

# Epistles of John — Addresses 1 - 9

W. Kelly.

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Part 1 of An Exposition of the Epistles of John the Apostle, 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.

## **Intropduction.**

### ***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 as 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 has 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 can 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!

## **THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN**

### **ADDRESS 1**

#### **1 JOHN 1: 1-4.**

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."\*

\*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.

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 grantees 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 unailing 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.

## 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]\* 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."

\*Testimony of weight casts doubt on reading "Christ" here; the usage of John rather favours it.

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, 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 Erebus 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.\* 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.

\*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.

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.

### **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 be 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 way the love of the Father and of the Son; and I violate the moral nature of God Himself. It is not merely a breach 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 παρακλήτωρ, 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 sin 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.\* 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.

\* The Revisers give the difference correctly.

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 (ὅτι ἕρ 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.

## 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,\* 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.† 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."

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

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

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 boastfully — "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.

## 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 write\* to you, little children, because ye have known the Father."

\*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.

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.\* 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.

\* 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 παῖδιά. 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 παῖδιά is here "addressed to all the readers" is to ignore words, context and sense.

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!

## **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.\* As for you, let† 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) abide‡ in Him."

\* 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.

†"Therefore" should here be dropped, as relying on inadequate testimony.

‡The best MSS. and Vv. give "abide ye," or "ye abide," rather than "ye shall abide."

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 same 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 "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 his 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 ever. 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 teetotaler, 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 an 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.\* 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.

\* 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.

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 had 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.

## **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. \*We 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."

\* "But" here lacks authority.

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 as 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 Judaizing of Christendom. Do not all its differing sections regard the law of Moses as 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.

## **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 us into the relationship; but the relationship decides the kind of duties which become ours 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 warn 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?