

1 John 1

by Daniel Steele

Daniel Steele's sermon on 1 John 1 emphasizes the reality of Christ's humanity, the importance of living in fellowship with God, and the necessity of confession and righteousness in the believer's life.

Scripture: 1 John 1:1-2

Topics: "Christology", "Gnosticism"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches on the importance of recognizing and affirming the reality of Christ's humanity, as opposed to the false philosophy of Dualism that denied the sinlessness of Jesus Christ by claiming sin exists only in the material body. Steele emphasizes the need to believe in 'Christ come in the flesh' to uphold the foundational truths of Christian theology, including Christ's mediatorship, atonement, and resurrection. The Epistle of John addresses the heresy of Gnosticism, which distorted the understanding of sin, forgiveness, and cleansing, leading to moral corruption and false claims of spiritual purity.

Transcript

HALF-HOURS WITH JOHN'S EPISTLES

FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

CHAPTER I.

PRELIMINARY NOTE

THE words which open this First Epistle of St. John -- an appeal to three of the five senses in proof of the reality of Christ's body -- show that it turns upon the Person of the Son of God incarnate. But why was the reality of Christ's humanity so stoutly denied? It was necessary in order to meet the demands of the false philosophy which some Christians had adopted in order to harmonize that doctrine with the sinlessness of the man Jesus Christ. Dualism asserts the existence of two gods or two original principles, one good and the other evil, one spirit and the other matter; spirit being perfectly holy, and matter incorrigibly evil, only evil and that continually and forever.

Spirit can never become unholy because there can be no real contact, no mixture with matter. The spirits of sensual, gluttonous, licentious and drunken men are perfectly free from moral evil which can exist in the body only. Hence there is no need of an atonement for the real self, the spirit in man. The moral leprosy touched only the body, the envelope of the spirit. A golden jewel may be encompassed for years in the filth

of a pigsty without the least defilement from its environment.

It would still be pure good. This was the favorite illustration of this philosophy. The moral effect of such teaching may be easily imagined when professing Christians could consort with harlots and claim fellowship with God, have their bodies filled with the spirit of wine and their souls filled with the Spirit Divine. The ethics of the Gospel would have been totally subverted if this pernicious teaching had prevailed. John realized the greatness of the impending ruin and assailed it in this pastoral address.

When the heresy arose that sin exists only in the material organism, and the spirit which acts through it is perfectly pure and always must be, the orthodox disciples under the leadership of John opposed this false doctrine imported from the pagan Orient. One of their arguments was that it denied the sinlessness of Jesus Christ who had a material body. His sinfulness must follow if matter is always evil. The Dualists, who are also called Gnostics, evaded this necessary inference by denying the reality of Christ's body.

They boldly asserted that he was a phantom, like the various theophanies, or appearances of God, in human form in the Old Testament. In other words, the incarnation was a sham. This removes the corner stone of Christian theology, Christ's mediatorship, for He was in no sense human; His atonement in His own blood was an illusion, since He had only the appearance of death; and His resurrection must be unreal, if He died only in appearance. Hence the whole controversy of John with the Dualists was centred in the question, was the body of Jesus real flesh and bones?

This accounts for the emphasis John so often in this Epistle puts upon believing on "Christ come in the flesh." This accounts for the very first words of the Epistle which contain the theme which John proposes to amplify, namely, the real humanity of his divine Master, just as he states the proposition to be proved by his Gospel, namely, the Supreme Divinity of the Son of God, the Logos, who was with God, and thus distinct in personality, and who was God, being one in nature. We have one dogmatic Gospel and one polemic Epistle, both by the same author, and both announcing their subject in the first sentence of their treatises.

To put the purpose of each in an epigrammatic form the theme of the Gospel is, Jesus is the Christ; i.e., very God; the theme of the Epistle is, the Christ is Jesus; i.e., very Man.

The subject-matter of the Gospel employed in the Epistle (i. 1-3).

The purpose of the Epistle (i. 4).

1. "From the beginning." As in John i. 1, before the world was. But in ii. 7, 13, 14, iii. 11, it signifies from the commencement of preaching the Gospel.

