignoring of his own sinfulness. He brought the fruits and flowers of the earth. People do something like this at funerals. It is a great day for flowers, as we know, even at the grave; and a more monstrous thing than flowers on a coffin it is hardly possible to conceive as far as principle is concerned. It utterly blots out the solemnity and the consequences of death. What is death for the saint but departing to be with Christ? And what is death to the sinner but the knell of inevitable and righteous judgment) And what for either are flowers? Can one wonder that even sensible people of the world now give notice to their friends "No flowers by request"? At any rate it is hard to conceive any fashion more heartless or foolish, though it is natural enough for the gardeners, and good for taste perhaps and trade but for nothing else.

"Whosoever doeth sin doeth also lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness?" This is a very different rendering from that of the A.V.; but as it was dwelt on previously, little more is called for now. Sin is not breach of law but lawlessness. This is the true sense. No other rendering is possible legitimately. What has ruled here is an utter mistake, founded on making the law instead of Christ the rule of life for the Christian, as people do who

understand not the scriptures. “And ye know that He was manifested that He might take away our sins; and in Him is no sin.” The apostle introduces at once the exact opposite. Where shall we look for one utterly free from lawlessness? There was but One, and He so evident that it was needless to name Him. Yes, we know that the Lord Jesus was manifested to take away our sins. How suited to a divine person, but withal truly man! He indeed abhorred sin; and, as is said immediately after His work, “In Him is no sin.” It is not only “was” before His advent, and “will be” now that He is risen, but “in Him is no sin.” It is an absolute truth. As it never was at any time, so it never could be. Yet the sinless One was just the One whom God made sin, that we — who were indeed sinners might become God’s righteousness in Him. The one refers to the unique act and aim of His atoning death; the other refers to the immutable and holy character of His life, so peculiarly displayed and tested particularly in this world. There it was manifest to every eye, unless they were blind or saw crooked.

“Every one that abideth in Him sinneth not.” There is no other remedy against sin than abiding in Him, constantly dependent and confiding. The guard or preservative is not in that one has called on the name of the Lord. This is excellent to begin with; but many that today say “Lord, Lord,” must be ignored in that day. To abide in Christ is the test of living faith in Christ, which is not empty or vain but works by love, as the law-affecting Galatians were told. Nor could it be otherwise. “I am crucified with Christ, but live, no longer I (the old man) but Christ liveth in me; and that which I now live in flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, that loved me and gave Himself for me.” He is not ashamed to call us brethren;

He has proved His love for us to the uttermost in a way proper neither to the Father nor to the Holy Spirit, yet essential. They never became incarnate to display absolute obedience in life, and in death to endure the judgment of our sins at God's hand. He did. Therein is for us a motive of exceeding power, particularly as there is a righteous nature communicated, as well as a relationship of such nearness to God, as only the supreme love of the Father could conceive and confer.

Then we come to the verses not before cleared. "Dear children, let no man lead you astray." Where is the subject on which there is more frequent mistake? Where any in which men are more apt not only to err, but to mislead others who trust them? There is no help for it but in Christ, His word, and His spirit. What can learning avail herein? Even piety can do little unless there is also true abiding in Him. "Apart from Him we can do nothing." Hence it is that if we so abide, the wicked one cannot harm us, though we are always exposed to his wiles, yet not ignorant of his devices. Not of us is he afraid, but of Christ his vanquisher. But our faith and abiding in Christ puts Him between us and the devil, who thus resisted will flee from us. It is not our old nature, the flesh, turned by grace and truth into a good nature. The flesh, the very mind of the flesh, is incurably evil; and on this God executed condemnation on our behalf who believe in Christ a sacrifice for sin. And now that He is dead and risen, He gives us of His own risen life, a new creation, not the old improved but set aside for ever and judged in Christ's cross. What is His life? Was there ever a single sin to tarnish it? Did the smallest defilement ever enter Him? This is the life that we now have; and hence the joy of the Father's love

rests upon us as His children — children of God the Father. We have therefore the new nature, which is a righteous one, before we are to do righteousness which is the course of that nature, as unrighteousness is alien to it.

With the Israelite it was a man addressed in the law as having a sinful nature. The law supposed such proclivities in him; he was therefore surrounded by prohibition on every side. He was not to own false gods, nor to have an image of the true God. Worship was exclusively due to the unseen but only true God that brought Israel out of Egypt, whose name he might not take in vain. He was not to take another's property, nor even to covet any one or thing that belonged to his neighbour. He was to keep the Sabbath on the seventh day, and to honour his parents, all under the severest sanction. Why? Because having aversion to God's will in his nature he was unrighteous. The law held out life and death — life to the obedient, death to the disobedient. Cursed be the man that confirmeth not the words of this law to do them; and all the people shall say, Amen! Accordingly death passed upon Israel long ago. But the day is coming when they too shall live; and "doing righteousness" will follow. The soul that does righteousness, the nature that loves it, has a new life in Christ which God gives of His grace independently of anything on our part. His Spirit it is that works in us to repent and believe the gospel. With this new life the new and Christian responsibility begins. We are called to walk consistently with Christ, whose is the righteous life given to our soul. "He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous" (verse 7). It is His nature, just as a mere fallen man sins.

Now he gets much stronger, and looks at the source of the mischief. “He that doeth sin is of the devil.” He had shown the source of the blessing; now he looks at the ultimate source of sin. It is not merely what Adam and Eve did but what the serpent infused into their hearts. What has the devil been about ever since but adding to the sin of the head fresh unrighteousness for each of the race? Here, it is said, “He that doeth sin is of the devil.” He is the leader that man belongs to. He may boast of his ancestors, but there is another who was not literally his father; but fallen man has made Satan practically his god. So scripture calls him the god of this age, and the prince of the world. How true it is “He that doeth sin is of the devil”; not as flung out in man’s haste, but nothing less than the truth of God. Not only is he a sinful man, but “he is of the devil.” “For the devil sinneth from the beginning,” that is, from the time that he was not content to be an angel of God but set up independently of God in his pride. From that moment was his beginning as the devil. This of course was after the time when he was created an angel. Here again we see that “From the beginning, “does not mean” In the beginning.” This is said of the Word, the Son, in eternity before the creation, or as “In the beginning” of Gen. 1:1, pointing to God’s action, not His being. “From the beginning,” no matter how or where it occurs, is from the time that the person spoken of manifests himself. “From the beginning” of Christ was from the time when Christ manifested Himself. “From the beginning” of the devil was when he manifested not his angelic qualities but his pride against God first, and his malice afterward, the sure effect of pride in others also.

“To this end the Son of God was manifested, that he might undo the works of the devil.” This does not seem to mean exactly the same thing as to take away our sins. It is not to be doubted that this great object also points to the self-same time; but we must remember that the death of Christ had far more in it than simply taking away our sins. This is everything to us; or at any rate everything of God’s grace practically begins with His work to take away our sins. But He became the bondman of God, and so His champion against Satan, the ceaseless adversary of both God and man; and Christ was manifested not only to reconcile us to God by His death, but to undo everything that Satan had wrought in all his malignant history. And so He will. Satan has a great deal to do with wars, famines, earthquakes, pestilences, etc., as is to be learnt from the early part of Job and elsewhere. Meanwhile God overrules for good all these things that Satan does for evil. But there is mischief in him at all times, restless mischief to injure; as there is the unceasing love of God to do good to all that listen to Him, especially in what He reveals of the Lord Jesus. “Every one that is born of God doeth not sin.” Righteousness is his life for practice, as it is for piety. The believer is characterised by the new nature that does not sin. Supposing a man had been a slave from the time that he was born, but that in the course of time some kindly Englishman interposed and delivered him from his captors. The man becomes a free man directly, by the law of this country, no small boon to the slave. When he thinks or talks of himself after that moment, does he still think of himself as a slave? Not at all: this is far from his thought. Such he was once; but now he is a free man. It may be objected that the old man still exists in the Christian; but the answer is that

God set him free from it by Christ's death. So that there remains enough true in this illustration to justify its use here. Alas! what is spiritual is not so easy to understand and feel as the natural.

"Every one that hath been begotten of God." This is the starting-point. To be born of Him is the real beginning, not in divine counsels but of His effectual work in the soul. Of the other life he does not speak, but distinctly of every one born with a nature that never sins. Our business is not to let the old nature out but to keep it under the power of Christ's death, mortifying all that belongs to it, and never by grace allowing it to work actively. We may fail, and we do through our own fault; for we have the Spirit dwelling in us to oppose the flesh, and are always inexcusable when we thus break down. But righteousness is our principle from the first, and a blessed fact too, because we have it as our new nature. We are not waiting for it as a prize outside us, like an Israelite. Sovereign grace has already made it ours, not only for us as to justification as the apostle Paul says, but in us a new nature as we see here. God has given us the blessing; and therefore we are to act consistently with it, looking up to God the source, and the Lord Jesus through whom we have it to abide in Him, that we may bear much fruit to the Father's glory all the way through.

"Every one that hath been begotten of God doeth not sin, because his seed remaineth in him." It is not merely that he ought not, but he does not. Every creature acts according to its nature; and the Christian's new nature is that he cannot sin; for judging by that new nature, it assuredly never sins. sin is the sad inconsistency of allowing the depraved nature to work its way; which was

clearly contrary to God's will, who would have it kept under Christ's death. Did we not die to it from the first, when we passed out of death into life? Did not our baptism testify to this? The unclean and dead thing ought to be out of sight, even completely put away from us. "And he cannot sin, because he is begotten of God." It is clearly in virtue of the new nature that he thus speaks so peremptorily.

"In this are manifest the children of God and the children of the devil: everyone that doeth not righteousness is not of God." But there is the further test of love, and he adds, "Neither he that loveth not his brother" (ver. 10). If this absence of love be one's character, it shows that he never had the new nature which loves righteousness and lives in it.

Let me call attention to the language of extreme decision in speaking of these two classes. It is the habit of many an excellent Christian to deny the title of saints to exercise such a judgment; and to this they cite our Lord's prohibition in Matt. 7:1-2: "Judge not, that ye may not be judged; for with what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you." Now in this application they are not wise; for the Lord here does not at all blame spiritual discernment of persons or things, which is a clear and weighty privilege of the Christian for his own guidance and the help or warning of others. And so the apostle lays it down (1 Cor. 2:15) that the spiritual (in contrast with the natural) man judges, or examines, all things, and he is judged by no one. What the Lord warned the disciples against is the bad habit of censoriousness, which so often leads to suspecting evil motives without ground and contrary to the holy

instincts of love. But love would be stifled by the notion that we ought not to judge who God's children are. If we are debarred from discerning them, how can we love them? Yet the very context proves that we can and ought to judge; for the Lord supposes it not only practicable but right and necessary when He says, "Give not what is holy to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before the swine." If we are thus bound to discern the unclean, how much more is it our happy place to recognise the sheep and the lambs of God's pasture, and help them lovingly in their need according to our measure!

But we need not go beyond the verse before us to see where the truth lies in this matter. "In this are manifest the children of God and the children of the devil." The apostle regarded the difference as plain enough. He looks as usual at broad, clear, and practical proofs; he does not encumber his aim with a hypocrite here or there who might for a while be allowed to evade detection; he is earnest in drawing the heed of God's family to what is of constant moment and interest for them all. There is no real difficulty in forming a sound judgment among those whose conduct is known to us, whether these are walking righteously or those unrighteously. It is unwarrantable to suspect of a hidden evil where no evil is apparent; as it is to accredit others with an excellence which is imaginary. Righteous judgment proceeds, especially in an application so general as this, on grounds which no upright and gracious soul could question.

Though man walks uncertainly and with vain show, it is not, it ought not to be, so with the Christian, who has the clearest duty from his own relationship to God and his brethren for suitable action. For he has to do, as the

rule every day, with men who are either the children of God or the children of the devil. Divine love that works in him cannot be indifferent about either; but it takes a wholly different shape to each. The apostle at any rate saw no obstacle in the way, and encourages him to act for God as well as for them, and would keep him from the rashness of framing a judgment on obscure and uncertain grounds. “In this are manifest the children of God and the children of the devil.” Righteousness and love are not without visible effects before all. They are both manifest in the children of God; and it is equally manifest that they are not in the child of the devil, but rather their opposites.

It is of painful interest to inquire how saints should slip into so serious a mistake as to draw them into perverting one scripture and neglecting others. For how many are the words of God which take for granted that even the simplest believers recognise their brethren, as also they love them; whilst they also feel bound to win the heedless from their fatal insecurity, and to warn those who scorn and mock. It is the ruin of the Christian profession which accounts for an assumption so destructive of the Christian’s duty. The world is churchy, and the church is yet more worldly; so that confusion is stamped on the actual state of the saints mixed up with those who, necessarily having nothing spiritual in common, cannot but drag down into more or less of their own darkness those who ought to be clear and free for the Lord. For who can doubt that the saint cannot lift his unconverted associate into communion with God’s mind? Or what is more certain and common than that, if the natural be yoked with the spiritual, the dead weight

of the former must sink the latter into more or less conformity with his own bad thoughts and ways?

Address 10 - 1 John 3:11-17

For this is the message which ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another: not as Cain was of the wicked one, and slew his brother; and for what did he slay him? Because his works were wicked, and those of his brother righteous. Wonder not,14 brethren, if the world hateth you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not the brother abideth in death. Every one that hateth his brother is a murderer; and ye know that no murderer hath life eternal abiding in him. Herein we know love, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought for the brethren to lay down our lives. But whoso may have the world's means of living, and behold his brother having need, and shut up his bowels from him, how abideth the love of God in him?"

The last clause, as was noticed, is the link of transition from righteousness to love. Men set these two things in opposition one to another: but they are perfectly united in Christ, the perfection of both righteousness and love. Hence it is thoroughly applicable to the Christian, since Christ is the life of the Christian. We really and truly receive by faith that life which was in the Lord Himself; not the life of Adam that all men have, but a new life possessed by none of us until we believed in the Lord Jesus. Being life, it is not capable of any outward mark of a sensible nature; still less is there a visible presentation of itself to us, though we know where it exists by its operations and effects. If this be so with the natural life, how much less could it be expected of the

supernatural or spiritual life? We ought not to ask for it, and thereby show that we do not know what life is; yet however difficult it may be to define life, everybody knows that, when life departs, death sets in. There may be the working of death before we depart, and there is, since sin came into the world. There is mortality, but death is when mortality has come to its issue. Everyone can tell is the general rule when a man, or any other animal, is dead. We know exceptions occur now and then: there are exceptions to every rule probably, and there are difficulties as to all truths. But there is no difficulty about God's word to make any real hindrance to spiritual intelligence. Doubtless an insuperable difficulty exists for those who have no knowledge of God; but this knowledge is communicated by the faith of Christ. "This is life eternal to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou didst send."

Who have got the new nature? Every Christian, and from the beginning; and now in the fullest form for Christians, for even our Lord here below spoke about our having life abundantly. "I am come that ye might have life, and that ye might have it abundantly." There is no need to say "more abundantly abundantly" is all that the Lord really did say. But what a. difference that makes! The life that the disciples possessed when our Lord was here never tended openly to break with the temple and with the Jewish system. But when our Lord Jesus, Who deigned to be, subject to the Jewish system as to the law generally, died and rose, what had He to do with the law? It would have been an absurdity to speak of the risen Christ going up to the temple, or partaking in any ceremonial of the Jew, such as the feasts or anything whatever. This is, exactly what was intended in doctrine for the

disciples. They did not realise it all at once. We are apt to be slow in learning these great changes. But the risen life of Christ was in the believer, whereby he died to all these things. Christ died not merely for our sins but died to sin which He never had in Himself, but in which we were deeply concerned. He had no more to do with it; He died to it once for all. Himself was all the while perfectly unaffected by its working. All that it drew out in His life was His grief and pity for those that were misled. But when He died, the mightiest work that God could do was done by the Lord Jesus.

Even when He comes again in His glory, it will be only drawing out, as it were, for that day in a public and powerful way the virtues involved in Him crucified. So this new life, although not at all of an outwardly sensible nature, is a life of indissoluble power. And power is given to it by the Holy Ghost. He is a spirit, not of cowardice, but of power and love, and of sound mind. The apostles were to receive power. They were to be not only witnesses to others, but they had to learn for themselves also much greater things which they could not then bear. These things came out when there was not merely risen life but the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. We ought never to confound these two things, nor confine His action to tongues, miracles, or any of these powers, which were only outward vouchers. The inward power of the Spirit was much greater than any of the external signs that accompanied it. The external signs were withdrawn as the church failed and broke down in love, truth, and light. How could God continue His stamp of approval on an unworthy state of things? We find that even the church in Ephesus was threatened, for it had fallen from its first love when John

wrote. This was really what became the general state after John departed. For the apostles were a great cheek upon the declension which was setting in so strongly.

We may well dwell on the new life thus, for it is what unites the practical righteousness and the active love of the believer. He is here speaking not of God's love, though this comes in, but of our love; just as he speaks not of righteousness in Christ, which is outside ourselves for justification, but of our righteousness. It is clear that this righteousness consists of good fruit. And how can there be good fruit without a good tree? Certainly in our natural state there was anything but a good tree; ours then was only a bad tree which bore bad fruit. For good fruit we must have a divine nature communicated to us, as it is with the bad tree, by introducing a good graft, in order to produce good fruit. It cannot be otherwise, and with this life, life eternal, John is occupied. It is not righteousness for us who had none, which we become in Christ, but righteousness within which produces our righteousness day by day. People may not like the truth, but here it is in the apostle's words.

After all it is too solemn for any to trifle with, because no man is a real Christian without both righteousness outside us in Christ, and the righteous nature within us, which is the new nature in virtue of what is proper to Christ. We have therefore the two things; what is called "objective" outside, and "subjective," or what we are; and this because Christians have necessarily the life of Christ. And this life does not differ from Himself. It is life He gives us to live in and by, the very same life that Christ had and was.

Thus he begins, “For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning.” You will remember perhaps, that in verse 5 of the first chapter we had the same phrase: “This then is the message which we have heard from him.” Here it is still more precise. It was not before the beginning, but “from the beginning.” Both make it decisive. What men added is of no account. This abides, the unchangeable truth of practical Christianity, and it is all the more important, because it is dead opposed to the prevalent ideas of men. In particular it openly contradicts the notion of what is called development. And development is utterly false, and more evil in divine things than in natural. It is a heathen guess reproduced of late as to nature. It denies God’s power and will in determining species. For species, as fixed as in other natural laws so-called, is the true principle of Zoology, not human classification on superficial resemblance. It therefore is at issue with creation in any real sense — that is, with the rights of God in creation; but how humbling that such a daring idea of the heathen should revive It was quite natural to the benighted “who knew not God.” They had it long before Darwin or his coadjutors. It now seems to be the craze of the so-called “philosophers” and their hangers on, the humble servants of a purely fanciful idea. But if bad in the lower creatures, it would not much matter, unless for the rights of God, how a mouse or a monkey or any like creature was thought to be developed. But when it touches man and man’s relationship to God, the idea that he could have come out of seaweed or anything else they are pleased to make primary in nature, it is serious so to swamp conscience and responsibility, and God’s claims in mankind, His offspring. The infidelity of the

theory makes it intolerable, and therefore it is far better to speak out plainly.

Here is matter of fresh interest, because this is “the message,” as well as that in the introductory words of 1 John 1, which follow the manifestation of divine love and life in the Son of man on earth. There it was a message that God is light, bringing this to bear upon us, which is as certainly the truth of Christianity as that God is love; indeed it was so stated before the actual announcement that God is love. Yet that God is love was clearly implied in the early four verses; still it was not announced in actual terms till later. But it was all important that man, if brought to God in sovereign grace, should never forget that God is light. Our receiving life eternal in Christ was not to make our practical holiness an optional matter. Our new blessing from God was intended to make sin as hateful to our souls as God proved it to be when He forsook the Lord Jesus bearing that intolerable burden. If He has given us already inestimable blessing, we cannot escape the moral responsibility of walking as in the light. It is a great privilege too. How blessed that, as we were creatures of darkness through sin we are translated into that marvellous light, not when we get to heaven but now in this world, and are called to walk accordingly. Were we sent forth to walk without the constant watching of our Father over us, it would be quite beyond us, because we should break away from God every time we sinned. Sin does interrupt communion, but it does not destroy the life of Christ. His life differs from all other life in that it cannot come to nought. It is of its own nature eternal. Herein we have the greatest comfort, although we have a solemn appeal to our hearts and our consciences.

Again the apostle says, “For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning.” Then Christ came in love; then He gave us life; and the call followed, not only that we should believe in God’s love in Him to us, but that we should love one another as He did.

It was a blessing, and a wonderful call worthy of Christ; and it supposes a complete change for and in us. If there is any one thing which stamps a fallen man, it is that he is always the centre of his thoughts and feelings. We are what we seek and value. Self certainly is not love. Therefore what the world calls it in its own slang is “Number one.” For man “Number one” is not God, but poor wretched fallen self every man his own god. For the One, the Supreme is and ought to be God. “Number one” ought to be assuredly God’s place to my soul; and it would be if I were not a fallen, sinful man. Now the Lord puts an end to all that distance by the call of grace. At any rate it is the fruit of God coming down in Him to be our Blesser; and our Blesser not only by a work done for us but in a life given to us. Thus practical Christianity becomes a living to God and according to His word, not only resting on Christ and His work outside but having Christ in us also. Both are true, and true from the earliest days. From this no change can be but for evil. But “from the beginning” this message was heard. How plainly “from” is not “in the beginning” when the Godhead alone existed! There was not even an angel to hear them, much less a man. But “from the beginning” ye heard it, evidently from the time Christ was here. Yet neither was it a mere call to love one’s neighbour as one’s self. This was the law.

“Our neighbour” then, as it must be interpreted, meant the Jew primarily. They did not love the Gentiles. They

might perhaps have a little difficulty about the Gentile that came to take refuge under the wings of the God of Israel. Such might be counted their neighbours in grace. These Gentile neighbours were comparatively few, putting them all together, in comparison with the rest of mankind. Ruth came under the protection of the God of Israel. Though she was not of the stock of Abraham, she was married to a not inconsiderable Israelite, and one too who gave her part with himself in the very line from whence was to come the Shepherd of Israel, the Lord Himself. Such persons were practically Israelites. However we need not discuss that. For all know that "loving our neighbour" till the Lord came was made sadly narrow. The Lord gave it enlargement when the scribe to whom He spoke started the difficulty, "Who is my neighbour?" So it is, when the truth is made plain and the hearers cannot easily get rid of it, they ask questions which they think will perplex. The Lord therefore uttered the beautiful parable of the good Samaritan. How cutting to Jewish pride! Not the "Good Israelite," but the "Good Samaritan!" Wherein lay its force? It was not another Samaritan that he saw needing his help, but an Israelite from whom every one turned away except the Samaritan. Even if a Levite beheld the sufferer, or if a priest, — Oh! it was not his business. These quite ignored their neighbour; and they did so because the distress called for love and compassion. But not so the Samaritan. He bound up his wounds and provided for him. Was it not the apt figure of the Lord Himself? and how blessed if the Lord in giving it meant it so to be! He that came down to be a "bondman" did not mind couching under the guise of a "Samaritan." He had come to bear their sins in His body on the tree, alone to bear them, to suffer for them, Just for unjust,

and to blot them out for ever. No wonder He was not ashamed to be a Samaritan in the parable: what baseness for Jews to call Him so!

But now it is another kind of love. It savours of God's own love. To whom is His love fully shown? To His children. The little perception of such loving as this shows how far souls in Christendom have departed. The most feeble of Christians have no little feeling for sinners in danger of perishing. But they are very little concerned about the saints of God, whether they are glorifying God and His Son or not. That sinners should be converted is the great desideratum: all else is quite secondary. How sad to stop so short! Is this what God feels? Was this all that His own Son cared for when upon earth? He was the revealed object of divine love and favour all through, before He bore our sins on the cross; but how did not He love the children of God?

And now, save in atonement, we have His place. We are children of God, and the love that rested upon Him rests upon us, as our Lord tells us in the end of John 17. That is entirely beyond what most of the children of God contemplate for themselves. Of course they do not deny the words; but do they seem to understand them, or speak and act as if they felt them, as conveying the model of their privilege and duty? And the consciousness of being so loved goes out in love to those who are as much its object as ourselves.

But it is also important that we should understand that such love as His was an entirely new thing. Only then was it charged that the children of God should love one another. The Lord laid it down as the "new commandment." Indeed it was a, new thing to learn that

God was now to form a family, and a family to be gathered together in one — the children of God that were scattered abroad. This had never been till now. But it is what God does in two particular forms. In the writings of John it is family unity; in those of Paul, the one body of Christ. Both at any rate coalesce in being divine unity in two different ways: the one because Christ brought God's nature to give it down here, and those that receive it His children to be gathered together in one, the other, of the body because Christ is glorified in heaven, and we are by the Spirit united with Him on high. It is the unity of the Head and the body. The Head of the body is the glorified Man, and the centre of the family is Jesus the Son of God; and Christ above is both.

Here then we have the limits of that love — loving one another. It is not love in the gospel going out to man as lost; it has nothing whatever to do with the law, or with one's neighbour; it is love in divine relationship towards God's family. Love to God's children is equally valid for the ends of the earth, as it is for those that surround as in England. They are alike members of Christ's body. These truths are meant to be carried out in one far off as truly as in another near; and you cannot set them aside except at the peril of fighting against or slighting the word of God, and of grieving the Holy Spirit who is in us in order that God's will should be carried out thenceforward.

Now this gives an opportunity for the apostle to pierce more deeply. He contrasts the children of God and the children of the devil strongly, tracing both to the root of the matter. Not content with calling them evil, children of wrath like others, he says here "children of the devil."

This comes to a decided point of awful significance. And, singular to say, he points to the earliest days of fallen man on earth, after the children were born to Adam and Eve, and begins with the very eldest one of the two sons. “Not as Cain was of that wicked one,” for this is the proper way to render it. The “who” has no business there, and only weakens. Cain is not to be our pattern but to be shunned. And wherefore? He “slew his brother.” There his wickedness carried him. Certainly this was not love but hatred; and it is what John wants to show. He will not allow any middle ground between love and hatred. He will not endorse any mixed thoughts with which some seem to be greatly charmed. All such sentiment to excuse Cain is a compromise of the truth; and it is of the greatest moment that we should know that there must be a clean breach between what is of God and what is of the devil. This is where we are brought here.

Now it is remarkable as showing the far-reaching truth here, that Cain was the one who took the lead in two innovations. He was the first to set up natural religion. Gain was not what people call an irreligious man, if thereby be meant that he had no religion. He was what answers in our day to a man that goes regularly to his church or his chapel. It was simply the religion of nature, and raised no question in his soul whether his offering became his own state or was according to the mind of God. People generally do not consider this at all. “Their fathers went there that is enough for most. They were christened, confirmed, and took the sacrament; or they became members, as others call it, of the church and congregation. It was all assumed to be the proper thing for a decent man. The Jesuits go rather farther, as

they say, for God's greater glory: the alleged ground for their heartless, unscrupulous, and wicked ambitions. For they are sworn to obey their General, if he declares that any means promote that object; as the General acts for, and not merely with, the pope; sometimes far in advance of the pope, but still it is all nominally to promote their lord the pope's glory.

So Cain for an act of homage had his idea of what befitted himself in approaching God. "Well," he seems to have thought, "there is nothing so fine here as the flowers and fruits that God has made in this fair world." Yet it was already a fallen world; and all were outcasts from paradise. Oh how soon this was forgotten; and still more its cause! Cain forgot the rebellious sin which morally compelled God to pronounce exile on the first pair. Was it not his religious duty then to offer what he thought the very best of earth's produce? No doubt he was horrified at his brother Abel's sacrifice. "Think of him; only think what a stupid he is. Why, he is going to offer a little lamb and kill it before Jehovah! Think of that! How shocking to Him, how cruel in itself! What harm has the lamb ever done? Why the firstlings of the flock, and of their fat? Surely he has quite mistaken Jehovah's character. Has He any pleasure in blood or fat? Has He any delight in the slaughter of a poor innocent creature to which He gave being?

There was here in particular, what there is generally, a great deal to reason on; and this is exactly the basis of natural religion of any kind and at any time. It is a religion that man reasons out as becoming himself and others with God. But as man is its only source, there is nothing of God in it, only man's pretension and profession.

And how about Abel? In faith Abel had pondered these things deeply. He at least had found out the awful fact of being a sinner in the sight of God; for Abel, we may be very sure, had learnt from his father and mother what God said about the fall. He learnt too that God spoke of another who was to intervene, the woman's Seed to accomplish the work that no creature could do: the destruction of the serpent and of his seed, enemies too. But more than this; it was not a light thing for Abel to hear that God clothed his parents with coats of skins, instead of fig-leaves. This was of no moment to Cain. But Abel assuredly recognised that there is a great truth in it. Death! therein he saw its bearings. Death! to be clothed with the fruit of death; and not my own death, wages of sin, but the death of another and such a mysterious other! For, as we too believe, Jehovah in His grace pointed to the only clothing for fallen sinful man and woman, who in spite of fig-leaves (nature's clothing) were in every sense naked in their sin. Before that their nakedness was in all innocence, but now their daring transgression lay bare. Their quick repairing to the covering of fig-leaves betrayed that they too were at a device no better than Cain's. Only God corrected it for them; and they accepted the correction. "Jehovah Elohim made Adam and his wife coats of skin, and clothed them": a clothing founded upon death. Hence Abel was taught by faith to put these things together, and brought accordingly the firstlings of his flock. Without faith it is impossible to please God; faith rests on God's testimony. It is not for me or you to define how far Abel's faith carried him; but his was the intelligence of faith, and Cain had none. It may be small but distinct as far as is revealed; and this is the great point: that faith should be real and of God.

There was great simplicity in Abel's faith, but spiritual perception. He brought of the firstlings of his flock, a lamb to die. It was no offering of power, not a wolf nor a lion nor a bear to fight the serpent; but on the contrary a little lamb to die. "And Jehovah looked upon Abel and on his offering." Did not He see, as ever before, what was as yet dim in the sight of any believer even? The Lamb without blemish and without spot, foreknown before the world's foundation, but to be manifested in Christ and His blood for our sakes? There and then the germ of divine truth appears, to this Abel held, abjuring human notions; but Jehovah had no respect to Cain or his offering of the fruit of the ground.

A little before it was noticed how Cain gave the first impulse to the world; but much more than the outside is hinted at also, for he introduced the world's religion. This last seems to be very prominent to the mind of the Spirit in the Epistle of Jude, which is more akin to the First Epistle of John than any, even bearing in mind its remarkable analogy in the way of contrast with 2 Peter. The strong resemblance is with John in this respect, that they are alike Epistles of the apostasy. Such is the dark, the ominously dark, streak which marks both of them, that evil at the core, apostasy working in spirit (which could not be hidden from Him who abides in the church), the harbinger of the future apostasy; and in our apostle's letters many antichrists, the harbinger of the antichrist.

But Jude, the brother of James and bondman of Jesus, speaks of "the way of Cain." One does not confine this to his murder of his brother, but sees rather religious wickedness in it as well as in Balaam and Korah, especially as this was the immediate occasion of the

murder. Besides he was a bold, presumptuous, and wicked man in his general character. “His works were wicked, and his brother’s righteous.” He was just the man to become founder of “the world” and of natural religion. What wonder that he was not content to live in his own home! “No, no! union is strength: we must combine.” Being a man of energy, he got people to agree. His will was more powerful than theirs. He was the first builder of a city; and you may depend upon it that he ruled the city too when it began to rise. Such is the nature of man and of his will. He likes power; and so it seems with Cain. But before that he pretended to religion too; and this was more particularly the open occasion of his downfall. For it was the great breach with God, and its murderous result which is now before us. Indeed the world’s religion and its civilization pretty well march together. Adam and Eve were very far from being savages, as bad men say, but who would speak of their state as a type of civilization It is a reality incomparably above civilization to live according to the will of God. And what is the worth in His sight, or for the soul and spirit, of all the progress men boast of?

The world is jubilant as to progress nowadays. There it began; and ere long in the same family the invention of wind and stringed instruments of music, and of all kinds of tools or cutting things in brass and iron: luxury and convenience in the earthly life. Progress could not well be without metallurgy, and Cain’s family was in active work soon enough. In Lamech’s day polygamy came, and the first verse of which we hear was addressed, not to God in praise or in penitence, but to his wives. A little bit of song goes forth to Adah and Zillah, to excuse and to exalt himself, and to quiet their fears, in sufficiently

defiant strain, and not without impious claim of God's sanction. If Cain was to be avenged sevenfold, Lamech surely seven-and-seventyfold. Lamech turns all to his haughty self-reliance.

Such is the world, and such the world's religion in its early buddings. But here the truth comes plainly out. "And wherefore slew he him? Because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous." It does not say exactly "own": "his" is quite enough. The moral condition of both is stated before either the offering or the city. Cain's works were "wicked" (for that is the proper rendering), and his brother's "righteous." "Wicked" has a stronger force than "evil" in some respects; it implies purpose and toil in them. There is here assiduity in evil; not merely bad acts, but an activity therein that is not necessarily implied in "evil." His works were wicked; his brother's, on the contrary, righteous. Both these things were habitual before the occasion which roused Cain's resentment. Yet it is instructive to note why this broke out. Jehovah accepted Abel and his offering, and rejected Cain's offering. Cain could not endure this. His pride fired up at it; his resentment had no bounds. As he could not do anything against Jehovah personally, he flew at his own brother. It was striking really at Jehovah. God's rejecting him was far worse in his eyes than his brother's acceptance, though this inflamed his rage. Sin was no more in the conscience of Cain than God was: therein in fact and principle they both go together. For it is the sense of sin that brings God before the soul, and God as judge of sin. What then must be the issue of our guilt in His eyes? But is there not mercy for the sinner? Yes, His mercy endureth for ever, as the Christian knows, and Israel will surely learn through His grace.

And this Cain had never believed, and so turned from obduracy to despair. Wicked himself, he had no notion of goodness in God even to a wicked man who turns to God at the call of grace. He knew very well if anyone offended him, there was small hope of mercy from himself. And as he never felt his need of a Saviour, and gave God no credit for grace in the woman's Seed, he judged God by his own thoughts to be like himself, or even more, implacable to the guilty.

Next this is applied. "Marvel not, brethren;" not exactly "my" brethren. "Marvel not, brethren, if the world hateth you." This is a turn to be well weighed. We have had "little children" in general, and twice also "babes." Then we had "beloved" and now we have "brethren." It is not hard to see the propriety of each of these. He is going to speak about love of the brethren, and he appropriately addresses them as "brethren." We ought never to pass over a word of Scripture without consideration, and seeking to learn why God uses that word rather than any other. Faith can say that it is always the best. One does not of course forget the carelessness of man and its effect. Thus we understand how it arises; we can account for its slipping in, and in general have full evidence to correct it, though this may not be possible in every case.

Here then comes what is very plain. Marvel not, brethren, if the world hateth you." Now, who composed the world; and who were these haters in particular that the apostle had in mind? Chiefly at least those that had once been in the communion of the church and had abandoned it. These are always the worst. Such as go back from the truth particularly hate not only the truth itself but those who hold fast to it. They cannot bear

either, and why? For the same reason as Cain could not. It is self-condemnation. There is nothing so provocative to a wicked apostate as that he should be condemned; for he tries to banish all suspicion of his own wickedness, being utterly blinded by the enemy. And as he is under Satan's lie, he also shares his murderous spirit.

This then is the spirit of the world; and more particularly of those in it that have given up the truth they once professed. Such are the persons so painfully prominent throughout this Epistle. They had once, as it seemed, left the world behind; they now went back to that world which they had outwardly denounced. It was only a superficial severance; the bond was not really broken; and they went back where their heart no longer attracted by the novelty of the truth led to its old love. The name of Jesus never had won them to God. Yet it has apparent influence sometimes even on the unconverted.

It is remarkable just to show the effect of the Saviour upon what is most worldly. Take the case of artists. Piety is not what distinguishes them as a class. On the contrary in general they are singularly given up to self-indulgence and worldliness of every kind. Of course one knows there have been not a few Christian painters; so that there is no thought of going beyond indisputable fact in thus speaking of painters as a class. Our excellent friend W. Cowper, the poet, had a very bad opinion of his fellows; he said poets were a bad lot as the rule, and nobody is better entitled to characterise them than Cowper. Though he was a genuine poet, he was glad to clear himself from any kind of complicity with his unpleasant associates. They, like the painters, are apt to flatter the vanity of men and women, and in

fact many live by it, for parents have of course great care for the pictures of their children. Yet painters were immensely affected by even the tradition of the Lord Jesus. If anyone knows the statuary of the ancients, he admits that the sculptures of the Greeks were sensuous. They were like themselves. But the paintings of the Middle Ages, and particularly later ones of fame which have come down to our own day, were affected surprisingly by such a poor representation of Christ as Popery affords. What a difference there is between theirs and those of the ancients! Even there the beauty of holiness is reflected as far as a worldly man could set it forth in idea. There you have the meekness of humility, and the expression of dependence on the invisible God. There too the woman no longer represented as a trap for man, nor man in his will and lust on the other side. There is not a trace of the Aphrodite or the Apollo which so carried away the Greek and played into nature's corrupt ways. The Virgin and the Child drew out homage to purity never before conceived by such men. Far from me to think of this effect as more than superficial. On the contrary such is the evil heart of man that it fell in with the idolatry of the mother to the dishonour of the Son of God. It was the powerful but outward effect of the name of Jesus upon those that rose not above the human without real faith in the Father and the Son.

We cannot therefore be surprised that the self-deceived who entered the church were yet more deeply affected by all their surroundings, and by the spiritual influence of that blessed Name; but it never pierced deeper than their mind. Christ was not their life, else they had never left Him; still less would He have left them. "For if they had been of us, they would have abode with us," and if

they did not so abide, what was the issue? That they gradually rose up implacably when outside, especially when the Christians refused the name of Christianity to such renegades as these? “Marvel not, if the world hateth you.” They were just part of that Cain-world, which ever began with religious pretension and ended with murder.

But here is the striking contrast of true Christianity. “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren.” That is a sentence the more to be weighed because it at once connects itself with words of the greatest weight in the Gospel. In John 5:24 the Lord Himself employed, without the emphatic “we” and to the individual believer, the same words in its last clause. “Verily, verily, I say to you, He that heareth my word and believeth him that sent me hath life eternal, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life.” I am giving it with more precision than in our Authorised version. But this is the real import of that wonderful verse which has been blessed to so many souls, even when a little obscured.

Yet we must never be too much affected by resemblance. They say that what shows a wit is that he finds resemblance between things that differ, to the surprise and pleasure of many. But there is another quality far better than wit, even a sound judgment. Now a sound judgment is marked by seeing difference in things which seem to resemble. This is just the opposite of wit; and there people generally fail.

What then is the difference between the two texts? Is it not that the Lord is there showing how a man receives eternal life now through believing God about His Son; so

that he does not come into judgment, as everyone without Christ must. So He says. For in truth whoever comes into judgment can never come out of it. The reason is plain; because “judgment” means that one incurs what he deserves. Now what do you or I really deserve? Were we not guilty, powerless for good and ungodly, till saved by grace? Do not think then that any man as he is can go into judgment and come out. No; it can only be into the lake of fire. But it is not so that God deals with those that believe. They have life eternal, and they do not come into judgment. It is not merely that they do not come into “condemnation” for this is not the word any more than the thought intended by it. The Lord declares in the plainest terms that the believer does not come into judgment; it was He that bore the judgment of our sins on the cross. The notion of judgment with life eternal is perfectly monstrous, and really has no sense. To confirm this grace yet more, He said that he “hath passed out of death into life.” Death was his lost condition through sin; but he now lives of His life. This change has taken place already for the soul, though not yet for the body which is assured in the resurrection of life as ver. 29 tells us.

Ver. 24 is therefore a very blessed word for the poor sinner that wants to know how he is to get life eternal. But this is not at all the case here in the Epistle. It is not a question of believing in order to gain the blessing. It is what “we,” the brethren, know, and their loving the brethren is the practical proof. Of this they were incapable without life eternal, as the divine nature which loves according to God. Hence he says “we,” and speaks of brethren only, and of such emphatically. It is therefore quite distinct from John 5:24. Not that this is

always the sense of “we.” The context alone decides what the “we” means. For “we” is so differently applied in scripture, that to make a canon of its being always the same is mere ignorance of its use there. Here too “we” is emphatic. “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren.” How plainly the difference must strike when both are weighed “We know (Consciously).”

What does the unbeliever know of this change? How could he possibly know it? The unbeliever is in death and sins, and he goes into judgment. Faith alone receives the blessing which Christ here gives. But the brethren as such love one another as of God’s family and as having already believed. “We” are not therefore called to believe here. It is assumed that we who believed unto life eternal love our brethren and, having passed out of death into life, our love to them confirms that fact. We have this conscious knowledge, and ought to have it, in contrast with those who made empty knowledge of high speculation without one divine affection. Of all men on the earth only believers, only brethren in the Lord, only “we” can say that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brethren. This love is the testimony to it and the practical evidence of it; but faith alone through Christ’s grace brought us into the blessing. We neither received life eternal, nor passed out of death into life, because of loving the brethren. At that time we hated the brethren, being dead in sins; but, believing God, we passed out of death into eternal life, and only then knew the brethren to love them ever after.

Hence the apostle lays down as an axiom of Christianity, “He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.” How

solemn the conclusion! There is no life, nor passing out of death, if one does not thus love. But why does he say "brother"? It is an abstract statement, because of his profession of course. The apostle delights in that kind of statement which pedants carefully avoid: but the apostle is far from mere letter. The apostle takes the man on his profession, and pronounces that "he who does not love his brother abideth in death;" which proves that he is no true brother by that very hatred. Remark the pointedness of his language. He does not say merely that he is dead, but that he abideth in death. Whatever was his profession, he was always dead spiritually, and he abides in death. The proof is that he never loved the one he was called to love as of God's family. He had no love; but he must have if he possessed the life of Christ in his soul.

He next puts the case even more strongly. "Every one that hateth his brother is a murderer." There he comes down with greater severity. It is not merely one that does not love, but the positive activity of hating. More outspoken in word and outrageous in conduct, he betrays his hatred, and is called a "murderer." The apostle here goes down to the root of things. As hatred is found to mark his spirit when tried, he is a murderer in principle; just as the Lord pronounces a man to be an adulterer in principle who indulged in lust which he ought not to allow, but to judge and be ashamed and humbled for it. God deals with the heart and not the externals only in Christianity. It is the inward working, as well as what comes out, which stamps the professor, however inadmissible and impossible in a court of law. "And ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." It is the very opposite of Christ, and the closest

correspondence with the devil. For what can be more like our adversary, the liar and murderer from the beginning?

“Herein we have known love, or the love, because he laid down his life for us.” The words do not in fact go beyond “love.” He does not say “of God.” It was with good intention put in; but it is best to cleave to the simple truth. “Because He laid down His life for us.” Here again the “He” is remarkable. Without doubt it is the love of God too; but he purposely mixes up God and Christ, although Christ alone laid down His life for us. That is what we have repeatedly found before, as another has pointed out. This is the great and irrefutable proof of infinite love, and of a love that was clearly of God, though Christ was the One who alone manifested it. He laid down His life for us. It is mere illusion, and to miss its force, to compare with it a man’s dying out of his great affection for his friend, or risking it to, save a stranger. Only consider the One who for us was dying thus! who became man that it might be done in the most harrowing of sufferings! and this for us when we were lost and had nothing but sins!

“And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” His was the unfathomable depth, and nothing can match it in any way. Still it becomes the model for those that are His, however short of atonement. What limit can be set to it? Love is intended to surmount every difficulty now. God’s love to us in our sins creates love not only to God but to His children, our brethren. “And we ought.” He does not say that “we do”: though there have been saints that have died not only for Christ’s sake but for their brethren. He is content to say “we ought”; our love, being of God, is capable of doing it. And in point of

fact, if our dying would be of real use to our brother, we ought to be willing. It is however a rare complication that would make it a duty.

But we are also taught that without pressing this extreme proof there is an appeal to our hearts at the door. We have not to go far without finding calls on the exercise of the love that is in our hearts. Come now; look at everyday matters. To lay down our lives for the brethren might befall us rarely here below; but there is all ordinary lack that often occurs, and we know it frequently where our lot lies: a brother or sister in abject need. How does it present itself to your soul? How does our love answer to the suffering of the poor brother or sister?

“Whoso may have the world’s means of living” is what is called here its “good.” Nor does he say merely “seeth,” but contemplateth, beholdeth, hath a full view of his brother’s need. He perhaps has not made the slightest sign, has not complained at all, nor mentioned his trial to another. This silence ought to be all the stronger appeal to our hearts. He has been bearing the pressure without a murmur; she has been enduring and only telling God about it. But there with our eyes wide open, beholding our brother’s affliction, we hesitate. One has the means of helping and relieving, but instead of this he “shutteth up his bowels” from him, the sufferer. There is no need to add “of compassion,” which is plainly enough implied. “How abideth the love of God in him?” The apostle puts it cautiously and calmly but earnestly and searchingly: “How dwelleth the love of God in him?” He does not ask me to die for my brother; he does ask me that my love should go out, with means beyond my own real wants, to one who is suffering

whether from the cold or sickness, hunger, or other pains. One can relieve the brother, and one does not: “how abideth the love of God in him?”

