

READING AND MEDITATIONS ON 1 JOHN

by W.W. Fereday

W.W. Fereday's meditative study of First John, exploring the themes of fellowship, love, and assurance that mark the true children of God.

6 Chapters

Table of Contents

- 0. Reading and Meditations on 1 John
- 1. Chapter 1
- 2. Chapter 2
- 3. Chapter 3
- 4. Chapter 4
- 5. Chapter 5

Reading and Meditations on 1 John

Chapter 1

“That which was from the beginning” (1 John 1). “In the beginning was the Word” (John 1). “In the beginning” refers to eternity; all things received being through Him, the Word, that was at the same time God and with God, of the same substance, distinct in Person, eternal and divine.

What He was there — before sin and death and darkness had come into the world, ere righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, had any force or application; before the world itself existed, save in the purposes of God His word has brought to light. “The Lord possessed Me in the beginning of His way I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.”

This was the beginning of His way — eternity. Again, when God was creating, “laying the foundation of the earth,” He was with Him. This is called the “beginning” in Genesis 1; there indeed He was the Creator Himself; but still by Him, when He gave His decree, as One brought up with Him, daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him; and His delights were with the sons of men. How blessed this is! His voice reaching us out of the depths of time and eternity.

Afterwards, when the world is fully in view, the habitable parts of the earth occupied by the fallen sons of men, and ere “the beginning” of 1 John 1 we are permitted to hear the voice of the eternal Word once more (Psa. 40), “Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will.” The counsels of God, as written in that great book, are revealed through the heart of the Son of God. Long before the Holy Ghost had commenced to unfold, by the pen of John, the glorious truths brought to light in Him “who was from the beginning,” He had lifted the veil, as it were, to let us see and hear what was passing in the eternal glory in heaven, the communings of the divine Persons (before the Word had become flesh, before that which was “from the beginning” — His manifestation on earth — had taken place), His delight in His Father’s will, as the other word told of His delights in the sons of men.

But the wonder and the glory is that there was no difference. Let the passage in the Psalm (40) be well pondered, and then let the student of scripture state wherein the life of Christ on earth differed in principle and character from what it had been in the heavenly glory. What part of the moral glory of God had He concealed in His heart? Could He hide Himself? “The light shineth in darkness,” as perfectly as in its own atmosphere. The Word that was with God, and at the same time was God — could He become flesh, and dwell among us, in such sort that His presence was a revelation of the Father, and the glory of His own Person not be displayed to those who had eyes to see? No, the Life was manifested, that very eternal Life that was with the Father; the Sonship was therefore as eternal as the Life itself. The Gospel gives us its display or manifestation in Him; the Epistle, the blessed fruits and proofs of that life in His people.

“The life was the light of men,” and through every avenue, so to speak, the Light had shone into the apostle’s heart, for the shining forth in due season of the knowledge of Him “that was from the beginning.”

His manifestation in time, as the eternal Life that was with the Father, naturally directs the thoughts to the earliest revelations concerning Him, intensifying the interest which they ever awaken. We remark with delight, that it is the very same glorious Person, whom we know as Jesus our Lord, that we find in the beginning of Jehovah's way — in the beginning of creation-work.

And what more wonderful than this, that when new-creation work was occupying the divine mind, we should be allowed to hear these words of the Son, uttered ere He left the glory He had with the Father, and became flesh! There were, first, the counsels about Him in the book; then, His own utterances of them in heaven; and next, the accomplishment of them on earth. What an illustration of what He said Himself to the Jews, "I am altogether that which I also say unto you" — a truth as declaratory of the glory of His Person, as that other word in the same chapter, "Before Abraham was, I am." They give us respectively the moral glory and His eternal being.

In John 1, then, He was in the beginning (eternity), God, and with God. In the epistle, 1 John 1, He is presented "as from the beginning," the manifestation on earth of that eternal Life that was with the Father, not the Word with God, as in the gospel (John 1); relationship and fellowship in the divine nature being the subject here.

But in Colossians 1, He is the Beginning, as Firstborn from among the dead, ascended on high, the glorified Head of a new creation; who is the Head of the body, the church, the members of which are firstfruits of this new creation, of which those "once alienated," "all things" "reconciled," "new heavens and new earth," and "all things new," will be the full display.

In Revelation 3 He announces Himself to the angel of the church at Laodicea, where to His view the riches, pretensions, and independence of the first man, alone were apparent, as the Holy Ghost had already presented Him by the pen of Paul, as "the Beginning," only more definitely, "the beginning of the creation of God."

But how great was the contrast in the spiritual condition of these two assemblies! At Colosse, whatever might be wanting, Paul looked for progress everywhere, "filled with full knowledge"; growing by the "true knowledge"; strengthened . . . according to the power of His glory. "His mouth was opened unto them, his heart enlarged. He reminds them that the Father had made them meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. He had translated them into the kingdom of the Son of His love. Could he stop there? Impossible! The privileges of the saints must wait on the glories of the Son. The glowing words, short sentences, and rapid style, remind us of the language of worship when the heart is full. Was there ever such a summary of glories in so small a space, from "image of the invisible God," to, "first-born from among the dead"? And He was "the beginning," in that new creation sphere where all these glories shine: all flowed from Him, Beginning and Head. Now Paul evidently felt in his spirit that the Lord was the common joy of their hearts and his. Impossible to come out in this way, when the heart, is full of Christ, with persons who were neither cold nor hot. But at Laodicea all was gone; the increase there was in riches, not those of Christ. "Beginning of the creation of God" awakes in a Laodicean, where there was life, thoughts widely different from those which would have filled the mind at Colosse. There, His glory constituted their riches and strength, "even unto all long-suffering," their affections were fed, and knowledge grew. The cry of an awakened Laodicean was for gold, white raiment, and eye salve, for without divine righteousness and holiness, who could have a place in the new creation of God? For them, the revelation of this glorious title raised the question in the conscience, "Am I on new creation

ground?” and met the sense of failure. Also, when the kingdom came, they would not be shut out, but reign with Christ. How different the language of the Holy Ghost by Paul to the Colossians, “translated into the kingdom of the Son of His love,” their present, known, and enjoyed place, before the time for sitting on His throne, or theirs, was come! The power of His glory strengthening; Christ in them, the hope of glory. With what different thoughts they must have contemplated Him as “the Beginning”! It is just the difference between Christ for the cravings of the awakened conscience of a Laodicean, and the full Person — Christ, in whom all the fullness dwells — made known to the heart of a Colossian, through the unveiling of His various glory.

But I thought we were going to feed in other pastures, and here we are running into Colossian fields!

“Which we have heard, which we have seen,” and so forth. In John the knowledge of Christ was not only of the deepest, it was also of the most intimate character. It reached him, as it were, through every avenue. He was the disciple who lay in the bosom of Jesus; he had lain there too, one might say, in a spiritual sense, as far as such words may be used of man, and was absorbed with what he found in that nearness, the knowledge of the Person — that eternal life, which was with the Father.

This is one of John’s designations of Christ, the other most like it is “only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father.” These names, I think, reach farther into that great deep — the revelation of His Person — than any other. The life, the nature, that which had been displayed in the Person of the Lord Himself, was what occupied John. This life alone he contemplated in the saints, after the introductory part, in which the two natures are fully recognized, “If we walk in the light,” and so forth, and, “If we say that we have no sin,” and so forth.

Like the friend of the Bridegroom, who heard His voice, and found in that the fullness of joy, the beloved disciple lay in His bosom, and spoke of fellowship with Him and the Father as fullness of joy. They were each in the place to realize that of which they spoke, near to Himself!

In the epistle, the eternal Life, which was with the Father, is viewed as in the believer, and thus is all profession tested.

Men talk of the halo of antiquity, but here it was the glory of eternity itself, eternity with God, which surrounded the divine Subject of his testimony. Who could think of development in such an One? There could be none, that which was “from the beginning” was simply that which was “in the beginning.” Could the eye of God discern progress any more than decline there, a “higher,” and a “lower,” in “that which was from the beginning”! The spirit of evil in man would make the end to be an improvement, a development of the beginning; the Spirit of God declares that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. But the Life has relationships also. “With the Father” implies, I think, His eternal Sonship.

And now he declares what he had seen and heard. We may be sure he speaks out of the fullness of his heart, yet the Holy Ghost was the source of these communications. The object was twofold, that they might share the apostle’s fellowship with the Father and the Son, and that their joy through this communion might be full.