The first verse of the Epistle declares the reality of Christ's body, as attested by all the special senses which in the nature of the case can be applied. Taste and smell are not related to this demonstration. But the eyes, the ears and the hands are summoned as witnesses in proof that the important witness is emphasized by the use of two verbs, that which we have seen with our eyes and continuously, calmly and intently "contemplated" or surveyed. The phrase "with our eyes" is not redundant, for it accentuates the direct, outward experience of a matter so marvelous in itself and in its basal relation to vital Christian truths. It was no mere trance or vision of the soul alone. "Your eyes have seen" is the formula for assured certitude in Deut. iii. 21, xi. 7, xxi. 7.

"Our hands handled." Referring to the challenge of Christ, after His resurrection, in John xx. 27, and Luke xxiv. 39. "Handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." This is the only intimation of the resurrection of Jesus found in this Epistle. Handling marks the solid ground of the apostolic knowledge, says Theophylact, "we have not given our assent to a mere momentary chance vision."

"The Word of life." The Logos (John i. 1), the whole Gospel revelation of God to man in the Person and teaching of His Son in the flesh. The sum of God's message is that life, spiritual and eternal, is in His Son and in all who perseveringly keep their union with Him by faith. See v.13. This life is not bare existence, as the annihilationists contend. It is not mere being, but well-being, fellowship with God and with man in God, through faith in Jesus Christ the embodied ideal of life made visible. Compare 1 John v.11, 12, 20; Rom. v. 10, vi. 23; 2 Cor. iv. 10; Col. iii. 4; 2 Tim. i. 1 "I am the resurrection and the life," John xi. 25. See also John vi. 57, xiv. 6, 19. But the strongest self-assertion of Christ that He is not only the bearer of life, but its independent source, is found in John v.26, "For as the Father hath life in Himself, even so gave He to the Son also to have life in Himself." As having anything in one's self precludes the causality of another, we are justified in the declaration that the Son is not merely the channel of life, but its independent, coördinate source. He is the self-dependent principle of a creative spiritual life. Life is Christ's immanent spiritual possession.

2. "Was manifested." The Son of God in three ways is made known as "the life," as His first coming was manifested, 1 John i. 2-9; after His resurrection, when He breathed on His disciples and imparted the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life (John xx. 22); and at His second coming (1 John ii. 28), when as the judge He will reward the righteous with eternal life. (Matt xxv. 46.)

"We have seen." Personal experience. "Bear witness." Responsible affirmation.

"And declare." Authoritative and dogmatic announcement. This is the logical order in which the Gospel of Christ will conquer the world.

"The eternal life." This special gift of Christ to believers -- eternal felicity -- is not to be confounded with an unending continuance in Heb. vii. 16. "Eternal life," found in the Old Testament only once (Dan. xii. 2), is eminently a New Testament phrase, occurring forty-three times.

"The Father." This simple title is always used with reference to the Son. "The simplest conception of God having a moral character, essentially love, includes an object loved from eternity, before the creation of any being. The person loved -- for the proper object of love is a person -- not being a creature must be divine. Hence the title, "the Father," on the lips of Him who shared God's glory and love before the world was implies more than one person in the unity of the divine nature.

3. "We announce unto you also." The reception of a revelation from God, outward in the form of a book, or inward in a joyful experience of love revealed and perfect, lays us under the obligation to publish it as widely as possible. There is no copyright or patent right to the blessedness of the Gospel. It is diffusive in its nature. It will not abide with him who seeks its exclusive possession. It evaporates if monopolized.

"Fellowship." The conscious realization of harmony with God and of communion with Him and conformity to His moral attributes. What the twelve apostles gained in outward intercourse with Christ, John desires that we may enjoy to the uttermost, by an inward and spiritual apprehension of the invisible and glorified Saviour.

"With the Father and the Son." Such coordination implies sameness of essence in these two Persons. Moreover fellowship with the Father is involved in fellowship with the Son. "He that hath the Son hath the Father."

4. "That our joy may be full." The Revision and most of the critics read "our joy." No believer's joy is complete till he has declared to others his faith in Christ. Mute Christians have imperfect joy. John gives two recipes for fullness of joy. The first is, "Ask and ye shall receive" (John xvi. 24), and the second is the confession of Christ's power to save. Neither Christ nor John taught the popular modern doctrine of indifference to feelings -- that we must tie down the safety-valve of our sensibilities and choke down our hallelujahs.

i. 5 - ii. 28. GOD IS LIGHT.

a. i. 5 - ii. 11. What Walking in the Light involves: the Condition and Conduct of the Believer.

Fellowship with God and with the Brethren (i. 5-7).

Consciousness and confession of sin [committed before forgiveness] (i. 8-10).