Love, as it is the energy of God’s nature, so it is of the new nature of His children, and meant to be in constant flow to others, not only on great occasions but in the least things of this life. Let us not miss the exquisite propriety of the apostle’s language. In ver. 16 it was quite enough to say love, or the love, and to leave it thus open, when the words that followed made evident whose love it was that laid down His life for us. Again, in 1 John 2 it is not “love” only that is contrasted with the world, nor yet “the love of God,” but “the love of the Father.” But here “the love of the Father” would not have suited. It is “the love of God” so considerate of the least of His creatures, which so deeply rebukes His child that shuts up his compassion from his tried fellow.

In conclusion note how variously the chapter applies Christ’s death. In ver. 4 it was that He might take away our sins sacrificially; in ver. 8 it was that He might undo the works of the devil; and in ver. 16 He laid down His life for us as the model of love to us and for us. All this united in His death; as we may see yet more in Heb. 2:9, 10, 14, and 17.

14 “My,” of the common text, is wanting in the best copies.

Address 11 - 1 John 3:18-24

“Dear children, let us not love with word nor with the tongue, but in deed and truth. And herein we shall know that we are of the truth, and shall persuade our hearts before him, that if our heart condemn us, [it is] that God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not. we have boldness toward God, and whatsoever we ask we receive from him, because we keep hi,; commandments, and do the things pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment, that we believe the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and that we love one another, even as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments abideth in him, and he in him. And herein we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he gave to us.”

We now enter on a new subject not touched before, but connected with the mutual love of the children of God which we have had already. The apostle appeals first to them in the quality of dear children, meaning here as always the entire family. There is no need for “My”: it is not supplied by the Spirit of God, and therefore is illegitimate. “Dear children” is his general term of endearment, and this is the reason why he calls them not merely children, but “dear children.” Both terms took in fathers, young men and babes, the whole family of God.

Here then he calls us to love not with word nor with the tongue, but in deed and truth. He is thus leading forward into the new subject. He adds “herein we shall know.” It is not “know” but “shall know.” This has its

importance, because it does not refer to what they already were in Christ. For instance the eternal life which they now possessed in Him was settled knowledge; but here he looks on to the boldness or confidence of heart given by walking uprightly before God in daily practice, and very particularly in love. For this is a duty as to which many deceive themselves. Nothing is easier than to call for love and complain of others wanting it; but some that are loudest in the complaint are very short of it themselves. They are or count themselves desirous of being objects of love; but the right way is for ourselves to love, if indeed we would be loved. The going out of heart in goodness without a selfish aim draws out other hearts, whereas the lip too readily learns to talk about love and ends there. The Epistle is therefore guarded in these words that serve as a connecting link between what went before and that which follows. “Dear children, let us not love with word nor with the tongue.” This of course a Christian, no matter what may be his state, would know he ought to detest; but if not in a practically good state with God, his love must be shallow and powerless. Therefore it is here said “not with word nor with the tongue” — to give it as exactly as one can. There is a slight difference in losing the “with” in both places and the article in the second. We are to love, “but in deed and truth.” The natural man in Christendom talks of love in his way. Christ proved it in all its genuineness, and we who confess Him have to walk in the same simplicity and reality.

All this evidently flows out of the life eternal which we have if we believe on Him. This it is which is called in an unusual expression “the life of God” in Eph. 4:18, but “Christ our life” in Col. 3:3, 4, and similar language in

Gal. 2:20. For that matter John so remarkably intermingles God and Christ, that one can hardly say which of the two is precisely intended. But this is done expressly and for excellent reason: the Son is as truly God as the Father; and we are not allowed to forget it. His so writing is not from any want of care. The apostle John knew well what he was doing, and meant to say as he wrote. Only foolish men that have great confidence in themselves would dare to think otherwise of an inspired man. It is because the Father and the Son are God. Christ though become man remains just as truly God as any other in the Godhead. By His humiliation to vindicate God and bless man He never forfeited His divine glory for an instant. He was the true God when He deigned to be born of woman. Yet we know what a new-born child is, how entirely dependent upon its mother or its nurse. Is there any creature in the world so indebted to loving care as a human babe? But Christ even then was the true God just as much as when He raised Lazarus or any other from the dead. And when He died He was just the same, though on the opposite side of circumstances. He could not cease to be true God; this was not touched, nor at all affected by His dying. Even in a man the soul and the spirit are not affected by death; it is but severing the link between the body and the inner man. So for the Lord Jesus, He was always the Son. Jesus Christ no doubt was His name after He became man; but He is over all, God blessed for ever, Amen; just as truly as the Father and the Holy Spirit, Who never became incarnate.

Now love is what characterises the energy of God: how blessed in itself and for us! Judgment is not His nature neither had it any exercise on man till sin appeared;

there was no question of such a dealing but through sin. But He was always love. And when the fit moment came for Him to put in action His love, particularly in the incarnation of Christ and the work of Christ, all came out in ways beyond parallel. His beneficence to the creature was left far behind; His wise and kind arrangements, from the greatest to the meanest of animals, wondrous as they all are, were eclipsed; still more evident it became as we consider the goodness of His provision for man.

We do well to consider what surrounds us. The Lord sometimes pointed to objects outside with an à fortiori to us. Witness the weighty lessons even for the disciples from what was seen in the birds of the sky, or in the lilies of the field. They do indeed show not merely divine power but wisdom, benevolence, and oversight that thinks of them to the least degree, goodness that pervades and abides in the face of man's sin and wickedness. For when man fell, God might have turned the green of the field to an offensive red as an alarming sign of the judgment that was coming; but there was no such change. The green field remains the green field, and the flowers are still beautiful and sweet. We do not say that they are all that they were in paradise, for certainly all things here below were profoundly affected by the fall; but incontestably there remains an ideal beyond anything that ever man can reach. Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like the flowers of the field without any cultivation of man whatever.

But it is important to see that divine love is an affection entirely outside creation, and essentially above mere human nature. It is just as supernatural as the life which is the new nature on which the Spirit of God acts. There

must be a nature to bear fruit fit for God's acceptance. Indeed, you cannot have any fruit without a living spring. Whence comes this source of such new feeling and action as wholly to transcend in the exercises of the soul anything of which man as man is capable? What is the spring in the believer of all that is love Godward or manward? It is eternal life. Without this there is no nature to bear good fruit. Are not we ourselves ample witnesses of its truth? We once were men in the surprising qualities which God confers on man; for they are very great, apart from the new creation and its special privileges. Of these we had none then; and we could not have understood what has been spoken of grace. It would have seemed rant and nonsense to the natural man, as it always does, though there may be sense enough to hold the tongue and not to say so. But men feel that they do not enter into God's mind, and cannot. Not even man's spirit, the best part of man, can take it in. His spirit soars far above the lower nature of man, but the highest part of man's nature cannot enter into the things of God (John 3:3-6).

The spirit of man cannot rise above the things of man (1 Cor. 2:9-11), any more than a dog can understand the working, say, of a watch. For the dog has only the nature of a dog, not the nature of a man, who has far superior intelligence improving itself, profiting by others, working to a new but definite end, and guided by reasons as well as mechanical power in the making of a watch. In course of time it may become mechanical enough; but there was no little exercise of thought and skill on the part of him who made the first watch. Probably it was big and clumsy too, and often required mending. Still the first was a greater effort of mind than

the later skill which wrought up the best watch that England could produce. For its maker has the advantage of all the numberless improvements made ever since in this detail or that to make a record watch. Yet with all this activity of mind there is a consciousness of responsibility to God and a far higher moral sense than that of intellect, which belongs to man alone on earth.

The gist then is that the things of God are as much above the best man after the flesh and the highest part of that man as a watch or other such work is above the nature of a dog or any instinct it possesses. How morally debasing to forget it! This is surely an all-important difference, and cannot but, where it is truly felt, draw out our thanksgiving, whilst it also vindicates and displays the depths of God's grace. For He has given us who believe a life capable of entering into His thoughts and His affections, into His counsels and His mind, enabling us by His Spirit to search all things, yea, the deep things of God.

For it is admitted that we need for this the Spirit of God also. It is not enough to be born of the Spirit. The Old Testament saints were so born; but they could not as yet receive the indwelling Spirit from on high. To no saints was He given till Christ's redemption was effected. And only when the converted soul rests on redemption does one now receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The lack of this is the reason why converted persons are found spiritually dull. They cannot go beyond the elements of divine truth because, though having the new nature, they have not yet the power of the Spirit; and if probed, they would be found not to have settled peace yet. The real fact is that they are not really resting on Christ's redemption, and so have not that fruit of redemption.

They are looking for what they want. They are, as they say, striving earnestly to get what they have not got. They have to learn that liberty in Christ is only to be had by giving up altogether self and its efforts, to rest only and altogether on Christ and His work of redemption. The atoning work is done.

This shortcoming or shallowness of faith came in as a flood after the apostles passed away. In the early days it was not for anyone to enter the church except those sealed by the Holy Spirit. But when the church began to settle down in the world, and persecution became only a temporary outburst, when many wise and rich people came in, powerful and noble, there was an object in consequence to become acquainted with personages who in Christian love became more intimate than they ever would as in the world. It was an inducement to not a few to follow them; as some of late found from the same cause in their little history. Love soon decays in such circumstances. So that we readily understand the necessity for the words, “Let us love, not with word, nor with the tongue, but in deed and truth.”

“And herein we shall know that we are of the truth;” that is, if walking in love. This is immense comfort to the believer; but what a mistake to put it before an unconverted soul as the way to get forgiveness! Who that knows the gospel could ask such to show these fruits of love? But it is what saints ought to feel in what is justly called the moral government of God. For, when brought to God, we become objects of God as Father to judge us every day (1 Peter 1:17). The Lord presented it figuratively in John 15, and declared Himself the true Vine, as the disciples were the branches. This is not the figure of being born again (which is really in John 3:3-6);

nor still less has it to do with union, as many mistakenly imagine. In neither case is there such thing as losing life eternal or Christ's members cut off. This difference suffices to disprove such misapplications. The Vine teaches the necessity of communion with Christ practically. To abide in Him, and He in us, is the power of fruit-bearing. For what enables the disciple to bring forth fruit? Is it not dependence on Christ, His words abiding in us, and prayer (ver. 7)? It is Christ who is the source of all the fruit, and the branches bear it by hanging on Him. Apart from Him they can do nothing. And it is the Father who prunes the branch that it may bear more fruit. But it is the Vine that supplies all the sap to the branches that attach to Him.

Our Lord did a great deal more; but for fruit-bearing this is what He does. If you disconnect the branch from the vine, what then? Will it bear grapes again? Can there be any more fruit? Not the least. There were those once following Christ who walked no more with Him. They cut themselves off. They were no longer branches of the Vine. It is not denied that one here and another there might repent and seek restoration. Far be it from us to deny or discourage a soul. But those that leave Christ in general become hard and antagonistic to a decree. In fact, it is comparatively rare for such as turn their back on the Lord to return to Him again. If real repentance work, who so ready to receive? There is no limit to His love. But those contemplated here, instead of self-judgment, have hard thoughts of Christ, and abandon all reverence, lowering His person, and trifling with His work, so as to manifest that they had only notions, and not life eternal.

Therefore it is of deep importance to remember that the moral government of God foes on with souls now and has a double action. On the one hand God watches over every saint, and judges every fault, but in faithful love. On the other hand, there are those who, distrusting Him, cannot bear His dealings. They resist or despise the trials which God employs as a means of recovery. For He chastens; and no chastening at the time seems pleasant. Joy would altogether deny His character; but it is for profit, and afterwards yields peaceful fruit of righteousness to those exercised thereby. It is God as Father now judging according to the work of each; in short, His moral government. He thus deals with those that are His children, or at most those that profess so to be. For God concerns Himself thus according to men's profession; and in a way quite different with those who have never borne the Lord's name.

It is therefore incumbent on everyone that names the name of the Lord to withdraw from iniquity, and thus wake up out of the snare of the devil lest he get a constant advantage over his soul, and an overwhelming advantage. The longer any wait the worse it becomes. It is bad enough for those who believe to remain units; and it is to be feared that not a few are content with isolation, as if they escaped responsibility, in the present growing disorder here below. They look at the faults of other Christians to justify their isolation, and shun the trials of walking together as brethren, whose shortcomings they are very quick to discern, and without mercy. But there is no real conscience as to God's glory in their own state. How wretched it is to justify ourselves by the faults of others! But is their own walk really better than that of such as never made

profession of Christ? Is it not sadly like walking in the light of their own fire and in the sparks of their own kindling? Let them beware lest they lie down in sorrow. Their course is one neither of righteousness nor of love; and Christianity unites both according to the truth of Christ.

Now, in our walk when we are brought to God, the secret of power is dependence on Christ. Does not the vine teach us this more than any other figure? It would be hard to find in all the realm of nature a tree so impressive as the vine to mark the need for the branches to keep up their place in the vine in order to bear fruit. And as certainly it is the same principle between Christ and the Christian. So it is here. If love be merely with word and with the tongue, if not in deed and truth, can it but displease God? Is it not an insult to the Spirit of God? If we walk as children of light, we also carry out the divine principle of love, i.e., we seek the good of one another without a selfish purpose. Such is the love we know in God; and Christ became man to show it in a way that even God as such could not. And who can wonder that He so deeply feels any slight to the name of His Son, Jesus our Lord? It was the humiliation of Christ in becoming a man, and bearing the sufferings which His sacrifice of Himself entailed, even to enduring God's judgment of sin laid on Him. This could not be in God as God; but it is exactly what we have from God in Christ's propitiation for our sins. Therein all the light and the love and the truth of God shine in a way beyond thought of man; and this is Christianity.

But a necessary part of practical Christianity is not merely righteousness, as we have been seeing, or obedience. It is love; only let it be real, he says; and if it

be so, “we shall know.” In this he classes himself with the rest, which contributes to the beauty of his words. “Herein we shall know that we” — you and I, the apostle and the saints — “are of the truth.” But when there is a bad conscience, the exercise of love and of everything else which flows from divine life, dwindles away. One does not in this refer to those who are not children of God, but only to those who are. It is they that are crippled by it; it is they that suffer from what they have lost; and there is always a suspension of enjoyment when communion with Him is thus interrupted. Some might think it remarkable that, while the life that God gives In Christ is eternal, the communion that we enjoy by it is most sensitive to any evil on our part; it immediately ceases through indulging in ever so little a folly. And why? Communion means that the blessing is shared in common. How could God share even a little folly with us? With any sins He cannot possibly have communion; nor can we be walking in Christ. Enjoyment of communion is “broken at once. Far from Him to say that it is so lost that it cannot be regained. But we can praise Him that there is no regaining life eternal, because it is eternal; yet there is the necessity that we be restored to the communion interrupted by evil of any kind. It might be only a bad thought or feeling; but communion is broken till it is judged. If it is allowed, it hinders no less than any outward or open evil.

So he says, “Herein we shall know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.” To be “of the truth” is the basis of truthfulness in practice; to lose or neglect the truth is soon followed by untruthful ways, which expose one to love with word and with the tongue, instead of in deed and truth. It was not looking back to

see that they were converted, still less that they were baptized. Neither is meant of God to give us comfort when He is thus dishonoured in such circumstances, but rather to put us to shame. Is it not grievous that I, who have been brought to God and not merely have its outward mark, should have behaved so ill? If on the contrary we are kept watchful and earnest before God, loving too and lowly withal, “we shall know that we are of the truth.” This inspires boldness or confidence before God. And such really is the sense here. The force intended is not standing, nor assurance of faith; but the heart’s boldness before God in a walk of unaffected and active love. “Therein we shall know that we are of the truth, and shall” — not exactly assure, but “persuade our hearts before Him.” This is the simple and literal meaning; which seems to me better to take as it is, seeking to understand what the Spirit meant by it. A different form of this word and other words express assurance, one of which would have been employed if “assurance” had been meant here; but “we shall persuade our hearts before Him” seems well suited to act powerfully on our souls, and to express the boldness inspired by simple-hearted sincerity in a living Christian walk.

There is much in these words to encourage and strengthen a godly Methodist. Their weak point is in not apprehending life eternal in Christ, and assigning too much to their own emotions. The grace of God in the gospel leaves ample room for the warmest and deepest affections. Spiritual feelings have a just place, but far more the grace and truth through Christ which create and elicit them; yet all saints should be sound according to the word and Spirit of God. Nor ought we to be like a

rigid Calvinist, who thinks the one thing is to have come to the conclusion that we are the elect, and therefore entitled to all comfort. Thus he swamps the moral government of God before us by his absorption with election. Now election is an admirable truth for which to praise our God; but it is not meant to serve as security against the unhappy certainty that we have dishonoured God. Why should we want to be comforted in presence of the fact that we have displeased Him? He wants us to be humbled on that account; and this is what is brought in immediately after. “For if our heart condemn us”; this is just what our heart does, when we walk badly, and there is that which grieves the Spirit of God, and we have not duly judged ourselves before Him. And if we know that our heart condemns us, we infer rightly how much more God knew to blame. “God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.” Some of the Calvinists turn it in this way: if our heart condemn us, God in His grace does not. How sad it is to lose the profit of His word by any systematic departure from its plain sense! His mind is that if I condemn myself, God is greater than I, He knows all where we only know in part.

They fear to shake our standing thereby. Now this has nothing whatever to do with our standing in Christ, but with our state day by day. It is a question of loss of communion; and we are called to judge ourselves in His sight, instead of falling back on election or standing. Election as well as standing abide; it is all wrong for a believer to doubt of either. But if his heart condemn him, we may be sure that God knows far more: he should be in the dust before Him, and thus have divine help to search all out and hate his carelessness, because he is an object of such grace. We are to judge our bad state

while holding fast the standing in Christ which God has given us. This remains firm; but our state has been wrong, and God would have us, not to hide from it nor excuse it, but condemn ourselves unsparingly.

What a pity to fall under these systems of men, as one may call the peculiarities of Calvinists or Arminians! For one only blames their peculiarities, not the truth which they hold as Christians. There are dear saints of God among both; but they both suffer not a little, from the Arminian not giving sufficient glory to God's grace in life eternal, and from the Calvinist not leaving sufficient value to communion, which is often followed by uncertainty about his own election. As one of them said, "If you do not doubt about yourself, I doubt about you." Their tendency is to slur their sins or to set up a school of doubt. It was a pious man who so spoke, and he wrote many hymns; and I can but hope the hymns are better than the doctrine. For such doubting is abominable, unworthy not only of a Christian but of Christ still more. It practically denies the gospel, which proclaims salvation by God's grace, and calls for our peaceful enjoyment of it. Hence in point of fact Calvinists generally, though with bright exceptions, are weak. as to the gospel. They are occupied with election, rather than with God's love to the world, to say nothing of the provision of grace for their own souls. Election has a too absorbing place in their creed, which makes it a sort of servant-of-all-work. But all this falls miserably short of God's grace and truth. In Christ there is room for everything true that both Calvinists and Arminians hold, and for a good deal more which neither holds. It is a pity that saints of God do not drop these partial schemes of doctrine, cleaving only to God's revelation, accepting it

wholly, and eschewing every substitute for it. Christianity has ample room for the widest feeling and for the soundest judgment, and in short for everything that faith is bound to receive from God, or that love is free to achieve for His glory.

The heart's condemnation here is from the consciousness of failure in our ways, and the conviction of still more known to God in His moral government of our souls. This too is implied in "Forgive us our debts, as we also forgave our debtors." Here too it is a question, not of plenary forgiveness in faith of the gospel, but of God's watchful and constant oversight of His children's ways. This has nothing at all to do with the poor sinner's need; for it is plain that the gospel offers no forgiveness of sins on the condition of a forgiving spirit to others. Grace gives remission of sins on the faith of the Lord Jesus. Here is nothing to do with that; but if you — a Christian — fail to walk in a forgiving spirit with others, God is displeased with you. Thereby you no longer enjoy communion with Him, and He will not restore it till you truly judge yourself for the wrong. This lack is what produced the saint's self-condemnation, and the indication of censure on God's part.

Evidently then it is of great importance to distinguish between the ground of grace on which we stand for life eternal and redemption, and the application of God's moral dealing with us every day, where He must judge our faulty ways, and He is chastising us that we may become partakers of His holiness. This leads us truly to condemn our inconsistencies and conform our practice to God's mind in His hatred of sin, and in furtherance of what is loving, righteous, and true.

The apostle says, “Beloved, if our heart condemn not, we have boldness toward God” (ver. 21). His heart responds to those who walk normally before Him. It is no longer merely “‘Dear children.” He delights in seeing love realised, and encourages the activity of love in prayer where things thus go well. Where the Spirit of God has to occupy us with our failure, we cannot be free to ask new favours. We must submit to the humiliating sense, that if we condemn ourselves about our ways, God condemns us yet more. Where by His power there is quiet enjoyment of communion, our hearts can earnestly ask for more grace. “Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, we have boldness toward him, and whatsoever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments, and do the things pleasing in his sight.” There is nothing in this case to arrest the activity of love. Grace has its unhindered way in what is good, because we are walking happily in the light of God, so that the heart turns not to self-reproach. We can freely have done with self to enjoy Christ.

Such is clearly the right state for every Christian to walk in day by day. It is what we have to seek; but alas! where we sadly fall short perhaps; but assuredly it is that to which we are called by grace. A peaceful, single-eyed and confiding state can only be by walking before God according to our life in Christ. To comfort ourselves under failure, because we have life eternal, does not rightly meet what is due to God, any more than to our own state. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. There is not only faith but experimental reality in the soul’s following what the apostle tells us of what was wrought in him. “I am crucified with Christ, and no longer do I live, but Christ liveth in me; but that which I

now live in flesh I live by the faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). Tradition is vain, ordinances fall. The power of Christ's cross is brought home. He for his old life was identified by faith with Him — who actually suffered it; and he now lives in Him who is alive for evermore; and it is a life of faith in His love. This individualising is not a very common phase in Scripture. Generally "Christ loving" and "Christ giving Himself" is said for Christians as a whole as in Eph. 5:1, 2. But it is very precious to have it personally also, though short indeed to have it no more than personal, whereby we fail to appreciate our communion with the Father and with the Son in the blessedness of all the family of God.

Peace with God, peace of conscience, indispensable as it may be, is not all the blessing that His grace would have us enjoy; still less is the assurance that we are forgiven all our offences. This we have as believing God's glad tidings; but it is not what is spoken of in vers. 19-22. It was a very necessary and great mercy for each soul at his beginning. Then in faith it is wrong to allow a question whether he really believes or not. Scripture knows nothing of such a doubt in one who believes in Christ; he is nowhere thrown back on what he finds within. It is because he is lost that God points to His Son as Saviour, as to whom no question of failure could arise with him. Here it is for Christians in their walk of every day; and the question now is of practical confidence in the heart. We are in such nearness by grace that anything unsuitable in us toward our God and Father is intolerable, and provided against with all care.

Many of us know in our own families what it is to have a child sometimes naughty. Does not this make a

difference if the child has real affection? Even if the father and mother do not know why, the child is ill at ease. Instead of being able happily to meet its parents as usual, something has gone wrong; and the more upright the child, the more that is felt. It is just so with our God and Father; save that He never fails, and all is known to Him. Hence the vast importance of self-judgment, which we need because of what we are. Where this is applied to our failure, the soul returns into the enjoyment of the communion, which to our sorrow had been lost. The right state is the boldness toward God. It is not the standing which the Christian has permanently; but the heart's state liable to interruption by carelessness. While we walk in the Spirit, this boldness God-ward is our happy state; and it is the only becoming state for a Christian. How sad to settle down into the lack of it habitually! Surely there ought to be an earnest crying to God to find what has taken it from the heart; if so, one will not have to cry long. It flows from the love of the Father that He would have us taste its comfort, and feel its deprivation through any unjudged fault. But we have in Jesus as Advocate with the Father the provided resource, instead of seeking an earthly director who supplants the Lord and cannot suffice for a function so delicate and difficult. It is our privilege readily and at once to repair through Christ to the throne of grace, nay to the Father's love, assured that no failure can be there.

Hence here it is beautifully added, "Whatsoever we ask, we receive from Him." It is another sample of the absolute way in which John loves to speak. He does not speak of any modification through occasional circumstances, or of any particular hindrance that may

arise. He does not allude to a possibly inconsistent state. He assumes here that the heart does not condemn; that one has boldness toward God; that we are in the enjoyment of communion with Him. And what is the effect of communion? It excludes wrong petitions. We do not then seek anything alien to the will of God. We ask for that which is according to His will; and He grudges us nothing good. He delights in our enjoyment of all that is for His glory; and all this we have found in Christ; for He is the ever attractive and sustaining link. It is Christ who chooses everything for us. There is no light nor spring in our heart without Christ thus depended on. Accordingly this is just what God has given us. Whatsoever we ask we receive; for in that state we shall never ask anything amiss. Our apostle supplies here the reason, “because we keep His commandments.” Those who fail to see that it is a question of God’s moral government of the Christian’s state fall into the error of confounding it with the ground of salvation, and make it conditional. But this annuls sovereign grace in saving sinners. Here it is not grace, but government. And government is necessarily conditional. But God’s grace which saves our souls and effaces our sins is absolute, free, and sovereign. The only condition here, if it is to be called a condition, is to give up ourselves as ungodly, and receive what His love gives us freely in Christ.

Here is another subject altogether; and its mixture with grace is the common vice of so-called “theology.” Who can wonder therefore, that simple, sound, and intelligent Christians distrust and repudiate so unreliable a guide. They have good reason to beware, for it habitually darkens and perplexes many believers who, immature in the truth, thought themselves on the

right line by listening to it. But systematic divinity is like what is called a hortus siccus; that is, flowers and leaves, or the like, plucked from the plant and dried, so that not a particle remains of freshness or life in one of them.

Such is “theology”; whereas Scripture is “spirit and life.” So is the Lord Jesus, the living One who died but is alive again for evermore; and again the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of truth that quickens, the One given not only for life but to keep every truth fresh and powerful; and so it is in the ever-flowing love of God the Father. Man makes, or strives to make, revelation into a science. Can two things more thoroughly differ? Who ever found life or peace in systematic divinity? It is always guarding this and guarding that with human weapons, and framing its uncertain and defective doctrines into imaginary fortresses of the faith, which must be Christ’s working in us by the word and Spirit of God. Only in the Bible we have the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; and we have the Holy Spirit who wrote all to guide us into all the truth. Therefore we have confidence in God and the word of His grace.

Scripture is the standard, and the Holy Spirit is the power sent down to abide in and with us for ever. What ample privileges, to say nothing of the gifts of Christ’s grace in ministry from the highest to the least! We are commended to this, and God would have us judge everything that hinders; and this is what occupies the apostle in these verses. And if we profit in faith and love, he says, “Whatsoever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.” Only think of applying this to the gospel! The last clause is just what

our blessed Lord said He always did (John 8:29). He is the perfection of all He undertook. “I do always the things that are pleasing to him.” But there is where we fall. We neither do nor say always the things that please Him. As God sees and hears everything, He takes special notice of His children, not as against us but for us; and if God be for us, who against us? Therefore, as He slurs over no fault, we need not take up John 17 or Rom. 8 as a hiding place, but do well to humble ourselves for all that has grieved the Holy Spirit of God by whom we were sealed for redemption’s day. Our hearts thus return to the enjoyment of boldness toward God. This gives liberty and impulse to prayer, as it is said here, “Whatsoever we ask.” Surely, if we ask for dependence on Christ God will hear, seeking more continuance in prayer, more profiting by His word: these are according to God’s will, as well as the means of exercising and enjoying eternal life. For that life is the substratum of all this Epistle.

“And this is His commandment, that we should believe the name of His Son.” This is here rendered “on”; but the Greek admits of no “on.” Now it maybe more difficult to understand it according to what the Spirit of God unquestionably wrote; but if we do not understand the phrase, are we not to receive it implicitly as written? We need not force a meaning on it, but be content to accept what is His word without understanding it, and wait till we do. But there it is written to the family of God, though it be an unusual phrase. In Scripture ordinarily it is “believing God and believing God about His Son; and, when Christ is introduced, it is “believing on or in Christ.” Such is the general language of Scripture. Here the form used, is “believing the name.”

When it is said one believes God about Christ, it is believing God's record of Christ; it is believing what God tells me of Christ. When then it is said "believe the name of His Son," does it not mean believing what that Name imports? The Name is God's revelation of the Lord, that is, of what He is, and has done, and a beautiful expression it is. It is not merely that His name as a man was Jesus, one need scarcely say, nor only His title is the Lord, or any of His offices. Here it is believing the Name, the divine revelation, or God's testimony to His Son Jesus Christ. For He pre-eminently is the object of faith; and here and now it is that we shall believe His name, as if it personified Himself. It is not only what we begin with when once we believed. We believed on the Lord then; but the apostle loves to speak of the person and all that comes in and through Him is believed. Hence he employs this singular expression, "believe the name of His Son Jesus Christ." There is dependence upon Christ; but here it is believing the Name of His Son Jesus Christ, what that blessed name conveys as revealed by God in His word. We believe His Name.

There is a difference of reading nearly balanced that is worthy of notice. The form of the word "believe" in the ordinary text with high authority implies continuance in faith; in others of great weight, it is believing once for all, the fact summed up in its conclusion. But when we come to "love," it is the actual loving of every day. This is plain and sure. But the two things are blended into one commandment. It is the great commandment of Christianity in contrast with the commandment of the law. There it was to love God and one's neighbour. Now it is to believe the name of His Son Jesus Christ and to love one another, even God's children. How deplorable

the blunder to confound the children of God with our neighbour! This is not its meaning; but those are to be loved whom the world knows not, as it knew Him not whose Name is believed. All this was far beyond the thoughts of man, What would you think of one who told you to love all the children in London in the same way as you love your own children? You would think such a person demented. This may help to show how much higher is “His commandment” here. As we said before, there is all possible difference between the children of God and the children of the devil. A man might be my next door neighbour and the greatest enemy to Christ. To such a one the command that I am here to love has no application. One ought to have the love of compassion for him, to desire and to seek from God that he might receive the word of truth, the gospel of salvation. His hardened opposition, his very defiance of God, might only the more draw out our supplication that he might become a monument of mercy. And God has hearkened to prayer in such a case, and has honoured the persistent cry that entreated in faith and humility for a guilty soul. It would require no little courage to enable one so to seek and labour for our next-door neighbour of such a character. Yet even so this neighbour in no way falls under the commandment before us, which applies only to loving “one another, as He gave us commandment.” It is strictly and solely mutual Christian love.

Here again is another example of the way in which John mixes up God and Christ. In the beginning of the verse the last person spoken of is God; and we were to ask and receive of Him, and to do those things that are pleasing in His sight. “And this is His commandment, that we

should believe the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment." Now we know very well it was Christ who gave the commandment. Yet it is the same "He" apparently all through. Such a style could never have become possible unless Christ were as truly God as the Father. This is the secret of its peculiarity. And John's writing is done purposely in honour of the Son even as of the Father, instead of a negligent slip. There is no inadvertence in Scripture; as there may be in the most celebrated classic. Divine purpose and perfect wisdom reign in the written word.

"And he that keepeth His commandments abideth in Him." It is one of the drawbacks of our beautiful authorised version that the translators cannot let the same word go on unaltered even in the same context; so fond are they of, ringing the change on the same word. Most who know only the English version would suppose that there must be some shade of difference between "dwell" and "abide." But the Greek gives only the same word. It is the more regrettable because there is a distinct word for "dwell" which has its own propriety of application. Is it not far better for the English reader also to have the same word? Here it signifies little save to remember that the "dwelling" and the "abiding" mean the same thing. In John 5 it is of much consequence to adhere to "judgment" all through, and not allow "condemnation" or "damnation" unless distinctly expressed.

Here we have the transition to the new subject of abiding in God, and God in us. There is no vagueness as to it. Without obedience this wondrous privilege cannot be. "And he that keepeth his commandments abideth in

him, and he in him." Exegetically, he abides in God, and God in him. But it is applicable to Christ also, and is so said elsewhere. In itself therefore it is perfectly true whether you say "abide in Christ" or "abide in God." When you abide in Christ you abide in God; and when you abide in God you abide no less in Christ. But there may be a contextual propriety which chooses one rather than the other in strict interpretation. That is often important to see; yet it is simple. But it is helpful to avoid mistakes as to Scripture and seeing distinctions without a difference.

"And herein we know that he abideth in us by the Spirit which he gave us." There the gift of the Spirit is the power and proof of God's abiding in the Christian. It is in this way that God abides in him. He gave him the Spirit. But abiding in God is a matter of spiritual dependence on Him in practice; and it could not be unless the Spirit abiding in the saint wrought so as to keep in ungrieved looking to Him, and drawing from Him. If I were grieving the Lord at the time, I am no longer abiding in Him; I have slipped away out of His presence, and am for awhile perhaps pursuing my own thought and way and will. But whether it be but a passing slip, or for a certain time, I am out of the enjoyment of His presence, and not abiding in Him.

Yet it may be noticed that in the last half we hear, not as in the first half of the two truths, but only of God's abiding in us, which is simply by the Spirit given to us. On this alone depends God's abiding in us. It is founded on redemption, and abides as redemption also abides. But our abiding in Him is a question of spiritual state; and is only taken up for full explanation in the latter part of 1 John 4. The early verses, 1-6 are a parenthesis of

the utmost moment as a basis for both the one and the other.

It is in 1 John 3:23 and 24 that the apostle enters on the exposition of the proper and full place of the Christian, and this with the least reference possible to the negative side, which had such prominence in the previous discussion. Here the positive blessedness of our privileges is set before all the saints with the same simplicity, but depth also, characteristic of his letter from first to last. In verse 23 it is the plain and easily recognised trait of the Christian; in verse. 24 it is the less cognisable but no less real inner exercise of life by the power of the indwelling Spirit of God working on or rather in that life. And special notice, as we have seen, is taken of the blighting influence of a careless walk on the enjoyment of the heart’s boldness before God which ought to be our portion habitually.

Address 12 - 1 John 4:1-6

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, if they are of God because many false prophets are (or, have) gone out into the world. Herein ye know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesseth Jesus Christ come in flesh is of God; and every spirit which confesseth not Jesus15 is not of God; and this is the (spirit or principle) of the antichrist whereof ye have heard that it cometh; and now it is already in the world. Ye are of God, dear 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: for this reason they speak [as] of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God doth not hear us. From this we know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error” (vers. 1-6).

Before the apostle proceeds with God’s abiding in us, known by the Spirit given to us (1 John 3:24), he turns off to the grave subject before us. Therein he would guard us, against the inroads of the enemy on the foundations of the faith, by the truth of Christ’s person, and by God’s authoritative revelation of Him through the inspired apostles and prophets given by the ascended Lord, and embodied in the Scriptures of the New Testament.

It is not, as in his previous teaching, the tests which sever the real Christian from the spurious or self-deceived. The introduction of the Holy Spirit leads him into a digression, as we have seen his manner to be, of extreme value on what is most fundamental, the divinely given tests of the truth itself. These tests are two: the

person of Him who was manifested in flesh; and the revelation of Him through the chosen witnesses in order that, as He was truly divine and perfectly human, we might have a no less divine communication of what is so transcendent a blessing stamped with God's authority through men inspired for the purpose. He is the One on whose reception depends life eternal with all the privileges of the Christian, and of the church, of which the apostle Paul was the minister beyond all others; He is the One whose rejection entails God's wrath to abide on all those guilty of it (John 3:35, 36). As He came down from heaven, Himself the truth in sovereign grace, so God took care to give us the surest revelation by man and for man, — whether he hear or refuse, adapted to the conscience and heart of man, but guarded and guided by the God who cannot err.

If God in virtue of redemption was pleased to give the Holy Spirit to the Christian in a measure and way which was not nor could be before Christ's death, resurrection and ascension, Satan set himself to counterfeit the heavenly gift, and thwart the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. He acts by apostates, the many false prophets who not only mislead others to perdition, but incur themselves vengeance more severely than the guilty Jew or the dark Gentile. Hence the care to present the two-fold criterion of the truth in the simplest and most direct form for the help of every Christian who needs it.

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits if (or, whether) they are of God." It is a question of discerning, not Christians, but the real character of those who claimed to speak. in the Spirit. This the enemy simulated; and his power of subtle persuasion

has ever been great since man's first temptation in paradise. "He was a murderer from the beginning, and stood not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh falsehood he speaketh of his own, for he is a liar and its father" (John 8:44). Evil spirits were more than ever at work to oppose the Spirit of truth, as very many unclean spirits in the possessed were cast out by the Holy One of God when here. In the Gospel of the divine Servant of God and man, it is the first miracle recorded; Christ's word had power to bless man, and expel the demon. And now that the intrepid and unflinching apostle to the uncircumcision was gone, his warning to the elders of the church in Ephesus was being rapidly verified: "I know, that there will come in among you after my departure grievous wolves, not sparing the flock; and. from among your own selves shall arise men speaking perverted things to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29, 30).

This outbreak of evil was aggravated before the eyes of the last apostle. He appeals to every saint on his faith in Christ and in the word of God; and strips the true question of all the gloss of reasoning and sentiment by which the enemy obscured what was at stake. It was really giving up God and His word under pretension of new and higher truth. Some antichrists denied the real humanity of Christ, others His true deity, and others their union in one person. In any of these ways the truth of His person, and of His work consequently, was abandoned and sought to be overthrown. They knew the Father and Jesus Christ whom He sent; and they had the Spirit to help them. Thus they were as simple children of God not only responsible but by grace adequate to prove what sort of spirit wrought in these new lights. They

were bound for His sake and for their own souls to sift their novelties, “because many false prophets were gone out into the world.” Were these men such? Christ had given true “apostles and prophets,” who conjointly form the foundation of the church dogmatically. Hence we have Mark and Luke, to say nothing of writers of Epistles, who were not apostles but prophets. Satan imitated this, and availed himself of these unbelievers in going out into the world to lead astray and destroy. There were “many false prophets.”

The first test is as to the Spirit. “Herein we know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesseth Jesus Christ come in flesh is of God.” The common rendering fails to give its real force; for the introduction of “that” and “is” is not only uncalled for, but makes it to be mere confession of a fact; whereas the apostolic word means the confession of His person. Is it true that an evil spirit would deny the historical fact that Jesus Christ is come in flesh? Do not Mohammedans admit this fact without hesitation, if the Jews do not? And assuredly some of the most extreme and pernicious sceptics allow the fact, and eulogise the Lord after their fashion as the best of men.

But there is no true confession of the person of the Lord as here laid down by the apostle save by the Spirit of God. For, few as the words are, they go to the essence of the matter. Many a man was called “Jesus” between the son of Nun and the Son of Mary the virgin. The first, as far as Scripture speaks, was truly but only a type of the Joshua immeasurably greater than himself. Others may have been so named, but quite unworthy, notably he whom the Jews preferred to the Lord of glory, if we attach any credit to some twenty manuscripts which say so. Certainly he was surnamed Barabbas (son of the

father), the devil's counterpart to the true Son of the Father.

The Spirit in Matt. 1 gives us His interpretation of the name: "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." Joshua led Israel into Canaan in the face of enemies which swarmed there; but the Antitype alone could save His people from their sins. He was Jah, Jehovah, the Eternal absolutely, the Eternal relatively and historically; and as they were His people, He it was that should save them from their sins, as none but He could who was also Immanuel, God with us; and who but He could claim this title as Himself 2 If His people reject Him to their own loss for awhile, His grace turns to the besotted nations, to such of them at least as hear His voice. To Gentiles, as we were, this salvation was sent meanwhile; but the Gentile, puffed up in unbelief and pride, must be cut off, as in part the Jews were to let us in. At length, turning to their crucified Messiah, then exalted and lifted up and very high, and cleared of all inward fear as well as of outward, "So all Israel shall be saved." His love had waited long, unexhausted and faithful till they will have got to the bottom of their evil and their sufferings; His mercy endures for ever, as His gifts and calling admit no change of mind.

This is the "Jesus Christ" whom every spirit that is of God confesses. Only He is now known in Christianity far more profoundly as well as more intimately than when presented to Israel, who shall know Him in the visible glories of the coming kingdom. He who came in flesh was Jah the Saviour, as He was also God's Anointed or Christ. It is He whom the Spirit of truth honours, as the spirit of error hates Him. For there is the dark side:

“Every spirit which confesseth not Jesus is not of God.” What confirms the shorter reading here is the article before “Jesus” in the latter clause. It is in its common usage of reference, and can hardly be expressed in English translation. But the explanation is clear and sure: “Every spirit which confesseth not (the) Jesus (already described).” It supposes no repetition of the words here omitted, yet implies that predication as true.

The name of Jesus is the expression of all that He is as revealed of God; and as we need, so we have it all to our everlasting joy. Nor does it avail only for the supreme excellency of all that is in Him and through Him: He and He only gives us the truth of every one and thing as it really is; and thus He proves Himself to be the truth objectively, as the Spirit is the truth in the inward power of giving us to realise and enjoy what is in and by Christ (1 John 5:6). He alone leads into any adequate knowledge of God. He shows us the Father. He makes known to us, as not to the world, the Holy Spirit. He reveals the Trinity. In Christ we know light and life and love, as of God, and nowhere else. In Him we know obedience, righteousness, holiness, reverence, dependence, faithfulness, humility, meekness, absolutely and in all perfection. In Him is displayed man the worthy object of God’s delight; and man under Satan’s power in his enmity to God, the truth of man naturally as he is. So through Him we know what Satan is in hatred as well as deceit. Without Christ we have only the shadow of redemption and propitiation, of sacrifice and offering, of priest and sanctuary. He only is the substance and fulness, setting everything in its true character and true relation to God, Himself the centre of all. Do you doubt as to the truth of anything? Bring Christ into the

difficulty, apply Him to the question; and you will find the truth in each and every case. Is not He manifestly and justly the criterion of the truth?

Thus it is that, while the reasoning soul loses itself in the labyrinth of speculation in quest of the truth which eludes the strongest natural mind, grace provides the truth in Christ to the simplest believer who looks to Him as his all. For there is the solution; Christ is the truth objectively, as the Spirit is in power to his spirit. Those self-seeking and self-vaunting "false prophets" may tell "the little child" that he cannot do without them, and that they alone have "the spirit," he no more than "the letter." The believer knows that he has Christ, the Son manifested in flesh, and refuses to let go what was "heard from the beginning" and is now in the written word of God. He does not pretend to have all realised; but he knows that having Christ the truth, he has it all perfectly in Him, and counts on the unction of the Spirit for application as the need arises. He therefore feels the all-importance that what was heard from the beginning should abide in him, that he too should abide in the Son and in the Father. If Christ thus revealed is given up, Christianity is gone. And when the enemy was undermining Christ under pretence of higher truth, the Spirit of God recalls to Him Who was and is the truth. He therefore admits of no development, which is no more than the lie of Satan, and has no truth, but betrays itself by denying known life eternal as His present gift. The lie offers only "ideas."

Grace then furnishes a sure criterion to know when it is the Spirit of God teaching the truth, or when an evil spirit insinuates the great lie. The Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus; the evil spirit cries up the world, being the

instrument of the devil to deceive as far as he can. If he cannot deceive the elect, he accuses them, and makes them appear narrow, morose, and bigoted; because they are not misled by the fine colours with which Satan invests his evil doings. They believe God concerning His Son. This is quite a different thing from confounding with faith credulity, which is but believing man. But no link with God is formed save in believing God; and this is by His word, and since the apostle passed away, His written word. The Holy Spirit bore witness to the Lord as the incarnate Son of God. One accordingly believes on the Lord Jesus Christ at God's word for life eternal. A fact about Him, however true and important, is not believing on and confessing Himself. Life is in His Son. And He came in flesh; for this was essentially "Jesus," the marvel of divine grace, the test of divine truth. Confessing Him means that one owns the truth of His person thus come in flesh. The difference is not only important but vital. It is not the fact of His birth, but His person so born to confess.

Many think that here it is only the fact of His incarnation. Assuredly the incarnation is pressed, because it is a cardinal truth of Christianity, of rich grace; and there were some then that denied it and reduced it to a mere semblance. A little book of great antiquity was discovered recently called the Gospel of Peter, not only spurious but utterly heterodox, evidencing deadly error in early days; a most sorrowful thing that it should ever have been written. For it was as false in itself as it was a vile imposture, no more coming from a Christian than from Peter. But Peter was a marked favourite because of his fervour; and many who could not fully take in Paul's teaching exceedingly

enjoyed Peter's preaching. The wicked forger took advantage of the apostle's repute (probably after his death) to gain acceptance for his own Gnostic legend. For its purport is to represent that Christ did not come in flesh so as to die on the cross, that He merely took flesh as one lives in a house; that flesh did not really form part of His person; that, after living in the body for a time, on coming to the cross He left it and went up to heaven.