That we may enter more fully into this great truth, let us look again at the way in which it is presented in John 18. First, there was the fellowship of the apostles exclusively, a permitted participation in the divine counsels and workings (the Lord working with them, Mark 16), and doubtless affections too, resulting in a unity thus expressed, “one as we.” This unity they realized through fellowship with the Father and the Son in their thoughts and purposes, they were strengthened and sustained by the Holy Ghost in a ministry, which was according to those purposes and affections too, I think one may say. It was a wonderful thing; nothing like it had ever been known on earth; fruit of His call, His manifestation, and the presence and sustaining power of the Holy Ghost — it was indeed a wonder of divine wisdom, and grace, and power.

Let us look at the words once more, “one as we,” spoken of the apostles exclusively. Now let us recall their varied ministries in the word, and first as to the characters of the servants themselves. In what single point does one of them resemble another? And the special subjects of their ministries are as different as their own personal characters. Yet who has ever really found, in the writings of any one of these servants of God, a single expression that contradicted or weakened the testimony of the others? No such unity had ever been realized on earth. “For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard,” they said; and, “We are of God: he that knoweth God, heareth us,” — the apostles.

Next, the Lord prays for those who should believe through the apostles’ word. By that word was communicated the knowledge of the Father and the Son, and, through the power of the Holy Ghost, they had fellowship with the divine Persons, that is the fellowship of which John speaks in this chapter (1 John 1). This fellowship also manifested itself in unity — “one in us.” Not, “one as we,” so that the mind — the truth — of God should be authoritatively expressed, but a oneness which is simply a result of fellowship with the Father and the Son; a fellowship so feebly realized that unity is, for many, little more than an idea in the mind. Of confederacy, a mere human thing, one has no need to speak, but unity is a divine thought. Christ is its center, and the Holy Ghost its power. “He that gathereth not with me scattereth.” One in us “as Thou, Father, art in Me and I in Thee.”

The well is deep, and there is One only who can draw out and minister to us. The Father’s joy in the Son, and the Son’s in the Father, who can tell? “My beloved Son, in whom I have found My delight.” “That the world may know that I love the Father. I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before Him.” This is the fellowship, principle and fullness of that to which we are called. What can we say? joy and sorrow alternately filling the heart as it, or the conscience, is first reached; but the apostle only speaks of joy — “that your joy may be full.” Two things at least, we may perceive, are inseparably connected with this fellowship — unity and joy, effect of the power that worketh in us. Man believes in beholding this unity, and the joy of the Lord is the strength of His people.

Let us pause a moment to think of what this means; a joy not based upon things earthly or natural, but on that which is independent of circumstances here, or created things anywhere, on fellowship with the Father and the Son, in the light. How precious and glorious the privilege to tell of its joy from actual realization!

Verse 5. “This then is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.” We pass on now from the manifestation, “that which was displayed,” which John’s ministry mainly gives (as the beloved brother in departing reminded us),

to the message, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. Now we have come to what the message reveals — the nature of God — and then that nature in us, considered abstractedly.

It is important to note that the moment divine light is brought in, the full testing of man commences. First, in John 3: “This is the judgment, that light is come unto the world, and men loved darkness rather than light.” The Lord does not say “land of Israel,” and “Jews,” but the world and men. But here, in the chapter before us, it is the truth of His, nature, light without darkness, applied to test the reality of the profession of fellowship with God.

It is evident that it is no question here of a ground of righteous standing before God, as in Romans, or of that which gives boldness to enter into the holiest, as in Hebrews; but of fellowship with Him who is light, and in whom is no darkness. If we say we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not practice the truth.

This is self-evident. We must have His own nature, and walk in it, to have fellowship with Him. The Gentiles walk on in darkness, the saints are “light in the Lord,” and their walk is in the light.

Verse 7. “But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.” We have the position and state of Christians viewed as in the world; not as one body by the Holy Ghost — the body of Christ; nor as sitting in heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 2:6), but simply as saints walking in the light of the perfect revelation of God. Christ — Word of God and Son of the Father — had been here; “that eternal Life which was with the Father,” had been manifested, and was now in them as life. The message announced what the manifestation had already demonstrated, that God is light, without any darkness. All had not with the outward eyes beheld that manifestation. The light of the revelation of God characterized the position; there was no getting out of the light without giving up Christ altogether. The light was there, either to cheer the faithful heart, or to detect its failure.

Attention has often been called to the difference between walking “according to” and “in the light.” We must remember that the truth is stated abstractedly by John. The saints are regarded on the side of what they have from God, the life that was manifested in Christ, and the Holy Ghost (“Which thing is true in Him and in you,” (1 John. 2:8), and “Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4). The possession of eternal life, and the unction of the Holy One, are the mighty springs of a “walk,” in which our path is illuminated by the light without darkness — the true knowledge of God. Life in the power of the Holy Ghost (its perfect display had been in Christ), was now in the saints. How should not energy characterize those who were in the position set forth in this verse? It is no question here of what gives title to stand before God, nor even of acceptance in the Beloved; grace has revealed that also, but here the life that was displayed in Him is in the saints, and therefore we have the walk in the light, and the fellowship, as marking both the position and state; the inconsistencies, arising from the fact that sin is in us, not taken up.

How is it possible that the life eternal and the Holy Ghost should not make their presence manifest, by a walk in the light, in which the fruits of light are apparent, and in a fellowship with one another, which is but the outflow of fellowship with the Father and the Son? We must remember, that a work accomplished for us, is not the starting-point here, but the life that had been manifested in Christ, together with the unction of the Holy One. The unsullied light! how sweet the thought of it to those who participate in its nature — the sons of light — who have become so, by believing in the

light (John 12). The light excludes all darkness. The blood cleanses from all sin. How blessed all that is from God — the cloudless light, the precious blood!

It should be noted that the blood from sin, is in the present tense. It is its property and unchanging value that we have here, no thought of repeated application. (See Heb. 1, 10). When the blood of bulls and goats is referred to, the repetition is constant. But who would speak of a second application of the precious blood of Jesus Christ? Or, should the saint's present consciousness of its value for the moment be enfeebled, is it so in the mind of Him by whom we were sanctified unto the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ? "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (set apart).

Moreover, it is said, "If we walk in the light, as He is in the light," the blood cleanses; not, if we sin. On the other hand, "if any man sin," speaking of Christians, and sinning is not walking according to the light, we have an Advocate with the Father {1 John 2:1}. He does not say in this connection, what in itself is eternally true, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin. It was Himself who said, "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet." Walking in the light supposes life, divine life, with its energies, holiness, and love, and therefore the judgment and rejection of all that is contrary to that life which is the light of men. Walking is a real thing.

Verse 8. "If we say we have no sin," and so forth. We were talking lately of a passage in which Peter's doctrine touches that of Paul. In this verse, John speaks, like Paul, of sin, not sins, the principle of sin. If we deny that it is in us, the truth is not in us. Had we been in the light, the truth would have been in us also. The truth of the two natures is taught in this epistle almost as clearly as in the writings of the apostle who said, "It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." In John we have it in this form, "If we say that we have no sin, the truth is not in us." That sin is in us is the truth, yet is it equally the truth that in us is implanted a life, a nature, characterized by "no sin," no darkness, so that it is said of every one born of God, "he cannot sin, because he is born of God," for this new nature is essentially sinless. It lives eternally in the light, and manifests itself in us, in fruits of light. We have seen it, in all its brightness, in Him; practically whoever abides in Him does not sin. We shall find the character and actings of the life of the flesh also, considered abstractedly, brought out with equal clearness. When we have considered the truth relative to the natures, as we find it in this epistle, it will be interesting to compare it with the teachings on the same subject in Romans.

Verse 9. "If we confess our sins," and so forth. It does not say, if we confess our sin. That has been settled on the cross, our old man has been crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be annulled; but sins are its fruit, when it is not held practically in death. Confessing them, if we sin, "He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins." Could our practical unfaithfulness affect the faithfulness or the righteousness of the righteous One, who had Himself borne our sins in His own body on the tree, so that, on confession of sins, He would not forgive, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness?

Verse 10. "If we say that we have not sinned," and so forth, we make God a liar, His word is not in us. "If we say we have no sin," "the truth, is not in us." In neither case are we in the light.