Obedience to God by Imitation of Christ (ii. 1-6).

Love of the Brethren (ii. 7-11).

5. "This is the message." The revelation of God's moral character; which must be known before we can be assimilated to its beauty and purity. Harmony must rest on a mutual knowledge and a moral likeness and sympathy. This constitutes true spiritual fellowship. The incarnation brings God to the knowledge of men. The work of the Spirit in the believer conforms him to the image of God revealed in Christ.

"God is light." Absolutely pure and self-communicating from His very nature, like the sun in the heavens. The holiness of God and the implied obligation of men to be like Him is the underlying truth of the Gospel message, and the theme of the preacher. No moral evil is in Him. Here in the words "light" and "darkness" we have a strong proof that John is opposing Zoroastrian dualism which identified light and spirit with moral goodness, and darkness and matter with moral evil, both principles being self-existent and from eternity.

The announcement of God's character is not a discovery of human genius, but a personal revelation. Only in this way can man know God. The reception of this revelation requires faith, without which man is an agnostic, without God, or, as Paul says, "atheos, an atheist in the world." This atheism, under the full light of the New Testament, has not an intellectual, but a moral cause. Against the requirement to become like God the depraved will rebels. This voluntary moral element in unbelief renders it culpable.

Every revelation of God's nature enjoins a duty. "God is spirit," therefore we must worship Him in spirit. "God is love," therefore we must have love as a proof that we are His children, i.e., to show that we are facsimiles of God. "God is light," therefore we must walk in the light or be ensphered in holiness. But there is a great temptation to profess a likeness to God when there is no such similarity to his moral character. This temptation takes on a three-fold form: (1.)

To say we have fellowship with the Light and walk in darkness, or sin. (2.) To say, "We have no sin," no guilt needing atonement. (3.) To say we have not sinned, making God a liar and evincing that His truth is

not in us. In these three cases John considers three classes of spurious professors of Christianity. Says Bishop Westcott, In doing this he unites himself with those whom he addresses; and recognizes the fact that he no less than his fellow-Christians has to guard against the temptations to which the three types of false doctrine correspond. The words quoted afford no foundation to the grave error of Dean Alford, who, because John says, "if we," says, This state of needing cleansing from all present sin is veritably that of all of us; and that our recognition and confession of it is the very essential of walking in the light. But if such a genuine case of confession followed by walking in the light should occur, and the person thus walking in the light should declare this fact for the benefit of those stumbling in the dark, our logical dean must insist that this victorious soul is deceived and the truth is not in him.

He must also aver that the saintly John, while penning these words, could not truthfully say that he was walking in the light and that he had no present guilt. That exegesis of "we," in these three hypothetical sentences, which declares that it refers not to false professors but to real Christians living at their spiritual climax in this world, makes John the most self-contradictory writer to be found in the whole range of secular and sacred literature. For he declares the purpose of his writing to be "that ye sin not" once (aorist tense), and "that he that is born of God does not sin."

Then he is made to say that all who obey God's prohibition and by grace abstain from sin and say so, should be branded as deluded or lying, or both duped and duping. But we have not finished the chapter of contradictions involved in the erroneous interpretation of "we."

6. "Walk in darkness." Ensphere ourselves in darkness or sin by our own choice. Such persons seek to hide those acts which their consciences condemn from themselves, from their fellow men and from God (See John iii. 19, 20.) Religious fanatics in all ages have endeavored to combine loose morals with the possession of true Christian faith. It seems that John found such persons among the Gnostics in the church at Ephesus. He says that they lie and do not the truth. They affirm what they know to be positively false when they profess fellowship with the holy God and are willfully choosing darkness and sin. (See James ii. 14.) Such a choice is fatal to fellowship with God.

7. "Walk in the light." By believing on Him who is the light we become "sons of light" and "partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light," having become ourselves "light in the Lord." (John xii. 36; Luke xvi. 8; Eph. v. 8; Col. i. 12; 1 Thess. v. 5.) This choice of light as the sphere of life is a state of justification. They who are in this state and they only are candidates for perfect cleansing from all sin. "This," says Haupt, "must not be understood of forgiveness of sins past but of sanctification," i. e., initial sanctification in the new birth. To say that this cleansing is a judicial clearance from the guilt of sin, is to deny that God "justifies the ungodly" and to set up rectitude of previous life as the condition of pardon as the Roman Catholic Church teaches. On this ground no sinner can be forgiven. Good works instead of trust in Christ cannot save, but good works as the fruit of faith are well pleasing to God. The present tense "cleanseth" here denotes continuousness, not on one individual, but on the human family, one after another being wholly purified, as in Rom. iii. 24, one after another is instantaneously justified. When one leper is cleansed as in Matt. viii. 3, the aorist tense is used, but when many in succession are to be cleansed as in Matt. x. 8, the present tense is used.