It seems like the doctrine of the Moslems, who imagine that, at the critical moment, God, by an exercise of His power and retributive justice, substituted Judas Iscariot for the Lord Jesus, and took Him up on high. In short this class of Gnostics and the Mahomedans held that the Lord did not die on the cross. Indeed the Mahomedans believe that the Lord will come again to judge the world, and that He will find all the world then in an apostate state. There are ignorant men preaching worse everywhere in Christendom, who look for a state of growing perfection for man on the earth without Christ. Is it not humbling to think that a kingdom without the King is the idea of vast numbers, alike Nationalist and Dissenting? Some, no doubt, look for another and greater outpouring of the Spirit to bring it about. But He will thus be poured out again in honour of Christ's reign over the earth. The Mahomedans, blind as they are, own that in the coming crisis they themselves will have given up their Koran (their sacred book, as they call it), that the Jews will have given up the Old Testament, and that the Christians will have given up the New Testament. To such an apostasy Scripture shows that Christendom is rapidly hastening; and the strongest force toward it is in

the sceptical theories which deny true inspiration, so prevalent in Christendom even now.

But here is the test, the touchstone of truth. “Every spirit which confesseth Jesus Christ come in flesh is of God.” This is the simple and proper way to render the words. The true spirit confesses Christ’s person. It is of all moment to understand this, because laying the stress on “coming in flesh” may overlook Who came thus. Undoubtedly His coming in flesh is very important, yet far more momentous is He who thus came. Who was He that came in flesh? persons in their senses would not say that you or I came in the flesh. Take the mightiest monarchs that founded world-powers — Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Alexander, Caesar. Take the greatest names in letters, philosophy, oratory, science, and what not. Nobody could with propriety speak of their coming in flesh. The reason is because we could not appear at all unless we came in flesh. The wonder, the truth, the infinite grace, is that He came in flesh. It was a divine person, the Son of God, the Creator. That He came in flesh is a most glorious thing morally for God and for man. Nothing in eternity past can compare with it save His death on the cross; nothing in eternity future.

Evidently the grand point is not merely what He became, but Who He is that thus came. Surely He might have come otherwise. He might have come in His own glory, He might have come in angelic glory (as in this guise He had often appeared for a little). He was pleased to come in flesh to glorify the Father, to vindicate God as such, to bless those who believe, to judge those who dishonour Him, to restore creation, and to destroy the devil and his works. All turns on His eternal being and divine glory. This is the doctrine of

John all through the Epistle as well as the Gospel, and prophetically in the Book of Revelation; and here it is comprised in the criterion of God's Spirit distinguished from the spirit of error.

No evil spirit will ever confess Him. They have the most awful dread of the Lord Jesus; and this natural dread is because they never doubt that He is a divine person, and that He is the appointed One not only to judge the world but in particular to punish them as the constant, active, and subtle instruments of antagonism to God and of endless mischief to man. Hence, whenever they were in the presence of the Lord, they showed the utmost terror. As the Epistle of James puts it, "The demons also believe and shudder." Alas! this is what man does not; he neither believes nor shudders; but the day is coming when he must.

Therein we have the first test. It is the glorious person of Him that came in flesh. The truth of Jesus Christ runs from the first chapter to the last of this Epistle. It is here presented in few and plain words as the test of the Spirit of truth who is come down to glorify Christ.

Next we have the counterpart. "And every spirit that confesseth not Jesus"; such is the shorter and, as I believe, the true reading, in which the best critics agree. The acceptance of this text confirms the genuine sense of what precedes, and makes it perfectly plain that it is the confession, not of a mere fact, but of the person. For in the detection of the evil spirit there is nothing expressed as to Christ's coming in the flesh, though implied of course. It is simply "Jesus," while here the article appears, "the" Jesus of whom more had just been said. "Every spirit that confesseth not (the) Jesus is not

of God." He is adequate to detect every evil spirit. It is not only that He came, was truly man, and will come again. The Mahomedans believe all this; yet they themselves are, what they call others, unbelievers. For they do not believe in the glory of His person. Their unbelief makes them hate Christians, and join with the Jews in a measure against Christians. They only look at Him as a prophet, a wonderful man, excellent beyond all the sons of men, and the appointed Judge of the world when he comes to reign for seven years! But they do not believe in His divine nature, or that He put aside His divine glory to manifest God's grace.

But if the critical text be certain, it makes no difference at bottom to the text on the negative side as compared with the positive, yet it confirms in the strongest way that the confession which the Spirit of God requires is not of tiny mere fact but of the person of our Lord, for in the negative case only the person is named, though the fuller expression is implied. It may be of interest to know that manuscripts are not wanting which departed from the right text in ver. 2 and made it to express simply a fact, and that the Latin Vulgate followed that error, with a few early fathers Greek and Latin. But no editor of the slightest weight follows their mistake.

This terminates the first test of the Spirit of God. It is the confession of the truth, Jesus Christ come in flesh. Every spirit which confesseth Him is of God: every spirit which confesseth Him not is not of God. "This is that [spirit, or, principle] of the antichrist whereof ye have heard that it cometh, and now it is in the world already." It was not men only who were active but evil spirits; and the apostle speaks in real love but peremptorily. If a divine person in love to man deigned to be born of

woman, how could it be an open question? Not to confess Him is to fight against God.

Thus closely connected with the first test we have the second test of the truth communicated to the Christian. Undoubtedly He personally is the truth (John 14:6), the Word become flesh who tabernacled among us. But God has given a fresh revelation of which He is the centre; and this is His word and the truth. It is this which is taken up here. It is the Father's word, and it makes known the Father and the Son by the Holy Spirit. Do you ask where? It is what is commonly called the New Testament, the collected teaching of His holy apostles and prophets. Even then the false prophets claimed to have the fuller light of God. They did not admit that "the doctrine of the apostles" was God's word. It was all well as a beginning: they alone had the truth. They were like the Quakers, who are fond of testifying; but it is their own thoughts and talk. Others too are not wanting, down to such as lay more stress on a dream to show them Christ, or their duty is Christians, than on the written word of God. Now we have the rationalistic school, who deny that Scripture is the word, although some allow there may be words of God in it. But they all deny it as a whole to be God's word. Yet this unbelief unsettles everything in Scripture; for who then is to decide? Who is to say what is the word and what is not, if you are thrown on uncertain writings? This the sceptic likes, because he dreads the authority of Scripture, and the peril of which it warns all who do not bow to God. If it is the word of God, what an insult to God, and to the Holy Spirit especially whom the Lord declares it is unpardonable to blaspheme!

Those who are addressed no doubt felt the seriousness of what he had already said. He immediately adds another criterion of a kindred sort: the new word of God, His final communication, founded on Jesus the Lord and His work of redemption accomplished and accepted of God. “Ye are of God, dear children.” It seems preferable to render this term τεκνία generally “dear children.” For τέκνα all translate as “children” and “little children” (παιδία) is appropriated in 1 John 2:13 and 18 to the third class of the “dear children” or tekniva, which is the general designation of all the three classes, and so runs through the Epistle. Hence “children” in 1 John 3:1, 2 includes all the family. We are all called “children of God,” and we are so now; and it is a mistake to say “sons” of God, though we are also His sons. But here it is expressly “children” of God, not sons adopted but born of God, and so His children. But τεκνία is a diminutive term closely connected with “children “; and the reason for its use is as an expression of affection; as when a parent, not content to say to his little one “my dear,” calls it “my dearie.” It is meant for fondness of expression. This illustrates its force here; and therefore it seems best to say “dear children,” in order to distinguish from “children” (τέκνα) on the one hand, and the little children or babes (παιδία) on the other.

“Ye are of God, dear children,” is the address to the whole family. It is also the emphatic “ye.” The false prophets said they were the reliable guides. No, he means, they are enemies of Christ, emissaries of Satan. “Ye” are God’s children, in contrast with these pretentious and false guides that despise the dear children. God in Christ is to you the source of every blessing, life eternal, forgiveness, relation to Himself as

Father, and the gift of His indwelling Spirit. “Ye are of God, dear children, and have overcome them,” that is, the false prophets. But it was not because you have anything to boast of your own wisdom or power or holiness; but “because greater is he that is in you.” The Christian’s source of power is the Spirit of God abiding in him. God Himself abides in him; and this He makes good by His indwelling Spirit. Therefore he can say “because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world;” or as in 1 John 5:19, “The whole world lieth in the wicked one.” Here it is clearly the devil working by these evil spirits.

Thus the emphasis on “Ye” is exceedingly cheering and establishing: to be told that they distinctively were “of God” in the sense of His being the source of all their blessing. Also, if God is the giver of the blessing, He does not change. The gifts of God are without change of mind on His part. When it is not a gift or a calling of God, He may repent. So He repented of creation (Gen. 6:6), as we are told; and He destroyed it. That was not a gift; but simply an act however immense. But when in sovereign love He calls to Himself poor guilty men to make them His own, when He makes a gift of eternal life, for instance, or forgiveness of our sins, or the place of a child, such boons are the gifts and calling of God; and they are without repentance. Here His mind never changes. The children may be too often foolish and sadly wrong, but He does not change.

What the apostle says here has great force without doubt. It is not only that they had received all these blessings from God, but “Ye (emphatically) are of God.” They were born of God, loved as such by Him, and so abode as their new being. And if they “have overcome

them," the instruments of Satan's deceit, it was "because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world," albeit its prince and god. These false prophets go boldly on with their spiritual wickedness, but "ye have overcome them." Christians were not attracted to them but held aloof; they heard the voice of the good Shepherd and followed Him. They knew that only He could give life, liberty, and food (John 10:9), and that He had come and was sent of the Father on this errand of God's love, and of His own love to them. Only the Son of God could utter such words; as only He laid down His life for them in atonement. They believed on Him who calls His own sheep by name, and they follow because they know His voice; they do not know the voice of strangers, but flee from them, and will not follow such. And now, as resting on Christ's redemption, God Himself was in them by His Spirit and abiding in them.

Next he describes these false prophets in the most trenchant terms, and lays another and awful emphasis on them. "They are of the world." The source of all their teaching as of all their conduct and aims was not God, but the world which is enmity against Him. It is therefore all under Satan's instigation, who is at the bottom of all the lies which pretend to be the truth. "For this reason they speak out of the world," as it literally runs: "(as) of the world" would be our idiom. The world which cast out God in Christ, and crucified Him was the spring of all they taught. The sense is not that they spoke "about" the world, and it was in order to distinguish from this that it has been paraphrased in the way just expressed. The world is the source, not the subject-matter, out of which they spoke. "And the world heareth them." The world loves its own; and therefore

the world, having no knowledge of God, nor of sin which needs His intervention in the Lord Jesus in both life eternal and everlasting redemption, is content with the grandiloquent speculations of the blind, which leave out God and exalt man as he is. They never truly heard the voice of the Son of God. They are dead; and things of death are their realities.

Then he turns to another emphasis. “We are of God” is another and distinct thing from “Ye.” “Ye” means the body of Christians, and real ones only. Besides what “we” share with “you,” God is the source of the divine power which makes us the mouthpieces of His word, so that you hear Him in hearing us. “We” means apostles and prophets sent of Christ, and given for the blessing of His saints. They were inspired of God, and so taught the truth as it is in Jesus. The New Testament consists of these divine communications in a permanent form. As they taught, so the inspired wrote; and as they wrote; so they gave out orally. As the New Testament consists of a number of pieces which were gradually added together, and all was not completely gathered into a single volume as now, there might have been a difficulty for some. The Lord’s authority was the end of controversy for the Old Testament to all men of faith. It might have been urged in early clays that the new words were so different from the Old Testament, so comparatively simple here and so profound there, that it was hard to say of all the little books then in circulation, the Gospels and the Epistles, that they were certainly inspired of God. It is then of this new word of God that the apostle treats, embodied in the so-called New Testament. This is the further criterion. What the apostles and prophets testified in the Holy Spirit of the Father and the Son in due time

contributed this new deposit of inspiration; and the apostle refers to their testimony as being the truth as well as Christ. Christ, is the truth personally. The New Testament, giving the oral testimony of these chosen witnesses, is the truth in the written form. Therefore of these he says, “We are of God.” We have in the Holy Spirit set out to you the truth of Christ from first to last; we are of God in and for this work: “He that knoweth God heareth us.”

It seems a portentous mistake to apply the like to every Christian that preaches, no matter how truly, or to every teacher of the truth, no matter how well instructed he himself may be. What evangelist or teacher could claim such a place? Far be it from such so to exalt any gift the Lord may give today; nor have I ever known any true servant claiming such language for himself. It belongs only to inspired men. Consider seriously what the apostle says, “He that knoweth God heareth us.” Could any minister on earth expect this absolutely? It is not only that in the divided state of Christendom no man could look for such a hearing, but it never was true beyond the apostles and prophets. The apostle speaks only of those who shared a position like his own in those days when the foundation of Christianity was laid down. It was right and necessary that believers henceforth should know the divine authority which God insists on for the apostolic teaching. But it is restricted to the inspired of the New Testament as it had been to those of the Old Testament. There is now, as there was then, gracious guidance in the Spirit to every one that preached or taught the truth; but inspiration has the special character of exemption from error in what was given as the rule of faith.

Further, though they are gone, God took care that we should have their Spirit-taught words, not only their testimony but in the very words which the Holy Spirit gave them to utter, that what they were as of God then should never be lost, while a Christian remains to profit by them. This Epistle for instance we have as truly as those to whom it was written, and we have the same Spirit of God who abides for ever. But here it was for the inspired to lay the foundation. No such category of God's servants is on earth now. But we have the work done by inspired writers. It is the written standard of Christianity and the church. He simply speaks of what they gave out, and the saints heard. It was for the most part written then, though somewhat remained for himself to add. But he hesitated not to say that "he that knoweth God (that is, every Christian) heareth us." He rejected the false prophets as of Satan, and not of God. "He heareth us" as the men exclusively raised up of God to give the truth, now contained in the New Testament.

His words are as important as of the deepest interest. Men have dared to say there is nothing in the New Testament that claims the authority of God for itself. It is only their ignorance that has blinded their eyes to what God does say there. Nor is this the only witness to the same truth; for there are several more in the New Testament. The first of those scriptures we may look at is 1 Cor. 11. For demons had been at work even in those early days, and the apostle took pains in 1 Cor. 12 to guard them from any spirit which refused to call Jesus Lord. But 1 Cor. 11:13 comes to us from God, "revealing" by the Spirit things hidden of old even from the prophets of early days. The time had come, for the Son of God had come, to reveal to us by the Spirit even

“the depths of God.” Next, he adds their inspiration, or communication to the believers: “Which things also we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit.” It is not that the Spirit only conveyed the ideas, for by this notion even many undermine inspiration. They assume that the thoughts came from the Spirit of God; but that for the good men were left to do the best they could. No wonder, if so, that men fall into mistakes. But this notion of theirs is exactly what is false. He says here that the things revealed they also speak; and this in words Spirit-taught, instead of being left to human infirmity. In short the Spirit who revealed the truths was equally careful to safeguard the words, “expounding (or, communicating) spiritual things in spiritual [words].” The medium of conveyance, the words were Spirit-taught, not left to feeble man. Thus the passage expressly tells us that the words were inspired, and not the thoughts only.

Take another witness to the same effect from the last Epistle that the apostle Paul ever wrote, his Second Epistle to Timothy. He shows that, in the perilous times of the last days, the main safeguard lies not in uncertain traditions of unknown source, but in abiding in the truth which we have learnt with full conviction, knowing their source, and now in the written word. Consider the persons that speak and how they stand in their ways, their conversation, their life. He says therefore, “But thou hast fully known my doctrine” — in contrast with these bad men, whom he calls impostors, comparing them to the magicians in Egypt. “But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, charity” — or love — “patience, persecutions” — not popularity — “persecutions, afflictions which

came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured; but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Such is the great mark of the real Christian now as it has always been. "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. But continue thou," he says to Timothy, "in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them." Their character, you see, being sustained with the truth is of all moment; for no matter what a man may say, however clever or smooth or with fine sentiments, it is all worthless unless he lives the truth now to the conscience of God's elect.

"From a child thou hast known the sacred letters," the Old Testament so described in ver. 15, "which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ, Jesus" But next in ver. 16 he comes to "Every scripture" — not exactly "all," but "every scripture, is given by inspiration of God" (or, God-breathed). This is meant beyond doubt to cover the New Testament; and therefore purposely "every," because some part — at least John's writings — was not yet written. If he had said "all scripture," it would have meant "all that is already written but when he says "every scripture," the door is left open for any thing yet to be inspired. "Every scripture" is therefore the correct phrase, if any additions should be made to the Canon. Nor is it only that the men were inspired. What the apostle says here is that every thing coming under the character of Scripture is inspired. Here again it is not merely the ideas but what they wrote; Scripture necessarily means their words. The words were inspired just as much as

the truth intended. Nor could anything be satisfactory unless it were so.

Let those who will compromise, so as to allow inspiration along with errors and inconsistencies, we who believe that God's inspiration excludes such failures are exhorted to cast away theory and accept the facts. But we deny that their objections are well-founded, though we do not overlook the difficulties (many of them from the copyists, and therefore apart from inspiration).

Assuredly too of all these theories, none is so inconsistent and irreverent as their view of a divine inspiration with error and discrepancy pervading what is so vital a part — the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. How call so motley a product as this carry with it the authority of God, or be entitled to the name of God's word? In fact the apparent discrepancies can be shown to flow from the distinct purpose of God by each of His instruments, each fitted specifically by grace for His work, and altogether effecting the more richly their combined testimony to the glory of the Lord Jesus beyond the thoughts of the writers themselves, but extant there for Christian use when required. But to admit that God inspired the various writers for His purpose of glorifying Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, and then to argue that they were allowed to make not a few mistakes (some of them gross and puerile) is surely of all theories the most unsatisfactory and the least defeasible even logically, not to say that it is wholly unworthy of the Holy Spirit as well as of Him who is the truth. For this halfway theory, like all compromises in divine things, cannot approve itself to any but its inventors, and in all probability not to them. We all know that the Lord promised the power of the Spirit to teach

the apostles all things, and to recall to their remembrance all the things He said to them. This halting hypothesis is that the Spirit only brought them to their memory in a way or measure which exposed them to these alleged defects. The believer, without pretending ability to clear up every difficulty, is assured that what He promised the Holy Spirit performed, and that every scripture is worthy, not of the writers merely but of God, its real Author.

Clearly then if “he that knoweth God heareth us,” every Christian accepts the New Testament as of God; and again he who does not is no real Christian but a sceptic. For hearing the apostles and prophets of the New Testament is inseparable from knowing God now. This, the second test of the truth, goes farther than whether a man be a Christian. To profess Christ and reject plenary inspiration indicates the work of evil spirits. Infidelity as the rule begins with the Old Testament, but it will surely attack and reject the New Testament also. Singular to say, a gentleman who had filled a very important position with the world’s honour, active in Sunday School work, and regarded as a devoted Christian, suddenly disclosed one day when we talked together, that, although he fully believed in the Old Testament, he did not believe in the New! The avowal could not but wound a believer beyond measure. To kill another with a revolver seems to me a far less sin against God. Is it not awful to think of such audacious infidelity in one accepted as a Christian teacher? “Herein know we the Spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.”

It is well here to observe how far goes the principle here stated peremptorily: “He that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God doth not hear us.” It cheers the

Christian, who finds his richest spiritual food not in the Old Testament though just as truly inspired, but in the New Testament where Christ is no longer veiled or distant, but manifested in all the fulness of His glory and His grace, in the majesty of God and the meek tenderness of the lowliest Man that ever trod the earth. We hear God speaking in the prophets His servants, but as Father in the Son, His Father and our Father, His God and our God. This judges man, religious no less than profane; this gives Him His place, and puts me in mine. As unbelieving it condemns pious superstition as thoroughly as profane infidelity, and every one of the many shades of unbelief in not hearing the voice of God in the words of the inspired, and here of Christ's apostles and prophets in particular. And we may notice by the way that the apostle Paul claims for himself not a whit less than the apostle John for them all. "If anyone thinketh himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him recognise the things which I write to you, that they are the Lord's commandment. But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant" (1 Cor. 14:37, 38). What a reproof to vain Christians like those Corinthians — who enter on ground so slippery without knowing it!

"For the word of God is living and energetic, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and capable of judging thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is not a creature unmanifest in his sight; but all things are naked and laid bare to his eyes with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:12, 13). Do we need the church to tell us that the sword of the Spirit is God's word when it pierces us through as nothing else? And as our Lord said in His last discourse to the unbelieving Jews, "If any

man hear my sayings and keep them not, I am not judging him; for I came not that I might judge the world but that I might save the world. He that rejecteth me and receiveth not my sayings hath one that judgeth him: the word which I spoke, that shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:47, 48). And here in 1 John 4:6 the Holy Spirit inspired our apostle to assert the equivalent of the word that came through the apostles and prophets. Does one need the church to tell me that he spoke the truth of God to the blessing of the believer, to the ruin of the false prophets, and of all that despise what God authenticates? The inspired were servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries; but the word they spoke, or wrote, was no less God's than if He had uttered it audibly to each that heard.

The church, the individual Christian, is directly addressed by His word. This is evident from the Epistles of the New Testament on their face. They were with a slight exception written to the general mass of the faithful, save the very few and short letters to fellow-labourers for work of which the faithful are not capable, but only such as had adequate authority. They remain for the faithful now as really as then; and if they find difficulties as the early Christians did, they have the same living Interpreter as their brethren of old. But the essential principle for faith is to have God speaking to His children immediately in His word. To interpose church or clergy between His word and His children is rebellion against God. It is false ground (too common among Protestants) to plead man's right to hear His written word it is thoroughly true to assert His right to address, instruct, console or rebuke His own family; yea, more, to speak to the conscience of any and every man,

as the Lord did and His apostles, and indeed His servants in general.

Nor is there a falser principle than that which has lately overspread the country through the Oxford revival of popery without the pope. They may base it on a saying of the famous Augustine bishop of Hippo; but it was unworthy of his piety. For it robs God of His due, to say that he would not believe the gospel, if the authority of the catholic church did not move him to it. Great a man as he was, here he did not realise what he said; for if one does not believe God's word because He says it through the inspired, one does not truly believe God but rather His vouchers: a real and manifest insult to God. Believing God Himself makes my faith to be of divine source and character. No other faith is acceptable to God. Even to believe on Christ because of the signs He wrought and they beheld was human faith, and unacceptable: "Jesus himself did not trust himself to them" (John 2:24). To look for, or allow any one or body to accredit God's word is a grievous sin against God and a deep injury to man; yea, it would be fatal unless it were a blunder, and the man had really better than such humanly grounded faith.

If any resort to the subterfuge that the apostle speaks only of the oral word, let them know that they are wholly and ungratefully in error when they thus slight the written word. The Lord Himself has ruled that, as bearing authority, Scripture is superior to anything merely spoken, even if He was the speaker who spoke as none else ever spoke. Therefore said He to the reasoning Jews, "Think not that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, Moses on whom ye have your hope. For if ye believed Moses, ye would

believe me, for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my sayings?" Both were the unimpeachable word of God, one spoken and the other written in the Holy Spirit; but as God's authority to man, the Lord undeniably gives the highest place to the written word, the permanent witness of the divine mind, which allows of meditation and consideration before God as no oral words could. With this we may compare the apostle's statement in Rom. 16:26, which is wrongly translated by the Revisers like others "the scriptures of the prophets," in flat contradiction of now manifested "just before, and of "made known unto all the nations," as well as of its own anarthrous form, "prophetic scriptures" (in contrast with Rom. 1:2). The phrase really applies to New Testament scriptures which had begun to appear in the widest known Gentile tongue, and were going forth as the gospel did to all the nations.

These words close the subject; and they are an admirable close. Whether it was the confession of Christ as He really is, the truth of His person, or whether the authority of the word that revealed Him, here we have in the simplest form the truth in Himself, and the truth that flowed from Him. This is the Spirit of truth. But there is the spirit of error also. The devil is its active source in its deadliest form. It is natural that those who believe not in the gracious presence of God's Spirit should be no less incredulous of the immense part Satan takes in all the mischief of the world on a great scale generally; in the miseries of men individually as well is of nations, and of the savage races. But the worst part of the devil's evil is what he does in Christendom; what he insinuates against Christ and the revealed truth of God. There it is

called not exactly the spirit of malice, but “the spirit of error”; and this is the most dangerous. It is not gross corruption, nor sanguinary violence, but outwardly plausible and subtle inwardly, with a little truth in front of a great lie, openness to will but no room for conscience, Jesus not confessed but perverted, and the Father unknown. Such is the working of the spirit of error. Thence will be the apostasy and the man of sin.

How great the grace of God, in face of the declension of the Christian profession and the revealed utter ruin and judgment without one promise of recovery, to provide for the safety and joy of the faithful, however tried: Jesus truly confessed and believed on; the word of God; and both by the Spirit of truth. This is the substance of the solemn parenthesis now before us.

There is a cry often raised among those who rest for security and guidance on outward ordinances and on official position, not on the words “hear the church.” But it is striking to observe that they never think of applying these words of our Lord in Matt. 18:17 as He directs. It is His prescribed discipline where one brother sins against another, and it would seem on an individual matter between the two, at first unknown to others, which at length comes out through the offender’s refractoriness, so that the assembly or church becomes the last resort. Is this ever the way with those who cite it for what the Lord contemplates neither here nor anywhere else? As everyone knows, “hear the church,” in the right case as well as the wrong, means in their lips to hear the priest, or the priests collectively, or, among the extreme, the arch-priest, the Pope. But this is either sheer error or fraud, if they know they are without doubt misapplying His words.

Scripture however goes much farther, and shows that before the last apostle passed away declension had set in so decidedly that the Lord told John in the Spirit to write to the seven churches selected for the last letters to such on earth. They begin with that in Ephesus, so bright in earlier days, — but here threatened with the removal of its lampstand, and end with spuing that in Laodicea out of His mouth as intolerably nauseous. The Lord is not seen ministering in grace but judging in the midst, and therefore as Son of Man with garment flowing to the feet, not tucked up or taken off to do service. Now to every one of these churches chosen to set forth as a mystery the church on earth before it is seen no more here below, the Lord's final word is (with a promise before or after), "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches." Since the apostle's day the Lord has a grave controversy with the churches. Even then they were veering to ruin as assemblies, and He menaces at last with repudiation. The prophecy in the very next chapter shows the outer frame no longer an object of His communications; and the overcomers are seen glorified in heaven around a throne of divine judgment on Jews and Gentiles, with spared remnants from "both: no church more is apparent on earth, but strokes of displeasure on the nations. These are the things which are about to, and must, take place after "the things which are" (the church period).

Now such a message from the Lord "to him that hath an ear," is of unspeakably solemn power. It negatives the perverted cry "hear the church." It calls on every faithful soul to "hear what the Spirit saith to the churches." The church never was a standard of truth,

but God’s word only. Assuredly the church (not Israel, nor Mohamedanism, nor the heathen) is the responsible witness of the truth by fidelity to it in word and deed. No where, and no when, but in the church was testified “the mystery of godliness,” great as it is; the church is not the truth but its pillar and pedestal. Christ is the truth objectively, and the Spirit the power to work inwardly and bring it home. But when decay and heterodoxy set in, the outward professing church ceased to be even a reliable witness. And the Lord commands him that has the obedient ear to hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

The authority of the truth lies in Him whose words are divine; not so the pillar and pedestal which once hold them up to be seen and heard (1 Tim. 3). The pillar may be injured or defaced, but the truth remains for ever in Christ, the Spirit and the word. Yet 2 Tim. 3 speaks of men having a form of godliness but denying the power, and enjoins turning away from them. Ere long rival churches began, and not this only but also anathematising each other. This compelled all but the heedless to see the necessity of knowing the truth, in order to judge which of the two was the true church, or it might be neither. Thus the sevenfold call of the Lord to hear what the Spirit says to the churches, always true but now applied judicially and individually, became of increasing value. Assuredly it did not lose its need of application after the Reformation, when not only kings and nations claimed title to set up their own churches as distinctive religious corporations, but leading men asserted a similar right for their societies. Thus the very notion of the church got lost for most in the chaos of Christendom.

Nor can one be surprised that, having long ceased to believe in the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the assembly, they lost along with that the authority of the word, not only in practice but in principle, so far as to deny its self-evidencing light to the conscience of man, and to assert the need of the feeble falling church to make its authority valid But their crookedness in this is as clear as their presumption; for they avail themselves of every semblance of misunderstood Scripture to accredit their own systems. But the principle of using the church to authenticate God's word is infidel, and convicts those who deliberately affirm it of departure from God's authority. On the very day of Pentecost the apostle Peter vindicated the gift of the Spirit by the word of God. It never occurred to him nor any other apostle to appeal to the church. God's word needs no vindication. To pretend that it does verges on blasphemy. The apostle Paul puts honour on the Old Testament in praising Berean Jews, not only for receiving the word with all readiness of mind, but also for searching the Scriptures if these things were so. They knew the old oracles to be of God, and did well to test the oral preaching of one whom they did not know, whose testimony they found by constant research corroborated by those Scriptures. The old written word was the standard which led them all the more to receive the new word with in readiness of mind.

15 On ample ground of external witness, backed up by internal considerations, almost all the later critics seem to be right in dropping the words here omitted, which were probably inserted from the clause before. The MSS. differ much as usual in such cases. — There is a reading, alluded to by ancient writers ὃ λύει instead of ὃ

μὴ ὁμολογεῖ. But it is authenticated by neither ancient MS. nor Version, save the Vulgate's "qui solvit."

Address 13 - 1 John 4:7-10

"Beloved, let us love one another; because love is of God; and every one that loveth hath been begotten of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knew not God, because God is love. Herein was manifested the love of God in us (or, in our case), that God hath sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us, and sent his Son [as] propitiation for our sins."

After the episode, as we may call it, of the first six verses, we return to the new theme that was introduced by the apostle it the end of the third chapter. He had shown the love of our brethren as a divine affection, not merely to be desired but of such solemn import that it really decides whether we are Christians or not. This accordingly makes it of very particular interest for us to beware of self-deceit. "Beloved, let us love one another; because love is of God; and every one that loveth hath been begotten of God, and knoweth God."

If this divinely drawn inference is a sure and strong thing to say, there is no excuse for failure in love. But we must remember that love is not merely kind to a fellow-saint; it is also faithful to God. And sometimes the faithfulness of love is resented instead of being acceptable. In such a case the brother who is ruffled by being reproved for his failure whatever it be, and who regards the other's faithfulness as inconsistent with love, has need to beware. For if that resentment overcome him — and it sometimes does — the issue may prove that there never was the divine gift of life in his

soul. We find too often that departure from love even in a small way, if yielded to, is an extremely grave sign. It may be a symptom of what may be called the moral leprosy of the man. For, as we are here taught, there is nothing really of God, nothing truly sound, in the man that does not love.

In principle too can anything be plainer? Hatred certainly is not of God; love is, being the reflex of the active energy in God's nature. Light is, if we may so say, the moral principle of His nature; that which is perfectly pure, which detects and rejects all evil; because in God absolutely it goes with holiness, and really in the Christian too, wherever there is life eternal. But love is the active outgoing of the divine nature, the seeking good without any motive whatever in those that are loved, but in its own spring of goodness. God's love not only gives all, but also forgives all. This is only possible toward us through the Mediator. For God is consistent in His ways; and, where sin is, there must be a ground of righteousness. Where is this to be found? Certainly hot in sinful man. But God in Himself knew where unfailing righteousness would be found, even in days when unrighteousness prevailed.

Jehovah before the flood and after the law was looking onward to His Christ, and in an evil day spoke by His prophet of His salvation to come, and of His righteousness to be revealed (Isa. 56:1). Nowhere on earth could it be seen; but faith ever waited for it. There was no ground anywhere in man, not even in a true saint of God, not in Enoch nor in Elijah, to say nothing of others. They too looked forward to it in hope. But it was not yet an accomplished fact. The reliance of every saint was entirely on the One that was coming; for, as you

know, He was proclaimed to man directly after he became a sinner. This was what Jehovah Elohim presented to the guilty pair, and in a, most impressive way; for it was not in direct address to the fallen but in the judgment of the serpent. Who but God would ever have thought, in a sentence pronounced upon the enemy, of also embodying the revelation of a Saviour? Thus did He in all holiness intimate the revelation of a Saviour to crush the power of evil for the deliverance of its victims, but also in love to endure anguish in the accomplishment of that deliverance. For who but an unbeliever fails to see that this is clearly the meaning of the heel being bruised? But the woman's Seed, though thus suffering, should crush the serpent's head; thence is fatal destruction from which the evil one shall never recover.

The "love" here meant has no source in the creature; it "is of God"; and if God were not the spring and power, not a soul could be saved, nor a saint walk in His love. For love knows how to bring out all the resources of grace where man lies in utter ruin. See it in Christ who died for our sins, and lives to be Advocate with the Father. What love in both ways! It is not merely said that the believer's sins are forgiven: were this all, it might have meant that if a saint fell, he had to begin over again. Nor are Christians wanting who think that if a believer sins, he loses all and has to recommence; but those who so think evidently do not believe in life eternal as the present possession of the believer in Christ. It is humbling to say that others, have denied life eternal, though in a rather different way; but, however it may be denied, it is to sin against a foundation truth of Christianity.

Next we are told that “everyone that loveth hath been begotten of God.” To be of Him thus involves love in the children also. They have His nature. He that does not love never was born of God. But one may perhaps be badly instructed, and may feebly have learnt to judge the risings of the flesh, and consequently be not aware that a feeling of hatred is entirely incompatible with the Christian. The reason is its incompatibility with God and the life he has in His Son. “Love is of God, and every one” — nothing can be plainer — “that loveth hath been begotten of God, and knoweth God.” Is not this a wonderful thing to say about a man on earth? We know but very little of one another; and one evidence of our ignorance even of near friends and relatives is that we are surprised from time to time by little things which cause immense difficulty and surprise with no end of pain and sorrow here below. Well, if we knew one another, and possessed a loving nature, these things could not be. How astonishing, then, that we, who are so ignorant even of our next-door neighbour, should be capable of knowing God! We may know far too little of our brethren; the reason of which is the feebleness of our love. Were our love strong by faith and the new life in unhindered exercise, we should be intimate with them all and enter into their sufferings with Christ and for His sake in ways as pleasing to God and comforting to them as blessed to our own souls. For confidence is the child of love; and known love begets confidence, as we saw with God as well as His children. And who does not know the comparatively little confidence even among those that are children of God? Lack of love is indeed a matter of deep reproach, and most inconsistent on the part of God’s family. But here we have His mind in few and plain words.

There are immense difficulties in this world aggravated by the ruin-state of Christendom. There is a most subtle and restless enemy at work. We saw this when looking into the previous verses, “Believe not every spirit,” etc. The Holy Spirit was sent down by the Father and the Son. As before to harass the Lord Jesus when on earth, so Satan in no long time sent out evil spirits to imitate the Spirit of God. It was not merely in demoniacs, but by false teaching, subversive of Christ Himself. Christ gave apostles, prophets, teachers, in the power of the Holy Spirit for edifying the members of His body; Satan counterworks all. “Believe not every spirit.” And then followed the tests we have considered. But here it is our walking in love. It is not assaults on the truth, but the practical life of a believer which God would have instinct with love more than any other thing in those whom He has begotten with the word of truth. Righteousness is assumed, and obedience; but there must be love; and as love is the energetic power in God’s nature, so is it also the indispensable power that works in the Christians’ life one with another, coming out more saliently perhaps than anything else. Is it so with you, my brother? Do I fail in love?

He enters on this subject as he did before, saying “Beloved.” it was a call particularly for their affections, though then a warning; he was very much in earnest about the danger. Here were these evil spirits; and there is apt to be much unbelief as to either the Holy Spirit on one hand or Satan and his emissaries on the other. There are more than ever evil spirits at work in Christendom; for therein particularly they work. It is not merely in heathen countries, with their dark and cruel superstitions; in Christendom the spirit of error takes a

fair form and pretends to highest truth. “Have we not truth of which none ever before heard, and withal of the utmost value? It was all very well to have had God’s righteousness, the heavenly calling, the mystery of the church, and so on; but now we have got something far better. Then it was but tuning the instruments; now the concert is begun in earnest, and we are the men!” No doubt it is utterly false, but such is the spirit and the blinded feeling of those animated by evil spirits. What evident vainglory in contrast with the meek Lord of all! It is for the destruction of the truth and not the edification of the souls that trust them, even worse than what Scripture calls “serving their belly.” They are of the world, and out of it they speak. They have their own motives from self.

But the precious fact as to the love that is of God is this the entire motive is His own goodness; as man has the reverse of that in his nature. The believer receives grace as a lost sinner in all its sovereignty as its object, and having life eternal in Christ his it flowing out habitually. It is therefore of the Spirit acting on the new nature, as being begotten of God. He is entitled to boast in God as well as in God’s love without any motive but the good that He is, which He delights to communicate to others. Such are Christians who by the faith of Christ are filled, firstly with being loved of His love, and secondly, carried out in the exercise of that love to their brethren (for this is the direction here) by the Spirit of God. But the principle is quite clear: to love is inseparable from being born of God; and so he that loves proves by this very fact that he is a child of God. It has nothing at all to do with natural affections, which everybody ought to know may be strong in the most wicked men and women. Deadly

enemies of God, given up to base lusts and passions, yet they may have much natural sweetness and warm benevolence too. None of these things is His love, nor in the least spoken of here, nor anything but that which shone in the Lord Jesus. “Love,” says the apostle, “is of God.” Whatever is of ourselves is not of God. But this love is not of ourselves, even in a believer. He derives it entirely from above; he is born of the Spirit; and what is so born is spirit and not flesh. He is born of God; and God is love.

The connection here is with what was introduced at the end of the third chapter, where, for the first time in this Epistle, we hear of the Spirit of God. The form there taken is of God’s abiding in the believer; and the proof is the Spirit which He gave us. The Spirit given to the believer abides in him, and is the proof that God abides in him. This is a great advance on having the new life. Great as is the boon of a divine nature that we partake, it is much more to have God abiding in us. Yet this is effected and provided by that gift of the Spirit which is the distinctive mark of a Christian.

The aim then is to enforce the mutual love of Christians by the source whence it flows, and by the nature which, if it acts, must accord. But hindrances there are which run strongly against love, within and without; so that the saints need God to abide in them in order that love should work freely and fully. We therefore require not only to be begotten of God, but also divine power, nay, God’s abiding in us, in order that we should love one another according to God. If we were only born of God, there would still remain a mighty hindrance, which the new birth does not so much as touch. And what is that? The ignorance of redemption. There must be faith in the

work of Christ for us, in the blood of Christ that cleanseth from every sin. There is a divine work in the soul before one rests on the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Take any scriptural case given to us.

Let me present one from the Gospel of Luke: the female in Luke 7, of whom the Holy Spirit says so much in the few words, “a woman in the city that was a sinner.” Yet she came, much to the astonishment of Simon the Pharisee, into his house when he had the Lord and the disciples dining with him. Even under such deterrent circumstances this woman Came, who would have dreaded at any other time to enter that man’s house. What emboldened her? Looking to the Lord in faith, nothing could keep her back from intruding (as it must have appeared, and as everyone would naturally say) into such a house under such circumstances. But the power of faith breaks through no small obstacles. Yet at that time she did not know her sins forgiven; nor were they forgiven. But she was on the way. She loved the Lord. It would be too much to say that she loved the disciples; still less that she felt for Simon any more than for other such souls. Another mighty work of God produces this too. But the Lord drew her to Himself by a new force of divine attraction. This is the effect of faith working by love. His grace created an affection she never before knew. She was perfectly sure the Lord was filled with holy love. Why was He thus going about all the country? What was the motive power of all His life, words and ways? Was it not divine love?

Life already wrought in the hitherto sinful woman, full of defilement, who had heretofore a character of infamy. But she believed in the Lord already; and she loved much, as He testified to Simon and them all. She found

in Him a new life, and a new character formed by this blessed One. She might never see Him again nor have a like opportunity, however inopportune to other eyes. It was now or never for her soul; and so it is when simple faith actuates the heart. There is no loss of time, no allowance of any excuse for putting off; but in she goes, and “stood behind at His feet weeping.” Her unconscious bearing was morally beautiful; certainly she had not learnt it from her former life: it was entirely the effect of faith in Christ on her soul. There she began to wash His feet with her tears, and was wiping them with the hairs of her head. The Lord knew it all, and needed no turning round to look at the one behind. He knew it all perfectly, nobody so well as He. But it only drew out the contempt of Simon; for the ill-feeling of the unbeliever is against the Lord yet more than against His followers; he does not always say so, and perhaps he does not always recognise that so it is. It is possible that even Simon would not have allowed that; but it is evident that such was the moral of it all for him — the devil’s moral. “This [one] if he were a prophet, would have known who and what the woman is that toucheth him, for she is a sinner.” So he said in himself; but the Lord heard and answered. Had He not come to save the lost? and if Simon had broken down as she, to save Simon too? But to take the place of a sinner truly and before God is a harder thing for a proud self-righteous Pharisee than for a woman who had no character to lose.

But grace and truth can break down a Saul of Tarsus on the one side, no less than give a thorough sense of sin to a dissolute on the other. What was it that here produced brokenness as well as love? It was Jesus to faith, divine

love in Jesus. But she needed more; and grace gave her more on the spot. For it is an immense accession for the heart to know that the sins are forgiven. And the Lord would not leave this to be implied only; He pronounced the word of God which the soul craves, Thy sins are forgiven. He was entitled to do so. The work was not yet done on which it is grounded; but the Judge of living and dead can never say what is not perfectly right, any more than the Judge of all the earth can do anything but right. Thus the Lord therefore pleaded her cause, and refuted the Pharisee's unbelief; for He showed Himself the Lord of the prophets, and forgave sins as only God is entitled to do. Out of the fulness of His grace He brought the woman into the knowledge that her faith had saved her, and sent her away in peace.

Now, till we know that our faith has saved us, and that our sins are forgiven, this question must always occupy the mind. It is necessarily the great question for the soul when awakened. How can a quickened soul find rest till he knows that his sins are effaced, and that he is saved? All the while that there is hesitation and uncertainty herein, there must be pre-occupation of heart; and necessarily if we have no assurance that our sins are forgiven, we are not in a condition to let out the heart in love toward those who are thus at rest. Till then we cannot properly take the place of children of God. As the woman received it from the lips of the Lord, we have by faith to get it from or by the written word of God. If we have not forgiveness certified by the word of God, if we have not our new relationship carried home by Scripture to our souls, we must act on our own feeling, our own thoughts, or perhaps those of a man who knows no better himself. But even if it were the best preacher

conceivable, who preached nothing but the truth, one is bound to receive the witness of God which He has witnessed concerning His Son. And “he that believes on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.” Nobody but God can avail, and there is no rule of faith but His word. The truth we must have therefore from God, and how am I to get it from God? By the word now written.

Therefore you cannot lay axe more wickedly to the tree of truth than by denying the divine authority of Scripture. One of the prevalent signs of unbelief now is that Scripture contains the word, as the more modest freethinkers say. But what the Lord and the apostles taught is the word. Again, as “every scripture is inspired of God,” so they authenticate what was written for the church of God. In these “prophetic Scriptures” they may incorporate what the devil says, and what bad people say. Of course these things are not given for us to follow but to learn, as far as God pleases, of enemies. Only unbelief makes a difficulty; but the believer accepts from God what He tells of evil as well as of good. What is thus written is really the word of God to profit by His wisdom, that me may the better avoid and be on our guard against every snare that comes from Satan or from mere nature. But Scripture is the written word of God.

Ever since the blood of Christ was shed or, to speak more generally, since He died and rose, the way in which souls enter into peace is through faith in the glad tidings. The Spirit proclaims the saving grace of God in the gospel message. Faith finds in Christ not only life but peace. This is the true preparation not only for obedience but for loving those who believe, children of God like ourselves. There is no doubt that the new nature loves. Life eternal given to us has the capacity of

love; but flesh not duly judged is a hindrance in the way. Grace calls us to feel the inconsistency before we can go forward. There may be a steam engine and its various parts ready for use, but the steam must be there in order for it to work. This illustrates what is communicated in the verses before us.

There is again the dark side. “He that loveth not knoweth not God.” It does not matter what may be a man’s gift, or what may be his activity, or what reputation and influence he may possess, if he does not love he does not know God. The word is unsparing of self-deceit. He that has been begotten of God loves his brother, and knows God. His new divine affections have a definite sphere; and he has that knowledge of God which is distinctly said by our Lord to constitute life eternal. What He presented to the Father in John 17:3 is virtually reproduced here in a brief dogmatic statement with its negative. “He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.” Where no love is, there is no knowledge of God. The reason is as plain as it is decisive; “for God is love.”

The verses that follow set forth God’s love in its sovereign grace and fulness, the stream that fills the void heart for loving. The Spirit speaks of His love in its bright display in Christ the Son, sent in infinite grace into this world of sin, self, and darkness. It would be hard to match its simple grandeur even in Scripture. “In this was manifested the love of God,” not exactly “toward us,” or “toward all” as the apostle Paul says in Romans 3:22. The love of God is manifested toward everybody in principle. Here it is more definite, and rather looks “upon all that believe,” as is said in the same verse. It “was manifested in us.” It speaks thus of

its taking effect. It was manifested in our case. The “in” therefore seems quite the proper word. “In this was manifested the love of God in us” or “in our case.” Here, as being the more extended mission of our Lord for life eternal, it is not merely God “sent” but “hath sent.” It expresses the permanent result of the past act. In the following ver. 10 it is simply “God sent”; for though it expresses simply the fact, it was far the deepest, greatest, most momentous end which ever engaged the Father and the Son in time or eternity. The difference is but slight, for it is only another tense of the same verb; but as all differences of Scripture are by divine wisdom, it is well for us to enquire into their respective meanings. “Sent” expresses simply the fact. It may be, and this is, of the utmost possible consequence, and the single act enhances it in this case. But “hath sent” expresses the present result of a past action, which suits His mission that we might live through Him.