Chapter 2

How precious the grace that has provided for the sins and inconsistencies of saints, in the same perfection of wisdom, and love, and righteousness, that was shown in taking up our case, when sin alone marked our former life of alienation from God! We walk in the light, as God is in the light. He has not come to us in the clouds and thick darkness, with which He surrounded Him-self in the day that man in the flesh undertook to obey His righteous requirements; but in the glorious light of that eternal Life which was with the Father. How it shone in the fullness of its own grace and truth, when it dwelt amongst us!

“If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” If our walk is not according to the light, not only is the blood of Jesus Christ of eternal efficacy (there is but the one application of it), but the Advocate with the Father is Jesus Christ the righteous. He acts for us with the Father, and in us by His Spirit: divine righteousness established in His own Person in heaven, being the groundwork of divine actings towards us, and in us now. Thus our souls are restored where the realization of fellowship had been interrupted.

“He is the propitiation for our sins, and for the whole world.” All these precious truths about Christ are communicated in connection with our new place, walking in the light as God is in the light, fellowship with the Father and the Son, and with one another, the blood of Jesus Christ being of abiding efficacy.

See in what varied ways the Spirit ministers Christ in these few verses;

- 1: “The Word” that “was God,” according to John 1, is here “the Word of life”; and,
- 2: “This Word” of life is He who was, “from the beginning, the manifestation of that eternal life which was with the Father.”
- 3: “He was the perfect offering, His blood cleansing us from every sin.”
- 4: “He is the righteous One on high” (our righteousness there).
- 5: “The Advocate with the Father.”
- 6: “The propitiation for our sins.”
- 7: “And for the whole world.”

Verse 3. And now we come to tests as to the possession of this life. If it be in us, it cannot be different from what it was in Him, for it is the same eternal life; He looks at it in itself, a very blessed and powerful way of learning the truth practically, omitting all consideration of the hindrances arising from the fact that sin is in us, as already stated, John 1:8; 2:1-2.

I trust there will be little difficulty in understanding the separate consideration of the real character of the eternal life. That is what is meant, when it is said, John states the truth here abstractedly. He

is treating his subject, the manifestation of this life in us, separately, apart from the other truth that sin is in us; not that we must sin, but, as it is said, “if we sin.”

Now, keeping the Father’s commandments was a principle of that eternal life” — obedience in love and divine delight. “That the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do.” This is the exact opposite of what is termed legal obedience, so that you see at once that this obedience in Him is the expression of the eternal life. But this is the obedience to which we are sanctified (separated) — sanctified unto the “obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1), to obey in the way He obeyed.

It is evident that one who has not the principle of obedience, which loves to do His will in obedience to His commandments, has not the life — the nature — of which obedience in love is an essential characteristic. If, then, such an one says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, he is not speaking the truth. The truth, the life, is not in him.

Verse 5. “Whoso keepeth His word,” and so forth. His word is the expression of Himself “the eternal,” life as He said, “I am in principle what I say” (John 8). That is, His word is the expression of Himself, of God, who is love. If I keep His word, I possess the nature, the life in which God’s love is found. It cannot be separated from that, God’s love is realized in keeping the word of Christ. It is perfected in us, is actually in us. All this flows from the life being really in us, of which keeping His word is a proof.

Verse 6. “To walk as He walked.” It is the same life, how can it act otherwise? And he identifies the believer with this life. He does not say, “Be like what Christ was,” which is impossible, because there is sin in us, and there was none in Him. The day is coming when we shall be like Him, when we shall see Him as He is now, with the Father. He was manifested to take away our sins, made sin for us; when manifested again it will be to give us to participate in the glory the Father has given Him. What a true inward knowledge of Christ is implied in these words — knowing Him by keeping His commandments, and God’s love perfected in us by keeping His word, a deeper thing even than keeping His commandments. We see all through that profession is tested by these characteristics of the divine nature. In the first chapter the plural number is used (he had been talking of fellowship), “if we say.” Here, in chapter 2, after verse 3, it is in the singular; “He that saith, I know Him”; “He that saith he abides in Him”; “He that saith he is in the light”; “He that loveth his brother.” These were some of the expressions of the Christian profession, which were all tested by that life which had been manifested in Him, in whom is no sin (chap. 2:5.)

“We know that we know him,” know that we are in Him, in the realization of those things which are simply expressions of the life as we saw it in Jesus. Similarly in 2 Peter 2, “if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The old commandment, which they had from the beginning, differed in nothing from the new commandment which he now wrote unto them, save in this, that the eternal life in which it was fulfilled was now in them also. It was old, because it was in Him, but new, because it was now in them, the same life producing the same kind of fruit; for he looks at the life in itself here.

“He that saith he is in the light and hates his brother” contradicts himself, darkness and light do not go together. The darkness, he says, is passing; the true light already shines. God was revealed in

the Word; the Father, in the only begotten Son — the eternal Life. The Life, too, was the light of men; hatred of the brethren formed no part of that life which was now in them.

Darkness passing away reminds us of Revelation 21:1-4. There was a new creation, new heaven and new earth, the first had passed away with the old creation. All that was connected with the darkness — death, sorrow, crying, tears (the former things) had passed away. When the holy city began to descend, at the beginning of the thousand years, to take up its millennial position in relation to the earth (not on it), the passing away of former things began. See what is said of the beginning of the millennium in Isaiah 45 — the former troubles forgotten: “I create new heavens and a new earth” (not said with regard to the physical change, but to the moral order then introduced), and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. “There shall be no more thence an infant of days . . . for the child shall die an hundred years old,” and so forth. (Compare Rev. 7:15-17). “He will tabernacle over them, they shall hunger no more . . . The Lamb shall lead them unto living fountains of water, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” Much of the blessing of the everlasting state will, I think, be realized in the glorious kingdom; as we now anticipate the joy that awaits us (when walking in the Spirit). Righteousness will reign then (as grace does now), afterwards it will dwell with them. God is spoken of as tabernacled over them (Gentiles, in the beginning of the millennium), in Revelation 7; afterwards, His tabernacle will be with men. “The Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory,” is said of the reign. The nations will walk by that light of which the Lamb is the true source, the lamp of God’s glory, but afterwards God is all in all, the Son Himself subject that it may be so.

Now, what gives character to our present position is, not the passing away of former troubles — the cessation of death, or God wiping away every tear from the eyes of His people, but the passing away of the old things, in which the first man developed. This of course for faith, while, in its purely spiritual aspect, new creation is already set up in its firstfruits, and, in connection with this new creation, old things are passed away, all things are become new. But the great characteristic blessing is, that the darkness is passing, the true light now shineth, and we are in it.

But by-and-by it will shine, not as dispelling darkness, but revealing glory in our own heavenly sphere; our position and state will be marked by “no darkness at all” — no night there, there will be no need of the sun; the glory of God will lighten it. We shall be the city of light then, as now we are children of light; the glory of God its luminous atmosphere — the Lamb the light of it, its central flame.

It is a blessed, wonderful thing, that our walk, even now, should be in the light. What will it be, where the light and glory actually characterize the scene! Even here, we may know much of its power, in a spiritual way, strengthened with all might, according to the power of his glory.

Verse 12. All the saints are addressed as children (compare vs. 28), not “little children,” on the common ground that their sins were forgiven them for His name’s sake.

Then they are looked at in classes, their moral state taken up. The fathers knew Him that is from the beginning (His manifestation down here). There was nothing higher or better; all that is glorious and eternal, the Father Himself, are only known through and in Him. The young men had overcome the wicked one, they had been in conflict, and had not succumbed to the lords of this darkness. (Eph. 6, New Trans.) The fathers had got into the deep and quiet waters, preoccupation

with Himself, losing themselves in Him. The little children had the spirit of sonship; all the children, as such, knew that their sins were forgiven for His name's sake; the youngest of the family cried, "Abba, Father." Such is the divinely given statement of the condition of the little flock. He can only repeat the same thing as to the fathers, but to the young men he adds, "You are strong, and the word of God abides in you." That was their strength, the ground was good and deep, and the enemy, instead of catching away what was sown there, was himself overcome. What an encouragement to them. to continue in the refusal of the world's attractions, itself as a system, and the things that are in it; they only minister to the lusts of the flesh and pride of life. That all that is in it, is not of the Father, but of the world, is a solemn truth; he does not say, not of God, but not of the Father. Could even a little child, crying, "Abba, Father," love the things that were not of the Father? Moreover, the great deceitful world is itself passing away with its lusts, but he that does God's will, that was what Christ did, remains for eternity.