8. "If we say we have no sin." "Because," said the Gnostics, "sin never defiles the soul but the body only, and hence we need no cleansing, having in our spirits no sin to be cleansed from." Bengel, Bishop B. F. Westcott, and others have noted that the phrase, "to have sin," is found only in John's writings (John ix. 41, xv. 22, 24, xix. 11), and that it expresses guilt. "To have sin" is distinguished from "to sin" as the sinful

principle is distinguished from the sinful act in itself.

It includes the idea of "personal guilt." If the pronoun "we," as many affirm, in the conditional clause, "if we say we have no sin," means all genuine Christians including the author of this Epistle, we must impeach the truthfulness of Paul when he declares respecting the justified soul, "There is therefore now no condemnation;" for condemnation is inseparable from "guilt" involved in John's idiomatic phrase "to have sin." We must impeach John as well as Paul, for he says, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin.

If guilt still remains for future ineffectual cleansing till physical death, it follows that John's words are untrue so far as this present life is concerned, and there is no deliverance from guilt in this world, and the only holy persons on earth are in the graveyard. We must also impeach truth, the heavenly maiden. "The truth shall make you free" from guilt and its penalty. And finally we must either put some new interpretation upon the words of the infallible Teacher himself, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed," from the guilt of sin and the love of sin, or we must say that they have no relation to man's deepest present need.

Such are some of the irresistible inferences from the interpretation of "we" as including all Christians in their present character after grace has done its best to purify them. To whom does John refer? To the dualists or agnostics in the church who imagined that their spirits were untouched of sin which inheres in matter only and cannot stain the soul. It belongs to the body and will perish with the body in the grave. These people were indulging in the grossest sensual sins -- gluttony, drunkenness, sodomy, fornication and adultery -- and were professing to walk in the light, to have fellowship with the holy God, to have no guilt upon their souls and hence no need of the blood of Christ.

John in defense of the truth deals faithfully with these men either deluded by their false philosophy or downright liars willfully maligning the Gospel. Many religious teachers who discard the Gnostic philosophy as a system retain its essence in the idea that there is impurity in the body which divine power cannot expel without the aid of death. Hence they oppose the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life as rank fanaticism, forgetful of the scripture that "where sin abounded grace did much more abound" and "that ye may know the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe." (See notes on verses 5, 6, 7, and concluding note 5, at the end of Chapter I, and Chapter II, concluding note.)

9. "Confess our sins." To God and to men when the sins have been in public, and to individuals who they have been wronged by our evil deeds. It is not necessary to confess publicly grossly shameful acts. Confession must be attended by an eternal abandonment of sin. Restitution when it is possible characterizes genuine confession. Confession implies repentance, a word not found in this Epistle nor in the Fourth Gospel. For this reason some teach that it is not required but faith only. But evangelical faith is possible only for a truly penitent and contrite soul.

"He is faithful." Not fickle, capricious and arbitrary, but immutable in the principles of his moral government. He can always be depended upon. His word is as good as his oath.

"And righteous to forgive us our sins." To render what is due from one to another is the essence of righteousness. Under the atonement it is due to the Son of God that his Father should forgive all who sue for pardon in His name. It is true that mercy is at the bottom of the atonement, so that the righteousness of God in forgiveness is removed but a step from mercy.

"And cleanse from all unrighteousness." The character is purified after the past sins have been forgiven, as a definite momentary act in the mind of God. The cleansing in its completion is also a definite work instantaneously wrought by the Holy Spirit in the believer. It is to be noted that both "forgive" and "cleanse" are in that tense which denotes not a continuous, but a decisive, single act. Says Alford, In verse 9 'to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' is plainly distinguished from 'to forgive us our sins;' distinguished as a further process; as, in a word, sanctification, distinct from justification. The two verbs are aorists, because the purpose of the faithfulness and justice of God is to do each as one great complex act--to justify and to sanctify wholly and entirely. He says, "to do," not both, but "each" as one great act. This is what the Wesleys discovered in 1737 "that men are justified before they are sanctified." Again, justification is a work done for us, and entire cleansing is a work wrought in us.