“In this was manifested the love of God in us (or, in our case), that God hath sent his only-begotten Son.” What care to state the glory of His person in this case “His only-begotten Son,” it was not necessary to repeat in the next verse, though of course “the Son” is the same. But here it was wise to signalise a work of such weight and lasting consequence in language of the simplest character that its immensity, unadorned and unfathomable, might fill the heart to overflowing with the love of God. “God hath sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.” This is the first action of divine grace, essential as the first need if we were truly dead spiritually. So it remains for each soul now. The first requisite and primary proof of God’s amazing love is that those who were the objects of His

love, and positively dead Godward, should be given to live. They had no sense of their own state; they had no acquaintance with God; and in their moral ruin they were wholly indifferent to either. Intellectual notions of man's mind might be there, but not a pulse of life toward God. They had conscience to make Him an object of more dread than the most furious demon.

Yet in the face of such depravity "God hath sent His only-begotten Son into the world." What a truth! How wonderful the bare fact! especially as it was in nothing but love. It was not something done in heaven. The Only-begotten Son He had sent to give a life in this world to fit for God there whence He came. But no work done even by the Son on high could suit either God or man. The way of love was that the Son should become man to glorify God, and give life in its highest nature to dead man by faith. Jews there were, and nations; but they were alike dead in their offences and sins, by nature children of wrath. As men they were dead while they lived. They had no hatred of sin, no love of grace; not one trait inwardly or outwardly was right in them. The mind of flesh in circumcision and uncircumcision was really and only enmity against God. Nevertheless God has sent His Only-begotten Son, the delight of the Father through all eternity, into the world, that we should live through Him; and the life given was His life.

The Old Testament tells how the race, whether Jews or Gentiles, had behaved toward God for thousands of years; the New Testament tells a still worse tale. Yet He who knew all beforehand has sent His Only-begotten into the world; and for what? Was it for judgment? It was for the very opposite; it was to quicken dead souls with the life eternal that was in His Son. For no less is

meant in the words “That we might live through Him.” There was a new life that man has not as man, no, not Adam innocent in the paradise of Eden, who disobeyed when all was good in him and around him, bringing in death and judgment. Life was proposed to natural man, to Israel in the law: if he obeyed it, he should not die. But the only result of this was that it became a ministration of death and condemnation; because the introduction of the law provoked the will of man, and he became a transgressor, and thus a worse sinner after he had it than before. Sin that it might appear sin was thus working out death by what is good, in order that sin might become exceeding sinful. There was not even the prolonging of his old life. The upshot to the sinner under law was total ruin.

But there was another life, life eternal, and this life was in the Son; in the Only-begotten Son whom God’s love had sent into the world. No doubt the Father raises the dead, and quickens: it is the prerogative of God. Therefore the Son also quickens whom He will. But in becoming man, though He never ceased to be God, He in perfect humiliation receives all from God, as becomes perfect man. Hence even as the Father has life in Himself, so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself (John 5:26). The Son was the One sent to become man and conversant with man. He was the object of faith always; and when become man He is still more evidently and urgently its object as Jesus Christ yet the Son, and in one person. So too it was increasingly evident for whom He had been sent in God’s love. It was for man, not for angels. “The life was the light of men.” But no illumination suffices for man’s need; and so, though coming into the world He lightens,

or is light to, every man: there was far more requisite, and He was the life to him that believed. To as many as received Him He gave title to become children of God. They were born now and thus of no creature source, but of God. But there is no believing and no new birth without the word as well as the Spirit. There must be God's word, because the very essence of faith is that, instead of trusting my thoughts or those of others, I believe God in His word (Rom. 10:17, James 1:18, 1 Peter 1:23-25). Christ is the incorruptible seed by God's living and abiding word.

When Adam and Eve sinned in paradise, it was because they were oblivious of, and not subject to, God's word. Eve was deceived by the serpent's temptation, Adam not so but more boldly transgressed. The word of God did not govern their souls. The subtle foe insinuated distrust of Him who forbade them to eat of a tree which held out to make them know good and evil like God. Then the lust for it followed, when the woman was not afraid to parley a moment longer with a creature whose aim became evident to entice her to disobey the positive prohibition of God, and doubt that death would follow. "Oh, dear, no; God not be so hard as that. Look at the beautiful fruit! so desirable also to make you wise. God wishes the knowledge of good and evil to belong to Himself alone. You will find it a new status altogether when thus enabled yourselves independently to judge between good and evil. You know nothing about this now. But when You eat the fruit of that tree, from your own conscience you will know whether a thing is good or evil. Why not rise to independence of Him who slights man, and assert your own rights as monarchs of all you survey? "

It was self-will, the sad root of evil. In love the Son of God came in order to stand in the breach. The first necessity is not atonement through the shedding of the Saviour's blood. Nobody ever believes the gospel without having a nature from God that craves and cries to God for what the gospel supplies. In every case one is born of God before he really rests upon the propitiation of Christ. For, having thus a new life, he soon enters into its necessity, and also its preciousness; he in faith eats Christ's flesh and drinks His blood. And therefore it is said that he believes in his heart (Rom. 10:9) that God raised Him from out of the dead. This does not mean a certain fervour of feeling. It has nothing to do with throwing the soul on his emotions; it means that, instead of resisting the truth, his heart goes along with the glad tidings God sends him. With heart it is believed to righteousness, founded on God's estimate of the atoning work of the Lord Jesus; as with mouth confession is made to salvation: thus is God honoured, and His Son, the rejected Lord.

But the first desideratum is the want of life, life eternal in the Son. Till he gets life, what adequate sense of his sin? till then, how can he know God's holy nature in any real way? He has no more than a dread of God. A heathen might have this; and the evil spirits believe and tremble. So we are informed on divine authority, and revealed facts are explained by it. The reason is that they know too well there is no forgiveness for their rebellion. Although they believe Who Jesus is, it does them no good: they are sentenced to destruction. They sinned irreparably. There is no possibility of salvation for an evil spirit, for a fallen angel.

But it is a totally different thing with man. Christ's birth witnessed complacency in men; how much more His atoning death! But in order that the shedding of His blood should purify the heart and conscience, there is a new nature given by receiving the Lord Jesus. It is not yet resting on His work, but believing in His grace as come in flesh, and the glory of Him that came on this marvellous mission of love, God's love. As surely as the heart receives Him thus from God, at that very moment the life is imparted to the soul. Life is always an instantaneous thing, whereas it is not so by any means for peace with God. As a matter of fact there may be not a little of going through experiences, whereby souls keep themselves without peace for months and even years. Yet all the while they partake of a divine nature through bowing to the Son of God, though without solid peace. They have life from the moment that the heart receives Him. And thus they acquire a divine perception of evil within, as well as of their past ways; not only of what one had done, but of what one is. Such is the effect of having divine life. It is therefore introduced here perfectly in the true and proper place. It comes in before the propitiation is applied to deliver from the burden of guilt.

"In this was manifested the love of God in us" (or, in our case), "that God hath sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him." The reason we have seen to be that till then we were spiritually dead before God, absolutely without any living tie with God whatsoever, only the awful responsibility of being naturally God's offspring, but nevertheless enemies of God by wicked works. Having been by God's constitution of man His offspring (in contrast with the lower animals)

does not help us, when ruined by sin, to have our soul saved. Man fell when under responsibility, and the Jew's undertaking to obey God's law only aggravated his responsibility, and could in no way deliver him from the wrath to come. Then the world consisted either of man without the law pursuing his own will, or of the Jew under law trying to recommend himself to God. But the grace that saves is not in the sinner but in the Saviour. "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." This is the gospel. It is not our love to Him, but His love to us while still sinners, His own spontaneous and gratuitous love to us.

Here too is afforded this second display of His love. The apostle shows us how God's love acted in view of our load of guilt, and not only our state of spiritual death. God's love wrought in what to Him was beyond all things severe to His heart and to His Son's. Man cannot conceive what it was for Jesus to bear the judgment of our sins at God's hand. It was also wholly beyond the thought of saints; even the apostles saw but the outside of the cross till the Lord opened their understanding to understand the Scriptures.

Yet Scripture had prefigured the Lord in atoning grace and infinite suffering in the Law, and the Psalms, and the Prophets. No disciple then but had witnessed the solemn ritual of the Day of Atonement; none who had not heard the unique Psalm 22; nor one who had not been perplexed by Isaiah 53, yet from no obscurity of language, but from truth so strange. Jesus making propitiation for our sins is the solution of the riddle in all three Scriptures. No words of His before the cross gave the key; no sight even of Him crucified brought the truth into their hearts. The blood of His cross made peace in

God's mind; to theirs as yet it was bitter anguish and cruel disappointment; for His words had fallen on ears yet deaf to the meaning of His death, and they had not known the scripture that He must thus suffer that they or any might have redemption. On the resurrection day the downcast pair on the way to Emmaus told out the state of all, when they said to Himself, "We did hope that He it was that should redeem Israel" — the very thing for which He hid laid the efficacious and everlasting basis (ver. 21) But what said our blessed Saviour in reply (vers. 25, 26)? O senseless and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets spoke! Ought not the Christ to suffer these things, and to enter into His glory?" Yet He had told them not long before (Luke 17:25), "First must He suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation."

Let us look into one of these in the light of the risen Lord and as the Holy Spirit bore witness. What meant that cry, not from the robbers on either side but from the rejected Messiah in their midst? "My God, my God, why didst Thou forsake Me?" This was the bitterest of that suffering without parallel, the righteous Servant, the beloved Son, forsaken of His God, when abhorred of His people, scorned by the Gentiles, deserted of His disciples. Why, after enjoying uninterruptedly the light of His Father's face throughout every step of His path of trial and sorrow, why was it hid from Him now when He needed most its cheer and consolation? Well He knew; yet He left it for faith to answer it from those that were once dead, but now enabled to confess that they had nothing but sins, through His grace who bore them in His body on the tree. Oh how deep was our guilt! yet deeper far His love who sent His Son, not only as life to

the dead, but as propitiation for our sins, whatever the cost; and it was immeasurable. Reproach, despite, laughter, scorn, jeers were there to wound Him from all high or low, religious, civil, military, even the crucified criminals; many bulls, Bashan's strong ones, surrounded Him: dogs, and evil-doers in a crowd; physical suffering all the more felt by His person, instead of less, because of His perfection, when poured out like water, all His bones out of joint, His heart like wax, His strength dried up as a potsherd, His tongue cleaving to His palate. But what was all this together compared to being abandoned by His God, as He Himself felt and owned?

Many a saint of His had suffered to the utmost of bodily anguish from heathens, ay, and from Jews, yet filled with patience and joy. Many more of His disciples have suffered still more hellish tortures under the misnamed Catholic Church, and especially by its child, the abominable Inquisition; but they too triumphed in His name over these worst of earth's persecutors. Yet He confessed Himself forsaken of His God, confessed it to God in the agonies of the cross as the deepest woe, so that His enemies might hear, though they understood not more than His friends till the risen Lord set all clear, and the Holy Spirit made the truth realised in power of peace as well as of testimony to all.

But the meek Lord did more. Even when realising the horror to His holy and loving soul of being forsaken, He fully vindicated Him that smote and bruised in a way beyond all creature thought, "And Thou [art] holy, that dwellest amid the praises of Israel." And more still, He owned that God's abandonment of Him was the one exception: "our fathers trusted in Thee; they trusted in Thee, and Thou didst deliver them. They cried unto

Thee, and were not confounded. But I [am] a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and the despised of the people." Yes, so it must be, if He was propitiation for our sins. For we the guilty could not be saved righteously, unless God made the Sinless One sin for us that we might become God's righteousness in Him. This, and this only, is the true answer to His "Why?" this the sole and complete solution of the enigma. But it is still impenetrable to all unbelievers, to Israel more than to any, but yet to be their song of everlasting praise when the veil is taken away which still lies upon their heart. So the latter half of this very Psalm reveals with all plainness and certainty, beginning with the Christians' little flock, before the light of heaven dawns on "the great congregation" (ver. 25), leading the right way for all the ends of the earth to remember and turn to Jehovah, and for all the families of the nations to worship before Him, in the days (not of Christianity and the church, but) of the Kingdom, when He rules among the nations as He is not in the least doing now.

It is the more important and indeed imperative to have the clear truth of Christ forsaken of God in atonement for sin; because thus alone is the ground of God's grace and of our peace taken firmly and with divinely given intelligence. And thus alone can we estimate aright, however feebly, the unfathomable suffering of the Man of sorrows and suffering, for God and for us, glorifying Him and saving us who believe. Here the theologians, even the truly pious, are shallow and faulty; and their own souls lose proportionately, and those who confide in their guidance as much or more. One does not think merely of the Greek communion or of the Latin where the poverty is extreme. But take the most evangelical of

the Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed; or of the Nonconformists who boast of their freedom from tradition and prejudice. Of these none better could be adduced than — not dull Thomas Scott, but — genial Matthew Henry, the devout son of a devout father driven out by the "Act of Uniformity" in 1662. Yet that most respectable of English Commentators, from whom not another16 differs in this, unmistakably shows himself unable to seize the gist of God's forsaking Jesus on the cross. For he says, "A sad complaint of God's withdrawings, v. 1, 2. This may be applied to David, or any other child of God, in the want of the tokens of his favour, pressed with the burthen of his displeasure," etc. 17 Of course Henry believed it did apply to Christ crucified: else he could not be owned as a Christian. But even where he does, it is superficial, as it must be in all who extend its application beyond Christ. The Psalm speaks throughout of Him alone as its personal aim, and of Him in the opening forsaken only as atoning for all saints before or after. Not one ever shared that abandonment, which He alone could bear, though infinitely more to Him, the Holy One of God, than to any saint who ever breathed. He explicitly denied it of all before Him; the Holy Spirit in the New Testament excludes it from every Christian. He was forsaken of God for our sins, that they and we who believe might never be. It is utterly false that "this may be applied to David, or any other child of God." It is, without their knowing it, a serious weakening of the gospel. Even where the believer's sin calls for the severest chastening, God deals with him as a father, chastens whom He loves, and scourges every son whom He receives, for in many things we all stumble; but He has said, I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise

forsake thee. It is all absolute truth of His grace; and as it applies to earthly difficulties, so still more evidently to those of our divine relationship through the efficacy of Christ's propitiation.

To the day of atonement's typical witness, one need not refer more now than to point out the beautiful distinction between the two goats, which together shadow the one atoning offering, for the children of Israel, one lot for Jehovah, and the other lot for Azazel (the goat that goes away). The first goat was slaughtered, and its blood brought within the veil. Over the second goat, the complement of the first, the high priest confessed all the iniquities of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, laid as it were on its head, and then sent it away by one standing ready into a land apart, into the wilderness never to be seen again. It is the witness of Christ's substitution to bear our sins away into a land of forgetfulness, as the slim goat is of propitiation for sin judged before Jehovah in vindication of His nature and majesty and word dishonoured by evil. Together they foreshadowed Christ's atoning work, in which God was shown not sparing the Saviour, His own Son, that He might spare guilty sinners as we have been. Was not the love of God in both the Father and the Son fully manifested in Christ's sacrifice to God for us that we might be for ever saved?

Of Isa. 52:13-53 we may say the less, because it speaks itself so plainly of Messiah to be exalted and very high, but first suffering for sins sacrificially for His sinful people, that they might share the blessing and honour thus won for them by His grace. We share His life sufferings, and some too His martyr sufferings; but He is absolutely alone as the Propitiation and the Substitute.

And these only are typified in Lev. 16. These only brought on God's forsaking Him in the opening of Ps. 22. None But He endured God's judgment of sin, and of our sins; and nothing but this judgment brings God's forsaking. We may endure severe discipline of our faults, but it is in His love; He and He only, as our sin-offering. What means His being wounded for our transgressions? bruised for our iniquities? the chastisement of our peace upon Him? What means Jehovah laid upon Him the iniquity of us all? "For the transgression of My people was He smitten" (not on Israel, as the Jews say). Still more decisively "it pleased Jehovah to bruise him." He put Him to grief (or, suffering). "When Thou (Jehovah) shalt make His (Messiah's) soul an offering for sin," what does this mean but His atoning work,? What again "He shall bear their iniquities"? and "He bore the sin of many"? Only blind and obstinate unbelief can evade what God thus reveals as clearly as words can make it.

"Herein is love, not that we loved God." This the law of God demanded but never received, any more than loving his neighbour. And man easily deceives himself in estimating his love. How many Jews were trying to make believe that they did love God as well as man! But it was sadly short of the divine standard, as the Lord Jesus made evident when here below. Till the heart is set free by Christ's redemption and has peace with God, it is impossible for love to break through the "barriers and integuments of death. Even saints under law are like Lazarus with his grave-clothes about him, alive but needing to be loosed and let go. How is the heart won? "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son as propitiation for our sins." The more conscience there is while under law in spirit, the

less happy we are. Exercised souls do not walk slipshod before God. They feel their shortcomings, and are grievously downcast about themselves. They are afraid that God has the same uncertainty about them that they cannot avoid about Him. That He justifies the ungodly through Christ's propitiation for our sins is the full proof of His love to us when sinners.

Life, as we have seen, must precede peace. By many a scripture, perhaps by God's solemn words as to sin and sinners, a person might be truly awakened. This is set out in the parable of the prodigal son, following the lost sheep, and the lost silver. In the intermediate parable the Lord presents the lost one dead, as before in the sheep actively straying. There is an evil life in which man is active, and goes astray; there is another life to which he is. dead. These aspects of death are in the earlier parables. The foolish sheep slipping heedlessly away and exposed to all mischief is man active in departure from God. The lost piece is one dead in sins. The Shepherd heirs all toll in quest of the stray. The light shines by the Spirit's work till the lost piece. is found. This is far from being all. The prodigal son is required to complete the picture; and therein a double work of God appears. First, the prodigal "cometh to himself," he is brought to repent. He judges himself a sinner; he acknowledges that he has sinned against heaven and in his father's sight, according to the language of the parable. He is now going the right way; he seeks after God. He had been seeking his own lusts and passions before; now that he is brought to himself, "he rose up and went unto his own father." But he has not yet peace. He is still in spirit under the law. "Make me as one of thy hired servants." This is exactly what

the law does; instead of leading into freedom, it can only put under bondage. The gospel alone can tell of all bonds broken by the Saviour, and the slave brought into the liberty of Christ. See this set out in the way of grace with the prodigal. “While he was yet a long way off his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and ran, and fell upon his neck, and covered him with kisses.” He, no doubt, was troubled about himself, and forecasting how the father would receive him. It is the father, not the son, who runs to meet him; it is the father who embraces him, notwithstanding his evil and his rags. What a melancholy sight is the son, to which he had reduced himself by folly and sins! In the father, all-overcoming love! But the father does not allow him to say, Make me as one of thy hired servants; he has the best robe brought for him, a ring put on his hand, and sandals on his feet, the fatted calf killed, and such a feast as never was before in that house. It was for a son dead but alive again, lost and now found.

We learn thus graphically what is also taught dogmatically in scripture, the goodness of God leading to repentance, drawing from the wrong to the right direction, with self-judgment of the soul, sure marks of life Godward. But there was no deliverance from fear or law till he was in the father’s arms, and the full sense of sonship by grace. Thus, and only then, he knew that all was clear. The father’s embrace made this perfectly plain, and the father’s ways with him were all the fruit of it. It is just so in the gospel, but many stop at the threshold. They have got out of the land where no one gave to the most abject want, but not to the Father who with the Son grants us all things. And here too it is. “Herein is love,” life for the dead, and propitiation for

the guilty. Is it not more blessed than if one had never been a sinner? Adam in paradise had nothing like it. Adam had no such life as Christ's. It was not given for paradise. He may have got it afterwards, like others who believed, the Old Testament saints; but he had it not then or there. It is really therefore when man has come to his worst, that God brings out His best. This is Christ not merely coming to give us life, but dying as propitiation for our sins.

When we think of the glory, and the sufferings withal, especially at God's hand of the One who thus died; when we think of all the sins and iniquities of those that He bore sacrificially, — Oh what a wondrous filling of the gap that nothing else could till between God and the sinner! This is what is implied here. "Not that we loved God" — we may have tried, but if so, we failed totally. That was the law; here is the gospel — "He loved us, and sent His Son as the propitiation for our sins." It was all done in His one act, in His one suffering. "Christ once suffered" ("once" was enough) "for sins, just for unjust, that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18). He was man; but was He not God? He was the Son; and He is risen. There is the glorious proof that He triumphed. Indeed He could not fail. How could God fall? And was He not the Only-begotten Son of God? If we believe the Scripture, we ought not to question it. Fear and failure are natural to fallen man. He is a sinner, and he therefore dreads God's judgment. But He does not ask you to trust yourselves. He tells you to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. He knows too well that you do not love Him; He bids You to believe in His love manifested in Christ, and in dying as a propitiation for you. Do not say that You are too bad; indeed You are as bad as can

be, and far worse than you think. Take honestly the place of being “lost”; and this will end all your talk about badness. Yet for the lost He came and died.

The prodigal thought he had got down low when he proposed to ask for that place. In fact he was not fit to be a servant. Think you that any man would be taken as servant with such a certificate of his life? There is no question of our character at all. Sovereign grace rises above every sin and iniquity. Let the soul take the place of being nothing but a sinner; and therefore leave it to God to show nothing but His love. What He does is not merely that He gives me the life to feel what is due to God, and what becomes His child, but also the propitiation which meets and clears away all my sins. And remember, if not all sins, none; if any, all. Such is the way of the gospel in which God settles the matter; and this is what every believer is called to rest in.

O dear brethren, are you resting thus in Christ? Do any of you that believe in Jesus the Son of God, the Only-begotten, say, Make me as one of thy hired servants? He that came as man, yet bringing life eternal, by that very gift of life makes you feel your sins, but also believe that He is the propitiation for them. Under the Jewish system there were constant sacrifices, and repeated sin-offerings; but now in the gospel, since the Son offered up Himself, there is remission of sins, and no longer a sacrifice for sin (Heb. 10:18). For by one offering He hath perfected for ever (or, in perpetuity, which is stronger still) the sanctified. By “sanctified” is meant those that are set apart to God, not by law now but by Christ’s blood.

Beloved brethren, is this your faith? May the Lord grant that so it may be; and that you may delight in the apostle John's unfolding of the love of God manifested in the sending of His Son with its declared two-fold aim. Can any thing so perfectly display the true character of the love that is of Gods that it has nothing at all to do with any effort of our own. It is out of God that it springs. But, if begotten of God, we share God's nature; and if we share His nature, He has provided to take away all that hinders the proper exercise of that nature. Our old man is still there as a matter of fact, though we know it crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be annulled, that we should no longer serve sin.

Yet if our eye be off Christ, the old nature certainly does hinder. We need therefore to know how God has dealt in Christ with our sins, and with sin, their root. There may also be a hindrance through inconsistency, so that love cannot flow out according to God toward those that God would have one love. His love inspires love to all that are His, to His children; and He has provided for this by our faith, the new life, and the Spirit who abides in us. It is not a question of whether one likes this quality or that behaviour, or the like; but in the face of all difficulties He counts on our loving them with that love which is of God. And He brings in these two immense manifestations of divine love, to which we owe our new relationship and the clearing away of our sins, in order also to fit us for loving one another as of God's family.

This is not all; but it is where we now stop. If the Lord will, we shall find that He has more to say, and of exceeding great moment as the crown of His love. We have had love coming down in the Son from its heavenly height, and going down into fathomless depths for us;

and we are to look at its carrying us up into that height. Let me meanwhile cite the following sonnet by a famous agnostic converted to God before he died. How sad that he had no one from the Word to assure him of the love of God in Christ, and thus banish till his doubts! J.G.R. needed Luke 15 rather than Ps. 27.

"I ask not for Thy love, O Lord; the days

Can never come, when anguish can atone,

Enough for me were but Thy pity shown

To me as to the stricken sheep that strays

With ceaseless cry for unforgotten ways.

Oh send me back to pastures I have known,

Or find me in the wilderness alone

And slay me as the hand of mercy slays.

I ask not for Thy love, nor e'en as much

As for a hope on Thy dear breast to lie

But be Thou still my Shepherd — still with such

Compassion as may melt, and such a cry;

That so I hear Thy feet, and feel Thy touch,

And dimly see Thy face ere yet I die."

16 The pious Bp. G. Horne on the Psalms wrote in just the same mistaken strain. I should hail with delight a single divine who knew and wrote better as to this fundamental truth of the gospel; but such are absolutely unknown to me.

17 Exposition of the Old and New Testaments with E. Bickersteth's preface, in six vols. 4to. London, 1839.

Address 14 - 1 John 4:11-16

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one hath beheld God at any time: if we love one another, God abideth in us, and his love hath been perfected in us. Herein we know that we abide in him, and he in us, because he hath given to us of his Spirit. And we have beheld, and testify that the Father hath sent his Son as Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abideth in him, and he in God. And we have known and have believed the love which God hath in us. God is love, and he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God in him."

We have seen that in order to give the love to which we are called its proper character, the apostle, in the verses already gone through, recalls the manifestation of God's love in Christ; first, when we were dead, to give us life, secondly, when we had life and felt the burden and evil of our sins as we never felt them before, to accomplish the propitiation which bore all our sins away. Such is the true order of God's acting on the soul. It enables us to see how very important is the reception of life; for without life there is nothing adequate to hear or to answer in divine things. There is still unremoved death in the soul; and the notion of the Spirit of God doing the part of life, or rather without it, is really monstrous. The Spirit of God could not consistently thus act if there were not life to act on.

Christ is, no doubt, the believer's life; and by faith the old "I" is treated as no longer existent before God. It is there in fact, but by grace of Christ it has no right. As Christians we deny it in His name; we own it as wholly

worthless; we abandon it as altogether evil now in our sight as it ever was to God, no matter what a man might be thought by his fellows. He might be a great genius; he might be of the most wonderful energy conceivable; but self is all without and against God, and never could therefore enter into His presence. How then could the old man ever be all object for the Holy Ghost to take up and sanctify to God? Therefore Scripture speaks not of sanctifying the depraved old life, But Of the old man crucified with Christ; of sin in the flesh condemned by God in Christ as a sacrifice for sin, that the body of sin might be annulled, that we should no longer serve sin. It is no longer the sinful "I," but "Christ liveth in me."

There is thus a new life, to which, in virtue of redemption, the Holy Spirit could attach Himself. Hence, as without a new life there is nothing but the old man, the necessity for the new life in Christ is apparent. In point of fact, all the Old Testament worthies, like every saint now, had life; and what believer knows of any life for sinful man but one — the life of Christ? Like incorruption for the body by and by, it is brought to light through the gospel, but it wrought in all believers before the gospel; nor could they be saints without it. Whatever difference in form has been effected, it is all the better for those that followed when our Lord became man. Then it was made plain, as never before, what the new life is, and who those are to whom He imparts it in believing. It was for men, not for angels. "The life was the light of men" only, as far as Scripture intimates. Angels never fell; their elect being kept from sin do not require a new life; nor is there repentance, or gift of grace, to fallen angels. They have a life, whatever it may be, which is not explained to us, nor is it our business to

pry into. What have we to do with such inquiries'? (see Col. 2:18.) It is always a vain pursuit when men get occupied with the angels. Yet I have known a Christian so full of it that he encouraged himself in the visionary idea of angels good and bad seeing him every night, so that he fancied he knew their names; but all this was mere feeling and imagination, though in a true saint of God. There are few greater follies than such speculations about the unseen.

But here is the blessed reality of God's deep concern, His active love in the case of man. First of all it is in its sovereign character, when we were dead, to give us life; and when we received life, that we should be delivered from all guilt; for the same Lord Jesus who brought us life became the propitiation for our sins. For that holy life made our sins an insupportable burden to us. But by His blood once shed for sins, atonement is made; and we are called to believe God's grace, and enjoy the blessed truth of it all.

But there is more than this, though the apostle has moved very gradually in coming to what remains. He began it in the last verse of 1 John 3, "he that keepeth His commandments abideth in Him, and He in him." The one thus blessed is obedient, and who now obeys? None, of course, but the Christian. Only it is not some Christians, but all that are real. They obey God, as having His nature, the life Christ is and has given them.

Yet he does not explain more here, but just leaves it for its due place. Only he adds a small but important intimation in the latter part of the verse. "And herein we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given to us." You perceive that the word "abide" is

preferred to “dwell,” as avoiding equivoque, besides that it is the proper equivalent. There is another word for “dwell” (οἰκεῖ), from which this word (

μένει) differs. God “abideth” in us. This is the simple and certain force. It is not a passing act or a visit for a little while. In “abide” we have one of the distinguishing words of Christianity, its perpetuity. Israel knew too well of something that was very good for a while; but it was taken from them; or, as was said to the Hebrews, what becometh old and aged is ready to vanish away. Such was Judaism, which had to give place to the permanence of Christianity in itself and in faithful souls. To abide is the stable character of every Christian blessing except a conditional one, and there are such too. But eternal is stamped on the new thing, particularly on the life we have in Christ; for this reason it is called by that striking term, and we do well to delight in it. At any rate so we used all to do, when we had in proclaiming it and giving thanks for it in no stinted measure many companions, who are silent now to our sorrow as to “eternal life.”

But there is more than eternal life, though the essence of our blessing is characterised by life in Christ. And was it not Christ displayed constantly in every act of His here below? Dependence on God in unfailing obedience. If He calls upon as to obey as He does, if He lays down commandments, these have nothing whatever to do with the Ten. The law was an appeal to flesh; therein life here below was held out but never gained this do, and thou shalt live.” But the commandments of Christ are directive precepts for those to whom new life is already given of grace by faith. They have now therefore the greatest of all blessings in having Christ their life. Nothing is more certain than that God has given the

believers Christ, and that Christ has also given Himself for them. Wonderful truth, yet most simple! It is the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation. But the truth of the gospel is soon lost when people speculate instead of believing.

For this very reason, as being a life simply of dependence, we want besides the presence and power of God; for there are immense dangers and difficulties in the way. Spiritually we need power, besides the capacity of life. If there be no such momentum, we fail to overcome the obstacles. Otherwise we find out our inertia, or adopt fleshly energy. However blessed dependence may be, it is not power. The true energy of the Christian is the abiding Spirit of God, not life abstractedly, though for our new place life in Christ is essential. He is needed for the working of power in us. When everything was created, the Holy Spirit did His part. When everything was thrown into chaos, the Spirit brooded over the scene of confusion and of darkness. So when God would have a tent in the midst of His people, He did not suffer Israel to frame one according to their own wisdom. Everything was arranged of Himself. Besides precept, God gave power by His Spirit even to the artisans who had to do with it. Perhaps one is not respectful enough, and ought to say goldsmiths, silversmiths, jewellers, joiners, upholsterers, etc., who had to do with constructing the different parts of the sanctuary. But nothing was left to man’s own device; the Spirit of God expressly wrought by man.

But the Spirit of God has now an aim incomparably higher. It is no question of an earthly tabernacle or even a magnificent temple, although we know that the inspiration of God directed as to both. But now the Spirit

of God deigns to abide in those who believe. He is the One that seals every Christian till the day of redemption. The Old Testament saints had no such privilege; and though they had life, they seem to have known little or nothing about it. The peculiarity of Christianity is that now we can say, We know God has revealed what was hidden from them. “What eye had not seen, nor heart conceived,” He now reveals by His Spirit. He is not so much to us the Spirit of prophecy but of communion; certainly too a spirit not of cowardice, but of power and love and of a sound mind. Accordingly as this is just what was needed, so also it is what God has given us. “Herein we know that he abideth in us by the Spirit which he hath given us.”

Here the apostle prepares the way for the requisite truth not yet set out in the call to love. “Beloved”; for here too such is the word of address. So it was before when God was warning them against the false prophets energised by evil spirits. This had been done in the earlier verses. He tells the saints lovingly of a great danger through the persuasive power of evil spirits if opposed in the confidence of the first man, instead of in faith of the Second. Jesus only is the conqueror of Satan; and the believer too conquers, but only through Him that loved him and died for his sins. No evil spirit confesses Jesus. Only the Spirit confesses Him come in flesh. There is the safeguard against false prophets: they cry up fallen man, they level down the Word become flesh. But he repeats “Beloved” when he exhorts the saints to love one another from ver. 7, both because “love is of God,” and from the evidence it furnishes that he who loves has been begotten of God and knows God; as also whoso does not love does not know God, because

God is love. Here, in pursuance of the theme, is reiterated “Beloved” in ver. 11.

“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” He never says that we ought to love God, but everywhere assumes that we do love Him. And so it is with every believer who knows God’s love to him when he was in his sins and enmity against Him, and learnt in the gospel that sovereign love to us in our guilty and lost estate which gave Christ His Son to die for us. “For when still without strength Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom. 5:6). The “due time” for love so needed by us, so immeasurable in itself, so worthy of God and His Son, was when man, both Gentile and Jew, joined hands to crucify the Saviour, and thus cut themselves off from mercy on every ground save His boundless grace. The Jew boasted of the law, but violated it everywhere, and never so shamelessly as then. The Roman boasted of his law and government, but, bold as he claimed to be, through fear of the spiteful cry from the people he scorned of losing Caesar’s friendship, condemned the guiltless, as he well know Jesus to be. Jew and Gentile united in the atrocious iniquity against God. Then and there it is that God commends His love unto us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Oh how foolish to fancy that He wants the sinner to commend himself to God by doing some good or great thing! and to forget that it is He who in His Son has wrought the only, the best and the greatest thing that even He could, in that all sufficient sacrifice for him that believes! When this is received, the heart that was proudest and darkest does not fail to love.

Nor is this the sole reason why the Christian loves God. In reserving Christ he receives life eternal. He is

begotten of God; he becomes His child. He loves God as His Father. If in ordinary circumstances a child loves his parents, spite of many a fault on both sides, how much does not the new nature prompt the Christian to love not only his All-good and gracious Father, but those who have the same life, the same Spirit?

“Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought to love one another.” It is easy to see that all Christian exhortations in Scripture presuppose divine grace already possessed. God did not call us to love till He proved His love toward us in Christ, and gave us to know His love. And the two-fold want of the sinner which has been just shown to be met from other Scriptures, we have seen briefly and touchingly set out in the verses 9, 10, last before us in this chapter. It is not an exaggeration that he who is born of God and redeemed by Christ’s blood cannot but love God, and it gives a plain and sufficient reason why he never exhorts us to love God or Christ.

It is a very different else with the natural man, as it was with us in our unconverted days. Any of us who had the favour of believing parents, and the word of God and prayer from early years, had a bad conscience till the truth was brought home to our hearts; we dreaded God because of our sins, yet neglected so great salvation, and trembled at death and judgment as they flashed on us for a little. Impossible for souls in that state to love Him whose everlasting judgment alarmed now and again our guilty souls, still in quest of pleasure, advancement in the world, wealth, and of whatever else of vain glory we aspired to. Any love we had then at best was of nature without the smallest reference of the heart to God. Such love was only higher than the affection of a dog or a cat, as man’s nature is higher than the brute’s.

But the love of the new nature is supernatural, and has its character, motives, and source in Christ. Hence the mistake and danger of attributing natural benevolence to grace. Christian love is akin to the love of God to us, when in us there was nothing to be loved; for as we read "we were aforetime foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another." So says he who as touching righteousness that is in law was found blameless. But the light of Christ's glory which shone into his heart exposed its rottenness; and these things and all else in which man glories he counted and went on counting but dung in comparison with Christ, so that he minded no path of suffering on the way to the resurrection from among the dead — in short to Christ in glory.

Our apostle says that, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. For though we share the same blessed life in Christ, and the same propitiation for our sins, the flesh and the world make many great and varied difficulties. It is the sheerest unbelief to shrink from our God, even when we seek to unbosom any folly and wrong into which we may have slipped; for He holds to His relationship of Father and to ours as His children, while the enemy seeks to estrange us from Him. But God's children are exposed to snares through the flesh. They are is prone, when off their guard, to espy the faults in their brethren as to gloss over or hide their own faults. This is not loving one another at all, still less as Christ loved us, the standard for the Christian, as the law was to Israel to love their neighbour as themselves: a difference which ought to be seen and felt. They were a people in the flesh, and under law; we are in the Spirit

(Rom. 8:9) and under grace (Rom. 6:14), if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in us. Then comes love to God's family, flowing out of God's grace to us personally. The law made nothing perfect (Heb. 7:19); nor was it made for a righteous man but for lawless and unruly and the like to condemn them, and drive to the only refuge for sinners. The use by fallen Christendom, ancient and modern, is to put the righteous under it, which the apostle declares to be unlawful. We are as expressly under grace which, notwithstanding all hindrances, strengthens us to love one another.

We cannot but love Him who first loved us, even when we were in rags and degraded among swine, and it may be found no pity from those who enjoyed our plenty in sin and folly; but when we came to want, none gave to us. Such is the world; but not such the father. When the prodigal judged in a measure his evil ways and their distressing results, his heart turns to the one he had so long left and forgotten I will arise (said he) and go to my father, and I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee; I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. But while he was yet a long way off, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and covered him with kisses." This is God's love as He told it who knew it best, and was then displaying it to the tax-gatherers and sinners who drew near to hear the wondrous tidings of grace among murmuring Pharisees and scribes. Not content with forgiving, nor allowing the prodigal to propose his place among the hirelings, the word is, "Bring out the best robe and clothe him in it, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it; and let us eat and make

merry; for this my son was dead, and is come to life, was lost and is found." This is grace, not law, showing what God is as Father in the worthy words of His Son. And if such He is to the most abandoned sinner that comes to Him, how sad to question the grace wherein the believers stand, or to doubt His pitiful love toward an erring Christian, His child!

Alas! if He never changes, His children did and do; so that it was very right and necessary to call them to love one another, as the apostle did with humility, "we also ought to love one another." He put himself among the rest as called to an obligation, which is not so easy at all times as some think. Love according to God is not mere "brotherly affection," however excellent this is when truly applicable. 2 Peter 1:7 draws the line, and puts love beyond it is deeper and higher. Where brotherly kindness gives the hand, love might decline, because it sees a dangerous snare and a grievous sin, which brotherly kindness was too pre-occupied to discern in the light of God. Divine love looks at the divine side, instead of yielding to mere emotions. We must stand at the fountain, as it were, to be fresh ourselves, and able to refresh, single-eyed dealers in the love that is of God. Nothing can be more opposed than the human amiability which tries nobody's conscience and allows everybody's will. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth and so it is with our love according to God. As it is of God, it feels and acts for God. But if He "so loved us, we ought to love one another." He knew all the drawbacks and shortcomings in us as His children, as He knew and felt all our sins and iniquities when we were children of wrath; yet He loved so as to give His Son for us. Surely

then we ought to love one another as objects of the same love.

So says the apostle Paul to the Ephesian saints “Be ye therefore imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love, even as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, an offering and sacrifice to God of a sweet-smelling savour.” There is nothing that draws out love so much as love; nor any love so efficacious and fruitful as the love of God in Christ the perfection even of His love. And this we know, not as spectators like the angels, but as ourselves the objects of it downwards and upwards to a degree stupendous in their eyes. For were we not in the depths of degradation and aggravated guilt and impotent daring? Yet Christ His Son went down below all our sins in God’s judgment on the cross. And is He not risen above all heights in heavenly glory, angels and principalities and powers being subjected to Him, to whom we are now united by the Holy Ghost, one spirit with the Lord?

Ver. 12 is a word worthy of all consideration. It recalls John 1:18: “No one hath seen God at any time.” How was so great a want for man supplied? Did not the God of all goodness feel for man’s lack? He made Himself known most gloriously for Himself and His Son, most efficaciously in itself, and most considerately and lovingly to man in sending His own Son become Man among men. “The only-begotten Son that is in the bosom of the Father, He declared [Him].” If every soul of man since Adam had been asked how God could make Himself known in the best and surest way, and in the fullest love to man in all his need and misery, never would one have ventured to propose a way comparable with God’s way. Yet Satan found the means, through

man’s lusts and passions, through his will, his supposed interests, and his invented religions in particular, to ignore and reject the Son of God to his own ruin.

But the Son of God who came in divine love is gone back to His Father. And the apostle again says, “No one hath seen God at any time,” in the plainest reference to similar words in the Gospel. Yet the Son, the rejected Son, is not here to declare Him. What is the answer to the same want now? “If we love one another, God abideth in us, and his love is perfected in us.” Is not this a striking and solemn means of supplying the need? Does it not address itself in a direct and powerful way to you, my brothers, to me, and to every other child of God? We are here and now through the Son not only washed from our sins but made sons of God, and by our mutual love according to God to know and witness Him in a world that knows Him not. The children are now to reflect here the love of God. This the Lord did perfectly when here; how are we, or are we really knowing and abiding in His love thus?

But we have only looked into the first words of the apostle’s answer now. Let us hear what remains: “If we love one another, God abideth in us, and his love is perfected in us” (verse 12). The love of Christians mutually is the proof and the power of communion that He abides in us, and that His love is perfected in us, instead of being choked by the flesh or enticed by the allurements of the world. Evangelising the incredulous or perishing sinner is no answer to the question raised. Where and how is God to be seen now? In face of every effort of Satan to set the children of God against one another, their loving each other as God loved and as Christ manifested it declares that God abides in us, and

His love is perfected in us. What an encouragement to walk humbly and unobtrusively in the love that is of God! What a reproof to any who think little of its importance and blessing! Yet 1 John 4:12 could not have been without John 1:18, and more too — Christ's death for us and the gift of the Spirit to us. Christ must be the life in order to such a reproduction. Yet when the disciples saw its perfection in Christ, how little they realised God in Him! When He died and rose, they understood it better. But when anointed with the Spirit they enjoyed best of all, and walked as they abode in that love, which is the energy of God's nature. It is so with us now in principle and in fact too according to the measure of our spirituality.

The so-called evangelicals think that their chief love should go out in seeking the conversion of souls. It is indeed a good work if done in faith and love to Christ; but this is not what our Lord enjoined as the love so near His heart; nor can it be doubted that zealous evangelists and their allies are often not a little insensible to the new commandment that we should love one another. They are apt to be so absorbed in their own work as to measure love not a little by the support given to what interests them. And the modern system of special societies craves similarly for new methods, as if the words of the Lord had become obsolete. Far be it from my heart to say an unkind word of anybody; still we must look at facts as they are, and I refer to things that seem irrefutable.

We can readily see how much this love of God in us toward our brethren rises above moral duty. If the Holy Spirit had not so written through the apostle, we might have thought it a grievous exaggeration to give it such

value, as to say that if we love one another, God abideth in us, and His love is perfected in us. May we simply and fully believe His word, that we may be enabled thus to love, and assure our souls that as love is of God so He abides in us to walk in it, apart from the world which can mix only to destroy its character, instead of His love being perfected in us. None can share or understand this love unless they are born of God, and even then only as walking by faith of Christ and so seeing the unseen and eternal. The sight of our eyes or mind destroys its character.

Now we are responsible for knowing God, and we who believe in Christ base the joy of knowing God. Every word, every work, every look of His recorded in the word lets us into that intimacy; for the inspired have much to tell us even in all these ways of Christ about God. They all reveal Him, the least thing as well as the greatest. But now the Lord is gone. He that declared God is in heaven. Is there no present living witness of God? The apostle repeats here in the Epistle, “No man hath beheld God at any time.” His love was in all perfection in Christ, He was seen in contrast with all human imperfections. Where is the resource? “If we love one another.” Is it not very solemn that God points to Christians for letting this dark world behold what God is? We are called especially by the action of divine love in our souls and ways to be the witnesses of God to the world that doubts all certainty about Him. When Christ declared Him, He was as perfect as Himself; but how is it in our case, spite of every infirmity? “If we love one another, God abideth in us, and his love is perfected in us.” The apostle here too looks at the principle, not at how far saints fail; and this we have seen to be the way

of John. He never forgets the source in God, and the channel in Christ who manifested it; and he sets before the saints the outflow of grace in accordance with the new nature.

Why settle down with the continual confession that we are not doing the truth? Where Christians do so, is there not something that grieves the Spirit of God? That is what we do well to search out and judge before God. We are warned against grieving Him. It is the flesh which especially opposes the Spirit. “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall in no wise fulfil flesh’s lusts (says the apostle Paul). For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit [is] against the flesh; and these are opposed one to the other in order that ye should not do those things which ye desire.” It is not, as lamentably said in the A.V. “So that ye cannot;” which too naturally affords an excuse for sin. There is no ground whatever for such a misconstruction. The flesh is always the great opponent of the Spirit. The flesh may work sometimes amiably, which is not really love, sometimes with open rudeness and impropriety, which no one could imagine to be love. But here, if we love one another, in the face of all the subtle efforts of the spirit of falsehood and malice, it is only the more truly and manifestly the love of God, not founded upon what we see in one another, but what we all have received from God Himself in Christ. Think of what we once were that are now God’s children, as wicked as any who still neglect so great salvation, some of us once more daring and notorious than most. Such were we; and if we were moral or religious according to flesh, proud of that which was no more than a veil, and in God’s sight because of the pretence worse than the openly evil. “But we got washed, but we were sanctified,

but we were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." So the apostle wrote, owning what God's love had wrought in many of the corrupt city of Corinth, yet in sharp reproof of their grave inconsistencies. And he had the joy of learning that his faithful love (which pained himself more than them) was not in vain, but grieved them to repentance, yea repentance to salvation never to be regretted; though in his conflict of feeling he did regret his own letter passingly, by grace to remember it with abiding joy. For the great love that was in him reached through the conscience and the truth to the little love in them; and then what diligence it wrought in them! What clearing of themselves! What indignation, and fear and ardent desire, and zeal and avenging, in every way proving themselves pure where they had been so deeply to blame! This is a trying and painful form of loving one another; but it is a real one, though happier far the heeding of the word, so as to be kept from all evil.