Verse 18. The babes specially needed to be warned about Antichrist, not so much the young men, who, sustained in conflict, were overcoming the wicked one himself; nor the fathers, who, through deep knowledge of the Christ, would instinctively perceive and reject the spirit of Antichrist wherever it showed itself. That the ways of these antichrists were the opposite of Christ's, were not His, sufficed for the fathers to determine their true character as walking in darkness proved that the life, that is the light of men, was not, in them.

The appearance of these antichrists, even thus early, was a sign of the last time, the power that would have kept them out was ebbing away. In the beginning, when it was said, of the rest "durst {dared} no man join them," they would have found no place amongst the saints. That time was now past, the first love and the first works were no more (I do not speak of individual recovery). It was already the last time, but he is not addressing the church, as such, but the saints individually, encouraging and strengthening them in view of the power of the enemy, already coming in. This is most blessed.

And mark, what is said of the babes, how they are characterized.

- 1: They had the spirit of adoption, and knew the Father.
- 2: They had the unction from the Holy One, by which they understood all things.
- 3: They knew the truth in Christ, possessed it, (did not profess their readiness to receive it, if any one could show it to them), and therefore knew that what was contrary to that which they possessed was a lie.

They did not need to say, "Who shall go up for us to heaven, to bring it unto us," nor "Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us"; they knew the truth, these babes, and had found it in Christ, divinely instructed by the Holy One. Thus, in John 10, the sheep knew the Shepherd's voice, it was enough — every voice henceforth was tested by that. Sin was known and felt to be sinful now, because "in Him there is no sin," darkness in the same way, because in God is no darkness at all.

The liar denied that Jesus was the Messiah, the Antichrist denied the Father and the Son. This was the voice of the old serpent, the liar and adversary. They who departed went out, "that they might be made manifest that none are of us." (See New Trans.) They went out, deceived by the

lie. Those who remained possessed the truth, subjectively and objectively.

Now they had only to let that which was from the beginning, which they from the beginning had heard, abide in them, and they would abide in the Son and in the Father. "Whosoever denies the Son, has not the Father"; this is as absolute as the kindred truth, that whoever refused to bend the knee at the name of Jesus, God's holy Servant, whom He had anointed, had not salvation; all is exclusive here. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." So of the name of Mediator, "For there is . . . one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." Again, God has "given Him a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus," and so forth. The gospel is spoken of in the same way, "If any man preach another gospel, . . . let him be accursed." It was not according to man, though sent to man, and even in the way in which the apostle received it, men were excluded. He did not receive it of man, but was taught it by revelation of Jesus Christ. His apostleship was received, in like manner, apart wholly from human intervention, not of man, nor by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father.

"How exclusive!" say many in our day, when the truth is pressed. They are right, it is so, but it is equally true of all that we have in or from Him, as may be clearly seen in respect of truth, light, life, and glory, and so forth. "No lie is of the truth." "In him was life, and the life was the light of men" — nothing else was that. "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." According to 1 Timothy 1 the law has its application to wicked persons, "and if there be any other thing contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glad tidings of the glory of the blessed God." Divine glory is necessarily intolerant of all that is contrary to it. In the heavenly city, light and glory are not distinguishable. The nations shall walk by the light of it, the kings of the earth bring their glory to it; there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth.

But we were speaking of the antichrists. They went out, I believe, anticipating the discipline of the assembly, for, as yet, what defiled and worked abomination and made a lie, found no abiding place in the assembly of God. The saints had the unction of the Holy One, the truth and power of God were realized in the presence of the Holy Ghost; they overcame them because of His greatness. The faithful tried those who called themselves apostles, and found them to be only liars, because He was amongst them, the Spirit of truth (1 John 4:4). In the beginning, we read, "of the rest durst {dared} no man join them"; here, those who got in, go out of themselves. God was in the midst of her. His presence was to these children of darkness insupportable. The power of His presence was a reality to all; as the sense of it waned, the need of discipline increased; but discipline, where there is no recovery of power, finally disappears with the power itself. This state is characteristic of the "last time." How precious His counsel when this is felt; gold purified by fire may be bought of Him, and if He chastens, it is only those whom He loves. "Be zealous and repent," are the words for this, as "Watch and pray," are for every hour.

The apostle continues, verse 24, "As for you, . . . if what ye heard from the beginning abides in you, ye shall abide . . . And this is the promise which He hath promised us, even life eternal." Here he brings in the principle of Christian responsibility, viewing them as walking on earth, as Paul, when addressing the Colossians, says, "If ye continue"; but along with it, the two great blessings which could not be forfeited, the promise and the gift. Eternal life, as promise, from a "God that cannot lie," and the Holy Ghost present as gift.

It is as important as it is interesting to observe, that all our blessings are presented in a conditional form, when the saints are addressed on the ground of their own profession, or viewed as in the wilderness, and not in their position as members of Christ. Salvation, eternal life, and righteousness, are, then, connected with responsibility. "If that which ye have heard," and so forth. "If ye continue in the faith." "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." "Kept . . . unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time." In the same way the Apostle Paul speaks of gaining Christ, and having the righteousness of God. Had he not already found Christ for his gain, and was he not consciously standing in the righteousness of God?

In all these cases the blessings spoken of are possessed now, it is true in spirit, but the day is coming, when, in all their fullness, they are to be for ever realized, without let or hindrance, in their own proper sphere. We read in 1 Peter 1: "hope with perfect steadfastness in the grace which will be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." We wait for that day to enjoy in all their fullness the everlasting blessedness of having Christ for our gain, God's righteousness for His presence, and the life eternal in which they are for ever enjoyed. We have them now in spirit and by faith; but then in unhindered power, and according to His mind in whom they are possessed.

Verse 28. The apostle now gives special reasons for his desire that they should abide in Christ, that he might not be ashamed before Him at His coming. How present to his soul was the coming of that great day! "Holding forth the word of life, that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain," gives us Paul's sense of responsibility in view of the coming of Christ. That day, and not the rapture (1 Thess. 4), would bring to light the character of the workman and his work. The whole family are addressed here.

The chapter ends with the test of righteousness. We have seen the tests of obedience and love applied in the beginning. Obedience, love, and righteousness, were the characteristics of that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us. "He that doeth righteousness is born of Him." "He that loveth his brother abideth in the light." "Whoso keepeth his word, in him the love of God is perfected."

Chapter 3

Verse 1. “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not.” — “O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee.” “Now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father.” “I have given them Thy word, and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” Unknown and hated, they share the portion of the blessed One! To be in favor with God implies enmity from the world; many shrink before its frown or seek its applause. Some have so learned Christ and been taught by Him as the truth is in Jesus, as to say with Paul, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” The shame it meant for Christ, Paul flings back upon the world which put Him there. For himself henceforth, it is but a crucified rejected thing, he on his side crucified to it, but it is with Christ. The cross on which He died, the only thing on earth in which he gloried — this is overcoming, not loving, the world — nearest of all in the conflict to Him who said, “I have overcome the world.”

In Christ Jesus, he tells us, nothing availed but new creation, as, in this epistle, the life manifested in Christ, now in the saints, is everything. There the starting-point was the cross, and new creation the rule of walk. What had become of the world and its sanctuary, its elements and beggarly principles, and the hand-writing of ordinances? They had all been inseparably united, component parts of the old creation system, and subsisted or fell together. The cross was the condemnation and setting aside of the whole system; the law was weak because of the flesh, the flesh was enmity against God, the ordinances were for this very flesh — the law made nothing perfect. Paul would not have his own righteousness, which was by it. The sanctuary was a worldly one, but the worshipers are now not of the world, but in conflict with the lords of this darkness.

Paul views the world in its relation to the cross, but John sees it in its opposition to the Father. All that is in it “is not of the Father, but is of the world,” and itself “lieth in the wicked one.” We see what the world is as a moral system, it does not know the Father, how then can it know His children? Our blessings and glories proceed not from it; the world hates, but the Father loves us. Now are we His children, Jesus is coming, and then we shall be like Him, see Him as He now is with the Father, in the glory He had with the Father before the world was. He asked the Father for this, not for the glory of the kingdom; we shall be with the Son of Man in that also. But to be like Him as He is with the Father in the day for which we wait is another thought. What a now and then for the saints! How blessed and wonderful these His ways toward us! But such is our spiritual state that they rarely, if ever, reach the heart save through the conscience. The light of these precious revelations brings to view hidden things, which have to be judged in the conscience, and, put away, ere the heart can take up in communion with God the truths and hopes with which He would feed it.