10. "If we say we have not sinned." This verse elucidates verse 8, showing that sins before the new birth are spoken of in both passages and not the daily sins of believers, if such a phrase is not a self-contradiction. The Gnostic professed Christians absolutely denied the fact of past sin. Hence, if they denied past sinful acts, they could deny that they had sin. To have no sin refers to a sinful state. The whole context shows that both these verses described refer to sins before the experience of regeneration or to those who had in heart so far backslidden as to lose their sonship to God by ceasing to bear His moral likeness.

"We make him a liar." It is manifest that John does not include himself in this word "we," but that he means "any one" or "he who." John uses the editorial "we," as James does in James iii. 1-3, 9, wherein he does not mean that he personally is guilty of moral "offences," nor that he is a horse trainer, nor that he blesses God and at the same time curses men, nor that he should "receive the greater condemnation."

"His word is not in us." John and faithful Christians are not included in "us." What John does mean is that God's word is not in any man who makes him a liar by denying that he never did sin, since God has said that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

CONCLUDING NOTES.

1. The Fatherhood of God and the Sonship of men. In verse 2 God is spoken of as "the Father." (1.) The Old Testament conception of Fatherhood is national. "Israel is my son, even my first born." (Ex. iv. 22, 23.) The relationship is still national, not personal, when God addresses the Hebrew king, the representative head of the nation, thus: "Thou art my son, this day (of solemn consecration) I have begotten thee." (Ps. ii. 7.) The individual Israelite did not dare to call himself a son of God. The Jews were shocked at what they deemed blasphemy when Jesus called himself the Son of God, and they took up stones to stone him. (2.) The Gentile idea of sonship is purely physical. Homer calls Zeus or Jupiter, "father of gods and men." To this physical conception Paul alludes on Mars Hill when he quotes a Greek poet as saying, "For we are also his offspring." (3.) But in the Gospels and Epistles the conception of sonship is spiritual and personal, being limited to those only who have been born from above, born of the Spirit. To such has the Son of God given the right, the privilege, the prerogative "to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." (John i. 12.) Spiritual sonship relates to confidence, obedience, love, holiness and a predominant similarity of moral character, hating what He hates and loving what He loves. There is nothing saving in either national or physical sonship. It must be personal and spiritual: "Ye must be born again." The denial of this is the taproot of modern liberalism, which rejects those Scriptures which teach that the wicked are children of the devil. (Matt xiii. 38; John viii. 44; Acts xiii. 10; 1 John iii. 10.)

2. "The blood of Jesus Christ" "brings about that real sinlessness which is essential to union with God" (Bishop Westcott), who also says "the question is not of justification, but of sanctification." As ritual purity was required of all who would approach to God under the old covenant, so moral cleanness of conscience through the blood of Christ is required of all who would serve the living God in New Testament times. (Eph. v. 26, 27; Tit.ii. 14; Heb. ix. 13, 14, 22-24.) Two distinct ideas were included in the sacrifice of a victim on the Jewish altar, the death of the animal, and the liberation of the life so as to become available for the offerer. Thus the blood of Christ represents His life as rendered in free self-sacrifice to God for men, and also as brought into fellowship with God after being set free by death. The blood of Christ is, as shed, the life of Christ given for all men, but as applied, it becomes the life of those only who by believing on Him are incorporated "in Christ." Participation in His blood is sharing His life. (John vi. 53-56.) The following texts have predominant reference to justification: Acts xx. 28; Rom. v. 9; Eph. i. 7, ii. 13; Col. i. 20; Heb. ix. 14, x. 19, xii. 24; 1 Pet. i. 2, 18. The two elements, Christ's death, the blood shed, and Christ's life set free, the blood offered, are clearly indicated in the double cure in verse 9. God is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, i. e., to make holy and keep holy.

3. "Self-deception." Says Haupt: The word 'deceive' used by John in verse 8 occurs in no other document of the New Testament so often as in the Apocalypse. But in all the passages it is employed with a very definitely stamped meaning, never for mere error with express limitations as such, but always for fundamental departure from the truth. It occurs concerning the artifices of Satan, of antichrist, of the beast, and once of the false teachers in Thyatira (Rev. ii. 20), whose work, however, is expressly marked by its signs as fundamental deception. It is employed in the same sense when the natural, unregenerate man declares, under the hallucination of Gnostic error, that he has no sin to be washed away and no need of the atonement in the blood of the Son of God.