"If we love one another, God abideth in us." This is the normal way, where faith works, and not flesh. And this leads to the opening of the great truth of the Spirit given to us, whereby God abides in us; nor is this all that he says, for he adds that "God's love is perfected in us." This he had said earlier and in another connection. In 1 John 2:5 he stated that "Whoso keepeth his word, truly in him hath the love of God been perfected." For to keep His word indicates the highest and deepest character of obedience. Whoso not merely keeps His commandments in detail, but keeps His word as a whole, "in him verily is the love of God perfected." Of course it does not mean the strange error of the man's own perfection. The flesh is never extirpated while we live; but God dealt with it in

Christ's cross, and we, as having life in Christ, mortify our members that are on the earth. But the flesh is in us, though we are no longer in it. The flesh is never changed into Spirit, nor will it disappear whilst we are here in the body but by grace bound never to let it act, but to keep it by faith under the power of Christ's death. Thus His love is perfected as in him that keeps the word, so also in that we love one another. We are subject to His word, and we walk together in love in spite of all difficulties. Thus is God's love perfected in us; it is carried out according to the mind of God. We have nothing to boast; but we heartily obey and love through the power of His love toward us and in us. Undoubtedly it supposes that habitually we have been looking to God, and that He has answered our prayers, and so His love is perfected in us. Obedience is carried out and love too according to His mind.

Now he enters on the gift of the Spirit. "Herein we know that we abide in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit."

The advance is marked above 1 John 3:24. It is not merely "the Spirit." God wrought by the Spirit in many a one where it could not be said to be "of His Spirit." We often hear of the Spirit working, as we have seen, in the Old Testament, and still more in the New. We find partakers of the Holy Spirit and powers of the world to come spoken of in Heb. 6:4, 5, where they fell away fatally from God. These are never said to have been born of the Spirit, still less that God gave them "of His Spirit." This implies real communion with God; and the New Testament gives a deeper force to the expression "of His Spirit" than the Old. It is in this way that God abides in the Christian. Yet even when there was an external

purpose God wrought by the power of the Spirit in one way or another. In every case it was the Spirit of God; and the Spirit is a spirit of power. Consequently there was an effect altogether above man, and above what even life eternal could do without the Spirit.

God abides in us, as he says, and we abide in Him. He begins with abiding in us; not with our abiding in God, but with God's abiding in us. It will be shown presently that it is of importance to discern the difference. That God abides in us is His grace to us when resting on Christ's redemption. That we abide in Him is the fruit of the confidence in God that His grace inspires in us. Thus, as it were, we retire from self as well as from all around us of the creature, and we make God the home of our hearts even while we are here below. This is abiding in God; and it becomes us to look to God for grace habitually thus to abide in Him. When we so abide in Him, He acts in us in the way of power in communion. In accordance with this therefore it is written that He hath given us of His Spirit. "Of his Spirit" has a particularity in the manner of its expression which plainly indicates that what we share is with Himself. It is "of his Spirit" that we are here said to partake.

Yet there is no small danger lest we mistake so great a privilege. There are many pious persons who confound a certain happiness in their souls with God's abiding in them. This danger is generally of a mystic character. They are self-inspective and emotional. Anyone who has read writings of the celebrated William Law on the soul would know what is meant. He was one of these mystics, but altogether wrong in hiding or even losing God's grace in Christ under sacramental efficacy and man's inward feelings. He did not apprehend in the least

degree man's total ruin, nor the fulness of redemption, still less life eternal in Christ. It was an effort to love God and a readiness to accredit the effort; not the faith of God's redeeming love and unsparing judgment of the flesh, to find an infinitely better portion in Christ the Lord. Since then a community is distinguished by what they call "Christian sanctification," which is not Scriptural sanctification; but rather a good opinion of their state founded on a bright feeling in their souls; the cause and effect of which is that they are exceedingly occupied with themselves and their experience, which they tell out to one another for mutual edification. This has so important and fixed a place in their eyes that they have a regular meeting in classes, with a leader in each, for communicating one to another what they think the Spirit of God has produced in their souls from week to week. They cannot point to any institution of the sort in the New Testament.

But the Spirit of God glorifies Christ by receiving of His things and announcing them to us. He was to guide into all the truth. This kind of mysticism glorifies self; it is occupied with our own feelings. It is therefore directly exposed to leading to self-worship in some souls and to dejection in such as are not easily satisfied with their attainment. It is wholesome to learn that there is nothing in ourselves to yield spiritual satisfaction, so as to make Christ our all, as He really is. But to be thus occupied with one's own heart, save for humbling ourselves on account of it, is as dishonouring to Him as it is dangerous to ourselves. Occupation with ourselves is not merely unprofitable, but hinders growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Yet there is not a doubt that many real Christians

have been drawn into this invention of man which necessarily substitutes occupation with ourselves instead of with Christ Jesus, and rejoicing in our own joy, instead of rejoicing always in the Lord.

Observe the care with which inspiration has guarded against the mystical school in the next verse. The blessed truth of Christ, the facts which the Gospels reveal, is the best corrective of this abuse of introspection, because it sets and establishes the heart on its divine foundation, and the fulness of joy in Christ excludes dwelling on ourselves or our good state, as we estimate it. Here the Holy Spirit brings us back again to rest on what God has wrought for us, to the very ground of the gospel itself. What can more thoroughly correct any such looking within? “And we have beheld” — there is the emphatic word of the inspired witnesses — “and testify that the Father hath sent the Son as Saviour of the world.” Whatever others may occupy themselves with (and they pretend to many a high thing), “we have beheld and testify that the Father hath sent the Son as Saviour of the world.”

What is, what ought to be, the effect of such a truth? Does it not fill us with the praise of the Father and the Son? Does it not shame us into nothingness as to ourselves? There we are shown that we were the merest sinners, yet as surely saved by faith through grace. Timid faith questions whether we were so bad, or God so good. But if through the Holy Spirit we simply believe, we cannot assuredly find anything in ourselves worth talking of in comparison of grace so rich, and for ever too. Thus does God wean us from ourselves, the world, and every other object, to delight our souls in Himself

and His Son. Even knowledge may and does puff up; but love, the Father's love and the Son's, builds up.

It equally delivers from another and opposite school, who are occupied with themselves as under law, and who, instead of looking for good in themselves, think that they please God and are all the better themselves for a sort of despairing pessimism, rarely rising above "Oh wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me out of this body of death?" They quite ignore what the apostle declares to the believer in virtue of Christ's work. Instead of working like a hired servant with the muck-rake in their dark and filthy heart, they are through the Saviour of the world entitled to the "best robe" and the "fatted calf," and share the Father's joy to the glory of the Son. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus freed me from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2). And it makes the comfort of deliverance all the more impressive, when it is observed that the "me" now freed when we turn from self to Christ is the same "me" that was groaning under law just before (Rom. 7:24). How much better than the emotional or the groaning schools, occupied with self in such different ways, to condemn flesh out and out, as God did on the cross, and to find Christ worthy of all their thoughts and the spring of unfading peace and joy! There we prove that it is the Father's will and the Son's work and the Spirit's witness that we are called to rejoice in, as we shall for ever.

It is an interesting connection of scripture with this, that the first place where the Lord found Himself acknowledged as the Saviour of the world was in Samaria. It succeeded the wonderful scene at the well, where the poor woman that had had five husbands, and

had one now who was not her husband, was given life eternal through faith in the Lord Jesus. He also told her of the passing away of the contending religions of Palestine. The mountain of Samaria was to pass, and even Jerusalem. Henceforth there was to be another character of worship altogether, the kernel of which was divulged by the Lord even then. “The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him.”

Thus was fulness of grace revealed to a poor Samaritan woman in whom the truth had begun to work. She was smitten in conscience, and awakened in soul; but it was after this that she learnt who He was, that (she was assured) spoke from God to her heart, now received with all simplicity of faith, as she became a messenger to others of the One in whom she believed. And the Lord graciously dealt with these Samaritans, and did what we do not find Him doing in any other place during His ministry: He abode with them two days. And they testified of Him, that it was not because of what she testified of Him, as telling her all things that she ever did, but “we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is truly the Saviour of the world.” The copyists put in “the Christ” too, but this is not the authentic or appropriate word. It was owning at that early day the very title here given, save one thing necessarily absent from it — the Father’s sending the Son. This they knew not nor could they venture to anticipate. Neither they nor any others had the Holy Spirit given “whereby we cry Abba, Father”; but they acknowledged, and were the first to acknowledge, the truth that Jesus, is “the Saviour of the world.” It was not a question of Jews but of

sinners, and therefore for Samaritans or any one else. This was before the Lord had entered on His public ministry. These chapters of the Gospel of John show the Lord's acts before John the Baptist was delivered up, and His own going to Galilee; which have the greater interest when we find so grand a truth as Himself owned "the Saviour of the world."

This was a bright anticipation of the gospel through a true sense of the Lord's grace personally. It is not only a Saviour, and this not merely for the people of Israel who expected the Messiah, but "the Saviour of the world." Even then the truth broke through the clouds, the light shone into the hearts of the despised and ignorant Samaritans, and they were the first so to confess Him. Here it is the apostolic testimony. "And we have beheld and testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world."

But how are we to know that a sinner has made this, the grace and truth of Christ, his own? How are we to be satisfied that the saving truth of God has entered into anyone's soul, and introduced him into the intimate association with God of which the apostle has spoken? This is answered in the next verse. "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abideth in him, and he in God."

Now is not this a most amazing assurance to receive? For we have just had the true but simple believer bowing to the glad tidings, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. It is not merely subjection to the Messiah, the coming King of Israel, but believing Him to be the Son of God. "Whosoever shall confess." Nothing can be wider than "whosoever." He

does not only “believe” but “confess.” He has surmounted all difficulties, doubts or fears. He has weighed the truth, felt the grace, judged himself, and has no longer hesitation. And now the blessing of the Lord comes richly on his head. So the apostle said, “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised Him from among the dead, thou shalt be saved,” pressing God’s answer to Christ’s work. Here, as is usual, our apostle dwells on the glory of the Son’s person, but in the fulness of His grace toward the lost in the gospel. And the sinner, turning from himself and every prop of creation, confesses that Jesus is the Son of God. What then ensues? “God abideth in him, and he in God.” Not, I presume, that any person ever truly confesses Him to be the Son of God, without also believing in the work of redemption that He wrought and God accepted. It is all vague to unbelief. Men might use the words, but they do not realise the truth they express. Of course it is supposed that the confession is truly made according to God. He confesses that Jesus, the Man that multitudes took to be only a man however great, is the Son of God. Who then can doubt the efficacy of His redemption? The striking fact here conveyed is that whoever confesses Jesus to be. the Son of God has not only life, and the remission of sins, and the Holy Spirit, but the highest spiritual privileges conceivable. For what can be higher than God abiding in him, and he in God? No doubt the more spiritual your state, the more you realise it. But the apostle here tells the confessing Christian that this is his portion. May we cherish and enjoy it! May He cut off everything that comes in to dull our sense and value for it!

The apostle follows up in verse 16 its application. “And we have known and believed the love which God hath to us.” There is no uncertainty in the answer to the general principle: “we (emphatically) have known and believed the love which God hath in us.” His love is not only “toward” but “in” us. We value and delight all the more that His love in us first flowed toward us when children of wrath. Again he repeats “God is love,” but now he connects with it “He that abideth in love abideth in God.” This is an altogether new way of speaking of it. If I am abiding in the love that comes from God, I cannot but be quite at home with God. His love, flowing from His own goodness and giving Christ to die that there might be a perfect grant of righteousness, forgives my sins, makes me His child without desert on my part, and leads Him to abide in me. The love in Him (and no wonder) produces love in me; and abiding in love I abide in God, and God in me. It is not merely a visit now and a visit again, but there the Christian abides; it is his habit and his home to dwell in love. Can any blessing be more precious? Yet how simple it all is, if we believe. It casts down every high thing that lifteth itself up against the knowledge of God. The apostle is writing not to theologians nor philosophers, nor to scientists in religion, but to God’s children, that none might come short, and all might better know the love of God they began with, and enjoy increasingly the God of love.

But it is well to point out certain distinctions in “our abiding in God” and “God abiding in us,” of some importance to distinguish. There are three separate forms of the blessing. The first of these in order of time is that God abides in the Christian, and we have just had before us that whosoever confesses Jesus to be the Son

of God, has it in a double way (ver. 15); God abideth in him, and he in God. How does God abide in him? By the Spirit He gave us, as in 1 John 3:24, we know that God abides in us. Then 1 John 4:13 goes further: “Herein we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He hath given to us of His Spirit.”

Here we have our abiding in Him, which cannot be unless He in sovereign grace deigns to abide in us by the gift of the Spirit, which draws us to abide in Him as the effect. How then account for the order which 1 John 4:13 presents? It is therein implied that by virtue of the Spirit given God did abide in him, but through power of communion in partaking of His Spirit, not only did he abide in God, but God in him in the third form of special power. And this is confirmed by the other special intimation in ver. 16, “he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God in him,” like ver. 13, implying the previous blessing of God abiding, but adding the two others. It is spiritual power as the third result, which is special. In the general case to every confessor that Jesus is the Son of God we have only the first and second form of blessing, God abiding in him and he in God; but the third is only added here. It is here not merely the Spirit but “of His Spirit,” and this way strongly marks communion.

The manner of God’s abiding in the Christian is by the Spirit being given to him. Herein we know that God abides in us, a wondrous fact, yet not all the blessing. The apostle is our warrant for it, and this is enough. It is God abiding in us. Then there is an attractive effect upon us, so that we knowing His love abide in Him. The first we may call the sovereign operation of God, in honour of the work of Jesus confessed to be His Son. He seals us with the Spirit as His own redeemed by blood, if

we may refer to the language of the apostle Peter on this theme. That means God abiding in him. The second is the answer of the Christian's heart, which habitually counts on God in the submission and confidence of love, instead of turning to self or to others to meet difficulties. This is to abide in God, bringing everything to Him whose love has made. him His home. And as He has thus drawn so near, we too at His welcome make Him our home. This appears to be the difference between God's abiding in us and our abiding in God.

Thus there is the third form of divine privilege in the power that follows this communion. The first is sovereign operation; the second is the reflex effect and experience in confiding in Him; and the third is the power of the Spirit in spiritual power as the consequence of so great a blessing. And here it is where we are weakest of all. We are indeed apt to stop short of the full result in this failing world, as we ought not. This makes it humbling to us. For if you or I have little to show of devotedness and spiritual power, we are well aware why it is, and that the fault is entirely and only our own. Faults in others are not the cause nor a just excuse, but our own failure. If provoked, there must have been something to be provoked; and this could not be were we abiding in God and God abiding in us in power. But if God's abiding in us and our abiding in Him are the portion of every Christian, as the apostle makes plain, how sad if it were only true in principle but in fact great shortcoming! Let us exhort one another that the principle may issue in fruitful practice. There is the utmost encouragement if we are simple and steadfast in looking to God, and that His grace may make it real and manifest in us to His praise, yet prompt to be in the dust

when conscious of dishonouring Him. It ill becomes those so blessed as Christians are to have little but self-reproach. May we have the joy of proving that God is faithful to H’s word in making good privileges so wonderful that few saints believe that they are not only ours by title, but ours for enjoyment and practice!

Address 15 - 1 John 4:17-21

“Herein hath love been perfected with us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because even as he is, we also are in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath punishment; and he that feareth hath not been perfected in love. We love, because he first loved us. If any one say, I love God, and hate his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, that he that loveth God love also his brother.”

As the word last considered may have presented, from the nature of its subject, more than usual difficulty, the present address furnishes the opportunity of regarding the connection with what now claims one’s heed, divested of its many details, and thus in its simple and broad lines. Who can doubt that it was meant by its divine Author to attract and fix the interest of every Christian in that which they are wont to consider so far above their reach as to be practically unattainable? As it is part of an Epistle more immediately than any other appealing to all God’s children, and the more so as addressed formally to none in particular, ought not they, ought not we, every one of us, to pay the more marked heed? We shall surely find that the true faith of Christ entitles every true Christian, in virtue of life in the Son and of the indwelling Spirit of God, to read and weigh it afresh in God’s presence, and count on His love to give us not only enlarged spiritual understanding, but the realisation of the blessing He spreads before us to

appropriate and enjoy. Many of us have tasted the sweetness occasionally of finding this or that part of Scripture opening out its varied treasure under the Spirit's power, where our eyes had previously seen little or nothing. And herb it is the more to be sought, as it is avowedly to enlarge and deepen our communion with God.

After the twofold tests of truth against false prophets in the first six verses of our chapter — Jesus come in flesh, and the apostolic revelation (i.e., the New Testament) — the great theme of love is brought out in our apostle's characteristic manner, though with just as much weight as in the Pauline episode of 1 Cor. 13. God's children are to love one another, because love is of God, and every one that loveth hath been begotten of God, and knoweth God. We see at once that he regards love as inseparably linked with the great truth of life eternal in Christ, relationship therefore with God Himself, and intelligent spiritual knowledge of God. It is thus a sphere for the Christian on earth not only above human knowledge but above natural affections, having to do with fellow-saints here below, yet on grounds not only supernatural but divine, and directly, as we shall see, with God and His presence. Yet every Christian has an immediate concern in it all, not affecting superiority and wishing to shine as a lonely star apart, but in full intimacy with God's abiding in him and his abiding in God, to walk not simply in the light but in the love of God which is His own nature, the source of the Christian's new nature.

Now as this tends to the subjective or what acts in the soul, and might tend to puff up (for indeed it is as wonderful as it is true), a marked step is taken wholly outside the Christian. Therefore he is confronted with

what is altogether objective. “Herein was manifested the love of God in our case, because God hath sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as propitiation for our sins.” An “imitation of Christ” is utterly insufficient. We needed the infinite reality of God’s love in Christ, first, that we who were dead might live through Him; next, that He might be made sin sacrificially for us who were guilty and defiled. The love that wrought so efficaciously was solely in Him, not ours. We are therefore disciples of Jesus only, not of the à Kempis school or of any other mystic. The express aim is to found the truth on what God was to us, not on what we are or desire to be for God.

This being made admirably clear, the apostle urges that if God so loved us, we ought to love one another. We do love God, and we could not but love if we believed His immense love in Christ to us; but we ought to love those whom He loves as He loves us, alike His children. This is followed by the remarkable allusion to the substantially similar application to the Son in John 1:12, and to God’s children in 1 John 4:12. Christ declared the unseen God perfectly: how does our loving one another? If we thus love, “God abideth in us and His love is perfected in us.” Without having life in Christ it was impossible: but even more was wanted and given, even “of His Spirit” (ver. 13). For the same Spirit that descended and abode on Christ, in virtue of His personal and intrinsic perfection, now abides in us, in virtue of His work for us on the cross. Thus it is that as God abides in us, we too are enabled to abide in God, and to know that we abide in Him and He in us. Thus only are we kept from thinking

more highly of ourselves than we ought to think, while by grace made free of divine intimacy to the utmost.

That very word which is shown to be above man's nature, not only seeing but beholding, is now predicated of the witnesses in ver. 14. "And we have beheld and testify that the Father hath sent the Son as Saviour of the world," not as a vision or external sight, but by faith realising it in the Holy Spirit. And therefore "whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God" steps thereby into the blessing — "God abideth in him, and he in God." Such is the order of God's operation in grace. This is remarkably confirmed by ver. 16, where the apostle again joins himself with all other Christians in adding, "and we have known and believed the love which God hath in us" (ver. 16). For who could limit this to the apostolic choir? — this exposition of Christian communion with God, founded on the new life and accomplished propitiation, but by the Spirit consequently carried on into sharing God's delight in love as His children, with the words, "God is love, and he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God in him." This is the order of spiritual experience and power. Every part is most real for the Christian's intercourse with God, and each is here stated in its exactly right place; as encouraging to the simple saint as it reproves the indifferent or negligent of such divine favour and joy. And what a marked absence of anything like a dream or a vision, or of aught that could make a Christian conspicuous in the eyes of others or in his own!

It might be thought impossible to add anything beyond what has been so richly spread before us. For (1) we have the source of all the blessing traced to the love of God in giving us the value of Christ's life and death

when we lay dead in sins; and (2) divine love shown to work in us toward one another as surely as we have been begotten of God and know Him, the Holy Spirit abiding in us to confirm and elevate by enabling us to abide in God, and enjoy its fruit in spiritual power. The utmost care is taken to show that such is the title of grace to every Christian: only to make it effective our souls must be in communion about it. But there is a further and crowning favour set before us in ver. 17, “Herein hath love been perfected with us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because even as he is, we also are in this world.”

This is a notable accession of blessedness, which, is now revealed to the Christian. It is divine love not merely manifested in our case, when utterly worthless and incapable of any good; nor love working in us God’s children according to His love one toward another. It is not so much here the Holy Spirit groaning with us who groan as saints delivered in bodies undelivered, in the midst of the whole creation, groaning to be delivered as it will surely be when the Lord Jesus appears in power and glory. But here John tells us of the Spirit even now and here working in God’s children in the power of divine love, and in the enjoyment of God’s presence. This was love. perfected in us. Now the apostle speaks to us of the transcendent favour, that the love has been perfected with us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment. This “boldness” rises wholly above the thought of anyone who believes coming into judgment, that is, of course, a judgment. of everlasting consequence, a judgment of righteousness dealing with guilty or even failing man. For divine judgment, which the Lord Jesus is to execute, will take cognisance even of

the secrets of the heart and the words of the mouth, as well as all the deeds of the body. And what child of man can enter into that judgment and come out acquitted and unscathed?

Hence even in the Old Testament, which has very little light on the judgment of the dead, compared with what was given in the New Testament, we hear the Psalmist (Ps. 143:2) say: “Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.” Thus we are taught that if not merely a careless sinner but “Thy servant (a saint, of course) has Jehovah entering into judgment with him, not even he nor any man living can be justified. For judgment must not evade the facts, nor excuse the sins, and no mere man has ever lived without sins. How then can any sinful man be justified or saved?

Our Lord, when here, dealt with this awful difficulty in language perfectly simple and clear (John 5). He speaks of Himself, the incarnate Son of God, as having life to give to everyone who believes on Him, and as having judgment to exercise on all the wicked who reject and despise Him. He gives life to the believer; He will judge the unbeliever. But the words which make the way of deliverance immediately plain are in ver. 24: “Verily, verily, I say to you, he that heareth my word, and believeth Him that sent Me hath life eternal, and cometh not into judgment, but is (or hath) passed out of death into life.” The A.V. was very faulty here in the rendering of “condemnation” to suit the common error of Christendom as to a universal judgment of saints and sinners. “Judgment,” which is the only true sense, precludes this idea: and the Lord pronounces here that he who hears His word (the Ten Commandments, or the

like, would not avail), and believes Him that sent the Saviour (for it is essential to bow to God in that great mission of His love), hath life eternal, and doth not come into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life.

The believer therefore is never put on the trial of his guilt like the unbeliever; he has already, if we believe the Lord, passed out of death into life; because in receiving Christ he receives life eternal. This was to honour Christ; but as the unbeliever dishonoured Him and His word, and disbelieved God's sending Christ on His errand of love, he must be raised for judgment ("damnation" is not the right sense), as the believer will receive a resurrection of life, which is plainly here set in contrast with that for judgment. Notwithstanding he, when raised, will give account of all things done in the body to the Lord Jesus. He is taken on high when he renders it; but this is wholly incompatible with judgment into which, as the Lord assures, he does not come. The Lord on the cross bore the judgment of his sins: therefore this question is settled by grace; but he will be manifested (not judged) before the judgment seat of Christ, that he may know as he is known; and it will fill to the full his sense of the grace of God in his salvation.

Another scripture that bears on this point is Heb. 9:27, 28, where man's portion of death and judgment is contrasted with what Christ does for the believer; instead of his death is Christ's offering to bear his sins in His death; and instead of judgment, Christ's appearing without sin (having no more to do with it) for salvation. That is, salvation stands instead of judgment to those that look for Him the second time.

Indeed the Christian has only to consider what justification by faith is according to scripture generally, in order to see that the notion of a common judgment of sinners and saints, or of the saints in the real sense of judgment, is an error irreconcilable with the gospel, though I am not aware of a single Father that held the truth in this respect, still less any article of Councils. Not one of the creeds confesses this distinctive truth of Christ. Yet the anomaly which results is manifest; for as none can deny that our Lord will come for the Christian, the church as a whole, and the Old Testament saints too, and will not only receive them to Himself in the air but take them to the Father's house, the notion of a universal judgment (commonly based on the Lord's dealing with the good and bad of the nations at the end of the age, in Matt. 25:31-46) involves the strange confusion that the justified by God (for it is God that justifieth), are to be put on their trial after they are already in the glorified state, and to be judged by their Saviour whether they are not after all to be lost. If this alternative be denied, as, no doubt, every sound believer should repudiate it, do they not perceive that they make a judgment of believers nugatory, if the sting of its awful truth is extracted, and it is construed into no more than proclaiming them saved?, They would do well to search and see whether the scriptures, if rightly interpreted, do not fully agree with the Lord's authoritative word, that the believer does not come into judgment, which is reserved only for man, for man without Christ, guilty and lost as he is.

The universal judgment, accordingly, though it may plead the well-known canon of Vincent of Lerins as confessed by the catholic church, eastern and western,

is in this directly opposed to His word, which (as He declares) shall judge at the last day who now do not receive His words. It breeds darkness all around. It deprives those who heed it of the comfort to which Christ and His work entitle their faith. It dishonours the Father no less than the Son, Who would have the believers assured of their grace and enjoying the fruits of their love, both in life eternal and in redemption. It forgets that resurrection and ascension will be the triumphant separation to Christ in heavenly glory of those who are now in a world of mixture.

Our apostle does not put God's exceeding favour here on the ground or with the character of righteousness, as the apostle in 2 Cor. 5:21, when he says: "Him that knew no sin He [God] made sin for us that we might become God's righteousness in Him." The Judge will never sit to question the value of God's righteousness made ours in Himself. He will judge all who pretend to a righteousness of their own, for it is a falsehood and a fraud. He will judge all who despise Him in the opposite way of reckless unrighteousness and pleasing themselves in defiance of God. He will. deal even more severely with men's unrighteousness, however fast they hold the truth in unrighteousness, as is common in Christendom or in its measure among the Jews. But on those who of God are in Christ Jesus who was made. to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and holiness and redemption, He will never blow the chilling blast of judgment in heaven, after effectually by His Spirit filling our hearts with the warmth of His grace. That the Judge would challenge Himself our righteousness in that day is egregious as well as unfounded.

The entire preceding context explodes it. For the earlier half of 2 Cor. 5 is devoted to prove the power of resurrection life in Christ in delivering the Christian from the two great terrors of the natural man, death and judgment. “For we know (he says) that if our earthly tabernacle be destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this we groan, earnestly desiring to put on our house that is from heaven, if indeed when also clothed we shall not be found naked. For even we that are in this tabernacle groan being burdened, not for that we wish to be unclothed but clothed that the mortality may be swallowed up of life. Now he that wrought us for this very thing is God, who also gave to us the earnest of the Spirit. Being therefore always confident, and knowing that while present in the body we are absent from the Lord (for we walk by faith, not by sight), we are confident then and are well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. Wherefore also we are ambitious (or, zealous), whether present or absent to be acceptable to Him. For we must all be manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ, that each may receive the things [done] in the body, according to those which he did, whether [it be] good or bad.”

Here we have the great apostle treating it as a matter of Christian consciousness that all dread of death and judgment is removed, since God wrought us for the self-same thing as Christ that He might be the first-born of many brethren, alike conformed to His glorious image. He has by His work disarmed for us death of its terror, that reigns over the race. We being burdened by a body yet unredeemed do therefore groan; and we groan the

more, but in a gracious way, because we are ourselves reconciled to God with its cognate blessings. Our longing is to be clothed with the changed body; but we are always of good courage, and recognising that to depart and be with Christ, as he wrote to the Philippian saints, is very much better than to be absent from the Lord, we are well pleased rather to be present with the Lord.

Nor does the judgment of Christ, undoubtedly solemn as it is, bring anxiety, because He bore our judgment. Even here God gives occasion in sickness, and other ways, to review our state and conduct apart from engrossing labour and occupation of any kind; nor does He fail to probe wounds and penetrate the most hidden recess of the heart. He enables us to cry, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if wickedness may be in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” Such self-judgment is eminently wholesome; and if we had it not, we should miss not a little blessing by the way. Now, what this is now to the Christian is but a part of what will be fully before Christ’s judgment-seat; to lose which, if possible, would be to lose its vast blessing. So far from awakening alarm, or shaking our constant good courage, the apostle only speaks of us as downcast in deep feeling for the unawakened, and stimulated to persuade mankind from their obduracy to turn to the Lord. “Knowing therefore the fear (or terror) of the Lord we persuade men.” They had fear for all others, not for themselves or their acceptance. “For ourselves,” he says, “we have been manifested to God, and I hope also that we have been manifested in your consciences.” Grace gave this submission even now to the inshining of God’s light in

Christ. Into this the grace which brings to God brings us. This is or may be hindered; it will be perfect when we are manifested before the judgment seat, without false shame, being in the glorified state, and able, without a cloud, to see all His glory, so humbling to us, so glorious to the God of all grace, to the Son who alone made it a fact of blessing for every believer, to the Holy Spirit by whose effectual and constant power it was brought home from first to last in every saint.

But the less needs to be sought from elsewhere, since the verse before us utterly demolishes the strange and hoary error which has inflicted equal wrong on the testimony of the truth and on many a godly soul who has suffered for want of the truth known to others. “Herein hath love been perfected with us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment.” Think of such words, ye that boast of “the church’s teaching,” and have never suspected that it was “a different gospel, and not another.” So the apostle denounced the selfsame school that glories in the cross as an idol, and has never known God’s teaching of Christ crucified to their deliverance from man and his vain traditions, philosophy, science or what not, rising up against the Bible and Christ’s work to save the lost. The love of God was manifested to sinners in His life given to be our life, and in His death as propitiation for our sins; that love might be perfected in us as saints by His Spirit working in us. But even this was not enough to satisfy our God in honour of His Son. Love has been perfected with us, “that we may have boldness in the day of judgment.” “What!” do I hear you say, “can there be such words in the Bible? Is it possible that they mean what they say?” I should not be in the

least surprised if these were your thoughts, and you hardly dared to express your unbelief of God's word.

Yet can words be clearer than those in which our apostle attests love perfected with us, Christians, that we may have, not trembling, nor doubt, but boldness "in the day of judgment?" To rest this on aught but the work of Christ would be blasphemy. But in Christ it is the triumph of divine love — the same love that clothed the prodigal in his rags with "the best robe," not like Adam in his innocency but such as don the marriage robe in honour of the King's Son, the wedding garment. It is Christ we put on, and Christ dead and risen where sins and sin were completely settled for faith. O ye that have drunk yourselves stupid by drinking of the stagnant and defiling waters of the Fathers, why do you not listen to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and take life's water freely? Christ has so glorified God, not only in living obedience but in His death, that He can deliver from fear of the hour of death and the day of judgment even you who have too effectually instilled it into those famished ones who look up to you and are not fed. Yes, these are God's words for all to ponder. Love has been perfected "that we may have boldness in the day of judgment." We see the spring in God through His Son, and the aim for His children in view of that day. What a contrast with that miserable elegy, or lamentation (call it not a hymn), the "Dies Irae" which some cry up as a Christian composition! His love would chase away fear from the heart of every Christian.

But there is much more. He gives the reason or ground which immensely enhances the boon: "Because even as He (Christ) is, we also are in this world." If God had not revealed this, one might venture to say that such a

pronouncement would have been voted the most frightful presumption that ever fell from the lips or pen of man. But there is no indiscretion in thinking that in all probability its force is so absolutely unrecognised in the schools of divinity, that no one is disturbed by the astonishing truth conveyed to us. For the apostle declares that even as Christ is, so too are we, we Christians, in this world. He says this according to his uniform doctrine in the Epistle, “which thing is true in him and in you.” For now He is dead and risen, and bears much fruit like Himself. Our old self exists of course in fact, but “in that day (now and long come, since Pentecost) ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.” This was never true before, and never will be in the coming age, but is true now in Christians here.

Accordingly our standing and pattern is no longer in the first Adam but in the second Man, and He is the last Adam. Never will there be another head. The Son of man glorified God even as to sin in death, the only way of deliverance; for in His death it was fully judged to God’s glory. And now God glorified the Son of man in resurrection and ascension glorifies Him in heaven, glorifies Him in Himself, as here no other ever was nor could be. He does not wait to crown Him on David’s throne in Zion, or as the King over all the earth. But on the very resurrection day He sends to “His brethren” the message, “I ascend unto my Father and your Father, my God and your God.” He takes us in our new being out of the fallen Adam, and sets us in the ascending Christ. Thus as He is, even so are we in this world.

Mark it well. It is not as He was. The church teaching, fairly enough set out by the late Archdeacon R.

Wilberforce, and hundreds or thousands like, is utterly false. Incarnation is a blessed truth, essential to the faith; but it is not our union with Him. It is true no doubt, but not Christianity. While living He abode alone; dying He bears much fruit. Union with Him could not be till He died for us and our sins. It is in resurrection, after God's judgment had passed on Him for man's evil, and not till then does He say, "My Father and your Father, my God and your God." The veil was not rent before He died, and priest and sacrifice and earthly sanctuary still had God's sanction. But His death was their death: and His resurrection is His life in power. Christianity succeeds, and the Holy Ghost comes down to seal those washed in His blood. "As He is, we also are in this world." We repudiate any standing before God save in Him; and this is our standing now" in this world." Do you think that anyone taught this by the Spirit could ever be content with the impostures of Popery, the dim religious light of Puseyism with its via media, or the varying compromises of Protestant denominationalism? Have we solid Christian standing in its positive blessedness? Higher there cannot be; and it is ours, every true Christian's, "in this world." It only remains that we believe God as to it for our own souls, and look to Him for grace to love and live it — Christ as our all.

The verses which follow show the immense import of what we have gained in ver. 17. "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear." How these words of God speak to the heart! It is not mere sentiment, but the God of light and love who would help His children against all doubt, that they might enjoy them with all simplicity and assurance. The fear spoken of here is inconsistent with love. Apply to this the common error

that God is going to judge His children, but the elect will get through. What tormenting anxiety this creates for godly souls, who can measure? For the gleam of comfort is hidden under the impenetrable secret of the elect, instead of the true light shining brightly and steadily in Christ for all that come to God through Him. I doubt not any more than the Calvinist that those that come are the elect; but his way of putting it is apt to cast souls on a hopeless reef, whereas the Christian truth ever points the needy soul to Him who can and will reveal salvation to the sinner and give him rest by faith in Himself.

If we look at a Christian who is under this question what can more hinder and stifle his proper affections than the fear which is inevitable with judgment at the end of his course? Is it possible to love thoroughly or at case one who, as you thus cannot but fear sometimes, may cast you into hell? “There is no fear in love,” says the apostle; “there is fear in my love,” says the simple believer, conscious of many a failure, and some serious enough to produce anguish as he thinks of that day. At the least, if his view keeps him in trepidation now and then, he sees enough in Christ to yield him what he calls a humble hope; but he is very sure that he can never profess to have boldness in the day of judgment. On the contrary, he dreads to think or hear about an object so fraught with terror. I put the case as truly as I know how, in order to convince such that they are under the influence of thoughts quite irreconcilable with God’s revelation. If you say No, they cannot be reconciled with what the apostle says here, let me assure you that you do not improve your case by such an insinuation, but endanger your soul by the unbelieving impression that Scripture

can be inconsistent with itself, or that another portion may modify or get rid of what troubles you here.

It is the error you have somehow imbibed or allowed which is at fault, not the word before us which is intended to take away fear, not to create it. Christ only, as the divine witness and proof of God's perfect love, can banish your fear. This is the invariable aim of the Holy Ghost; He leads into all truth, but it is by glorifying Christ, taking His things and announcing them to us. He may indirectly help us by taking our things that we may be humbled and grieved before God; but even here it is to occupy us with Him through whom came grace and truth, and who is the fulness of all in His own person.

There is another danger for those who are not yet delivered from fear. They fall back on baptism or betake themselves to the Lord's Supper as a resource against fear. But Scripture gives no countenance to such a delusion. On the contrary, the apostle Paul is careful, in writing to the Corinthians his first Epistle when many were in a bad and dangerous state, to warn them of any such misuse. In 1 Cor. 1:14 he thanks God that he baptized none of them unless Crispus and Gaius, that none might say that he baptized unto his own name. He baptized also the house of Stephanas, and did not know that he baptized any other. For Christ, said he, sent me not to baptize but to preach the gospel. Think of his writing thus if baptism be the means of life eternal! On the contrary, Christ sent him not to baptize (which he left to others to do for the "many" Corinthians who "heard, believed and were baptized" in that city (Acts 18:8). And he tells them in 1 Cor. 4:15: "In Christ Jesus I begot you through the gospel." The gospel, the word of

truth, was and is the means of being begotten of God, never baptism whatever its value in its place.

But he goes further still in 1 Cor. 10, for he warns the Corinthians, and all Christians ever since, from the pattern of Israel, though all passed through the sea and all were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And all ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink, yet God was not pleased with the most of them, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. “But these things happened, types of us, that we should not be lusters of evil things as they also lusted.” And as to the Lord’s Supper, even upright and capable Romanists, like Cardinal Cajetan, rejected the false interpretation of John 6:53-56, as to the Eucharist. It is Christ Himself in death the object of our faith, as the living bread was of Him incarnate before death. Applied to the Lord’s Supper it falls doubly. For then it would teach that none could have life without the Supper, and again, that all who partook of it have life: two execrable untruths. Applied to Christ in life and death they are both of them precious truths. Thus is the word of God proved stronger than all the arguments of men. Christ is the all to the Christian.

It is now made known that God by His word assures of His love all that believe, and He sets it forth in Christ incarnate, Christ dying in atonement, and Christ in glory, winding all up with the declaration that “even as He is, we also are in this world.” For it is here only that His grace and truth are present; and as Christ was full of grace and truth, to receive Him is to receive of His fulness, as every Christian does. This then is the question for you, dear doubting fearing friend. Do you believe, as a poor guilty sinner, on Him? Do you believe

that God out of His own boundless love. gave Jesus His Son? Cast away the vain hope of any good thing of your own fit for God; receive on God's authority and in His grace Him who has all good not only for God but for you, and who was sent to be the propitiation for sins. Then, as receiving God's glad tidings, you are entitled to say, as you weigh it all before Him, "By grace I do believe that I have life, and peace, and am His child." Then you know that you are elect. Any other way of claiming to know it is human and dangerous, uncertain and evil, the devil cheating you to ruin. Christ is the truth to settle all election that is true and good. Believing on and confessing Him you are entitled without an atom of argument to say, God has chosen me: else, left to myself and my reason, I had never believed after a divine sort. Thus it is that "perfect love casteth out fear," and gives me by faith peace with God, instead of that punishment or torment which my spirit knows too well.

Hence it is very certain that "he that feareth hath not been made perfect in love." While you are uncertain of God's love, you cannot really love Him; when you believe the reality of His love in giving His Son for the ungodly, for His enemies, is He not coming down to meet you? Take again the once abandoned woman (Luke 7), and the violent robber on the cross (Luke 23); why are these extreme cases recorded, but to encourage you on God's part? Otherwise they had been passed over in silence. But they are written expressly to meet doubting men and women, as hard to believe God's love as the most outrageous sinner, or even more so.

Do not be disheartened because you come to the conclusion that you do not love God. This is not the true question, but does not God point to Christ and His death

for sins as the best proof even He could give of His love to you and me? When you bow your reasoning mind to such an overwhelming proof to satisfy you of His love, you will surely love, though you may be slow to allow it: others will see the chance in you. When you rest on Christ's sacrifice for your sins, your heart will open to the God that thus cleanses you by Christ's blood from every stain; and you will be ready then to say, I have found Him, and soon learn that it was He who found you. Come just as you are, that He may have all the glory. And if He loved me with so mighty a love of His own without one single thing or thought in me worthy of His love; if He so loved me notwithstanding my entire being and all my life full of sins, will He cease to love me when I am His child, His son by faith in Christ, and by the Holy Spirit cry, Abba, Father? Assuredly not: even my father would not cast me off even if erring, thoughtless, and foolish. But God does then as Father judge my conduct as His child by day, and discipline me when I need it. And is not this the fruit of His persevering and faithful love to me in the wilderness?

There is also immense comfort as a child of God in knowing that whatever the want, the sorrow, the shame, the fear, He wants me to go to Him freely and without delay to cast all my care on Him, for He cares for me and loves me. See that Satan sows no distrust of Him in your heart; for it is a lie to injure me by dishonouring Him. Let me think then of Christ, and what this tells of His love to me, and the hateful spell is broken. No, I am not made perfect in love if I dread Him; and the more I have been beguiled, the more need of telling all out in His presence in the confidence of His love.

What then explains the root of the whole matter? The few words in which the apostle sums it all up in ver. 17: “We love, because He first loved us.” Short as it is, and shorter in the critical text, supported by the best authorities, it is a divine source of rest to the believer. And it appears to me that the natural mind would have been more ready to insert “Him” than to leave it out. If “Him” was there originally, it would have been a daring act for any even nominal Christian copyist to have struck it out; but if the omission preferred now on sufficient external grounds be correct, we can easily understand a well-meaning scribe conceiving the first clause sounding rather lame for want of in object, and venturing to insert “Him,” because it is without doubt intrinsically true.

On the whole then it appears to me that the reading left absolutely is both impressive in itself, and gains rather than loses by the absence of an expressed object which would tend to limit rather than enlarge the sense. For as it thus stands, it means that we love [both God and His children], because “He loved us.” Christ was the source in our souls of divine love, whatever its object or direction. It sprang up not from ourselves in any wise. Love is of God. We in unbelief think that it must begin in us to draw out His love. But not so: we were dead, we were sinful, and in any case love was not, nor could it spring up from us. Our spiritual history, our being in reference to love and to God, is simply this: — “We love, because He first loved us.” We own it to be the truth to our shame; we gladly acknowledge it the truth to His glory and to our blessing for ever. The Spirit opened our hearts by the word to the Son sent by the Father to give us life and salvation through His atoning death, and now

to be one spirit with the glorified Lord, to be as He is in this world, now and henceforth abiding in love, and so in God and God in us.

Next in ver. 20 we have the last of the false professions, and here individualised as in 1 John 2. “If anyone say, I love God, and hate his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” Such language and conduct betray unreality; and the apostle does not scruple to stigmatise that person as a liar. Our feeling toward a brother tests the truth or falsehood of our profession Godward. It is a present and tangible case. Here is my brother at my door, endowed with life in Christ, and cleansed from his sins by Christ’s blood; and do I allow on any pretext hatred in the heart, and talk of loving the unseen God? It is a falsehood: Satan has closed my eyes. Were there living faith, the life would attract, and God’s love draw out love from me. Nor does the Holy Spirit of God abide in the saint for nothing; and where the heart treats Him as nothing in another, is it not the plain evidence that He cannot be there to give the enjoyment of fellowship one with another through the Son, by whom all the blessing comes? If “liar” is a character most ignominious among men, what is it in the mouth of an apostle and in the eternal things of God? Thus does the only wise God in the evil day provide means that His children should not be deceived. For the more blessed is the love that is inspired by divine grace, the more important it is that we should not be imposed on by what is untrue. It is a part of God’s moral government of His children that they are tried here below in a great variety of ways. But the love that is of God confides in God, abides in love whether others do or

not, and has the Spirit's abiding power to make good God's own presence in our souls, that we may be calm and subject whatever happens.

Here again the same care is taken, as we have seen in other cases, to establish us in obedience as to loving a brother. For what is so lowly as obedience? What so counteractive to pride or vanity, to passion or light wit? And what gives such courage and firmness even to a timid soul as the consciousness of obeying God? Hence the importance of its application to loving a brother who might from this or that slight fault be regarded as anything but a persona grata. "And this commandment have we from Him, that he that loveth God love his brother also." Our God does not leave us to our own thoughts or discretion. We are sanctified unto obedience, and to an obedience after Christ's own filial love, not at a Jew's distance from God under law. He enjoins on him that loves Himself to love his brother. For indeed if God loves His child, am I, are you, not to love him? Is this not enough to make one ashamed of exercising one's will against God's will? Listen then to His word. He therefore lays it down as an authoritative commandment, that if I resist still I may have the sting in my soul that I am fighting against God, and all the more on my part because He reveals Himself as the God of all grace. Do I persist, in the face of an injunction so plain, following truth and love so precious? Had I not better judge myself, what I am, and whither I go: for is not this flat self-will against the God and Father of the Lord? The brother may have ways or words not pleasant to me; yet it may be that I am quite wrong in my estimate, and the fault in me rather than him; but if I demur to His plain commandment, how can I trust

myself in anything else? Is not this rebellion? and against whom?