Verse 3. “And every one that hath this hope in Him purifies himself even as He is pure.” What a standard! perfect as the “Life.” The moral glory of the eternal life that was with the Father, shining

through and in the midst of this darkness, we have looked upon with the eye of faith; the properly divine and heavenly glory with the Father which eye hath not seen, we wait to see, and to behold it in the Man once humbled. here, and to be ourselves conformed to His image in that day! The grace, bringing salvation, that was manifested at His first appearing, is a spring of holiness to those led by the Spirit, as is also the grace of the glory that awaits us at His second appearing. In the interval between the two, another motive power is ministered to our souls: in looking on the glory of the Lord with unveiled face, we are changed now into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit — but this is inwardly and morally — when He appears, then we shall be like Him, because of seeing Him as He is. What a now and then we have here!

The grace of God has appeared; what it brought for all we have at least tasted in the knowledge of the goodness of God. What the appearing of the glory of our Savior Jesus Christ will bring, has not yet been manifested, in the hope of it we purify ourselves. He gave Himself for us, that He might purify unto Himself the objects of His love (Eph. 5:25-27).

I have just spoken of the spring of holiness realized in contemplating the glory of the Lord with unveiled face, now, while He is with the Father, in the interval between the two appearings. If we speak of the effects of these motives which the Spirit of glory ministers to us, we should not omit that which is amongst the greatest and sweetest of all, the dawning of the day, and rising of the Morning Star in the hearts which wait for Him, This is the hope of love, as the appearing in glory is the hope of righteousness. The truth of Christian responsibility is taught in connection with the appearing — public manifestation — not with the doctrine of the Morning Star; that is, His coming in special reference to His own peculiar treasure, for which He gave Himself, that He might sanctify it, having purified it by the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church. Holy, glorious, blameless! Such are His thoughts about the church, His bride. To present it to Himself, and then in the Father's house, was no matter of display and kingdom glory. All that belongs to the day, the rising of the Sun of righteousness. He will indeed have the nations for His inheritance, but He had bought the world itself (the field), for the treasure He found in it. Was she not dearer to Him than all beside? For her He sold all that He had, left the glory, bought the world, gave Himself, sent the Spirit. And for her descends Himself from heaven that He may present her to Himself; though there be others not properly of the bride (the church united to Him by the Holy Ghost), caught up at the same time (1 Thess. 4)

The glorious inheritance is connected with service here, but in that which is immediately before us, the hope of meeting Him in the air, there is nothing to modify the heart's pure delight. The dawn of day and light of the Morning Star are already in the hearts that are waiting for Him, and never did divine announcement on earth meet with such prompt response as that awakened by these words, "I am the bright and morning star." The whole heart, the Spirit leading, tells itself out in one sweet word, "Come." "Come" — from the lips and hearts of men — not that the mountains might flow down, the nations tremble, at His presence, the everlasting doors lift up their heads that the King of glory might come in; not to remove the evil, or bring in the good; but that in His coming the heart might have Himself for its infinite unspeakable gain, fully known and realized in yonder bright regions of joy.

Verse 4. "Every one that practices sin practices lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness." Here we have a divinely given definition of sin, namely, insubjection to law, a deeper thing than

transgression of the law. Insubjection to law is the principle of sin, as enmity against God is the principle of the mind of the flesh, which “is not subject to the law of God,” nor can be. Neither can they who are in the state characterized as flesh please God. But He was manifested to take away our sins, has He not done it? “Who His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree.” Sin and sins have been dealt with judicially on the cross. Sin in the flesh was there condemned, and we are dead, in His death, unto sin (Rom. 6). “How shall we live any longer therein?” This is faith’s way of looking at it — being God’s way of viewing His saints in grace, the work of Christ for sin being accomplished. But there is another thought here; in Him there is no sin, and He has become our life, and that life does not sin. In 1 John 2:29, the principle laid down is that the practice is according to the nature, the divine nature in us considered abstractedly. “If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him.” It is put negatively in 1 John 3:9, cannot sin, because he is begotten of God.

Verse 6. “Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither known Him.” The first part is very clear, and whoever sins has not the life, does not know Him.

Verse 7. Every one who practices righteousness is righteous as He is righteous. It is the same life. (See 1 John 2:29). There, he who practices righteousness is begotten of God. In verse 10, whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother — for righteousness and love are qualities of the divine nature.

Verse 8. He that practices sin is of the devil — he also practices lawlessness (see vs. 4), but Christ was manifested to take away our sins and undo the works of the devil, who sinned from the beginning. In John 8 the Lord tells them that they were of their father the devil, and that he was a murderer from the beginning, a sinner (murderer and liar) from the beginning. Such is the devil! Thus murder and falsehood characterize the devil and his children from the beginning. To apply the words of 1 John 2:8, the thing was true in him and in them — as the nature that cannot sin is in Christ and those that are His. Now the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest; love and righteousness characterize the former, hatred (murder) and unrighteousness the latter. The message which we heard from the beginning was that we should love one another. Cain was of his father the devil, and murdered his brother — certainly had not eternal life dwelling in him.

Verse 13. Do not wonder if the world hates you. In the first verse we are told that the world does not know us, because it knew Him. not. “We have heard,” they said, “out of the law that Christ abideth for ever, and how sayest thou, the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” A Messiah who does not abide, the Son of Man lifted up, was on their side the rejection of the hope of Israel, on God’s side it meant the judgment of the nation, and the setting aside for a time of Jewish hopes, which, like the promises, could only be realized in Christ. That His sufferings must precede His glories was too humbling a doctrine for the proud heart of man, so they hid their faces from and refused to, know Him. It was of no use then to explain the glorious titles — “Messiah,” and “Son of Man.” They were of the darkness, and as darkness is to light, such was their relation morally to Him. He called on them to believe in the light, that they might become sons of light, something far more important than Jewish or earthly hopes connected with the Messiah. They heard indeed, but understood not, saw, but perceived not, they hid their faces from Him, and He departed, and did hide Himself from them. The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not. It is also written, “They hated Me without a cause.” What a privilege to be

allowed to share His sufferings; hated and unknown during the little while. “Ye are they who have continued with Me in My temptations,” the Lord says to His disciples, “and I appoint unto you a kingdom.” We may enter into the spirit of these things now. Soon all will be changed, the despisers will wonder and perish, the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

Verse 15. Every one that hates his brother is a murderer. The thought of the heart constitutes such an one a murderer before Him who judges the thoughts and intents of the heart. These three things characterize a person who, does not love his brother.

1. “He is not of God, for God is love.”
2. “He abides in death,” the death of nature.
3. “Eternal life does not abide in him,” he is an unconverted person. (See vss. 10, 14, 15).

Cain neither practiced righteousness, nor loved his brother, but took the place of a worshiper, a false one. Of the preciousness of the blood and the sweet savor of the fat, what they mean before God and for man, he was equally ignorant. When he found that his offering was rejected, his countenance fell, he was angry with God, and murdered his brother.

Verse 16. “Hereby we have known love, because He laid down His life for us.” We have seen that hatred [murder] is of the devil, who sinned from the beginning; here we are taught that we know love by this, that He laid down His life for us. The contrast could not be more complete, hatred and love, each traced up to its source.

Verses 19, 20. If our hearts condemn us, the Searcher of hearts knows, better even than we do, that there is something hindering which we may not have found out. What to do in such case every true person will know. “Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any way of pain in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” But if our hearts should not condemn us, who can convey to another the precious results, freedom or boldness with God, the heart unlocked, the tongue loosed; though shut up on every side it may be with men, rejected, misjudged, the sorrows we suffer at the hand of man are quickly forgotten in the joy of communion with Himself. In spirit at home with Him — ah! who can harm us in that blest place? dwelling in the secret, place of the Most High, we abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

This word, “boldness,” in what blessed connection it is ever found! When speaking of the all-various wisdom of God, according to eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord, which was to be made known to the angels through the church, the apostle adds, “in whom [Christ] we have boldness and access”; we draw near to the God of this glorious all-various wisdom, according to the boldness we have in Christ. We enter into the holy of holies boldly, through the blood of Jesus, there to worship and adore; and when pressed by the trials of the wilderness, we approach with boldness to the throne of grace. Moreover, it is not only in wilderness trials that this boldness of approach is realized, for this is the boldness we have towards God, that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us. “It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man.” “It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.” If it be a question of responsibility, as in the wilderness, we are to hold fast the boldness and the boast of hope firm to the end.

Verse 24 commences a new subject here; the tests from application of the principles of the divine nature, as seen in Christ, end at verse 23. "And he that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us." Our abiding in Him is dependent on the obedience (quality of the divine life) which keeps His commandments, and which is inseparable from the boldness which we have towards Him. He abides in us through the nature communicated, and we know it by the Holy Ghost whom He has given to us.

Chapter 4

Verse 1. “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” “Believe not every spirit.” Already the Spirit had warned of surrounding evils and dangers — the world, it was not of the Father, nor anything in it, lying itself in the wicked one, and passing away. It was the last hour, as the presence of the antichrists demonstrated; antichrists, liars, and seducers were there; and now another class of evil-doers was mentioned, many false prophets had gone out into the world; evil abounds in the last hour, not yet expired. Many antichrists, many false prophets; the saints, as such, are responsible not to believe, but to try the spirits, and here are some of the tests. In the confession of Jesus Christ come in the flesh, the Spirit of God is recognized, the confessor is of God; the denial of this is the proof that the spirit of the antichrist that should come is already in the world. This is not the world’s rejection and hatred, but special Satanic wickedness and opposition to Christ. Whatever the profession or claims of these persons, the truth as to their state is this — they are not of God, but “of the devil,” and “of the world.” Their teaching is the doctrine of devils, their conversation that of men of the world, to which they belong. It will be remembered that the world lieth in the wicked one, so that giving forth his teachings, and speaking as of the world, of which he is prince, are naturally connected. They are at this moment crowding to the standard of the prince of darkness. The word “development” is constantly on their lips, and the phrase, “The church teaches,” which, in their sense, no one denies. But who teaches the church? Is it such as the Lord set in the church, according to 1 Corinthians 12, or whence do they come? Are there not many who, having departed from the faith, and given heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, are now actively engaged in teaching them; subverting the order and truth of God, teaching further for doctrine the commandments of men? The truth of God displaced for doctrines of devils and commandments of men! Can any one read church history, or look around him, and deny that our Lord’s words have the fullest application? (Mark 7:7-9). “Howbeit, in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. And He said unto them, “Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.” Churchmen petitioning church authorities for “relief of conscience,” I think they term it, that they may not be compelled to teach, or appear to teach, what they know is contrary to the truth, but continuing to obey the commandments of men when not “relieved.” The martyrs of old maintained a pure conscience by dying for Him whom they loved. But these false prophets are not to be borne with, but overcome. “Ye are of God, children, and have overcome them, because greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world.” This was not the church teaching, but the church overcoming those who taught falsehoods, and this, not by ecclesiastical authority, but by the power of the Spirit of God, which was greater amongst them than that of Satan in the world. “Thou canst not bear evil men, and thou hast tried them who say that themselves are apostles, and are not, and hast found them to be liars,” said the Lord Jesus, addressing the church at Ephesus; and “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches,” not “what the churches teach.”

In the New Testament, at any rate, the church is taught, but teaches nothing. “We are of God, he that knows God hears us” — the apostles — hears what they (not the church) taught. “He who is not of God does not hear us,” and from this the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error are known. The false teachers invite us to hear, first, themselves, and then, the church, which, by accrediting them (these false apostles and liars), practically declares that He that is in you is not greater than he that is in the world; that is, that the spirit of Antichrist, is not only in the world already, but in the church also, and greater there than the Spirit of God. But this means that the lamp is gone out, the church fallen, and, having failed in its responsible place as pillar and ground of the truth, must be judged, for judgment begins at the house of God. The Lord marks it that they call themselves apostles, as Jezebel called herself a prophetess. (See Rev. 2, 3; 1 Pet. 4:17). The church’s teachings, therefore, are to be dreaded rather than received. “I commend you to God,” said the Apostle Paul, “and to the word of His grace”; not “to my successors,” or “to a teaching church.” “He that is of God hears us,” says the Apostle John: “and he who does not hear us is not of God” (not a believer). A rationalist he may be, but certainly an infidel — not of God.

These false teachers are often learned, intellectual, and able men, but “of the world that lies in the wicked one,” and speak (not “about the world,” which is not the thought, but) as themselves of the world, belonging to it — a different thing. And naturally the world hears them, themselves and their hearers are simply of the world; this accounts for their popularity. The tables of the rich and intellectual are covered with their books, but, their words are neither living nor powerful, piercing no conscience, and reaching no heart, they serve the enemy’s purpose as channels of deadly poison. Let us remember that the church itself is under judgment. Oh, if it had been faithful in its position as pillar and ground of the truth (and that was its calling and responsibility on earth, not to teach, but to keep the truth, and hear what the Spirit of God would teach it), from what sorrow and mighty evils it would have been preserved! How great would have been the gain, both for itself and the poor world around! The false prophets, the antichrists, and grievous wolves would have been kept outside, the flock lying down in green pastures, and led by the waters of quietness. But it has failed, like everything else, from the beginning. What, then, is our resource? God, in the fullness of that name — Father, Son, and Holy Ghost! He never fails; Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and the Holy Ghost abides with us.

The “word of His grace” is only more precious on account of our unfaithfulness. It will be much the same with Israel, the ruin total, discovered in the end by a remnant which passes through deepest trial from within and from without, but reaches the kingdom in the glorious character of “the righteous nation that keepeth the truth.” So it will be in what has been denominated “the church remnant,” the “heart-stirring” cry, “Behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him,” arouses from the slumber of ages those who, like the Jewish remnant, had “slept in the dust of the earth.” The character of the faithful ones of the church, at the close, we get in the address to Philadelphia. These also keep the truth, for they do not deny His name (the Holy and True One), and keep His word. The earthly remnant celebrates its strong city, whose walls and bulwarks are salvation, and whose gates open to let them in. Its glory will be great, but not like that of the heavenly overcomer, he belongs to the city of the God of the Lord Jesus, its name is written on him. Not salvation, but divine glory, forms the wall of this city — the holy Jerusalem, which comes out of heaven from God. Nothing that makes a lie shall at all enter into it. “Without are dogs . . . and every one that loves and makes a lie.” The divine glory, symbolized, by the jasper stone, constitutes its light,

strength, and security (Rev. 21:11, 18, 19). What glorious reward for the overcomers in the conflict with wicked spirits in the heavenlies, to receive from Christ Himself — the glorious Overcomer — the “freedom of the city” of His God! And this, too, when the church, as house of God on earth, had entirely failed. But there are higher glories than these — the “name of my God,” and His own “new name,” connected, I believe, with His victory. How lovely the grace that rewards with honors like these the faithfulness which was His own gift! It is very evident that he whose spirit is not stirred by these glorious promises is still sleeping in the dust of the earth.

And now it is in my heart to give some extracts from the teachings of only a few of these false prophets (their name is legion), under whose teaching and influence the faith of Christ is being given up by multitudes who had hitherto professed it outwardly. I do so in the hope that the few who may read this paper may, for the Lord Jesus sake and their own, for the sake of the souls of men, give heed to the exhortation with which this chapter commences, not to believe every spirit, but to try the spirits whether they be of God. “Many false prophets are gone out,” and so forth. It is equally true of this very hour, the last hour. Beloved brethren in the far-off prairies of America will remember telling me that for twelve long years no professing Christian had ever visited them, who did not seek to introduce false doctrines. Thank God! the sheep knew the voice of the divine Shepherd, and so were kept. Great numbers had the doctrine of the Lord’s coming, and some were earnest Christians, but in almost every case these people were unsound in doctrine. Thus the liar from the beginning sought to bring discredit on that precious truth by connecting it with error. There are persons now, as of old, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ, and “no wonder,” the apostle adds, “for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.” “The church teaches,” say these prophets, when pressed for their authority, never, with God’s prophets of old, “Thus saith the Lord.” By “the church teaching” they mean, in general, the fathers, or persons accredited by the church, itself fallen, and under judgment. Even to Ephesus, the brightest of all the assemblies, the Lord said, “Remember whence thou art fallen,” with a threat of removing the candlestick out of its place.