It is the moral glory of Christ that He ever applied obedience in every demand and every difficulty. If it were at the beginning before His public service, on this He stood, to this He submitted, and by this defeated the enemy in each one of the three great temptations. “It is written,” “It is written,” were His answers of entire submission to His Father. Did Satan dare to cite Scripture, the Scripture referring to Himself, He does not argue but answers, “It is written again.” He did not doubt Jehovah’s care nor His charge to angels; but He was here not to do Satan’s bidding, and He refused to tempt God as if He doubted His word. Just the same unswerving obedience we find publicly at the end: “Because I did not speak from myself, but the Father that sent me Himself gave I e commandment what I should say and what I should speak, and I know that His commandment is life eternal. What things therefore I speak, even as the Father hath said to me, so I speak” (John 12:49, 50).

In giving His last instructions to His own it is the same obedience, — the clearer too, in the most solemn of all things then approaching, His death. “I will no longer speak much with you, for the ruler of the world cometh and in me hath nothing. But that the world may know that I love the Father, and even as the Father commanded me, thus I do.” He was about to lay down His life, not only of His own free love but in obedience to the Father (John 14:30, 31). Indeed even before that He had said (John 10:17, 18), “On this account the Father loveth me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one taketh it from me, but I lay it down of

myself. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it again. This commandment I received from my Father." What can be clearer than that our blessed Lord brought everything within the scope of His obedience? And this is the highest spirituality which the Holy Spirit can work in any saint. Therefore do we heed His solemn words: "He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If anyone serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there also shall my servant be; if anyone serve me, him shall the Father honour" (John 12:25, 26). Blessed Lord, to serve Thee we would follow Thee; but Oh with what unequal steps! Oh how great the grace indeed that Thy servant also shall be with Thee, and have the Father's honour!

Here God's authority enters, as in all the rest of Christian life, into loving; and as loving one's brother is peculiarly liable to cheeks, if not evasions, He makes it a matter of command, joining our love even to Himself with love to our brother. Yet in this the same blessedness controls the manner and all involved in it. His word alone can surely and safely guide, whatever the circumstances which very greatly modify how it is to be done. Who is sufficient for these things? Our power is in the Spirit according to our new life in Christ, and in obedience to God speaking to us in His word.

After having set forth with great fulness the working of divine love in our case as sinners, and in us now we are saints, and this right on to the day of glory, the discussion is terminated with the words, "We love, because He first loved us." No doubt "we love Him," but if the critical omission of "Him" be true, which it appears to be, then our love is put into a general form

("we love," and not only "we love Him"); it takes in not only our loving Him, but loving all that are His around us. "We love." There was no real love in our hearts till we knew His love. This is the more important because of its sentimental abuse. It may not be known to all that a school of pious persons, by others called Mystics, and found more particularly in France, Germany and Holland, who had their followers in England, invented the theory that there was no real love of God unless wholly independent of self. That sounds very fine, but there is no soundness and little reality in it. It never was fact for a soul since the world began. Not that me may not in spiritual experience rise to a love of God independent of self, and leaving self behind, if we may, to lose ourselves in the sense of His perfect love, and our delight in His nature and ways.

But we always begin with the fact to the praise of His grace that God loved us when we were dead and guilty. It was His pure mercy that saved us (Titus 3:4-7). It is the grossest ignorance, unbelief and presumption, unless we truly find in Christ and His work the love of God toward us when in our utter ruin and sins. To shirk this in its depths, and strive to rise into unselfish love of Him, is not only worthless, but an unbelieving wrong done to the truth as to God and His Son, as well as ourselves. It is only a disguised working of the "self" which they disclaim and would spare, and which leads to no small admiration of themselves, their ecstasies over their state. Yet after all it utterly falls short of the communion described by the apostle, based on Christ's life in us, His atoning death in full efficacy, and the consequent abiding of God in us by His Spirit given to us; and all this is the common portion of Christians,

however few they may be who realise it as all ought. It is deplorable indeed that any of God's children should descend so low as to think that the love they can feel toward God is the grand thing, and to find such pleasure in it as if this were the best state for the saints of God on earth. It is His love in Christ which is the source and fulness of all, and makes ours so small in comparison.

How simple, how sweet and how strong is His word here! "We love, because He first loved us." Assuredly if His children, we do love, and the change is vast for those, once filled with self in one form or another, to be brought to love with a love which is of God. But we do love Christ, and God who gave Him, and the children of God who received Him like ourselves. All is included in "we love." Yet none of it had been possible unless we begin in the dust of death, where and "because He first loved us." These words are therefore a corrective, much needed by our hearts, to strip us of self-occupation and self-admiration, of the folly of imagining that we have got rid of sin by a leap of special faith into a state of moral perfection. The notion that we are perfect in such a sense as this is the plainest and surest proof of our imperfection. It convicts us of great ignorance of Scripture, which is characteristic of all the classes of the introspective school.

On the other hand, it is undeniable that the effect of occupation with Christ, in the word and Spirit of God, makes Him all and ourselves nothing in our own eyes. And this way and ought to go so far, in the delight our souls find in Him and in God Himself, as to drop ourselves altogether. Some Christians, wise and prudent, do not like this, and say that we cannot in spirit be always on high, and must descend into the valley. But

are they wise, spiritually, after all? No saint is puffed up when he is consciously in God's presence. When he leaves it, the danger ensues of being proud to have been there beyond others. Brethren, if we believe the apostle, we are entitled to know by His love shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us (and not by our feelings, which change like the moon, and are apt to give credit to us, poor foolish creatures), that we abide in Him and He in us. The blessed effect then is that we in all simplicity "boast in God," as the apostle Paul says, "through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we now received the reconciliation."

Observe too how characteristic of our apostle it is, after he has presented what is of the highest nature, to add a word of the most practical kind; and we need this. It is good for the soul, and it is what God has written, knowing best what is for His glory in us.

"If a man say, I love God and hate his brother, he is a liar." The thing that was precious in the apostle's eyes was doing the truth, not talking about it, but the holy reality. Now if he hate his brother, he is a liar. Nobody spoke more plainly and without respect of persons, when needed, yet none can deny that even among the apostles his love was conspicuous. Ought not we to do so, when it is due to God? But how very different from that which passes for love in these degenerate days, aping the world where the great aim seems to be, allowing everybody's and trying nobody's conscience. How far was this ideal from him, who among Christians would have no mincing about evil matters!

Now, what works in a false professor fully may work partially in a true confessor, if not walking circumspectly

and with vigilance. Wilful sin carries away the unbeliever as Satan's prey. But if a believer sin (not goes on sinning), he is weakened and the Spirit of God grieved; and in that state he might act unworthily of Christ to his brother, or in some other uncomely way. We have seen how grace intervenes and restores, though not always very soon. There may be thus grievous inconsistency till his soul is restored. It is however a grave inconsistency, or, to use Levitical language, a rising in the flesh but not leprosy, as it is with the man that hates his brother. And God can use for the good of others, what is so evil; as the Psalmist says: "The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart [not in his own] that there is no fear of God before his eyes." Grace makes the inconsistency a warning. All things work together for good to those that love God. It becomes therefore a practical point, an impressive lesson to beware of saying and not doing. "For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" Logic never wrought love, nor rises above a mental inference. But the new nature, with Christ acting on it, produces the result according to God.

It is all beside the mark to talk about things that do not try the heart; but God so arranges matters that we have practical tests around us. How are we carrying ourselves towards those that are our brethren? The apostle's divinely-given sense of truth utterly discards evasion. He brings in an illustration, almost childlike in simplicity (anything but childish), but holy and wise. The pride of man would regard it as insignificant. They consider themselves perfect, and claim for self liberty to vent displeasure and dislike as it thinks proper.

Circumstances may make it trying even to a saint, for a brother may act wrongly. Am I not to love him? Certainly I am. His conduct may give a different shape to your love, but love has always to be exercised as in the sight of God. It may not go forth in the same way, but can anything show more absence of love than turning away from even my faulty brother with scorn or dislike, with unwillingness to bear his burden or with indifference? It shows love, that you share his sorrow, even if he failed to be as really humbled as he ought. Reproving him simply might provoke, and therefore love would act otherwise. For we need God in nothing more than how to walk in love.

But those that love know where to turn in difficulties, and have through the Spirit the guidance of God in this respect as in others. Love does not behave in an unseemly manner, it does not seek its own. It knows how to bear or cover all, to hope all, to believe all, and to endure all. Hence what is so persevering as love? and if other things fail, love never does. To this we are called in Christ, and we have ample opportunities for its exercise. There are our brethren that we have seen, and many we see around us. If I put myself in circumstances where I do not see nor care about them, occupy myself with other objects that please me, this is not love; and if I yield to such a state habitually, it is assuredly a dangerous case. It is certainly a thing to judge, and to cry to God for deliverance. Let brotherly love continue.

There is another important thing connected with it here The subject is fully discussed indeed, and according to the wonderfully near relationship into which we are brought with the Father and the Son. Here it is applied to the ordinary matters of daily life in order to test the

reality of love; but there is another form of impressing it. “And this commandment have we from Him, that he who loves God love his brother also.”

Many Christians look on commandments as necessarily legal. They therefore associate the word with the law, a ministry of death and condemnation. But those who have weighed the Gospel of John, and this Epistle under our consideration ought to know better. As applied now, it is a profound mistake. The Bible abounds with commandments of another tenor, New Testament as well as Old. The difference is plain. The commandments of the law addressed man in the flesh, in order to prove his perversity and rebelliousness; and thus the impossibility of any standing before God for a moment on such a ground. But when the saving grace of God appeared, Christ gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all lawlessness and purify to Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good works. Then it is that we need and receive these commandments in order to guide us, as a sort of divine clue, through all the intricacies of life. Here in this world, if there is distress and suffering, God commands love, laying it on His own children.

Supposing a husband lays any word strongly on his wife — call it a commandment or not; do you think she would find it irksome to obey? If she loved him it would be a joy to her. Another who was not his wife might and would resent such a command which he had no right to impose; but there is a vast difference between the two. It is the relationship which explains it. Now we Christians are in the nearest relationship to God, who lays it on our hearts as His command to love our brother.

It is to be supposed too, that some things a husband ought to know better than his wife; and at any rate he is there to guide his wife. The responsibility is his, and he cannot without sin forfeit it. Of course he is bound to take care that he is guided of God in what he says; and when he does, as he is bound to see that his wishes are carried out, so she also to find not only her duty but her pleasure in it. If this be plain among men, it is yet more incumbent on the child of God. Here is One who loves me perfectly, made me His child, One that spared not for me what was most precious to Himself, His own Son, when there was not a single thing in me to love. He now loves me no longer as a guilty sinner but as His child: am I to count a commandment anything but a matter to receive with glad confidence? In His case there could be no question of the entire goodness and wisdom of His ways. We cannot infallibly count on such a thing in either husband or father. But as we were bound to honour our parents, to obey unless in direct contrariety to God's plain word, how much more are we called to be the ready servants of God's will, and with all love as His own children?

There can be no real exception in our relationship with God. We are called absolutely to obey. Luther in his haste, who had so much to learn because of his Romanist ignorance, never liked, because he did not understand, the Epistle of James, which would have done him much good if he had. It is true that James was given to write of justification before men — not to be "believed" but to be "shown." But therein he speaks admirably of that which guides and controls the child of God now as the "law of liberty." It is in contrast with the law of Moses, the law of bondage. That which God lays

on His child is a law of liberty. How is this? Because the new nature desires above all things to do the will of God; and consequently, when told what that will is, the heart goes thoroughly with it. There is of course need of prayer, and vigilance against the flesh; and there may be as many hindrances as Satan can muster; but when once we know what our Father lays upon us, we judge any reluctance as evil, and cherish His will as a law of liberty. This is what the new nature delights in, and James speaks of the new nature rather than of redemption, on which Paul is so full. You will recollect in the same chapter from which I have already quoted the words, we are told that "of His own will God begat us by the word of truth that we should be a certain firstfruits of His creatures." It is substantially what John calls life and Peter a divine nature. It was given to the apostle Paul to develop beyond others Christ's redemption, and the mighty motive which the knowledge of the constraining, self-sacrificing love of Christ gives the heart. But James tells us of the new nature going along with what comes as the will of God, and thus from all we get a great convergence of light for our souls.

Here it is impressed that loving our brethren is not merely the instinct of the new nature, but what God insists on as obedience to Himself. What is there for us holier than obedience? What humbler? Is anything more becoming, more Christlike, than obedience? It is the place which Christ fulfilled in all its perfection, even to giving up His life in Ills perfect love to us. "This commandment have I received of my Father." Did its being the Father's command make it irksome to Christ? No, whatever it cost, this was an added and immense delight to our Lord Jesus. His perfect love and the

commandment of His Father coalesced in it; and the same sort of appeal comes to us in loving the children of God. “And this commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love also his brother.” Not only should our hearts go out in love, but we know that we are pleasing God and doing His will. Now “He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever,” as said our apostle earlier. Let us not forget that He binds together loving Him and loving His children, and will not have the first without the last. If it be His love and honour, so let it be our love and duty, because He loves us each and all with the same perfect love.

Address 16 - 1 John 5:1-5

“Every one that believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God, and every one that loveth him that begot loveth also him that is begotten of him. Herein we know that we love the children of God when we love God and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous. For all that is begotten of God overcometh the world, and this is the victory that overcame the world, our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?”

Here the apostle lays bare the root of the matter in hand. There is in the case another relationship of far deeper significance than that of “his brother,” that is, of one brother to another. How is my brother related to God? For it is the same subject as in the last chapter carried into the present one. And it is very important to have all answer from God to the question now raised, Who is my brother? There are many serious and pious persons who seem to have great difficulty in answering this. No doubt the scattering of God’s children, who were once gathered together in one, adds to the perplexity. Are my brethren the persons who compose the same religious communion? For any that think so, the love that God expects goes out to those in the same community, whether right or wrong. The community may be wrong or according to God; but even were it right in itself, the present state of ruin in the church is a reproach Godward, and makes the path slippery for most. The reason is that it may shut one up to a party

fellowship, instead of looking to God's mind, the grief I ought to feel at confusion and disorder in divine things, and the danger of swerving from His will.

Let us not forget the essential feature of what becomes a saint is his separation to God, by His grace, from the world; not only from evil but to Himself in Christ. Sanctification is altogether imperfect if we leave out God, and only dwell on the avoidance of this or that evil. For clearly one might be separated from five hundred evils, yet in one thing drawn into fatal compromise, and thus not be truly in communion with God and His will. The separation might be ever so well intended, but not trustworthy, though likely to make the separatist self-satisfied. For when souls leave out God and His word as a whole, they are apt to have too good an opinion of themselves. But where Christ and God Himself are before the heart, what leads to more real humility?

This is exactly what we all need: to be perfectly happy by grace, yet nothing in our own eyes. Nothing but Christ for ourselves consciously in the presence of God harmonises these two blessings. You may find a person humble apparently but not holy, and a person apparently holy but far from humble. Neither is according to God. It is but affecting humility in one case, and sanctimoniousness in the other. They are self-deceived; Christ alone gives reality. Never trust those who accredit themselves as humble or holy. They remind one of the Old Testament description, "righteous over much." We have such always with us, but we need not trust them. For the most part they are those who say and do not.

But here we have the all-importance of knowing who they are that one is called to love. The apostle answers the question when things were becoming more and more difficult; and we need to be assured of God's will. Although the state was critical yet compared with our days orderly, where now it is anomalous, the test given is not that of outward communion. Today we see children of God, some here and some there, and Satan too successful in making them share ecclesiastically with almost every evil under the sun, so that real fellowship according to God's word is utterly swamped. Even God's children for the most part shirk the consequences of fidelity. So much the more do we want an absolutely unfailing, test who they are whom we are called to love, and here it is: — "Every one that believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God; and every one that loveth Him that begot loveth also him that is begotten of Him." He is God's child, and my brother. We are to love every one begotten of God, even "whosoever believeth."

Further, the way in which this faith is here described is remarkable too. The apostle John does not here look at Christ in glory, as he did in 1 John 4:17. He does not even dwell on Christ's death and resurrection. There is no statement of redemption. It is the person of Jesus, and the person put in the simplest possible way as "the Christ." How good and wise on God's part! There are many that know a vast deal about the Lord's sayings and doings, who overlook His person. Such are not true believers. Here much is made of the simplest believer, if true to His person; and he who does not believe that Jesus is the Christ is no believer at all. He who does truly confess and believe Him thus might be quite

ignorant of His many offices, and ignorant of God's purposes and counsels of glory, but he has the right object of faith before his soul as far as it goes. He might feebly apprehend Christ's priesthood, or His advocacy, and not at all His headship of the body the church, and His supremacy over all things, and any other grand truths and ways of the Lord, of which the New Testament is full. Such lack of knowledge is no proof that he is not a child of God; he has gradually to learn these things.

Here is a test in order to set our relationship to God on its right basis, and give our love its due direction. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ — the Anointed of God — whom He sent into the world to give life and be a Saviour, he is our brother. The apostle was inspired to come down to the lowest step on which one could rightly look at our Lord. It is not at all the particularism of Christ in glory, any more than of appreciating what is presented to faith in His work for our sins. The apostle does not warrant the thought that those and those alone are true Christians who are led at once to the gospel of Christ's glory; nor does he allow that those are the sole objects of love, who have believed as Saul of Tarsus did on the road to Damascus. John was inspired at the last epoch, when this Epistle was written to encourage the faith of the simpler souls who had never as yet heard of these things; but he would have them on God's part recognised as His children, and entitled to that love which is here urged on every saint.

Narrowness here is precisely what the Spirit of God detects and sets aside as dishonour to God. It is divine life, not ecclesiastical fellowship, which commends him

who is begotten of God to the love of all alike begotten by Him. He lays down a quite opposed principle of the largest grace. If God has opened the heart to believe that Jesus is the Christ, perhaps of one placed in difficult circumstances and rarely hearing the truth of God, we are to welcome and heartily own and love him as begotten of God. As Jesus the Christ has become the object of his faith, our place is to gladly acknowledge one thereby brought out of darkness and death to life everlasting. It may be very little in point of knowledge; but our duty is to make the most of a real work of God. For so it surely is if the soul rests on the blessed person of Jesus as the Christ. He is born of God just as truly as this brother who seems to have entered rapidly into some of the deepest truths of the New Testament. We are called to love the one no less than the other. We are to love them both simply, truly and divinely. Such is the manner of the love enjoined; though we dare not speak of our measure in it.

And this is of practical moment; for some Christians are by no means so pleasant or agreeable as others; but all such natural difference is quite outside this love of which the Holy Spirit speaks. Christ gives and forms the objects of grace independently of the old nature and character; and if love then prevail, it is all the more to God’s praise, where there was much to repel and dislike naturally. But life in Christ rises superior through the Spirit to all that is of flesh; and this is to God’s glory, not man’s. Many a Christian however has been misled by wrong thoughts instead of being properly confirmed in the truth. One soul has never been taught that we only begin, after conversion, to learn God’s mind in His word. Another has been unhappily led to admire, like a Jew,

fine buildings, and grand music in His worship, and thinks his prayers are more acceptable in a cathedral. If you do not know any one, even as a believer, so dense and ignorant of gospel liberty, there is at least one here who remembers it in himself.

The fact is common and beyond doubt that there are very many children of God altogether unacquainted with the ways of God who know no better. Now am I to slight a soul in that condition? Certainly not. If he be one who simply and truly believes in Jesus as the Christ, my heart is to go out to him as unfeignedly and warmly as to another ever so familiar with the truth and faithful in the ways of God. Only love is to be exercised according to the state. It needs the Spirit's guidance with discernment and consideration. Is he a weak one, easily to be hurt and east down? Is he so strong as to be able to bear plain speech and profit by it? It is rather a dangerous thing to uproot a habit of religion from a believer and destroy it without implanting the due truth to fill up the vacuum. They shall be all taught of God, says the Old Testament as well as the New. We need His guidance to act wisely as instruments of His grace in supplying the lack by a better knowledge of Christ and of God. Is not this the true way?

Perhaps if one began by attacking the pomp and show and natural attractions of the cathedral, it might shock the immature believer, used to these "beggarly elements" as the right thing. On the other hand one ought not to give the least appearance of accepting these Jewish things as Christian; that would be uncandid and unfaithful, mere pandering to the person's flesh and superstition. But all shows how much grace one needs to meet a saint who knows yet but little grace. How often

one fails here! If we have to do with those who really stand in grace, they bear readily with much weakness; but with those who have little sense of grace, we need much grace to treat them according to God. Since God loves them, there is no reason why we should not, and every reason why we should. God loves all that are begotten of Him. There is the ground of our love, and the clue to all the difficulty. “Every one that loveth Him that begat, loveth also him that is begotten of Him.”

We have not far to search in order to see that principle in the case of a family. If one goes into a household where he has a great regard for the head of it, what effect will that have on him as to the children? Assuredly to love them all. One child may be rather trying and noisy, liking to tease and apt to be turbulent, and too often falling out with his brothers and sisters. Another may be gentle and attractive above all the rest. But the question is, Do I love them all? Certainly I love every one of the children if I love the parents.

Divine life discloses goodness in the children of God, viewed with a single and loving eye. Nor, as the rule, is there more than a little trial for the love that we owe them; but on the other hand also we have to remember the trial that our shortcomings may give to them. Yet if these were tenfold more than they prove in fact, here is His word to me and to you: If we love God, we shall surely love His children; not merely those that we see from day to day, but those that we do not see. Whatever the strange appearances, the mistakes or even the wrongs to be blamed, all that only alters the way in which we are to show the love. Never allow the thought for a moment that we should not love them. Perhaps circumstances may be so bad that we can only pray, but

let us pray in love before God. Let us also reflect how far our love stands the test toward the saints we believe to be in the wrong. Do we seek their good? Are we earnest that the truth should reach them so as to deliver them from any prejudice or prepossession? We can always make good our love in God's presence. There is little love if we be not exercised about these things and using means, both with God and ourselves, in whatever way He may lay it on our hearts. It seems to me that this is the clear consequence from the principle that the apostle here lays down in this verse.

Another principle comes before us in the second verse. "Herein we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments." One can hardly conceive anything less logical according to the system of the schools. They would call it arguing in a circle, which is counted bad reasoning. But what has logic to do with the truth, with the grace of Christ, with the love of God and of His children? What has logic to do with life eternal? It is not a question of reasoning but of faith. Who can wonder that men who cannot rise above logic or learning or science are misty, yea, blind and lost before any characteristic truth in God's word, and find His love and its fruits all unintelligible or false according to dialectic rules. For there is no food for the soul in disputation; and if man could find bread for this life, "man liveth not by bread alone, but by everything that goeth out of the mouth of Jehovah doth man live" (Deut. 8:3). The Christian has found the way of life and of divine love, and the workings of the Holy Ghost through God's word. He therefore bows to this remarkable word. "Herein we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep His commandments." Thus are

the various truths bound up together in one. It is the reasoning of the heart purified by faith, not only down from God, but up to Him again, blending obedience with the love of God and of His children. This is a most wholesome guard against deceiving or being deceived.

If this way of apostolic appeal be going round in a circle and sounds strange to Peripatetic ears, what can be more truly divine and worthy of God? Man cannot understand it, “because love is of God;” and we must have the love in order to understand such words. Never can one understand the practical ways of God without having the new nature which He communicates to the believer, which lives in both obedience and love. The life in Christ is given to him that believes on Him. When the believer is assured of this, intelligence follows, of which the Holy Spirit is the power that works in the new man. But the more we appreciate such grace toward us, the more the truth strikes, and fills us with praise as we see how it comes of sovereign grace in Christ, and all the Godhead shares in it, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We can see how grace passes from the simple believing in Jesus as the Christ to the depths of God’s nature, and constrains us not to take the truth without weighing the wonders of grace in it, nor to go on with our souls unexercised from day to day.

Is there any epistle more calculated to act on the believer’s heart than the one now before us? If read in faith, there is certainly nothing to disturb our abiding in love. Christ has made this to faith a settled thing for ever. The truth of the gospel is the basis for God’s abiding in us and our abiding in Him, no less than for the practice of loving the children of God which we know when we love God and keep His commandments.

Divine love in Christ shines on a poor sinner, and gives him confidence that he is the object of perfect love, totally different from human affection at its best. For he is made not only a saint but a child of God. Only God could so love; and Christ His Son came to show it fully, and in order to do so, and blot out our sins, died as a sacrifice for us. This was not as man or the world gives; and it was made perfect, not only by the Holy Spirit coming to abide in us and with us, but in that we now in this world are as Christ is before the Father. For all the evils of us and in us are met and cleared by His death, and we have His risen life as our life, His Father our Father, His God our God; while we are in the world that crucified Christ. Soon is He coming to receive us to Himself that where He is we also may be. Meanwhile there are others who are God's children as we are, and He calls us to love them as He does. As they are in the same relationship and position, all is made plain. If God loves, so do we His children; and He makes it a matter of command to love our brother and to love them all. If we love not them, we do not love Him but deceive ourselves. This then is an end of that question.

But how is the love to the children of God to be shown? It is inseparable from loving God and keeping His commandments. It is not true love to them, if we fail in love to God or in keeping His commandments. Is not this a remarkable and heart-searching turn given to loving them? Is it not a matter for serious consideration? What a cheek to easy-going indifference! Suppose a child of God to be entrapped in an offence against God, either in false doctrine or in any practical way, what then? Is it love to sanction the evil thing, to make light of it, or to join one in it though a brother? "Herein we know that

we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments." It is not loving God's children when we show how little we love God by indifference to His injunction. Thus we have the principle of obedience affirmed in a new way to cheek the abuse of loving those who are sinning and call for censure. If we trifle with sin, if we slur over evil and wrong against God under the pretext of loving the children of God, we cannot know that our love to God's children is a reality, but a snare to us and to them. If through any cause we slip into disobeying God's will, all is wrong in our souls, and we have no certainty in our paths; for we have ceased to enjoy communion with Him, and we are in danger of humouring instead of loving the children of God. It is no longer true that we love them in a divine way. But if on the contrary we by faith introduce God into the question as One that the heart loves, then keeping His commandments follows, which forbids human yielding where He is concerned, and we have confidence that we love His children as in His sight. This is therefore an important test to judge our souls before Him. It is a truth which goes deep indeed, and closes the question by His word.

"For this is the love of God that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous." Thus the Holy Spirit gives not only a test in ver. 2 but a counter-test in ver. 3. It is not the love of God, or of His children, if we are disobedient. True love of God obeys, while it also shows itself in loving His children, and not our set or party but all His own. We cannot separate obedience from love. If it is not obedience, neither is it love. If it is divine love, obedience accompanies it. "And His commandments are

not grievous." It is the estimate of the apostle and of all who are before God with confidence in His grace. It is the truth pronounced by the Holy Spirit. So the Lord Himself, in Matt. 11, declared His yoke easy and His burden light. But there is in the way of the children of God a constant hindrance, greater perhaps than anything else. At first sight you might think of the flesh. But no: near as the flesh is to us, there is a more serious difficulty. When the flesh in Christians breaks out, they are conscious of shame and sensible that they are wrong. But the world is a subtle malaria around us; and, when it affects us insidiously, we may remain unconscious what it is that produces spiritual dimness and inability to enjoy the Father's love or to return it. This again is what alienates the children of God one from another in various ways, and corrupts in proportion as it influences. If the heart values the world, it is stolen away from God's children as those whom God would bind together with the nearest of family ties, and would have love to be ever flowing in the Spirit's power. This the world utterly forbids; for it loves its own in its poor selfish and heartless way. Thus no small danger arises for the saints who seek its ease and honour. It is a pitfall for these and other reasons. If a Christian wants to stand well with the world, he must please it to the grief of the Spirit.

Men cannot tolerate the love of God's children, because it condemns the world. They are unwilling to associate with such as love the brotherhood, and ask if these low people are really your companions. How can you make such folk your special friends? If a saint wants to keep up a position in the world, the difficulty is at once felt. The gentlemen and ladies you court refuse to let you

shame them with those of your intimacy they despise. This is and must be the spirit of the world. Yet you, a child of God and heir of heaven, wish to stand well in their eyes who crucified the Lord of glory! In their presence therefore you seek to avoid even a brotherly notice of poor children of God who are to reign with Christ and before the world too! Is this love to God and to His children? Is it loyalty to Christ, this anxiety of yours to be on good terms with the world? Then His commandments are more or less grievous. Is this not so? Where do you drift? These gentlemen and ladies, are they God's children? You do not say so; but they are nice people! Even if you hope they may be God's children, know you not that friendship with the world is enmity with God? "Whosoever therefore is minded to be friend of the world is constituted enemy of God." Do they not pursue the same principles and the same practices which cast out the Son of God from the world?

This is how we ought to look at the world because God so looks at it. It matters not how long ago it is since the world crucified the Lord. The sin is just as fresh now before God as when the fatal deed was done. No real change has come for the world since that day of guilt. It either claims the Christian relationship, or it denies it to those who believe. "What presumption to call Him your Father!" "Righteous Father," said the Lord, "the world knew Thee not." They might think it serving God to persecute those presumptuous men whom Christ is not ashamed to call His brethren, and who claim God as their Father. "Worst of all, they say He is not our Father, only theirs." What is more offensive to the world than drawing the line — presuming to have heavenly blessings and privileges which the world has not?

Do you plead that it is not exactly for yourself? But you have a son or daughter, whom you desire to have a fair place in the world: you have given it up for yourself, but there are the children! This is often the way in which the worldliness of a parent's heart is shown. It is not the earnest desire for the child to be in Christ, and God's own child. The practical aim first is to secure a good place in the world, though they pray that the child may be saved too. Meanwhile the unceasing effort is to advance the children in this present life. What is this but the world, no matter how it may be put in different shapes? It may not always be said, but the actions prove where the heart is. This seems to be the connection between vers. 3 and 4.

God's commandments are grievous chiefly through the evil influence of the world. "For all that is begotten of God overcometh the world." This is a searching appeal when we think how the children of God pander to the world. In general there is an utterly vague sense of what the world is. One has often been shocked among sober and real Christians to find on asking them what is the world, that they avow themselves unable to tell. Not a few think, since even the masses are baptized that, with the exception of open infidels, the world is gone and that Christendom has replaced it to the glory of God, if not for individual exactitude, at any rate in the moral sense of the expression. But let us not be deceived by Satin or appearances, were it incomparably better than it is. Christ is always the touchstone of truth. Is Christ now the life, the object, of mankind in any country under the sun? Where He is all this and more, simply and truly, it is not the world. Christ gives living consciousness of and rest in the Father's love; and where this is enjoyed in the

Holy Spirit, it is not the world. But where other objects than Christ attract and govern the heart, and the Father's love is unknown or counted an impossibility, the world remains in unchanged opposition. Can any question be of greater moment, if we have not already decided it by faith, than that we should examine ourselves and test our conscience, heart and ways? For it is an easy thing to let the world gain advantage in detail, even where in the main we seek to be faithful. Is it not dangerous, if we feel ourselves hazy, to shrink from the scriptural test? Divine love assuredly binds us, if we see more clearly, to help one another, instead of yielding to the unloving habit of spying out inconsistencies in this one or that, is an excuse for being mixed up with the world in divine worship and ways. There is nothing of Christ in anything of the sort.

Here we have the assurance that it is not the mystic recluse, nor the highly spiritual only, but that "All that is begotten of God overcometh the world." Does not this stimulate is well as encourage the simplest child of God? Have not all such been begotten of God? There is the principle laid down plainly. Not a single real Christian is exempted from the privilege any more than the responsibility. As every believer now is an object of God's love and in the relationship of His family, so he "overcometh the world." "And this is the victory that overcometh the world (not service, not sacrifice, nor even love, but) — our faith." Do you believe this, Christian? Be not faithless here but faithful. It is by faith in our Lord Jesus that we are brought to God; so too that we are kept of God; it is so that we discern and repel the enemy; and so do we obediently rest in His love who deigned to call us His friends.

Faith is the victory that overcame the world; but how? This he next adds. It is “he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God.” It is now not as “the Christ” simply. It is the same Jesus, but the apostle goes farther in the expression of His personal dignity. And it is always so with the real soul. One might well begin with believing that He is Jesus the Christ, or one might have had presented to faith yet more than this, — though it was glad tidings to hear on divine authority that God anointed Jesus, having sent Him into the world for the everlasting good of those who believe; and this is the Christ. But here we are told of His glory above the world as the eternal Son of God. Is not this far beyond His being the Christ or Anointed on the earth? He was Son of God before the world, and however the world or His earthly people reject, His glory as the Son of God will survive heaven and earth. He that came down was God humbling Himself in love; and He that went up was Man after redemption exalted above all the universe, Jesus the Son of God. He, who is God and man in one person fills the Christian’s heart, and shall fill all things. We no longer look at Him only as the Anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power who went about doing good and healing all those domineered by the devil. We see Him in heavenly glory, we are. enabled to appreciate Him in His eternal relationship to God, no less than to ourselves and to all else.

This is His title to explain the character of the faith that overcomes the world. How could it be otherwise? Grace in Him attracted our hearts when lost, gave us life, and died for our sins; then the new life is called into exercise in the knowledge of a divine glory that dims and annuls the false glory of man and the world, and of a love that

brings us into actual relationship with the Father and the Son, creating kindred duties, according to the entirely new place into which sovereign grace has now brought the Christian. The life we receive cannot but rise to its source, and as the grace better known gives it more power by the Spirit, we rise in our appreciation of Christ and of His word. Hence is seen the bearing of the truth that He is not only the Anointed coming into the world on His errand of divine mercy but the Son of God with a personal glory irrespective of any such mission, which is only enhanced by the world's ignorant contempt of Him to its own ruin. He is the Son of man who went down into all the depths to glorify God even as to sin and to save the lost. But as He was the Son of God before the earth and the heavens, so He abides when they shall perish. Hence this glory of the Lord Jesus is brought forward as that which strengthens faith against all difficulties from the world. For "Who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"

It is a soul that did not settle down in the truth received when first converted, but having tasted its preciousness was led on by the Spirit to know Him better in relation not only to its own circle but to God and His glory. "To him that hath shall be given"; and the diligent shall be made fat, yet better still have the joy of apprehending His love and His perfections. This therefore gave power over all the world could do in hatred and frown, any more than in its attractions, ease, or honour. Faith ever sees in the world the murderous hatred of the Son of God. Are we then to fear what we must abhor? "In the world ye have tribulation; but be of good cheer (be courageous): I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

The ever deepening faith in the glory of Christ is the main preservative against the world. As Satan is its prince with no end of wiles to mislead and injure, we need all that our Lord is even as Son of God to overcome in the conflict to which our very blessing in Him exposes and commits us. To be assured that the God of peace will bruise Satan under our feet is excellent; but to rest on that final victory alone would be a snare for our souls. We are here to defeat him now and always, as Joshua exhorted Israel; and we must be faithful in little things every day if we are to overcome in great difficulties.

Hence we may see how the Lord in His epistles to the Seven Churches in Asia expects it in every one of them, and gives special and suited promises to invigorate the faithful individuals when He could not count on the declining assemblies. See too how, when it was not only the Balaam spirit with Nicolaitanism as in Pergamos but the yet more audacious Jezebel in Thyatira, it is there that He presents Himself as the Son of God, the rock on which He builds His church superior to the power of death. It is life in Him that fits us for fellowship with the Father and Himself; but in order to overcome the world and enjoy the fellowship, faith in the Son of God must be fresh and firm by grace, and the Christian world so-called (as many are not ashamed to call it) becomes more painful and disgusting than the gross and open heathen world. So it is to the Father and the Son. The Patristic corrupters of the truth used to teach that if people got baptized, even if living wickedly, their sufferings in hell would be mitigated through their baptism; but the Lord had ruled the contrary if they had only an ear to hear. “That bondman who knew his own

lord’s will, and had not prepared [himself] nor done his will, shall be beaten with many [stripes]; but he who knew not and did things worthy of stripes shall be beaten with few” (Luke 12:47, 48).

Oh let us see to it that, simple and strong in the faith that Jesus is the Son of God, we too may overcome the world!

Address 17 - 1 John 5:6-12

“This is he that came through water and blood, Jesus Christ; not by (or, in the power of) the water only but by the water and the blood; and it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth. Because three are those that bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood; and the three agree in one. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; because 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 God hath made him a liar, because he hath not believed in the witness which God hath witnessed concerning his Son. And this is the witness that God gave to us life eternal, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.”

The verses last before us in the beginning of this chapter indicate both those whom we are to love according to God, and that this love is inseparable from obedience. Divine love in the Christian cannot be without obeying God’s commands. It is not so with natural affection, as this too is entirely independent of obedience. Christian love is the spiritual activity of the new man, and as it goes out to all that are God’s children because they are His, it cannot go out to any apart from subjection to God’s will. Love must take a different shape if dealing with the disobedience of such as are bound to obey God. In every case divine love and divine obedience are supposed to be inseparable in the believer.

Then we learn that there is a present enemy against us in both respects, an enemy which children of God are apt to overlook in its insidious character. The youngest have reason to feel that what is called in scripture “the flesh” is a source of hateful and selfish evil, though alas it is easier to detect its uncomeliness in another than in oneself. Indeed it is part of its deceivable working that we are as quick to discern (if not imagine) its offensiveness in another as we are slow thoroughly to judge it in our own case.

But the world is often a subtler snare. It has its own code of decorum, while it offers many an object which is pleasant to human nature, and to many real Christians; its religion (the worst part of it in God’s sight) has powerful attraction. The world therefore is a far more dangerous enemy than the flesh. An outbreak of the flesh is not only disreputable but humbling and a distress before God, even to a comparatively small measure of spirituality. But the world to a large extent seems respectable, and consequently, where not a saint would fail to discover the ordinary works of the flesh, most are apt to make excuses for the indulgence of the world. Now the world is the direct enemy of the Father, so much so that the love of the Father as such can never have power or be enjoyed where the spirit of the world prevails. It has often been remarked and is evidently true, that in Scripture as the world is opposed to the Father, so the flesh is to the Spirit, and the devil to the Son of God. But opposition of and in this triple evil to the Trinity Satan works for mischief through the world and the flesh; and we have the comfort that God the Father works for good through the Lord Jesus by the Spirit. We may distinguish the different forms of evil, but in fact

they often coalesce in practice, and so also it is in the working of the Godhead; and greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.

This brings before its the testimony of God in the world, which appeals to man and forms His own family. It is therefore through faith in the word which reveals Jesus the Son of God. It is not a matter of reasoning nor of affection, any more than through a rite applied by a special class of men. It is through God's testimony dealing with the conscience of the sinner, purifying the heart by the faith which rests for atonement on the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus. "This is He that came through water and blood, Jesus Christ; not by the water only, but by the water and the blood." For God gives special witnesses in order to act on man under the pressure of uncleanness and guilt, whether believers or unbelievers — unbelievers that they may bow to Him and the truth; believers that they may be purged in conscience, enlarged and strengthened in their faith.

Here then we are led from the person of Christ, which had just been before us, to the work of Christ characterising His person. For His work it is which furnishes the witnesses. God deigns to give us more than sufficient testimony. Two witnesses were required in the things of man with man, two sufficed, three better still. Here God provides fully. He presents to man three witnesses of the greatest conceivable weight for leading into the truth. "This is He that came," neither by human birth, might, or wisdom, nor yet by divine power or glory. It was not through His incarnation nor through His unequalled ministry. "This is He that came through water and blood, Jesus Christ." He who was the true God and life eternal came to die as truly as any man, yet

as no other could die, He by God made sin to save sinners and wash them, not only purified inwardly but in God's sight whiter than snow through His blood. Yes He came to die, for His death alone could blot out our sins or glorify God as to sin (John 13:31, 32). The allusion is unquestionably to our Lord on the cross, dead already, pierced by the soldier to make sure of His death, out of whose side flowed blood and water. In the history the blood is that which caught the eye first of course, and so there first named. The water was observed however to flow also. Whoever saw or heard of a fact so extraordinary that blood and water should issue out of the side of a dead man? Yet so they did here.

The Gospel of John (John 19:33-37) had drawn attention to it more than to His most stupendous miracles. "But when they came to Jesus they broke not his legs; but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and immediately there came out blood and water. And he that hath seen hath witnessed, and his witness is true, and he knoweth that he saith true that ye also may believe." It was really from the dead Man. God furnished this preternatural sign of a work peculiar to the incarnate Son of God alone; and the Spirit of God thought it so significant for His glory and man's reconciliation as first to record it signally in the last Gospel, and next to apply it to us in the Epistle before us.

"This is he that came through water and blood." Adam did not become father of the race till sin entered and death began its work. So our Lord became Head of the new creation when He rose, having borne our sins, the Firstborn of many brethren. Through "death" (not birth, as Puseyites, Irvingites, Rationalists, and other errorists

are alike now asserting) He annulled him that had the power of death. Till then the Levitical system with priests, sacrifices and earthly sanctuary had God's sanction. Then only was the work finished, and Christianity began on the basis of one efficacious offering and a risen Saviour, soon to be glorified in heaven. Hence as Paul, in restating the gospel to the volatile Corinthians, began with Christ dying for our sins according to the Scriptures, so in enforcing God's testimony the apostle John passes all else by and comes to the Lord's death for purification and atonement. Here he begins with water, the well-known figure of the cleansing power of the word, as we read among other Scriptures in John 3:5, there the Spirit co-operating, as here "blood" follows. The word of God first deals effectually with souls. God speaks to our conscience thereby, and brings us in guilty. His word, never tradition or any rhetoric of man, proves us deaf, stubborn, sin-defiled in His sight. But how precious it is henceforth, so to speak, as flowing from Him thus!

Consequently the washing of water is from the riven side of Him that died for sinners. This enhances its force immensely. So before He died the Lord laid down, "He that is bathed (i.e., washed all over) needeth not save to wash his feet." The person receives but one bathing; the feet need to be washed throughout the earthly pilgrimage. Christ's advocacy is what really meets the daily failures, not the Lord's Supper (a profane as well as an ignorant misuse of it); and the Holy Spirit applies His word on the ground of His death, whenever the need arises; but there is once only for the Christian "the washing of regeneration." Nothing but the death of Christ gives us clearance from sin. We may indeed feel

and hate the sin, and judge ourselves because of it; but there is no clearance of the soul apart from Christ's death. "This is he that came," etc. Such is the grand truth that was before God in Christ's death. And Christ is here summed up for the testimony of God in His death. How deep the truth! How incomparable the grace which could so speak to us!

But it is not only true that this is the purifying power brought to bear on us from the threshold of Christianity; His death was as absolutely needed on God's side as on ours. Here of course it was not for cleansing but for expiation. Sin had dislocated and thrown all here below into a moral chaos. The cross established divine order for ever. Without it how could love and light, grace and truth work together? How could love bring to heaven the sinner whom light disclosed to be only fit for hell? If grace pleaded for mercy, what could gainsay the truth that he is a heartless ungodly enemy? In the cross God's nature and attributes find perfect vindication and harmony. There God is glorified in the Son of man; and it is His righteousness thereby to justify the merest, yea the worst, sinner who truly believes in the Lord Jesus.

Hence it is that He came through "blood," and it is added, "not by water only, but by water and blood." God's majesty, His authority, His word, His holiness, His righteousness, no less than His love, were all concerned. But now in the death of the Son of man all are harmonised and glorified in absolute perfection, as could be in no other way; and if God there rests in everlasting delight, He is working by the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven to reveal it by His word to all that receive Christ, and His word by faith.

But what did the Lord's having come (for it was the end of His earthly life) by the water and the blood tell concerning man? The awful truth that man was so utterly bad that even a living and divine Blesser, who deigned to become man in His love to man, did not and could not draw man out of his evil and enmity. It must be a dying Saviour. "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life" (John 5:40); "Except the corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone" (John 12:24) 1, if I be lifted out of the earth, will draw all to me" (John 12:32). Christ's death is the overwhelming proof of man's moral death, and now is by grace the basis of the best blessings of God. How it demonstrates that the law of God could only condemn man! It no less proves the total ruin of human nature in every class. Though all the fulness of the Godhead dwelt in Jesus bodily, even it could not deliver man from his sins short of Christ's death, who thereon risen is the fulness and pattern of the new and heavenly estate of man according to divine counsels of grace.

It is not easy to render adequately the two prepositions in ver. 6, which are nevertheless alike rendered "by" in the Authorised Version. For the first used once (διὰ) is here given "through," in order to distinguish it from the second (ἐν) which has a stronger force expressed fully by "in the power of," but perhaps sufficiently as "by." The first, looking symbolically at water and blood as the means of meeting man's extremity, conveys that the Lord Jesus came to make this good for the believer's deliverance from defilement and from guilt. In the next and emphatic clause "in" is employed, which here as often would mean "in the power of," and hence "not in the power of the water only, but in the power of the

water and the blood." So lost was man that Christ come on his behalf, though God and man in one person, was unavailing through anything but death to purify and atone. And so did He in fact come in or by His death in this full power. There was His death infinitely efficacious in itself for the foulest and guiltiest of sinners, even if not a soul had believed. But God's grace would and did work, so that there should be faith in Him, and hence "by the water and the blood."