The first passage I now quote from one of these reamed doctors gives us the thought of many as to this teaching church. Its direct contradiction to revealed truth on the subject will be apparent at the first glance.

The church, in the fullest sense, is left to herself to work out by her natural faculties the principles of her own action.

In this short sentence the presence of the Holy Ghost, the enmity of the natural mind, and the authority of the word of God, are wholly denied. Another person of eminence amongst these teachers thus describes the Trinity:

The law of thought is the ultimate basis and bond of coherence of this world; this thought is consubstantial with the being of the eternal “I am.” Being, becoming, and animating — or substance, thinking, and conscious life — are the expressions of a triad, which may be represented as will, wisdom, and love — light, radiance, and warmth; and then he adds,

If all this has a Sabellian sound, those who oppose it are bound to show how it differs from the teaching of the fathers.

This is what an eminent doctor says of the fathers! Now in mythology triad is the term applied to the mysterious union of three deities, in theology Sabellianism is the doctrine that Godhead consists of one Person only. He does not deny the Sabellianism of these thoughts. We can now form some idea of what importance is to be attached to the statement, "The church teaches." The church, in the fullest sense, left to herself to work out by her natural faculties the principles of her own action "(according to one of these writers), has decided, it appears, to recognize this writer as an authorized teacher in her midst!

Another doctor remarks, that it was natural for a Christian in the earliest ages to regard heathenism as belonging to the kingdom of Satan. Then we have the following statement (he had been talking about the heathen divinities):

The natural religious shadows projected by the spiritual light within, showing on the dark problems without, were all in reality systems of law given by God, though not given by revelation.

That is, the idolatrous systems of worship offered to the gods, or to devils rather, of which the practice of diabolical corruption formed an essential part, were in reality laws given by God! I need not ask a child of God from what spirit such doctrines emanate. We know that the heart is desperately wicked, but I do not believe that such thoughts are of spontaneous growth there, but of Satanic origin. The Word says, "Try the spirits whether they are of God"; by multitudes an unheeded word. "Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition" — "observe what is delivered by yourselves to keep." But these prophets, far from approving or accepting this admonition of our divine Master, boldly declare that in the fullest sense the church is to work out by her "natural faculties" the principles of her own action. This is a principle "delivered by themselves to keep."

Certainly the allowance of such teachers and teaching, in the presence of a revelation from God, does look as if the natural faculties had succeeded in discovering a principle of action for those who desire to commit themselves to such guidance, instead of to the Word of God.

They do not believe that the natural mind is enmity against God. When an ecclesiastical authority teaches (the church practically accepting it by its recognition of the teacher), that the heathen systems of worship were in reality laws given by God, one recalls what the Spirit says expressly of the latter times, "Some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils."

Another of these prophets teaches, that if the whole Bible were taken away, our belief in the living God remains as sure as ever, it is written on our hearts by God's own hand as surely as by the hand of the apostle in the Bible.

Thus each person becomes a Bible himself, according to this, the feelings of his own heart being as sure as the Book. He continues: "That God is a rewarder of those that diligently seek Him, that His voice within the heart may be heard by any obedient child that listens for it," that "that voice within shall be our teacher, when the words of the best of books may fail us." That is, that the light within is a substitute for the light of revelation — as good, or better. Man, according to this, needs not the knowledge of Christ; the voice within, if heeded, is sufficient; but this is the denial of Christianity, simply deism, as the teaching of the other is practically Sabellianism. One more quotation from a prophet in our day.

Spiritual life and salvation are communicated by faith, when one fully repents, cries to God for salvation, and believes the atonement; but divine life, or regeneration, possessed by a few, is quite another thing, communicated and sustained by sacraments, possessed only in the degree in which, by personal efforts, we die to self. This is the portion of an elect few, who will form the bride of Christ.

He says that those are in a nearer relationship to Christ who are in the established church, though dead in sins, than a saved person who has spiritual life outside it. A well-known passage in the book of Proverbs forbids one making any reply to such statements.

But now, to go on with the chapter: the confession spoken of (vs. 3) is of the Person, Jesus Christ; but Jesus Christ come in the flesh, the confession of a doctrine simply is of no value; the confession of the truth contained in the doctrine is by the Holy Ghost.

Verse 7. Now he reminds the beloved that love is of God, and therefore we should love one another; if love is of God, every one that loves must be born of God. It is a matter here of nature, the divine nature, consequently God can only be known in that nature (vs. 8). "He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love," and "Who, of men, knows the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him; thus also the things of God knoweth no man, except the Spirit of God." God is known by participation in His nature, and by the Spirit. Blessed be His holy name! He is His own interpreter. The vain babblings and oppositions of false-named knowledge have no place here; he who knows God, knows that they are not of Him. No one can say, "Lord Jesus," unless in the power of the Holy Ghost. Oh, the comfort of the divine word, and the blessed assurance that it is all His own! The word of a God whom we know in this wondrous way, possessing, through endless grace and love, His nature and His Spirit. Alas! for the Gnostics of our time, and of all time. This they willingly are ignorant of, that it is in the wisdom of God, that the world by wisdom knew not God. We cannot know what God is in nature, save in possessing that nature. Through ignorance of this, these schools of thought fail utterly. They do not teach the knowledge of God, nor yet to say, "Lord Jesus." This is the work of the Holy Ghost; but the doctors prefer the operation of the "natural faculties," and in place of revealed truth tell us of natural religious shadows projected by the spiritual light within!

Verses 9 and 10. This is love towards us, not yet in us, manifested in His sending His only-begotten Son, that we might live through Him. This was what the Lord Himself said (John 3). The next verse teaches us, that the love was not found in us, but in God. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us. Farther on we find this love in us. So with regard to eternal life, He has given it to us, but it is in the Son. Love is "known" by His laying down His life for us (1 John 3:16). Love toward us, manifested by God sending His only-begotten Son that we might live through Him. Love consists in this, that God loved us when we loved Him not, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. That is, life and propitiation through the Son. Having thus given us the measure and the purposes of His love, John exhorts the beloved, by this so great love, to love one another, using the Lord's own word, "so." "God so loved." Eternal life and propitiation were its ripe fruits (others we shall enjoy in their season); the Father's house, the golden city, His tabernacle set amongst men; He will not forsake that, as of old He left the tent at Shiloh.

Verse 12. (See also John 1:18). The only-begotten Son hath revealed Him. What new tidings were these, the Father's name manifested! Here the same difficulty is met in another way. "If we love

one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us.” Where did that love come from? Love is of God, and it is in us; but God is love, He therefore is in us. The Holy Ghost, by whom, as Paul tells us, the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, is the power of this, and He dwells in us. But God dwelling in us is a truly wonderful and glorious privilege; His love is perfected in us, realized in the measure in which we love one another. So, in chapter 2, we see that the love of God is perfected in him that keeps Christ’s word. He declared that He was in principle what He said, His word was the perfect expression of Himself, but He was the manifestation of the perfect love of God; in keeping His word one possessed Himself, and thus the love of God was perfected in the believer. By love of God is meant, the love that is in God — divine love.

Verse 13. Hereby we know the full blessedness of God dwelling in us, and we in God, because “He has given us of his Spirit,” in the affections and thoughts which are by His Spirit. In 1 John 2:24, it is said, “Hereby we know that He dwells in us, by the Spirit which He has given us,” the presence of the Holy Ghost. In 1 John 3:16, “Hereby we have known love, because he laid down his life for us.” He would have us intelligent as to all these channels of blessing from Himself. If He beautifies His saints with salvation, they glorify Him with praise. To the world John can say, “We have seen and do testify”; to the saints, “We have known and believed.” How precious in either case his theme, “Savior of the world.” Never was music like the sound of these words in the ears of a converted sinner; and such are we, converted, convicted, and soon to be conformed to the image of the Son; and then the love that God hath to us, He is this love. Himself and His love are ever known together. Like Jesus. and His word, where His love is, there is God Himself, where His word is, there Jesus is present. God’s love perfected in him that keeps it — he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Can we not discern the thought of God’s heart in these words? What is the answer in ours? The privilege how great! the neglect of it how profound! An offence to the God of love, a grief to His Spirit. Oh how the spirit of “this darkness” has, in many ways, made breaches upon us, large enough to let in the things of the world, and practically to shut out the things of God! Have we gloried somewhat in our knowledge, forgetting that it is he that loveth that knoweth God, and that God and the world cannot be loved at the same time? — “O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee!” — and that another apostle prays that the saints might grow by the true knowledge of God. In all the teaching of this epistle, it is seen that the foundations are not in what is produced in the soul, as our dwelling in love, but in this, that God, who is love and light without darkness, has sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins, and that we might live through Him; that the Son, the eternal Life that was with the Father, had been manifested, and that that life is now in the saints.

Verse 17. “Herein is love with us [New Trans.] made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.” Love perfected in our case. The day of judgment will test the perfectness of this love; nowhere, not even in the Holy of holies, will the saints be more free with God, than in that awful hour; already they live of that eternal life in which Jesus, after His victory — sin, Satan, and death set aside or vanquished — ascended to the right hand. The victorious life is theirs, the life and nature of the Judge Himself. As He is, so are they. Neither time nor eternity affects a standing like this; judgment and glory leave it untouched. The day of glory equally manifests the perfectness of this love, for we shall see Him as He is. The glory of the Judge will be our glory, His life and glory ours.

“I give unto them eternal life,” “the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them.” Judgment could only reach them through that of the Judge Himself. The boldness of the saints with their God, the same in the day of judgment as in the Holy of holies, will tell aloud how love, with us, is made perfect. There is no fear in love, no, there is none, and we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. We cannot “fear where no fear is”; he that does not fear is perfected in love; but every blessing is from God. If we love Him, it is because He first loved us.

Chapter 5

The confession of His Person is the test here, as in the opening of chapter 4. "Every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ come in the flesh is of God"; this Antichrist denies. "Whosoever confesses that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" We have already seen that love and righteousness, in exercise amongst professors of the truth, proved that they possessed the divine nature, of which "these are qualities. But in verses 4 and 5, we find what is so deeply interesting, the confession of the Person of Jesus, Son of God, united with the possession of the divine nature (born of God), in giving us the victory over the world. Who then is he that conquers the world? What a bold challenge! Can you take it up? But I put another question, for the pleasure of answering it in our hearts. Who is He that has over come it, and bids us therefore be of good cheer? (John 16:33). Boldness in the day of judgment, and overcoming the world, these are high thoughts. Did ever Roman, Grecian, or barbarian commander think of victory like this? And yet they do not puff up, but build up on the most holy faith.

Verse 6. "This is he that came by water and blood," and so forth. We have seen that Jesus Christ come in the flesh is the Object of faith, but the manner of His coming is the great point here, how He came. Were it only in the flesh, Christ incarnate, what but judgment could have been the result? the creature forever separated from God. Atonement and reconciliation are not found in Christ in the flesh, indeed His presence in the flesh maintained in a sense the enmity between Jew and Gentile. "Come in the flesh," was also come under law, and in connection with the whole system. He broke down the middle wall of partition by death, when He "abolished in His flesh the enmity, the law of commandments contained in ordinances . . . and that He might reconcile both in one body to God by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby." For faith, all enmities perish there; at the other side of it, we love God and our neighbor. Present in the flesh, the only-begotten Son of the Father revealed the Father. The eternal life which was with the Father was manifested, but if this was all, our state was infinitely worse than ever, for His presence made it manifest, to those who had eyes to see, that a gulf impassable to man lay between them and Him whom the Son revealed, when He said, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." No, sin was there, and unless a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but for this purpose He came into this world, that the lost might find life through His death (Matt. 17:11), and that He might not be alone (John 12:24; Eph. 5:25).

He came by water and blood, not by water only, "but by water and blood," cleansing and expiation. We have in Ephesians the expression "washing of water by the word," from which we can clearly understand its use elsewhere. It is always used in a moral sense. One must be born of it and the Spirit, to enter the kingdom. "He that is washed" (John 13), signifies regeneration; one is not washed again, any more than (when it is a question of the efficacy of the blood) one is sprinkled again. It is in connection with walking in the light that it is said, "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin," that is its property, it cleanses from sin. But "if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father"; and to wash the feet is another thought, and the word for it different from that used in,

“He that is washed.” We are born again of incorruptible seed, by the word of God (1 Pet. 1). The entrance of the word brings light, and we are born of it by the Spirit, but it judges all that it finds, and writes death upon every thought of the carnal mind, and becomes itself the source of wholly new thoughts and affections. But blood, not water, is the expiation for sin, “without shedding of blood is no remission” (It would seem that many of the doctors have forgotten this). But there is no cleansing power like the death of Jesus, He died for and unto sin. There I get God’s judgment about it, and His judgment, through grace infinite, has become mine. “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin,” “We are baptized unto His death” (Rom. 6). “He that is dead is freed from sin”; freed as a slave from his master, not in the sense of saying, we have no sin. It is from the dead body of Jesus that the water and blood flowed.

How precious is the truth of Jesus wondrous death! Infinitely, everlastingly precious, and from every point of view, whether looked at from heaven or from earth, from the side of God’s glory or man’s ruin. Having humbled Himself to the death of the cross, it was the Father’s glory that raised Him to the right hand; there the Spirit in the saints delights to follow Him: Seek the things which are above, where the Christ is sitting at the right hand of God.

But the third witness is the Holy Ghost, which, like cleansing and expiation, we have through the death of Christ. He received the Spirit for man and in the Man (Psa. 68:18, margin), after that He had, through death, destroyed him that had the power of death. These are the three witnesses on God’s part. This the witness of God, about whom? About His Son, and what is it? That God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son, in us, from Him, as a stream from an exhaustless fountain. We have got the witness, too, in ourselves; for the life itself, with its affections, is there, the consciousness of it too, the Spirit also bearing witness. Like Himself, we love righteousness and hate iniquity, like Him we cry, “My God, My Father”; thus the nature approves itself to be divine. The thing that was true in Him is true also in us. The first chapter speaks of the manifestation of the eternal life that was with the Father, the last tells us that it is in us. God has given this life unto us.

And now, to the three witnesses on God’s part, the water, the blood, and the Holy Ghost, may a fourth be added, through grace, the heart of the believing sinner. This precious doctrine, received in the heart, delivers from the seductions and lies of false teachers and antichrists. “He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” Thus God, by His Spirit, definitively and for eternity, settles this question. All praise and glory to Him!

Verse 13 (New Trans.). “These things have I written to you that ye may know that ye have eternal life who believe on the name of the Son of God.”

It is in this way that God conveys to His people, through the apostle, His desire that they should enjoy the unspeakable blessedness of consciously possessing eternal life. The deep grace of this will be noted, and its importance too.

Verse 14. We have again this beautiful word “confidence,” or “boldness,” the grounds for it He delights to reveal — the divine Lover of His people! What they are for the day of judgment, for entering the Holy of holies, for drawing near to the throne of grace, we have seen. What they are in prayer is twofold — a heart that needs not to condemn itself, and one submissive to His will (“If we ask anything according to His will”; 3:21, 5:14).

Verse 16. "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and He shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it." There are two beautiful aspects in which the child of God is contemplated in this epistle; overcoming the world "and "prevailing with God "for the life of a sinning brother. Here it is prolongation of natural life. But what nearness to Christ this supposes, to Him who conquered the world, and obtained, by His death, eternal life for those who had sinned even unto death!

A sin unto death may be any sin, a resisting His will and grieving His Spirit, which only His eye has seen. What can be more sad for a child of God than the weakening of confidence in Him, the waning of all joy, and the apprehension of chastening, which may reach even unto death. May God preserve His beloved people from sorrow like this.

Verse 18. Through consciousness of what we have and are, as from God, we keep ourselves, and the wicked one touches us not. This is what we have in the thrice repeated, "we know." "Begotten of God," "of God," and with an understanding given us by the Son of God, that we might know Him that is true (This last is objective knowledge, the three former "we know" are subjective — conscious knowledge). "And we are in Him that is true . . . This is the true God and eternal life." Thus ends this glorious epistle — Jesus Christ is the true God and eternal life. Rock of ages! in vain the waves of hell have dashed against Thee, it was only that they might be broken and disappear for ever! All praise and glory to Him who has shut us in, within that Ark which has found its resting-place upon the throne of God!

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
 - 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net