But there is another addition of great moment. "And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth." All know that the Lord Jesus speaks of Himself as "the truth." How then is the Spirit also called the truth, though God the Father never is? The word, as the written or verbal answer to Christ, is also so designated, which we can readily understand, the word which the Holy Spirit employs for glorifying Christ to and in His own. But the difference seems to lie in this, that Jesus the Son is the truth objectively before us, the Spirit as the power that works inwardly in the saint to realise and enjoy Christ. Two deep wants must be met in order to be blessed of God. The truth we need from God for conscience, heart and mind; and it is given fully and perfectly in our Lord Jesus, the truth objectively. But there is "sin" in the old nature which resists what condemns; and even when a man is begotten of God, vigilance against its working out is always necessary here below. How is this met? By the Spirit of God, who is therefore the truth as the inward power for bringing home and applying the truth which is found in Christ outside. The Holy Spirit makes the object of faith received and intrinsically prized. He is the appropriating energy to the new man, life in Christ. In this which is a

very needed and real thing He too is the truth inwardly, though we cannot quite correctly say subjectively. In simple English, we look on the Lord as set before the eye of faith; and the Spirit is the power within our hearts. As the truth is the revelation of every one and every thing as they are, we can understand why the Son and the Holy Spirit can alike be called the truth, but neither God as such, nor the Father, because in neither is the revealer, though by the Son and the Spirit fully revealed.

If you listen to theology (that is, the attempt to make revealed truth a “science,” as rationalists and ritualists love to do to God’s dishonour and to their own grievous loss), they talk of God as the truth. I remember, years ago, meeting a celebrated but sceptic foreigner of the Romantic school who, though to me he discarded the Voltaires and the Rousseaus, laid his main stress on God being the truth. To a mutual friend he tersely if not reverently reported the difference, in that he saw God for himself, I only “through the spectacles of Jesus Christ.” Yes, he deceived himself that he saw or knew Him in any real way. God in Himself is entirely above creature ken. Man requires a mediator who is man no less than God, in order that we should be enabled by the Spirit to know Him. Thus only can truth be known. God as such is not the revelation of God (nor man’s conscience, nor his reason), but Christ as object, and the Spirit as the inner power for the new nature. How is God revealed? In Christ. Christ is the Revealer outwardly, as the Spirit works inwardly, and the word is the revelation of God or the truth. Christ might be before us every moment of our life, and we no better for it, unless the

Holy Spirit co-operated with the word in enabling us to receive it by faith and thenceforward in the new life.

But the apostle had more to say in his few but pregnant words. “For three are those that bear witness: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and the three agree in one.” It will be noticed that the order is here reversed. Historically it was the blood, the water, and the Spirit sent from heaven in honour of Christ’s redemption, to give the saints the abiding Paraclete, and to spread the glad tidings universally in God’s power, not in man’s, though working through man. God gives three testifiers, which agree in one testimony; but in spiritual fact the order is, “the Spirit, and the water, and the blood.” Of course, literally speaking, the personal witness is the Holy Ghost, and He too is the present living power. The water and the blood are but figuratively called witnesses, and so are personified. But the Holy Spirit is a true person in the Godhead; and one of His special functions, like the Son’s, is to bear witness on earth, He of Christ, as Christ of God and the Father. “And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth.”

But the text here has suffered, whether by inadvertence or by design. Be it said briefly that from “in heaven” in ver. 7 to “on earth” in ver. 8 is not scripture but an interpolation. It may have been at first a mere marginal note, copied afterwards as the text by men that did not understand the truth. The history of the case has been fully and minutely traced, the result of which is that the same grounds which make the New Testament text certain elsewhere prove this insertion as certainly to be a human accretion. Let me however show that any Christian who does not know one Greek word ought to

be satisfied that it is spurious. Such a one requires neither men of learning nor even the fruit of their researches to decide the question for himself. The word of God itself is amply sufficient and perfectly conclusive.

First, what is the meaning of bearing witness “in heaven”? When you weigh the thought, is it not (I will not say unscriptural only, but) rather folly? How could there be such a need or fact as to “bear witness in heaven”? The natural denizens in heaven are angels who never needed witness borne to them. They were elect and holy. In their case witness is superfluous. The fallen angels are irreparably lost, having left their first estate, some delivered to chains of darkness, others as yet allowed, like Satan, to accuse the saints whom they tempt, and to deceive the whole inhabited earth. Neither is witness for them. The spirits of the saints gone to be with Christ, what possible witness can they require?18 It is on earth that witness is needed and is given by God’s grace, because men are steeped in darkness and lack the truth. Pilate only expressed the ignorance of all the world in his question, What is truth? He was otiose, and like most waited not for the sure answer. None could find it exit unless God gave competent witnesses; and here they are, His three witnesses, “The Spirit, the water, and the blood.”

By the way, it may be well to advertise any limited to the English Bible, that the “record” is the same thing as the “witness.” Both mean God’s testimony to man; as in John 5:22, 23, the same word rightly rendered “judgment” appears wrongly as “condemnation” and “damnation.” It is a loss that the word was not, especially in the same context, translated in the same way, because it leads people to fancy there must he some difference, as

indicated by two or even three English words. “Three19 are those that bear witness,” but without “on earth,” the last words of the interpolation. These words were unnecessary, because only there does God give His witnesses; and the object is to present the truth to those who do not know it. Thanksgiving and praise characterise heaven, not witnessing. But here, if we receive the witness of God ourselves, the love of Christ constrains us to bear witness to others who are still sinners as we were.

Now let us come to what the Spirit wrote. There is nothing but the truth there.

It has been already shown. how right the order is in verse 6, which puts the Spirit last, because the presence of the Spirit as the divine witness on earth not only followed Christ’s work on the cross, but also is given individually since on the faith of the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation. Consequently the water and the blood preceded, as in fact so in the dealing of grace with the believer. Is it not so that one receives the truth of the gospel? First the word of truth enters through an awakened conscience, and one comes to God as a sinner in the name of the Saviour. Then the blood of Christ is privately presented or publicly preached to him as the perfect sacrifice to meet his case; and, if he submit to God’s righteousness instead of his seeking to establish his own, the Holy Spirit is given as a Spirit of liberty and communion. This last he could not have without resting on the all-cleansing blood of Christ. Thus the order in the soul’s blessing by grace answers to the water, and the blood, and the Spirit, just as in the terms laid down in verse 6. So in the consecration of the sons of Aaron, the priests, first came the washing with water; then the

blood of the ram of consecration put on the right ear, on the right thumb, and on the right toe (the organs of reception, of work, and of walk); and in the last place the anointing oil with blood from the altar sprinkled on them and their garments. What believer can fail to see how the type conforms to the New Testament reality in Christians now constituted a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices, the only priests and the only sacrifices in worship on earth now acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

But we come now to the witnesses looked at in the order not of God's dealings historically but of the operation in the Christian. individually. Now when we speak of three as bearing witness, the Spirit necessarily comes first, because He it is who not only has His crowning place but makes known in power the water and the blood for the soul's blessing. That is the reason of the difference in the next verse. "For three are those that bear witness, the Spirit, and the water and the blood, and the three agree in one" — three witnesses, jut for one united testimony. "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater." May I recall the divine relief and deliverance these words gave more than sixty years ago to a soul converted but harassed and deeply exercised through sense of sin which clouded his soul's rest on Jesus? These words chased away all doubt, and made him ashamed to question God's witness. It became God's application of the truth to him and no longer his applying it to himself, though not at all doubting the intrinsic worth of Christ's death for the sinner. It is not my seeing as I ought the efficacy of the blood, but resting by faith on God's seeing it, and God's valuing it as it deserves.

What then is God's witness spoken of in the beginning of verse 9? The answer is, "Because this is the witness of God which he hath witnessed concerning his Son." The troubled spirit just because no longer dead is intensely anxious for His witness about itself; and this agitation hinders it from hearing God about His Son. But this is the whole matter when one has given up oneself as good for nothing before God, a mere and lost sinner. Christ thus received on God's witness enables me to have done with myself altogether. What Christ is and has done gives peace. The Lord's death is the best proof that there is no life in the first man or his race. From Cain to the cross, bad as fallen man is elsewhere, his worst is when he professes religion and makes it his dependence and boast; as from the blood of Abel to the infinitely precious blood of Jesus we learn man's hatred to the grace and truth of God in Christ. But all becomes clear, though not always at once, to faith. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself; he that believeth not God hath made Him a liar, because he hath not believed in the witness which God hath witnessed concerning His Son." Can any witness be simpler, clearer, stronger than God's in these few and plain words? Are they not meant for anyone brought to feel his need of such mercy? Oh the unbelief of calling faith presumption! of doubting that one is entitled by God's word to take Him at His word, to own Him true and faithful in receiving His witness concerning His Son! Can any seek a more thorough proof that man, however religious after the flesh, believes Satan and disbelieves God? Ordinarily nobody would think of doubting a grave man's witness. Everybody just as ordinarily doubts God's witness for himself, and runs down the believer as presumptuous if not a hypocrite.

How foolish too to listen to the enemy's whisper that you are too great a sinner for Christ to save. He came to save the lost: can you be worse than "lost "? What does not "lost" include? Think of the Samaritan; of the sinful woman in a city; of Mary of Magdala: all desperate cases, each different from the other; all saved, and given to know it; and all recorded that you too may believe and be saved. They were each saved "by grace," God's grace and not theirs, and "through faith," not feelings, or love, or service, or sacraments. The apostle thanked God that he had baptised few of the many Corinthians that believed and were baptised. Christ, he said, sent him, the apostle, not to baptise but to preach the gospel. It was in Christ that he begot them through the gospel, not through baptism, excellent for its own end as it is. But baptism never gave life to a single soul; Christ is the life-giver to all who believe, working in each individually by His word and Spirit, as He will judge all who reject Him to their ruin. What will He say to those who mike void His word through a tradition, and in place of believing God, put a rite to give life to His deep dishonour and to magnify their own office, as if they were mediators between the living and the dead? This is the real presumption, not faith which gives God the glory.

Eternal life is in the Son of God, the Second man. Such is the prime doctrine of the Epistle. To this we come round once more after the very striking use made of the blood and water from out of the dead Christ, with the gift of the Holy Spirit given in consequence, to the chief characteristic of the Epistle — eternal life in the Son of God. It is indeed one of the greatest truths in all Scripture, and of capital importance for the saints in our

day. We have learnt by experience the mischief done by such as lapsed into undermining or obscuring it, under the vain pretext of new truth, while it was no better than old trash revived, a frequent device of Satan to accomplish his malicious purposes.

Well then, “If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater.” — What is so good, and wise, and sure? what so satisfying as God’s witness? He knows all truth, and as the God of all grace has given His Son both to declare it and to make us capable of receiving it in a new life; and further, after redemption His Spirit is divine power both to enjoy it and make it known to our fellows. Therefore one can understand the weight of such a word as “the witness of God,” greater than all difficulties.

And this triple witness of God is first of death written on all mankind by Him who drank the cup to the dregs, but His death issuing in a life without sin for us, though this for Him was always needless. That eternal life did not require any work for itself. It was our state of sin and death that needed His death for victory over all evil to God’s glory.

“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.” “Ye receive not our witness,” said the Lord to Nicodemus. Man must be born anew; he is incapable otherwise of learning according to God. Faith in God’s word alone leads to being taught of God. The church ought to have been, like the Lord, a faithful and true witness But its state had already become such as to make it untrustworthy. What

unfailing comfort then especially for the believer to have the witness, God's witness "in himself!"

But here, where was absolute need, and where by grace we have "the witness of God," how barefaced and faithless it is to call any soul to "hear the church"! Nay, the same word of God, which shows what the church was called to be in the world, equally shows that the church was to fall into all sorts of disorder. And remarkable it is in the two Epistles to Timothy that these two views are given: in the first Epistle the church in order, "the pillar and pedestal of the truth"; in the second Epistle, the church in a state of sad disorder. But the church is not the truth which the Christian is bound to hear and receive, though the corporate witness to it, as the Christian is the individual witness. Both the church and the Christian are called to hear as the truth nothing but the authoritative word of God. In 2 Timothy we learn that the Christian profession has become like a great house full of vessels to honour and dishonour. Therefore when the leaven was accepted and enforced instead of being purged out (1 Cor. 5), it became a question of purging oneself out from these radically settled evils, in order to be a vessel unto honour. Yet it is not for isolation, but "with those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

But so far is Scripture from allowing such a claim that we learn from its final book, the Revelation, that each faithful soul is charged to hear, not what the church says, but "what the Spirit saith to the churches," and this expressly in each of the Lord's messages to all the seven churches. Can anything be conceived more opposed to the Lord's mind than such an assumption, as Christendom sinks into ruin?

But whatever be the state of Christendom the word of God remains ever true and applicable to the Christian, “He that believeth… hath the witness in himself.” Were the believer in a land where he could enjoy no fellowship with saints, where he had no opportunity to hear a Christian teacher, where he knew of not a single brother in the Lord, the Son of God on whom he believes remains just the same; and he has the witness in himself as surely as if surrounded with every Christian privilege possible on earth. He is not dependent on any one under the sun; he has the Son. How profoundly wise and gracious is this witness on God’s part! For in such a case how many might cry out, What audacious presumption! But “he that believeth hath the witness in himself,” says God Himself. The audacity is in the infidelity which rejects it: “He that believeth not God hath made Him a liar, because he hath not believed the witness which God hath witnessed concerning His Son.” What could be worse than that? It is bad enough to lie about oneself, like a full-blown Brahmin saying that he had not sinned, though it gives the lie to the word. It is worse, not negatively only but positively, to make God a liar, and this every one does who rejects God’s witness to Christ His Son.

“And this is the witness that God hath given to us life eternal; and this life is in His Son” (ver. 11). Can anything be more plain or precise? “God hath given to us,” to every Christian, “life eternal; and this life is in His Son.” Even an infidel, hardened as he is, cannot hear without emotion the calm and bright assurance which this faith and confession impart. He knows his own misery if he thinks at all. The believer’s peace turns wholly on having God’s Son, and life eternal in Him.

Some of late have made much of life being said to be “in His Son” and not in us. They seem pleased with the idea, because they draw from it the desired inference that the Christian has not life eternal. Why this should make them happy it is hard to understand without remembering the blinding power of the enemy; and, sad to say, I do not forget when their joy seemed to be in the truth they now deny. Is it not horrible to pervert one Scripture into the contradiction of another? Here it is written that this “life is in His Son;” because the Spirit would comfort the believer with its security independently of himself and every other creature. In the Son is this life, where no evil can reach, no danger approach. It is his joy to know his life, the life eternal, in Him who is not only its unfailing spring but its divine preservative against all the wiles of Satan; and yet more, that he is in fellowship with God the Father, the object of his love and honour more than ever since redemption.

But John 5:24 equally assures us that we have this life, and that God has given it to us here; as a crowd of Scriptures show that with redemption it is essentially ours as the only life which the Spirit finds suitable to work on and in. The natural life may help to explain. Life acts from the crown of the head to the extremity of the fingers and toes. But they are not the seat of life, nor even an arm or a leg, which may be removed without injury to that seat. Only in Christ there is no such loss. There the new life rises far above the natural. Christ is the central seat of life eternal; but even the babes have it most truly, and shall never perish. Our blessedness lies in the certainty that the life is in God’s Son. This maintains it in all the confidence it inspires for every believer; but to turn it into a proof that the believer has

not now eternal life is not only to evince personal unbelief but misuse of the word of God.

“He that hath the Son hath the life.” It is inseparable from the Son. None can have the life unless he has the Son, who is the way, the truth, and the life. Not only is He God to give it, but as the glorifier of God, the Son of man who was also the Son of God. And God witnesses it of Him and of none else. The believer honours the Son by believing, and receives life eternal. The unbeliever dishonours Him and rejects the gift of life to his own perdition, but must bow when he is raised for judgment. Could life have been detached from the Son of God, so as to be in us only and not in the Son, it might conceivably be injured or decay; but inasmuch as it is in the Son, it abides holy and imperishable; and so it is that we have it, and know that we have it on His word. Every good work, every right affection, all true service, and acceptable worship, flow from eternal life in the power of the Spirit. It is impossible that the Christian could please the God and Father of the Lord Jesus without the action of life eternal; for now that life is come in the person of the Son of God, the Father too delights in our having this life and repudiates any other; for this life has its joy in knowing, serving, and worshipping the Father and the Son, as led by the Holy Ghost.

But let none forget the other and solemn side. “He that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” If you who read these words be an unbeliever, beware, I beseech you. Why perish everlastingly? Why reject the love of God in giving and sending His Son? Why reject Him who tasted death for you? Yet He never did you anything but good, and what have you ever shown to His name but neglect, dislike, and despite as far as you could? Oh believe what

God tells you of His Son. If you believe on Him, you have Him. It is impossible to have the Son of God and not have eternal life; but “he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” This is no less true than terrible: the unbeliever “shall not see life.” “The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things in his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath life eternal; and he that disobeyeth (or, disbelieveth) the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:35, 36).

Before closing let me remark two things of interest and moment. The first is the care to present life eternal objectively in the Word of life, the Son of God, in the first chapter. The apostle had freely given in the Gospel the Lord as giving life eternal to the believer in John 3, 5, 6, 10; but here he begins with the Word Himself as that life without one hint as yet about its communication to us. Yet it had been known as a truth familiarly before this Epistle was written. There was therefore a blessedly divine purpose to serve by saying not a word here about ourselves receiving, though the writer and the saints knew it already. Here then the aim seems to be to present Him as an object, so that we might delight our souls in Himself as the eternal life in divine being with the Father, and manifested in its perfection when manifested to us here below as Man among men. How immense the loss if there had not been in fact this objective manifestation of eternal life, the peculiar charm through the Gospel of John! So doctrinally there would have been in this Epistle if Christ had not been the starting-point and basis. And it is very gradually that we come to the open treatment of the communication of life eternal to us; in fact, it is only explicitly handled in 1

John 5 before us, the close of its teaching, as its objectivity in Christ was the beginning.

The second point appears also very suggestive. If there be any part of Scripture more than all the rest devoted to unfolding life eternal in Christ, and in those that are His by grace, it surely is the Gospel and the First Epistle of John. Yet Christian baptism is as absent as the Lord's supper from both. They are occupied with life eternal in all its fulness and power in Jesus the Son of God beyond all other Gospels and Epistles; and more than all they bear witness to its communication to the believer. Yet neither one nor other speaks of that Christian institution to which the declension from the truth in East and West, in ancients and moderns, in Episcopalians and Presbyterians, attributes it. The only shade of difference in Presbyterians from the rest is that their code of doctrine makes the life-giving efficacy of baptism contingent on election, but equally with the rest depending by divine appointment on baptism. The Scotch statement is as distinct as Calvin's for the Reformed abroad; and of course Luther went as far or farther.

But if Christian baptism be really, as tradition has taught wide and long, the means of quickening souls, how comes it that the Scriptures which are the fullest on life eternal and life-giving never notice it, and dwell exclusively on its being In immediately divine operation by the Spirit's using the word to reveal Christ to the believer? For it must be said plainly that it is as glaring a mistake to foist baptism into the "water" of John 3:5 as into "the water" of 1 John 5:6, 8. The apostle absolutely leaves institutions to dwell on truth vital and of everlasting consequence, and only alludes passingly to

the baptism of the disciples during the days of our Lord's ministry in John 4:1, 2, with the careful comment that He Himself did not baptise, He, though quickener of the dead. And the baptism before His death and resurrection was so distinct from what He commissioned after He rose, that persons so baptised were baptised in the Christian way even by the great apostle (Acts 19:5), who thanked God that he baptised but few in Corinth, avowed that Christ sent him not to baptise, but to preach the gospel (1 Cor. 1:14, 17), and declared that in Christ Jesus he begot them through the gospel. Christian baptism is really to Christ's death, as Rom. 6 clearly teaches, and if we believe God's word; it has nothing to do with the impartation of life to the soul dead in sins.

18 There is another internal proof that the three who bear witness in heaven is human error, and not the revealed truth of God. No inspired man ever wrote, "The Father, the Word." They are not correlative terms. In scripture we have the "Word" with "God," and the "Son" with the "Father." The editors of the Complutensian Polyglot first printed the unauthorised words from some recent MS. of no account, even if not written since printing came into use, and perhaps to authenticate the Latin Vulgate for Romanists use against its old and best MSS. One of the Greek MSS. represents it in such bad Greek as only an ignorant and non-Hellenist can have written, omitting the article where required.

19 It was a blundering idea after all to make six witnesses, three for heaven and three for earth. It supposes the Spirit in heaven answering to the Spirit in earth. It is as awkward to conceive the Holy Spirit an earthly witness also, as to imagine Spirit in the second triad to mean another, as some defenders of the

importation contended. But it is needless to say more than that the Codex Ravianus as well as one of the Wolfenbüttel copies (in Berlin), is an evident forgery which Copies the Complutensian Polyglot in its misprints and the peculiar letters. The Codex Regius Neapolitanus (173 in Scholz' list) confirms the true text, and gives the clause in a correct shape only in the margin. The other two (Cod. Ottob. or Vat. 298, and Cod. Montfort. or Trin. Coll. Dubl. G. 97) grossly omit the article and are otherwise quite in error.

Address 18 - 1 John 5:13-21

“These things I wrote [or, write] to you that ye may know that ye that believe on the name of the Son of God have life eternal. And this is the boldness which we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he heareth us. And if we know that he heareth us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of him. If anyone see his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask, and he will give him life for those that sin not unto death. There is sin unto death: I do not say that he should request for it. Every unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not unto death.

“We know that everyone that is begotten of God sinneth not, but the begotten of God keepeth himself, and the wicked one toucheth him not. We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the wicked one. And we know that the Son of God came, and hath given to us understanding that we should know the true one; and we are in the true one, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and life eternal. Dear children, keep yourselves from idols “

It is noticeable how the Spirit of God repeatedly presses on believers not only that they have eternal life, but that they know they have it. It would be possible, as it was the fact before Christ, to have eternal life without knowing it, and assuredly even now there are plain workings and effects of that life where its possession is unknown to not a few who have it. Nevertheless the lack of discerning a deleterious influence always exposes him who is ignorant of so great a privilege, not only to a

great loss of happiness in his soul before God, but to the practical result of lowering his standard of walk. How can such a one without the peaceful certainty of having life eternal avoid anxiety when the conscience summons as it were the heart to search and see whether he is after all a Christian after so much failure in his ways, and having to do with the tempter continually seeking to draw him into dishonour of the Lord, and then to produce distrust of God's grace?

Another reason why the Spirit of God so urgently and so repeatedly presses, not only the knowledge (γιν.) but the conscious knowledge, as here (

εἰδ.), Of having life eternal, is that in and since the apostle's day there have ever been adversaries of the truth who disputed the possibility of the knowledge of eternal life, so as to make it a very uncertain thing indeed. Such is the common road taken by unbelief in all ages, clouding certainty, often on the specious plea of our ignorance, unworthiness and liability to err, which is undeniably true enough. This however is not the question, but whether Christ has not fully and clearly revealed His gift of life eternal now to the believer. It is wholly false that this privilege is merely for certain favoured and highly spiritual members of God's family. The New Testament reveals it as meant for all who believe on the Son of God to know it as theirs.

Now nothing can be more certain than that God's love is toward every child of His family. Therefore is the word of God most ex licit that this privilege was meant to be inwardly known, enjoyed and exercised in personal communion, worship, and walk of every Christian, however immature; just as the other life, the flesh,

always utterly hateful to God, is now more than ever, through Christ and the given Spirit of God, made hateful to the saint. Hence the Christian has to disown and set aside the fallen life, and to walk by faith according to the only perfect model of Christ in his new nature, called here and in the corresponding Gospel “eternal life.” It is the life of Christ, and now by grace “our life.”

The apostle John had as his allotted task to unfold, not so much the Saviour’s work of redemption — though he does speak of it, for heavenly glory, and God’s great future purpose for the universe, or His counsels — as the personal dignity and grace of Him whose glory gave its value to the life He imparts as well as to His work. God could righteously and according to all that is in Him have delight in those counsels that are yet to be accomplished. Consequently all ground for dwelling on either worthiness or unworthiness on our part is taken away. It is no longer a question of the first man, but entirely of the Second, Christ the Lord. Our ground is what Christ is and has wrought as given us of God. What do His person and work claim from God, who above all appreciates Him aright; and for whom? Not for Himself certainly, for He needed nothing, as being the Son one with the Father, the object of God’s love from all eternity. He came and gave up Himself to vindicate the glory and give effect to the perfect love of God as the answer to Satan’s lie, who having rebelled against God himself sought to bring man under God’s displeasure, and succeeded to all appearance. But His counsels could not fail, and God will surely accomplish them on the ground of redemption. For redemption was no after-thought, nor were God’s counsels formed because of failure in anything He had instituted. They are indeed

made known to us who believe after man's total failure here below. But as God's love, so His counsels were before even creation, as the apostle Paul shows in Eph. 1:3-14, Col. 1:26, 2 Tim. 1:9, Titus 1:2.

John in particular was given to enter deeply into the nature of God, and consequently dwells much on the Lord's eternal person as well as His incarnate condition, so as to stay the heart and raise the believer above the sad fact of the church externally departing to utter confusion, ruin, and the approaching judgment of God, who begins with His house. The still growing defection of Christendom is no reason why our confidence in Christ should be shaken or wane one iota. How then does the Spirit of God ever strengthen the heart? By pointing us to the eternal life with the Father before a creature existed and God came down, true Man in the person of the Lord Jesus, that eternal life might be our known portion not less really than in the day of glory. Of course it is now ours in Him by faith. But it is a strange doctrine that a "present" thing is not ours now by faith as truly as the "future" thing for which we wait (1 Cor. 3:22). Only the case is still stronger for life in Christ.

Words could not be clearer than the Lord's in John 5:24, or the apostle's in ver. 12 before us. We might acquire the knowledge (γιν.) of what we expect to receive, but could not be inwardly conscious of what we do not actually possess. No Pelagian ever went so far as to deny that any Christian could have eternal life now, though he might explain away that eternal life. But to explode it altogether was reserved for a modern resuscitation of some Gnostic heterodoxy to which this Epistle gives no quarter. No orthodox sect ever adopted the deadly error.

But deadly error is now more rampant than ever; and infidelity knows no shame in our day. It would be difficult to mention a society of professing Christians having the reputation of being an ecclesiastical denomination, that has not scepticism as to the Scriptures at work more or less actively in it at the present moment. Even I can recollect when so fatal an evil was unknown save outside them. Nor had infidelity then covered their opposition to God's authority in Scripture with the veil of "the science of literary and historical investigation." They openly rejected His word, refused to sign articles of faith which asserted it, and renounced office and emoluments as the penalty. The present race relinquish common honesty and retain earthly honour and profit. Where will it all end? In the apostasy and the man of sin, as the ritualists in Satan's mystery, great Babylon, the mother of the harlots and the abominations of the earth.

Let us now consider the concluding remarks of the apostle. "These things I wrote [or, I write, as the epistolary aorist] to you, that ye may know that ye who believe on the name of the Son of God have life eternal." Grace found in us only sin and death: grace gives us the best God could bestow, and this by faith on the Lord Jesus His Son. And what so fitting or needed as life eternal, a divine nature that loves God and His Son and all that is good and holy; that hates sin and loves righteousness according to the perfect law of liberty, obeying God, not as a Jew under restraint but as our Lord did filially. And how ominous the school, who abandon their old convictions for novel and wild ideas, and say not only that you cannot know that you have life eternal, but that it cannot be for any now! Life eternal is

the good ground indispensable. for what another apostle calls “good works which God fore-prepared that we should walk in them.” Far from leaving any excuse for the doubters or disbelievers, the apostle here, as from the first, says all that should establish in Christ against any misleaders. He had shown. the supreme excellence and fulness of that life in Christ as the object of faith and love for souls at the beginning; now, in the last chapter, he insists on the believer’s possession of it, and here in conscious knowledge. Is not this just as it should be? It is due to the Son; it is the delight of the Father; and it enhances the boon all the more to the believer. If it be the first gift of grace to souls heretofore, if it be that on which fellowship with the Father and with His Son depends, if it be that on and in which the Holy Spirit the Paraclete acts in power at every conscious moment of our Christian life, how immense the loss, how incalculable the mistake of all who imbibed the poison, and of all who for any pretext made light of it if they did not dissemble and try to excuse!

The reader has a close rendering of the best text ascertainable of what the apostle here wrote. As ver. 12 stands in the Text. Rec. and the A. V., it is deplorably confused and even misleading. Here it is as simple as it is important, so much so that there is no need to criticise what any Christian reader can do for himself by the bare comparison of the two. The Revisers give what is substantially correct.

Then comes another point of moment, confidence or boldness for the heart in our intercourse with God as His children. Without the consciousness of having life eternal, and the relationship of children, it would be impossible. No wonder that those who do not believe in

either, as existing privileges now enjoyed, decry any such boldness as highly improper. How can they seriously read these words, and many more to the same effect, and fail to learn that God expects it from His children, and had such words as these written to encourage them in it, and to judge themselves for allowing any obstacle in its way? It is the main animating principle of Christian prayer. It ought to imbue our every petition. Not that where confident boldness is lacking anyone should suspend prayer. For we must not forget the Lord's parable (Luke 18:1- 8) spoken to the disciples that they (not "men" in general as in the A.V.), should always pray and not faint. But a different entreaty is not the proper spirit for a Christian's prayer. He ought earnestly to seek that such a dead weight be removed, and that holy boldness be given him. The very fact of having life divine and redemption, as well as the nearest possible relationship to God in the midst of a world of unbelief (which has no real part in any of these privileges, yet deceived into thinking their religious position assured corporately if not individually) creates a constant crowd of dangers, difficulties and wants for ourselves and our brethren. The resource is prayer, which God encourages, even if it be not always the prayer of faith, but too often of sheer perplexity. We should, if the eye were single, pray more freely in the Holy Spirit; but we may ever encourage ourselves in crying to Him as our Father, who loved us when there was nothing to love, and loves us now as His children arrayed with the best robe, even as Christians are here in this world. If we had been left to choose the strongest proofs of His love to us, could we have asked anything to compare with what His pledged word declares He has given us in Christ?

Let us then, abiding in love, abide in God, and God in us. This through His grace expels hindrances great or petty, and gives us to have boldness through the love that is unchanging in the midst of all change. God is pleased with this boldness in counting on His care for us in the midst of our trials, our weakness, our need, in the sorrow that sickness brings, in painful circumstances, in all the ways in which we are put to the proof from day to day. What then should be our feeling? Have we boldness of faith in our present intercourse with God and reckoning on Him through the grace that delivered us from death and sins, that give us life and the Holy Spirit? and are we trembling and doubtful in the little troubles of this life? Is not this unworthy, and a strange inconsistency? Let us, by faith bold about the best blessings, have no less boldness about these least things day by day. Doubt not that He who loves us enters into all allowed or sent to prove us. Here are the words: “And this is the boldness which we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will He heareth us.” Surely we should be ashamed to ask anything against His will. His word lets us know what is His will, and what is not. But there is more: “And if we know that He heareth us, we know that we have the petitions which we asked of Him” (vers. 14, 19). Oh let us not doubt Him in these comparatively small trials, after having proved His infinite love in the deepest wants that can be! What a proof is 1 John 4 that in Christ is nothing too great for man, and in these verses of 1 John 5 that nothing is too small for God’s love. How easily we forget to act at the moment when it might be for His answer, and then calls come in when it cannot be! Prayer is due to our God, and a rich blessing to us and for others. But it is not as it

should be without the boldness which honours God's love to us.

Knowing that we are His children, and having life and redemption, let us judge every obstruction. In spite of sin and Satan we have even now these incomparable privileges, the harbingers of everlasting glory, and, better than all, we have the Son and the Father and the Holy Spirit. We are blessed with the Blesser. Those believers who defer this blessedness to the day of glory may be right as to that day, but are utterly wrong in excluding their proper joys till then. Now is the time when we need those blessings: they are wanted most in the evil day for God's glory, and for His children too. When the day of glory comes there will be no need of exhortation to boldness in prayer, for all will be praise. There is urgent call for such prayer now in this world with its difficulties and perils; withal it is the day of the richest blessing for the Christian when we know that Christ is in the Father, we in Him, and He in us. It is therefore just the time for this practical boldness in asking God for anything and all things according to His will: aught else we dare not wish. And we know that He hears us. How wrong to doubt it! Has not God proved His perfect and constant love to us? He may see good to prove us by a hard trial. He may let a Christian (perhaps caring for money as he ought not) lose every half-penny in a world where every half-penny is useful. He may not know whence his breakfast is to come. But is he to doubt God after all he knows of His goodness and wisdom, as well as of his own folly? He is to ask Him to do as He will, assured that He hears him, and that we have the petitions which we have asked of Him.

I remember, perhaps a half-century ago, a godly ex-clergyman asked in the open street by a friend how he lived, and his family. His answer was that he could not well say how, yet they did live by God's grace. Up came the postman with no words but a banknote, which he showed to the inquirer with the remark, "This may, perhaps, tell you how I live." Our God is a living God, and answers faith as He sees fit, whatever the circumstances. Heavy trial is an honour to a Christian now as to Abraham of old. There may be those whom the Lord tries little, because they are weaklings in faith and cannot bear more. But he who is strong in the Lord is sure to be put to the proof, and for blessing. "He withdraweth not His eyes from the righteous." But we are surrounded with need and misery and sorrow. We are not to be self-occupied with a lively sense of our own trials, and dull about others. We know others brought into the same relationship of grace suffering severely in one way or another. Am I not to ask of God as heartily as for myself, and to act as becomes a brother in Christ?

But bold confidence in God practically according to His love is for each and all. Accordingly we learn to distrust our own will, and ask only what we know is according to His. And with what result? "He heareth us." Privileged, yea pressed, with confidence to ask of Him who loves and knows all, we are taught to count on His answer of grace. And if we know [it is knowledge, not objective but inward and conscious] that He hears us, whatever we ask we know [it is here the same inward knowledge] that we have the petitions which we have asked of Him. What could so much embolden the believer? It may not be our thought, but His answer in a wiser, deeper and more intimate way.

All is founded on the love of God, who gave Christ for us as sinners and to us as saints, with the Holy Spirit to make it good in our hearts and our ways. But if God encourages us to ask with boldness, we are constantly exposed to miss asking according to His will unless we grow in the knowledge of His word. Here lies the practical value of cultivating a deeper spiritual understanding of the Scriptures. The word of God He magnifies above all His name; so did the Lord and the apostles; and so should we. What a wretched return for His love, and the abundance of truth in Scripture, and the gift to us of the Spirit who inspired its writers, to look for little else than personal salvation, and consign ourselves to spiritual starvation, blind to revealed riches of grace without end!

In vers. 16, 17 the apostle touches on the delicate case where we may or may not do well to ask of God. “If anyone see his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask. and He will give him life for those that sin not unto death: there is sin unto death; not for that do I say that he should request. Every unrighteousness is sin; and there is sin not unto death.”

This passage often raises difficulties, because of preconceptions imported into it by such as forget the moral government that ever holds good for believers. It is the question discussed in the book of Job, where his three friends failed so conspicuously. The New Testament sets it out plainly: see, among others, John 15:1-10, 1 Cor. 11:27-32, Heb. 12:5-11, and 1 Peter 1:17. It is so here. It is no question of the second death, but of a saint cut off in this world for a sin of such a character, or in such circumstances, that God chastises it by death. It might be, as we see of old, the removal of saints

previously in high honour, as Moses and Aaron who greatly displeased Jehovah in Kadesh (Num. 20), or its immediate execution, as on Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). But the principle is explained by the apostle to the Corinthian saints, many of whom not only were old and infirm, but a good many had fallen asleep. “But if we discerned ourselves, we should not be judged [as all these were judged in varying degrees]. But when judged, we are chastened by the Lord that we should not be condemned with the world.” This then was sinning unto death, the Lord’s chastening of erring saints, expressly that they should not be condemned to the second death as the world is.

Hence it would have been quite a mistake of the Lord’s mind to pray that a brother should have his life prolonged, when he had so sinned that the Lord meant him to die as a chastisement. The world, which does nothing but sin and refuse the Saviour, is reserved for that awful second death, the everlasting judgment. To bring this into these verses is nothing but confusion to the spiritual understanding. But in another way they mark the gracious way in which God deigns to keep our boldness unbroken and free, only guarding us from a mistake to which otherwise we were liable.

A lie is a great sin, particularly in a Christian. But it has too often been since early days without entailing death. The Spirit first given, and the great grace in all, and the marked power which prevailed gave a lie in that day its special evil in God’s sight. The hypocrisy and deliberate agreement of the pair too, each denying Peter’s solemn charge to each, so aggravated the case as to make it a marked sin unto death. For it was a lie made the more intolerable by the wondrous blessing which God was just

giving in honour of His Son. How odious then in particular to pretend to a degree of devotedness that was utterly false! And so it was at Corinth: they were profaning the Lord's Supper besides by their misconduct.

This recalls a striking case that occurred years ago within my own knowledge. A brother who appeared to be in strong bodily health was suddenly laid aside; and I went to see him. As a medical man, he was a better judge probably than others. But he calmly told me, not without gravity and feeling, that he was about to die. There was no appearance of disease, nor could he say what it was; but he was quite sure his last on earth was come, and he added: "I have sinned a sin unto death," thereon disclosing to me what it was. He had no wish to live, neither praying nor asking me to pray for it. He bowed to the Lord's chastening, only grieved that his sin called for it, and quite happy at departing to be with Him. And he did fall asleep. He owned the Lord's righteous hand, and died without a cloud as to his acceptance.

This is a solemn way of the Lord, no doubt; but there is no reason for confining it to any particular age.

What then is the great difference? Not the enormity of the sin, but that the sin is committed under such circumstances as to make it egregious in the eye of God; and it just becomes a question for spiritual intelligence either in the man (the subject) himself who does not wish himself prayed for, with no desire to live whatever. In the case I mentioned he knew it was wrong to pray for him. I do not recollect any prayer made for him: indeed he died quickly. In ordinary cases it is the very

thing we are called to do. Our affections go out towards a person who is ill. We love to think of them being here with us a little longer. We delight to know their Christian character, to hear of their faith tried in one way or another, and their patience under it; so that we need correction.

“There is sin unto death”: rather than “a sin.” “Every unrighteousness is sin.” Every act of inconsistency with our new relationship is sinful. We are now left here to do the will of God. But it is only when aggravated by special circumstances of affront to God in private or public that such an evil act becomes sin unto death. Ordinarily it is not so.

Vers. 18-21 form a conclusion worthy of the Epistle. In those early times, when some who at first seemed to run well proved their lack of faith and life by abandoning Christ for knowledge (γνῶσις) falsely so-called, and ended in hostility to the Father and the Son, the apostle takes his place with the believers whom grace enables to say, “we know” (οἴδαμεν). Theirs was inward knowledge, though first learnt from without. With those not, born of God it never became the inwrought consciousness of their spirit. But so it is with every child of God. They had neither value nor desire for that external knowledge which beguiles and enchants the natural man. They were simply Gnostics; and what is really a shame was their glory, fable and philosophy, which characterised not only the antichrists but early Fathers, such as Clemens of Alexandria and the like. But not so true disciples, who find in Christ, viewed either on the earth (or in the heavens where “the mystery” appears as in the Pauline Epistles) all the treasures once hidden of divine wisdom and knowledge. And in this

pursuit they have the Holy Spirit guiding them into all the truth, the old but ever new, and always fresh as no earthly knowledge can be; for he only receives of Christ's things and announces to us, as it is now in the written word.

"We know that every one that is begotten of God sinneth not, but the begotten of God keepeth himself, and the wicked one toucheth him not." Here it is the divinely wrought conscious knowledge for every individual which is of immediate and deep concern for the Christian's heart, that it be kept up bright in his soul. In form it is a general and abstract statement, and no more, however faith may enter in and apply it. There is a shade of difference in the expression of "begotten" in the first clause and the second, though they equally belong to the same person, the Christian. The first is the continued effect of being thus begotten, the second the simple fact without question of continuance. If sin was a slight matter to Gnostic eyes, ignored by them or accepted as an unpleasant necessity (for these men differed not a little among themselves), it was a grave thing to God's children as it is to God. And it was alike a comfort and an admonition to be solemnly told that being begotten of God he does not sin, and the wicked one does not touch him. For God's word is living and energetic, unlike every other word; and the Holy Spirit abides in each Christian to give it power. Communion and walk, service and worship, fill up the life here below.

"We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the wicked one (or, wickedness)." There is nothing indefinite here, no toning down of the absolute contrast firmly and unhesitatingly drawn between ourselves, as the family of God on the one hand, and the whole world

on the other in its awful subjection to the wicked one. With the same inward consciousness the Christians knew that their new being had its source in God Himself, and that the whole world lay in the power of the wicked one. What more distinct on both sides? God the source of all on the one; subjection to Satan as complete on the other. It is not the church, opposed to and by Jews and Gentiles; but “we are of God” in our own consciousness, and the whole world unconsciously under the wicked one’s thraldom, as we too well know. This belongs to the new life to realise, appropriating by faith the known blessings to ourselves as is God’s will.

“And we know that the Son of God came and hath given us understanding that we should know the true one, and we are in the true one, in His Son Jesus Christ. This [or, He] is the true God, and life eternal.” The consciously known object of faith, as already come, is as momentous as the new nature, and its divine source; and here it is declared to be ours fully. We have here the same inward knowledge as before; “we know that the Son of God came,” in clear contrast with the Jews who look for another to come wholly inferior in every respect; and with the Gentiles, who not knowing God and worshipping demons are still more ignorant, if this may be said. But He, the Son of God, who gave being to all things, did in infinite love become man, to give not only life eternal to us but Himself in atoning death for our sins, as is testified elsewhere.

“‘Twas great to speak a world from nought,

‘Twas greater to redeem.”

But here it is said that He came to give us understanding to know the true One, the true God. For

He alone was capable of being the perfect image of the invisible God in a world of darkness and shame and shadows, with invisible powers of evil behind them to give colour to falsehood and blind men against the truth. His is no idea so dear to deceivers, but a real divine person, life eternal as a living fact, on which is based the deep and high and holy truth which is known in Christ, of whom the church is the corporate and responsible witness-falling even then, and how much more since. But there is a resource for faith in the darkest day, and this Epistle has a large part in pointing it out more clearly and fully than ever, with divine authority in Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and unto the ages, to the individual believer as in Himself.

Here this unchanging privilege is briefly but powerfully expressed: “And we are in the true One, in His Son Jesus Christ.” Thus it is explained that the manner for us to be in the unfailing security of the true God is by being in His Son; and this we know from His own words in John 14:20: “In that day ye shall know that I am in my Father and ye in me and I in you” — not only to be in Him, but to know this and all else here stated. “That day” is now this day. Now could more be done than to give us divine nature in Christ, and give us to abide in God by His Spirit abiding in us? and it is all the more striking, because those who go on, content or not content with worldly Christendom, never seem to have even the notion that these wondrous privileges are meant for every child of God to realise and live. How full of meaning and blessedness are the closing words of this paragraph! “This [Jesus Christ His Son] is the true God and life eternal.” He, of whom we are and in whom we are, is the true One, as against all false gods, or the

falsehood of not having God; but as a fact He is unknown save in His Son Jesus Christ, for through Him only will He be known, who gave up all to accomplish it and fit us, through His nature given, to be in Him. He is the true God; and He is also eternal life, without which, given to us, we could know neither the Father nor Him whom He sent. In Christ risen we have the full character of that life for our souls now; in our resurrection or change at His coming we shall have it for our bodies.

Along with the truth and the grace thus impressively presented is a short and solemn warning: “Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.” Every object outside Christ, that man’s heart sets up and cleaves to, Satan makes into an idol. They may not be for the present gold or silver, or stone or wood, but of a subtler nature. Yet the day hastens when the mass of the Jews, little as they deem it possible, will return to their old sin; and so will Christendom, even where they have boasted of their Protestantism, and of their invincible hatred of Romish idolatry. They will even amalgamate in the coming apostasy, and as both will adore the Man of Sin, the Antichrist when he sits down in the temple of God showing himself as God, so be hurled to perdition with his great political ally the Roman Beast of that day. The Lord is at hand.

Address 19 - 2 John 1-13

The Second Epistle Of John

“The elder to in elect lady* and her children, whom I love in truth, and not I only but also all who have known the truth, for the truth’s sake, which abideth in us, and it shall be with us for ever. Grace shall be with you, mercy, peace, from God [the] Father and from Jesus Christ the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

“I rejoiced exceedingly that I have found of thy children walking in truth even as we received commandment from the Father. And now I beseech thee, lady, not as writing to thee a new commandment but that which we had from [the] beginning that we should love one another. And this is love that we should walk according to his commandments. This is the commandment even as ye heard from [the] beginning that ye should walk in it. Because many misleaders went forth into the world, they that confess not Jesus Christ coming in flesh. This is the misleader and the antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we may not lose what we wrought but receive full reward. Every one that goeth onward and abideth not in the doctrine of the Christ hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine, he hath both the Father and the Son. If any one cometh to you and bringeth not this doctrine, receive him not at home and greet him not; for he that greeteth him partaketh in his wicked works.

“Having many things to write to you, I would not with paper and ink; but I hope to come unto you and to speak mouth unto mouth that our joy may be made full. The children of thine elect sister greet thee.”20 It ought to strike any careful reader of Scripture as remarkable,

that we have an apostolic epistle avowedly addressed to a lady and her children. Considering the reserve of the apostles and the unusual character of such an address, surely we ought to inquire why the Holy Spirit here departs from His ordinary way, and the more so as the first Epistle of John is so expressly general and large; for it is addressed, if to any, to the whole family of God. It has no local association, nothing personal in the usual sense of what is individual, that is to say, belonging to specified persons. 1 John is so open as to take in every member of God's family wherever they may be, more so than any other save perhaps the Epistle of Jude. Yet the same John, and it would seem at a subsequent time, was led by the Holy Spirit to address one individual, and this not a man but a woman and her children too. Later still he writes to a man in his Third Epistle, and we may readily see the propriety both of this and of the topic there handled for his good and ours. His name is given, but in the Second Epistle before us the lady is addressed as such without indicating her name, wherein we may perceive a delicate suitableness. Although no doubt the lady's need was met, nevertheless she was spared needless pain and publicity, whilst an Epistle inspired and of the utmost value was meant for saints then and at all times.

At any rate these are facts, and we are entitled to form a judgment which none need accept who are not convinced that the explanation fairly approves itself to their intelligence. We have a brief letter, but one of the most solemn Epistles in the New Testament, more fundamental than the very interesting and instructive one addressed to Gaius afterwards. Yet this was written to a lady and included her children. Reasons therefore of

permanent and urgent importance must have outweighed ordinary considerations for the Holy Spirit through the apostle to send such a peculiarly serious Epistle to the elect lady and her children; and so we cannot but discern from its contents. For they entirely corroborate this fact, that the Holy Spirit went out of His ordinary path, and here for reasons of commanding moment addresses a lady and her children, making them immediately and in the highest degree responsible to act on the truth conveyed in this letter.

A true Christ or a false one was in question. In all the Bible what is more important than that, especially since the manifestation of the Christ? Before He appeared it was the enemy's aim to occupy the minds of believers with present and subordinate objects. But now the true Christ was presented according to promise, now the Son of God was attested with irrefragable testimony and in personal grace and truth, and has given understanding that we should know Him that is true, Himself too declared to be "the true God and life eternal." It was a bold step of Satan who knew this well, to engage professing Christians to falsify the truth about Christ, to make an idol against Christ, as of old he made idols against Jehovah, when He dealt with Israel after the flesh under law. For one so subtle it became, now that the Son of God had come in grace and truth, a congenial enterprise to decry the truth as but elementary, and to present a wholly false Christ, so as to pollute the source of all blessing, and destroy souls misled to the wrong Christ instead of the One not only true but the truth.

This is exactly what Satan was there and then attempting by the many antichrists, and it is what accounts for the extraordinary appeal of the Holy Spirit

in this Epistle. “The elder,” says the apostle. Thus does he descend from the first place in the church of God, which he was fully entitled to fill, but love instinctively takes the more excellent way, and here the Holy Spirit inspired it for the special need. So the apostle Paul did now and then; and so did our apostle in all his Epistles. It is thus we have God teaching us even by the smallest change in scripture, by everything said and by everything not said, something more perfectly than in any other way. Hence we may not doubt that there was a particular wise and worthy reason why the apostle John should introduce himself under the name of “elder,” rather than apostle, both to the elect lady and to the beloved Gaius.

Yet observe another point. He does not say to the well-beloved lady. Some Christians are fond of warm expressions to individuals without any sufficient occasion for them. It is not a good habit, particularly where a lady is in the case. There is no indiscretion in so writing to a brother. When one thinks of what men and women are, one apprehends the wisdom of God that “the elder,” old as he was, avoids these terms to the lady, and sets a good example to others in this respect. Had he ever so holily done otherwise, many would have imitated him. But, as it stands, all was wisely ordered; and it is well for us to profit by what we read here.

“The elder to an elect lady.” He is careful to write with respect but without adulation. There is no commending of himself, no self-seeking. He might be considered cold rather than erring on the score of strong expressions. “The elder to an elect lady.” Her position was not slighted, but what both valued was the title of divine grace, not what she owed to providence. She was elect

of God, one chosen in Christ by and for God Himself. What consideration is nearer to the heart purified by faith? The apostle was led to use the term which owned the sovereign action of God. God hid chosen her out of all her natural associations, and the apostle delights to recognise that she was brought even on earth into new and divine ones. How blessed to know that so it is still for every true Christian! But even in these introductory words we may notice how true each Epistle is to God's object in it. The aim here is to guard the elect lady and her children from the seductive snares of an antichrist. The aim in the Epistle to Gaius is to encourage him in the face of obstacles to persevere in the path of grace as he had begun. "Elect" brought God before the lady, as "The beloved" cheered Gaius not to mind the frowns of Diotrephes. People often grow weary in well-doing when they find themselves deceived by those whom they might have lovingly served, and ruffled a little by the criticism of such as habitually oppose without any serious effort to help in difficulties. These enigmas Christ enables us to solve.

"The elder to an elect lady and her children." Who can doubt in ordinary circumstances that, when the apostle John saw these children, he accosted them affectionately, and that they knew his tenderness of feeling for them. But he was writing on a very solemn subject, in presence of which a lady and her children of themselves dwindle into insignificance, were it not for the Lord's name, and the title grace had given. Here the apostle puts before them in the most forcible manner their obligation to care and jealousy for the glory of Christ. It admitted of no compromise. Satan's undermining of the truth of Christ was a fact going on

then. They were in danger; the apostle knew it, and writes to put them on their guard. Everything usual became subordinate to God's honour in the case. It is now a question of a real Christ, and John has before him their danger of unwittingly slighting Christ's glory. Therefore his words are comparatively few, plain and decided. He soon reaches the point, and he speaks in a manner that ought never to be misunderstood by any Christian. He does, however, assure them of his love in truth; for this failed wherever Christ was lost. "Whom I love in truth." Oh how weighty and searching! It was not because of personal qualities that he loved. He may have seen ever so much sweetness in them; but of this he says nothing, only of "love in truth." This goes beyond loving "in the truth"; he loved "in truth." No doubt they had the truth. While of course there never can be truth without the truth, in truth means truly.

The apostle felt it of importance, in the midst of hollowness through waning of the truth, to assure them of divine reality in his love. They were souls whom God had brought to Himself through the truth; "And not I only but also all who have known the truth." What a wonderful thing it is to count on the love that is of God in such a world of vain show as this! John can warrant every Christian's love without any modification. As having Christ their life, he can assuredly count that every Christian loved this elect lady and her children, as he himself did. His apostolic authority in no way hindered his loving these children with their mother — They were God's children, and not merely hers, whom he says "I love in truth;" and he could say further that not he only loved them but also all those who have known the truth. Are not these the links to rivet and

value, dear brethren? The apostle then could count upon all those that knew the truth loving the lady and her children in truth. It could not be without life in Christ, and the Spirit given to us after redemption to carry it out in the face of all obstacles. Seen in the fullest perfection in Christ, it is reproduced in the Christian.

“For the truth’s sake, which abideth in us, and it shall be with us for ever.” This is a very striking way of speaking of the truth. The apostle here personifies the truth as Paul did the gospel in Phil. 1. The apostle was a minister of the church as well as of the gospel, and although he wrote of the church as none ever did, nevertheless he preached the gospel too as no other ever preached. He delighted in the glad tidings of God’s grace and of Christ’s glory. He never set either against the truth of the church. On the contrary, he ministered both in the depth of grace and in the height of glory. He felt as the apostle John here expresses it “for the truth’s sake which abideth in us, and it shall be with us for ever.” Neither would have said this for any Christian institution however significant. An institution has its place which none can despise or overlook but to their real loss; but what is it compared to “the truth”? The institution is only for a little, and might terminate for ever in a moment. But the truth! Why, it abideth in us, and it shall be with us for ever. It is meant to have growing power over the heart all the time we are here below; and we shall only have it perfectly to enjoy in heaven and through eternity.

Then follows his suited salutation, “Grace be with you, mercy, peace:” “Grace,” the fountain of divine love toward sinners; “peace,” the fruit of Christ’s work for believers, both generally wished to the saints; “mercy”

meeting individual need in weakness and trial. So here it is for the elect lady and her children. We can see its suitableness here, for the very writing to her and them implies it. Whenever we think of ourselves individually, the need of mercy from God is felt. When we speak about the church and her privileges and the height of glory to which she is destined in and with Christ, the need is swallowed up in the glory of God's grace. But the individual has wants still calling for "mercy" in evident ways.

Grace and peace are for the church as a whole while here below. "Grace shall be with you, mercy, peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ the Son of the Father," must have been all the more cheering to the lady and her children, as it took the form of an assurance rather than a wish or prayer. "The Son of the Father" is also said here only. Why? The denial of His glory by the enemy was answered by an unusual assertion of it. The Spirit of God waves the bright banner in Satan's face for the strengthening of this Christian family summoned to stand loyally. "The Son of the Father!" What a glorious title! Christians are often called sons and children: none but our Lord is called "the Son of the Father." All is assured to them in truth and love. He alone secures. Without Him we never could have been brought out of darkness into the light of God. To Him we are indebted for the knowledge of the Father and of Himself. He was the fulness of truth and love, and has by His grace and work made us to know, possess and enjoy it all in our souls.

"I rejoice greatly," he continues, "that I have found of thy children." He does not say thy children, and why? Because there may have been one or more of them who

not yet had confessed the Saviour and Lord. Possibly one or more might have slipped under the evil influence of the misleaders. He, for some sufficient reason, only goes so far as to say “of thy children walking in truth.” This is the grand point, because of a necessary limitation even then, not merely knowing the truth but “walking in truth,” or as the same apostle says in the Gospel, “he that doeth the truth” (John 3:21). But he proceeds, “According (or, even) as we received a commandment from the Father.” As some Christians are apt to think that a commandment must necessarily be legal, it is well they should be disabused of the mistake. No one speaks more of commandments than our Lord, and this too in the Gospel of John, who repeats the same word frequently in these Epistles, wherein the law is completely left behind and never alluded to. There the Son of God shines as nowhere else; yet the Son of God loved to speak of commandments both for Himself and for us on principles wholly distinct from the law, as in John 10:18, John 12:49, John 13:34, John 14:15, 21, 31, John 15:10.

And why so? Because He had taken the place of man, that is, of entire dependence and even obedience. Albeit the Son of the Father, He emptied Himself, taking a bondman’s form as He took His place in the likeness of men; and being found in figure as a man He humbled Himself, “becoming obedient unto death, even death of the cross.” It was not that He gave up or could give up Deity, but He renounced the glory proper to His personal dignity in order to vindicate God and bless man; and in order to accomplish this work, He as the perfect servant, He a dependent man, received everything from God His Father. Consequently, as is said

of Him in Ps. 40 “Mine ears hast Thou opened” (or, dug) in becoming incarnate. More than this, His ear was open daily, morning by morning, as in Isa. 50, He listened to what His Father had to say. Finally, as the true Hebrew servant, Ex. 21, instead of going out free, He abides servant for ever, of which the ear bored before the judges was the sign, to the Lord the still deeper sign of death. Such was He alone. But we, once lost sinners, by faith have received the life of Christ, as well as the anointing of the Holy Spirit; we love His commandments, as He loved His Father’s; and we are thus meant to show forth His excellencies. For what else are we left here? The Lord Jesus always hung upon the commandment of His Father. In Him the love and the obedience were absolutely perfect; and we follow Him, but Oh how unequal are our steps!

The Lord Jesus learnt obedience by the things that He suffered. We learn to obey, judging our reluctance; and the Holy Spirit makes it liberty through the grace of Christ. He learnt obedience because, as God, it was quite a new thing to Him. We have to learn it because we are naturally disobedient, which is quite another thing. By grace we love the word, and honour the God that loves us with all our hearts. Now we thankfully receive a commandment of the Father. Is there anything good that is not based upon divine authority? And the blotting out of divine authority would be an unutterable loss. No doubt there is more than authority, there is divine love; but while love was ever in God and manifested to us when godless and evil, we when converted always begin with divine authority and submissiveness of heart, horrified at our old rebellious spirit. In conversion a man truly submits to God for the

first time in his life; and this, as God wills, in bowing to the Lord Jesus.

“And now I beseech thee, lady, not as writing to thee a new commandment, but that which we had from the beginning, that we should love one another” (ver. 5). On this, one may say the less because we have had it so much before us already. Still it is always good to remind ourselves, not only of its being a great characteristic of the new nature and of divine teaching, but of its inseparableness from obedience, an equal characteristic of being begotten of God, as we have it laid down in ver. 6: “And this is love that we should walk according to His commandments.” It is only the wicked self-will of fallen man that he seeks to sever. Not only are both God’s commandments, or Christ’s as is true also, but they are identified in these striking words so far that they are inseparable from the life we have in Christ. And again in the rest of the verse all are bound together in what Christ enjoined on His disciples. “This is the commandment even as ye heard from [the] beginning that ye should walk in it.” These words “heard from the beginning” are carefully annexed; and the reason is to remind all then, as now that the injunction was from the time that Christ was manifested here.

Adam was the beginning of the human race on earth. But Christ is the beginning for the Christian: with Christ came grace and truth, and the spring of Christian obedience and mutual love. Before Christ came and was manifested here below, how could anyone know the truth about Him? The faithful surely looked for His coming for blessing to man and the earth; but how little was definite to their faith? All distinctness was reserved for the future. Worldly minds thought of Him for their

own earthly and human aspirations; but those born of God had more or less the prospect of faith only in the revelation of God. Still before Christ came even the saints could not but be more or less vague in their anticipations. But when the Son of God came manifested in flesh as foretold, grace and truth came in Him; and the light judged everything inconsistent with God's nature, and the truth manifested every one and thing as it really is. "This is the commandment, even as ye heard from [the] beginning, that ye should walk in it."

But the worst evils pressed now on all sides. Satan, not content with corrupting, was now denying the truth by those who once professed it. Hence the urgent call to assert it plainly and act faithfully more than ever. "Because many misleaders went forth" (not exactly "entered," as in the Rec. Text and the A.V.) "into the world." They had once been in the church, and they went forth to pursue their unhallowed work of defying God's word and denying the Son. "Entered the world" in no way expresses the fact, nor has it any just sense. They left the Christian confessors when duped by Satan to deny the truth of Christ. They bear the awful character of misleaders "that confess not Jesus Christ coming in flesh." "This is the misleader and the antichrist." In the Epistle of Jude the deadly evil was from such being within, though they set themselves up apart there; but the Epistles of John contemplate a later day, "a last hour," when they went out to resist as open antagonists. One that enters the church of God, and takes his part for a while in it as a Christian, goes out a great deal worse than when he, however bad, came in. He now hates the truth, and those who cleave to it. It

becomes his active business to mislead the saints, defame the truth, and deny Christ.

Here, we learn, went out into the world "those that confess not Jesus Christ coming in flesh." Christ's coming is now expressed in the abstract present, rather than as the perfect of 1 John 4:2 (the present result of a past action). This makes no difference practically for the truth, which in both cases is the confession of His person thus qualified. Accordingly, as there so here, to leave out the words "that is" gives the force better than in the Authorised and the Revised Versions. The truth of His person these misleaders did not believe. They do not confess Him. Not that they denied necessarily the historical fact of His birth, but they did not confess Christ's person coming or come in flesh. For the deep and wondrous truth is that He who was the Son of God from all eternity should so come. Such is the confession of all who have life and are anointed by the Spirit of God. He might have come as an angel or in any other way possible, but for God's will and glory He was pleased to come in flesh. This the misleaders opposed. It is the confession of Him whose divine and human natures united in one person. It is not all that Christianity means, but it is its basis without which redemption is impossible. For one not to confess Jesus thus come is to be the misleader and the antichrist.

"Look to yourselves that we may not lose what we wrought, but may receive full reward," or wages (ver. 8). It is not only an earnest caution but an appeal to love thoroughly in our apostle's manner as in 1 John 2:28. Not seeing this, old copyists and modern editors and translators lost its point, and reduced it to a common-place. The Authorised Version, after the commonly

received text, has excellent support, and yields an eminently touching reference. “Look to yourselves that we,” not ye, “may not lose,” etc. It is an affecting draught on their love. So 1 John 2:28 appealed to all God’s family, as here the apostle to an elect lady and her children.

“Whosoever transgresseth” does not express the sense the law has nothing to do with it, therefore the word “transgress” is a bad one. It should be, “Everyone that goes onward,” or “beyond” the truth of Christ. It is a further blow at those enamoured of progress, as if revealed truth could be like a human science susceptible of development. On the contrary, he who is not content with the truth which God has given in Christ, who. therefore goes beyond that truth, really abandons and loses the truth for phantoms of man’s mind. “Everyone that goeth forward and abideth not in the doctrine of the Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine, he hath both the Father and the Son.” Whatever may be the pretensions to higher light or truth, whatever may be his confidence in these new-fangled notions, he who goes forward out of the inspired word into ideas of his own head or imaginations of others “hath not God.” He is out of all present relationship with God even of the most distant sort. Whereas “he that abideth in the doctrine [of the Christ] he hath both the Father and the Son” — the highest, deepest, and most intimate revelation of the Godhead.

“If any one cometh to you and bringeth not this doctrine, receive him not at home and greet him not; for he that greeteth him partaketh in his evil works.” Now here is one of the most distressing duties that ever was or can be laid on a Christian; and it is laid on the lady and her

children peremptorily. Take this illustration. Many years ago a dear friend of mine fell into trouble through being in a Christian assembly which evaded judging similar error. This sister came to live where the assembly did judge the evil thoroughly; but she was slow to allow her responsibility as to it, pleading that she was only a woman, and what could she say or do? Such excuses may sound fair and fine; women might thus act laudably in matters wherein they are not so reserved as they might be. Who expected or hoped to see the evil to be duly judged on that ground? I reminded this “elect lady” of 2 John. This silenced her, for she was intelligent and experienced as well as God-fearing. The issue was that she stood convinced of having shirked her bounden duty.

Where the doctrine of Christ is at stake, one must not hesitate: compromise is treason to the Lord; and if we are not true to Christ, we shall never be true to anything that God has revealed to us. The honour of God is centred in Him through whom grace and truth came to us. Therefore if one come, not bringing this doctrine, even had he been once the dearest Christian friend on earth, she and her children were under the most solemn obligation to ignore him for Christ’s sake. Here lies the present call of God. If he does not bring the doctrine of Christ, close the door, have nothing to do with an antichrist. To those who do not value Christ’s name and word it must seem outrageous, especially in these liberal days, where man is all and Christ is little or nothing; and even professing Christians are so ready to say nothing about it. “What a pity to disturb unity by these questions! Is it not their chief duty to hold together and avoid scattering which is the shocking evil? Besides, he is such a nice and dear brother, who may see fit to give

up his little notion if you do not fan it into a flame." These are the neutrals, more dangerous than even the beguiled misleaders.

No, my brethren, we owe all through grace to the Son of God and the Father who sent and gave Him. If there be anything to which we are called as Christians to be resolute and unbending at all cost, it is where the glory and the truth of Christ is undermined and overthrown.

The closing verses (12 and 13) are a fine testimony to the holy but hearty love which bound the early saints together, as we see here between the aged apostle and this Christian household. "Having many things to write to you, I would not with paper and ink; for I hope to come unto you, and to speak mouth to mouth that our joy may be made full. The children of thine elect sister greet thee."

We can gather, alike from his hope of his coming and from his greeting, how fully the apostle counted that those addressed would lay to heart and carry out without fall his exclusion of one false to Christ and going about to ensnare others into his wicked works. There was no threat of consequences beyond the warning that compromise in such a case is to have fellowship with the evil-doer. Nor is there any effort to effect compliance with the injunction by appeals to his own place, or to their intimate friendship hitherto. It all depends on what grace has made us feel to be due to Christ. For even the youngest may be unwavering, when others who for the time ought to feel far more deeply have tampered with little evils, and thus grown insensible to the infinite worth of Christ, playing the amiable where the sternest decision is due to His name. For it is really a question

between the Son and Satan. How he looked for fidelity to Christ is made very plain, in that when he comes unto them, he speaks of their joy being made full. This he could not hope for if he stood in doubt of their fidelity.

But it may be well to add here that nothing can be less of the Spirit of God than to apply to minor differences of a disciplinary sort the rigour which is an absolute duty where it is a question of the true Christ or a false. Such a mistake is turned by the great enemy to the scattering of those whom Christ died to gather together in one. Even doctrine in general, unless fundamental, is not a Scriptural ground for so extreme a course. Still less is it due to a difference about the institutions of Christianity, whether baptism or the Lord's Supper. But the doctrine of the Christ does claim the allegiance of every saint; and he who undermines His person is to be discarded not only publicly but from private recognition at all cost.

20 There have existed from post-apostolic times till our day all sorts of differing views as to this address: Some for Eclecta as a proper name; others for Kyria; a third class for "the church" in more senses than one adumbrated thereby, to say nothing of the Virgin Mary. It appears to me that it was a living sister in Christ to whom the Holy Spirit would have the apostle write without giving her name; and that her "elect sister" in the last ver. (13) strongly confirms this, as it explodes the notion of "the church," which pleased Jerome (Ep. 123 ad Ageruchiam), the Schol. i., in Matthaei and Cassiodorus; and among moderns, Calovius, Hammond, Michaelis, etc. I am disposed even to think that the more literal rendering was really intended "to an elect lady," etc., though I shrank from acting on what seems not to have occurred to any one else.

Address 20 - 3 John 1-14

The Third Epistle Of John

“The elder to the beloved Gaius [or, Caius] whom I love in truth. Beloved, I desire that in all things thou shouldest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. For I rejoiced exceedingly when brethren came and bore witness to thy truth, even as thou walkest in truth. I have no greater joy than these things, that I hear of my children walking in the truth. Beloved, thou doest a faithful thing whatsoever thou mayest do unto the brethren and this strangers who bore witness to thy love before the church [or, assembly] in setting forward whom on their journey worthily of God thou wilt do well for they went forth for the name’s sake, taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive [or, welcome] such, that we may be fellow-workers with the truth. I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes that loveth pre-eminence among them receiveth us not. For this reason if I come, I will bring to remembrance his works which he doeth, babbling against us with wicked words; and not content with these things, neither himself receiveth the brethren, and those who would he hindereth and casteth out of the church. Beloved, imitate not the evil but the good. The good-doer is of God; the evil-doer hath not seen God. Demetrius hath been witnessed to by all, and by the truth itself; and we also bear witness, and thou knowest that our witness is true.

“Many things I had to write to thee, but with ink and pen I will not write to thee; but I hope soon to see thee,

and we will speak mouth unto mouth. Peace [be] to thee. The friends greet thee. Greet the friends by name."

It is difficult to conceive an epistle which has stronger points of contrast with John's Second one than that which now comes before us. Nevertheless they have one common root, and that fruit which it produces only takes so different a colour because of the different wants of Christians. In Christ is no real discordance but infinite adaptability to all our needs. Nevertheless their objects strikingly differ. The Second Epistle conveys the most solemn warning, and what gives it both special point and general application is the fact of being addressed not even to a bishop or overseer, nor to men like Timothy and Titus, who in a limited space and for a particular reason represented the apostle to an extent beyond those local charges, but to an unnamed Christian woman. An elect lady, and even her children, are all embraced and summoned to discharge the duty laid upon them. Nor was it of course a public or ecclesiastical act, but individual loyalty to Christ so stringent that they were forbidden to receive the false teacher into the house, or even to salute him in the ordinary way, being an antichrist.

The Third Epistle is the outgoing of the strongest Christian affection, being addressed to a Christian man already well known for his love, especially in caring for those engaged in the Lord's work. His heart received and went with them in their service to further the work and themselves according to all that lay in his power. Therefore the keyword of the Third Epistle is "receive," as the keyword of the Second is "receive not." This may seem to the natural man arbitrary and inconsistent. But what of him? Natural man receiveth not the things of the

Spirit of God, for they are folly to him (1 Cor. 11:14). Here on the contrary the direction is wholly opposite: there is really, perfect harmony; and what makes harmony is Christ. Souls there were and are who identify themselves with the truth of Christ here below; and the word in the Third Epistle is “Receive them.” It is enough that they bring the doctrine of the Christ, always taking for granted that their ways are according to Christ. No question is raised of ministerial position. The church in those days had not yet assumed the title to interfere with the rights of its Head. The free action of the Holy Spirit which the apostles upheld in the earliest days was honoured still. The measure and character of gift in those days, when parochial limits had not yet been invented, might differ much. One preacher might be dull to see the bearing of Christ in every part of the Bible, another might be ready and bright. Others again might be disposed to sentimentality and feeling though not really Christian, any more than addiction to dialectics or erudition. Faith and love are very different things, and it was these that wrought in their self-denying and laborious service, which Gaius prized for the Lord’s sake.

The First Epistle rises by the Holy Spirit above personality, and binds together in faith and love all the saints in view of Christ’s person, and in fellowship with the Father and His Son, the Lord Jesus. No Epistle more thoroughly and comprehensively takes in the whole family of God; none has less to do with a particular time or place. But the Second is addressed to an elect lady and her children, as the Third is to the beloved Gaius: so far in pointed contrast with the First, yet both the Second and the Third are but special applications of the

selfsame truth and love in Christ made known in the First.

In the Third it is divinely formed largeness of heart. “Love in truth” is the governing note here as in all. Gaius refuses either to be cajoled or to be frightened out of what is due to Christ. Authority, actual or assumed, was at work to criticise truth and love. One of narrow heart lifted himself up, it would appear in the assembly where Gaius was, who sought rule not according to Scripture but in his own way. Many have followed; no lack of succession in this line. The apostles and prophets did their work and departed, leaving their incontestably inspired testimony. But self-willed men are never wanting in any age.

We are given therefore invaluable instruction, what we should think of such men, and how to bear ourselves toward them. It is one of the needed lessons of this Epistle not to mind them but pursue the path of Christ ourselves. The Lord does not fail in His own way to bring to remembrance unloving work and babbling words, and to make manifest in due censure the selfish emptiness which slights apostolic authority, opposes active testimony of the gospel, and casts out of the assembly on false pretences those who withstand such ways. We do well not to be overmuch occupied with impropriety, nor to be diverted from the true path of devotedness to Christ; nor ought we to fear the big words habitual with men who, instead of following Christ, seek to exalt themselves and their party. Cleaving to Christ is the only true way of deliverance from self. There is the proud way of despising a Diotrephes, without even pity for his soul; yet Christ is not with such a feeling, but warns him.

The great principle, whether for the church or the Christian, is obedience, especially when we can say little of power. Subjection to the word is of the Lord; and is there anything humbler and also firmer than that? It gives alike courage and lowliness, with entire dependence on Him in whom we believe, whose ears are attentive, and who will vindicate His own word. Principle is indispensable, but it is not all. Principle alone never made a believer lowly or loving. It is often taken up in a dry, hard, and legal may. But we can never dispense with a living Christ; and He is accessible and active to all who wait on Him, however valuable truth may be, and God entitles us to have all the resources of Christ in His love, as being in His hand and the Father's.

"The elder to the beloved Gaius." Here he lets out his heart as he does not to the lady. There is divine wisdom in the language of Scripture. Too often unctuous expressions have led to folly if not to sin. "An elect lady" reminds us of God, if to Gaius affection could safely flow out in the simplest way. He was thus led to the right word, "elect." If God had chosen the lady, He chose her not to yield but to resist the devil, who would then flee. The way in which this lady was tried was very difficult for her. A lady instinctively shrinks from doing anything that seems unladylike. How shocking to refuse to receive, under her roof, a gentleman perhaps, and probably an old acquaintance. Not even to give him a common greeting! This to all who love not our Lord seems harsh indeed; yet it is exactly what the Spirit of God enjoins. How could it be otherwise when Christ, is fundamentally assailed, and we are called to be His good soldiers?

“An elect lady” is bound to Christ’s honour like all for whom He died and rose. No Christian can be absolved from this duty. At any rate, it is what seemed good to the Spirit of God in former days. The question is what is one doing and teaching now? He might have been the instrument of her conversion or that of her children, and it would go hard against her — a lady — not to notice this man. But circumstances were altered, now that he was an enemy of Christ instead of a true preacher of Christ. Perhaps the man secretly opposed. For we have to bear in mind that these deceivers are self-deceived, led too by Satan to think themselves better friends of Christ than real Christians, and their doctrine the right line of truth, supremely beautiful as well as new.

But in the Third it is quite another duty. Had we only the Second we might be in danger of becoming rigid, hard and suspicious. But the Third Epistle exhorts us whom we are to receive, and this with all our heart. If dangerous men go about and seek to enter, we must not forget true men earnest to spread the truth of Christ. The elect lady had to beware of wicked men however plausible; the brother is called to persevere in hearty love for the good and true. Sometimes such a brother is ruffled because of disappointment once or twice. He hates to be taken in; and such a case stumbles him, so that he is determined that it shall not occur again.

At any rate the apostle writes to encourage Gains in the path of love. It is not enough to begin well: the still greater aim is to grow in love, never weary in well-doing. Accordingly the apostle says of Gaius, “whom I love in truth.” This is the common ground of both Epistles; whatever be the difference in application and aim, loving in truth is an equally marked feature in each

of them. “Beloved, I desire that in all things thou shouldest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth” (ver. 2). How simple, large, and cordial!

There is no haste in broaching the matter; as indeed this is a beautiful feature in Scripture. There is gracious consideration of one another in general, unless grave danger claimed an immediate appeal, as we see in the Epistle to the Galatian saints. But as no such peril here existed, Gaius is assured of the personal interest that the apostle took in him. He wishes that in all things he may prosper. “Above all things” goes too far. Perhaps some have adopted the extravagant idea that no matter how ill our affairs go, or how bad the health, the only concern is that the soul should prosper. The inspired apostle does not favour such fanaticism. A brother may prosper or not in what he undertakes. His was true brotherly feeling; but he carefully gives the first place as a matter of course to the soul’s welfare. If this be safeguarded and real, we can as a general rule count on the Lord’s interest both in our undertakings or business, and in our bodily health. Our gracious God, if the soul prosper, has pleasure both in ourselves and in all our matters. The very hairs of our head are all numbered. If a sparrow does not fall to the ground without Him, if He thinks of the ravens and the lilies of the field, what a Father we have to do with for every day and in all things!

We know that if our earthly house be destroyed, we have a more glorious building from God, and if our outer man is consumed, yet the inward is renewed day by day. This is the highest and should be the nearest consideration. Still here was this good brother who had proved his kindness in caring for others, and especially those who

gave up all to serve the Lord Jesus; and the apostle wished him, prospering in soul, to prosper in all things, and to be in health, so as to be cheered and free and unimpeded.

Sometimes, that the soul may prosper, God withers up what we are too engrossed with; and if this suffice not, He disciplines with bodily sickness. And the Lord takes away the idol and smashes it to pieces. This is gracious of Him. Of course it may be painful, but our hearts go with what the Lord does to remove a snare and win back the soul to honour and enjoy Himself. Sometimes a zealous man is set aside in order that he may learn that God can carry on His work without him. He has been absorbed in reaching and preaching to others, and slipped into less vigilance as to his own soul's communion. The Lord in His goodness and love corrects, and a little sickness is turned to much good. But here, as Gaius was prospering in soul, the apostle wishes his prosperity in all things else and in his body too.

"For I rejoiced exceedingly when brethren came and bore witness to thy truth, even as thou walkest in truth" (ver. 3). Truth delighted the apostle's heart. Gaius was walking in truth. This indicated his soul's prospering. Kindness to the brethren, thoughtfulness about others, prospering in his affairs and in bodily health: what were they all to holding fast the truth — "thy truth," and his own walking in truth? And such was the witness that brethren bore to him; so that it was exceeding joy to the apostle. Gaius sought first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all else was added. His heart was not. set on his own things. There was no compromise of Christ, no making truth a secondary consideration, but he kept walking truthfully.

It was a matter of plain testimony on the part of others. “Brethren came and bore witness to thy truth [or, that is in thee].” Had it been Gaius talking about it, it might have been questionable; for who has ever found men whose love for the truth was unwavering and unstinted loud about their own fidelity or service? The more a man loves and values truth, the more he judges his own shortcoming in his service and his daily life.

“I have no greater joy than these things that I hear of my children walking in the truth” (ver. 4).

It is no longer the lady’s children or “the children of the elect sister.” Of “my children” we read here, those who were spiritually related to the apostle of whom Gaius was one, and on this account dear to the apostle. Gaius had not only begun well, but was going on well in face of evil. Still there was the need of cheering him on; and this comes out in a delicate form. “Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatever work thou mayest do toward the brethren and this strangers who witnessed to thy love before the church, in setting forward whom on their journey worthily of God thou wilt do well” (vers. 5, 6).

Benevolently or thoughtfully, generously or lovingly, would have been the words most Christian men might have used. With Gaius it was primarily a matter of faith before God. Faith always brings in God in one way, as love does in another. Faith bringing in the word of truth, as love is the energy of the divine nature in gracious affection.

In the last clause of ver. 5 the common text as presented by the A.V. is not only defective but contrary to sense. For it conveys the notion of two objects given, “to the brethren and to strangers.” The true text, as attested by

the best MSS., is “and this strangers.” Hence the point is that the love was shown in faith to the brethren, not as old friends but where they were strangers. And Scripture is express on the value that God attaches to love toward strangers, though here with the added tie of being brethren. God’s children are nearer to God than angels could be; and we may thus say that it ought to be more to us to entertain our brethren, and this strangers, than to entertain angels. Oh how far has superstition reversed the truth, and nature darkened the sense of our relationship to God!

Many saints are drawn out in love for labourers whom they know and admire, but they are reserved as to stranger brethren of whom they have not heard. The love of Gaius for the stranger brethren had the marked approval of the apostle. Before the church they “bore witness of thy love.” “Charity” has another meaning quite unknown to Scripture, wholly alien from the case before us, and beneath the divine affection here contemplated. No doubt its use in the English Version of 1. Cor. 13 elevates it not a little above conventionalism, but “love” is unequivocal save to the base. It is a good word of our mother tongue, whereas “charity” came in through the Latin. The Spirit of God uses a word which in a heathen’s mouth had a sensual force, gave it a blessed and holy direction, christened it and thus hallowed it for ever.

But the apostle would add rather than diminish the draught on love when he writes, “Whom if thou set forward on their journey worthily of God thou wilt do well.” Even if the love of Gaius had been abused, the apostle would not anticipate any halt. These brethren were going elsewhere, and the word is, “Whom if thou

set forward on their journey worthily of God." Its force is melted down by the enfeebled expression, "after a godly sort." Undeniably "after a godly sort" is much and excellent in itself; but it is always safer and more reverent to cleave to the actual words used by the Spirit of God. And nothing can be more intelligible than setting them forward, not after a man's thought of godliness, but "worthily of God." For God is love, and love is of God. It may be about a little thing here below; but it connects one's soul in faith and love with what is unseen and external, with God who blesses for all eternity.

Yet the apostle in suggesting it says no more than "thou wilt do well." It is simplicity as to Christ, this guarded language of the Holy Spirit, which avoids all approach to pressure or exaggeration, though the thing was near the heart of the apostle. One is reminded of something like it in Hebrews 13, where the apostle speaks of two sorts of sacrifices: "sacrifice of praise continually to God, that is, fruit of lips confessing His name"; "but to do good and communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." The first is of incomparable moment and value; but the lower form is of doing good and communicating here below, yet flowing from the same faith and love, "for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." The spiritual ones are the delight of God; those on the human side are well-pleasing to Him.

"For they went forth for the Name's sake, taking nothing of the Gentiles." Here is what especially endeared these labourers to the apostle. They kept themselves totally free from profiting by the resources of the world. Needy as they might be, they maintained the heavenly dignity of the gospel, and proved that they sought the best good of the Gentiles, not their own things. What more

degrades the gospel than to let its ministers or the church become beggars from the world? What so openly denies faith in the Lord's care for His work? And how refreshing to see a man above anxiety for himself in devotedness to the Lord! What knit the heart of Gaius to them was "that for the Name they went forth." They were not sent by man. The church has no authority for choosing, ordaining, or sending out the servants of the Lord. It is an unworthy and presumptuous mistake for the church, or for the servants, thus to usurp the place of Christ. Christ is the Head and the source and the sender of His gifts for ministry, and He only. Local charges were quite distinct.

The church however ought to take delight in acknowledging those whom the Lord sends. We find it so at Antioch (Acts 14:27), when Paul and Barnabas came back from an errand on which the Spirit of God had sent them. Thus, brethren "let them go" (ἀπέλυσαν); but they were "sent forth" (

ἐκπεμφθέντες) by the Holy Ghost (Acts 13:3,4). The Lord Himself "sent" the Twelve and the Seventy (Luke 9:2, Luke 10:1) when He was here: and now that He is above He, by the Spirit of God, gives and sends forth those alive again for evermore whom He has qualified for His work whatever it be. He has not abnegated His rights or bequeathed them to the church, or to any individuals in it. Nevertheless we read in Acts 13:3, that their fellow-servants had communion with the envoys of the Holy Spirit, and marked it by laying their hands on them as its sign, as they appear to have repeated it later, not for Barnabas, but for Paul when he went forth another time (Acts 15:40). It has nothing whatever to do with what they call ordination. It was simply a solemn sign of

commendation to the grace of God, which has been done of late on befitting occasions, and without the least pretension. But there is no such thought as the authority of the church in these matters. Mission like gift belongs to the Lord; and He is the same still, which Christendom has forgotten; and the Spirit of God is down here to give effect to it in us as then. There may not be the same manifested power as we find over and over again in the Acts of the Apostles. Yet God knows how to make good the same divine principle by ways suited to the present state of the church, which calls for humiliation on our part. But it is faithless to give up God's way for an unauthorised invention of man.

"We therefore ought to receive such." How gracious and how wise! It not merely calls on Gaius and other saints to receive or welcome such. We, says the apostle, ought to receive such. What more than moral beauty is this! It might have seemed enough to urge, "Ye receive such"; how much more to include all in the "we!" The apostle was not above joining himself to the rest. He thus sanctions and encourages those humbly going forth on the work, even though none else had a position comparable to his own in the church, which so impressively bespoke the grace of Christ, and reproved the nascent clericalism which despised these zealous labourers, and demonstrated to all how thoroughly they enjoyed the apostle's countenance and love.

Not content with so much, he goes so far is to say That we may be fellow-workers with the truth." May I warmly commend these words to all of you, my dear brethren What an honour! The truth is here personified as hated by the devil and the world, through which he works in a thousand ways to thwart Christ and all identified with

witnessing Him. Diotrephes was doing this, though we are not told that he sympathised with the antichrist or the heterodox in any respect. It is quite a different form of evil. His state was wretchedly bad, so that we do not well to say more. But it is open and right for all Christians to be fellow-workers with the truth. Some cannot preach; but we may and ought truly and practically to sympathise with those that do the work. Do we pray for them habitually? Do we watch to serve them in any way we can? If so, "we are fellow-helpers," not merely to them but "with the truth." One cannot suppose it a real difficulty for any saint to be a fellow-helper with the truth. The love of Gaius was marked; but for any in earnest before God it is the same call of love. "If the readiness be there, one is accepted according to what he may have, not according to what he hath not." All can help acceptably to the Lord in some way, which makes them in His grace fellow-helpers with the truth.

"I wrote something to the church." Hence we learn that it is a mistake to suppose that the apostles never wrote other epistles than those we have. God took care that those meant for the permanent blessing of the believer should not be lost; as He inspired them for continual service, He watched over them accordingly. We need not imagine such a thing as that the apostles never wrote anything else. Why not? But without pressing overmuch the allusion here, the fact cannot be doubted that communications by inspired men were written not necessarily inspired to form part of the Scriptures. We find a similar fact in the Old Testament, as for instance books by Solomon and others. If God has not preserved the whole amount, He has secured what was inspired for abiding use, of which His prophets were made

competent to judge. When such inspiration ceased for Old or New Testament, the prophets also ceased.

This divine selection is a thing to admire instead of causing difficulty. Had all the books been written that might have been written, the world could not contain them, as our apostle declares. The words and works of our Lord alone, if written out as they deserved, would overfill the world. How precious is that all-wise selection which is a characteristic of inspiration! God was the only judge of what is to most profit. Even the Bible, as it is, how little it is really known by those to whom it is dearer than life! Would that every child of God knew it all more thoroughly. Were you to read the Bible often every day of your life, not only in a way both pious and studious, any real Christian will tell you how far you would be from fathoming its depths. It is always beyond the greatest teacher. If there were only as many books as there are verses or even chapters of equal length, it is evident that the difficulty for the serious reader would be increased enormously.

Let us admire God's wisdom in selecting by inspiration what was for perpetual use within the short compass of the Bible as He has given it to us. It is not a bad adage that one may have too much of a good thing as well as too little. In the Bible we have neither, but what the only wise God saw best to His glory and for our blessing. It was of prime importance that His word should be as brief as could be consistent with the fulness of revealed truth. "I wrote something to the church, but Diotrephes that loveth pre-eminence among them receiveth us not" (ver. 9). There is no difficulty then in understanding why we have not the letter that John wrote. It would seem that Diotrephes showed his bad spirit by having

this letter to the church kept back, and that in this way the apostle was not received by him.

“For this reason if I come, I will bring to remembrance his works which he doeth, babbling against us with wicked words and not content with these things, neither himself receiveth the brethren and those who would he hindereth, and casteth them out of the church.” Whatever his doctrine might be, his works were evil. “Wherefore if I come, I will remember his deeds.” The same spirit which Diotrephes showed in rejecting what the apostle wrote — if that be the meaning of not receiving the apostle — displayed itself in his contempt for the brethren who went about preaching. His feeling seemed to be this: What business have they to come here? “I am here. It is for me to look after the truth; and I never thought of asking their help, especially as they are strangers who come without being sent for or in any way sent. They are intruders.” This is not an uncommon sentiment, and although some may not express it, how often is it not felt! It ran through the spirit and the conduct of this man, so high up in his own esteem as to evince a total want of respect toward the apostle. Who can wonder at his hostility toward the lowly brethren who addicted themselves to preaching far and wide? Doubtless he thought it a better thing if they had stuck to earning an honest living instead of going where he at least did not want them.

“Beloved,” as the solemn reference is, “imitate not what is evil but what is good.” Diotrephes was clearly doing that which was evil; Gaius must steer clear of imitating the evil, for evil is infectious. Let him adhere to the good. “He that doeth good is of God; he that doeth evil hath not seen God” (ver. 11). We may not affirm that

Diotrephes was absolutely involved in this tremendous character; but he gave serious ground for fearing it. The language is general but guarded. The apostle simply lays down the certain principle — doing evil is not of God. He who does it as the habit of his life has not seen God. How comforting is the other side! He is of God. To see God leaves its impress on your soul for ever. One cannot have seen God and be a doer of evil. Evil was true of Diotrephes to a certain and serious point. Whether it characterised him we may leave.

“Demetrius hath witness borne to him by all, and by the truth itself, and we also bear witness, and thou knowest that our witness is true” (ver. 12): Here is a fine character not heard of before. The truth itself, as well is all, bore witness to Demetrius; and we also bear witness, which Gaius consciously knew to be true. “We also bear witness.” Gaius could have the fullest fellowship with Demetrius. One reason as it seems why the Spirit of God thus notices Demetrius is that, even in our evil day, we may look for others who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. So here, if we are told of one Diotrephes, there were two to praise, Gaius and Demetrius, to say nothing of the faithful brethren though strangers, of whom Diotrephes had nothing good to say. The apostle would have us not to be overmuch oppressed by the sense of evil or by evil-speakers, but to have our hearts encouraged in the truth and in love.

Many things I had to write to thee, but with ink and pen I will not write to thee: but I hope soon to see thee, and we will speak mouth to mouth. Peace to thee. The friends greet thee. Greet the friends by name” (vers. 13, 14). We are not to fall under the cloud of evil. There is always a danger of throwing up one’s hands, exclaiming

that all is gone. Never could I sympathise with so unbelieving a thought. The prevalence of the worst evil, the breaking down of not a few who have seemed faithful, is the more reason to distrust ourselves, yet to abide in the Lord with purpose of heart. Let us never forget that the Holy Spirit abides in and with us for ever, to gather to His name yet more than to convert sinners, though He does both.

How simple and true are the concluding words in the Third Epistle as in the Second! Great artists used to represent not only the Lord but the apostles and the saints with a halo over the head. Scripture speaks of all with unpretending simplicity: the Lord the meekest and lowliest of men; and the apostles differing from other brethren in deeper self-abnegation and a more vivid sense of abiding in God, the privilege of His grace. And here who can fail to discern the heavenly-minded dignity of being but “a bondman of Jesus,” as the greatest of them loved to designate himself?

The Holy Spirit gave energy to work signs and wonders and powers, and yet to work as if oneself nothing. The inspired man had many things to write with ink and pen, but he hoped to see his beloved Gaius when “we shall speak mouth to mouth.” He preferred living fellowship, and wished him peace meanwhile. Here we have the friends saluting mutually, and in no vague way but “by name;” as in the Second Epistle it is family greeting: “the children of thine elect sister greet thee.”