Haupt calls attention to the correspondence of verse 8 with verse 6 and verse 9 with verse 7. If the cleansing from sin is an essential of our walking in light, so the denial of its necessity is a token of being in darkness. Dark and desperate, indeed, must be the condition of that hardened sinner who, under the delusion of false philosophy, can declare that he has no consciousness of sin.

4. "Gnosticism." Its name is Grecian (gnosis), but its origin is Asiatic. It is difficult to define this heresy. It is a conglomerate. Arising in the East, it rolled westward, incorporating into itself both Hebrew and Grecian elements. It is not a proper philosophy, a patient collection and study of facts. It ignores facts when, after the manner of all the Greek philosophies, it assumes a theory by an effort of the imagination and in a priori style arrives at fanciful conclusions, instead of patiently accumulating and studying facts and reasoning backward a posteriori to the fundamental principles.

While professing to have no hostility to the Gospel, Gnosticism proved one of the subtlest and most dangerous enemies which it has ever encountered. On the plea of interpreting Christian doctrines from a higher standpoint, it really disintegrated and demolished them; in explaining them, it explained them away. With the promise of giving the Gospel a broader and more catholic basis, it cut away the very foundations on which it rested -- the reality of sin, and the reality of redemption. It is a series of imaginative speculations respecting the origin of the universe and its relation to the Supreme Being.

Its idea of the sinfulness of man's physical organism still clings to a large section of Protestantism and is the doctrinal ground of their hostility to perfect holiness as a present experience. In addition to the utter and incurable evil of the material universe, the second element of Gnosticism was esoteric knowledge.

This was regarded as the main thing, and indeed, the only requisite to Christianity of the highest type. Hence the advocates of this error felt much flattered by the name, Gnostic, a knowing one, as some modern skeptics are pleased to style themselves Agnostics, ignoramuses.

Their pride of knowledge was exceedingly offensive, making them supercilious and contemptuous toward the unlearned mass of believers in Christ within the reach of whose humble intellectual powers were the facts, truths and moral precepts of his Gospel. This explains Paul's declaration that "knowledge puffeth up," for even as early as his day the Gnostic microbe was in the very air of Palestine and Asia Minor. In the estimation of these brain worshippers spiritual excellence did not consist in a holy life, but in beings initiated into the mysteries of this esoteric knowledge and in belonging to the high caste of intellects who "knew the depths" and could say in a self-congratulatory style, "This is profound."

They not only placed knowledge above virtue, but they knew that the moral code which ordinary believers understood literally was to be so transcendently and vaguely interpreted as to mean little or nothing. They insisted that the benefits of revelation were the exclusive privilege of a select band of philosophers, because they alone had the key to the true meaning of the Scriptures. John was in strong sympathy with the common people whom, in his old age, he called "my little children." It was his love for them that prompted the epithets liar, deceiver and children of the devil when speaking of this unnamed and arrogant set of disturbers and corrupters of the church of Christ.

The moral effects of this doctrine were indeed deplorable. Sin existed only in the body while the soul was perfectly holy, hence all kinds of sin could be committed with impunity. The golden jewel in the dunghill was not defiled. Thus was it with the soul of the glutton, the drunkard, and the adulterer. None of these needed cleansing, for the spirit, the real personality, was sinless.

5. "The law of non-contradiction." This is one of the fixed and cardinal rules of interpretation. The words of an author must be so explained as not to make him contradict himself in the same letter, the same page, the same paragraph. Some understand John to say that every Christian has sin in the sense of guilt in verse 8. But this contradicts: (1.) The preceding sentence, the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth from all sin. If he has sin he is not cleansed from it. If he is cleansed from sin and gives Christ the glory by declaring his deliverance he deceives himself and the truth is not in him. An infallible cure for pulmonary disease is advertised. If the healed consumptive testifies to his cure, do not believe him for he is a liar. This is a jumble of contradictions into which this erroneous interpretation leads.

(2.) It contradicts the design of this Epistle -- "that ye sin not" If divine grace is unable to lift a soul out of the miry pit of sin, and keep him out, by establishing his goings farther and farther away from this bottomless quagmire, why does a man wise enough to be one of the twelve apostles deliberately sit down to perform an impossibility?

(3.) It contradicts the whole tenor of this Epistle as found in numerous declarations scattered from beginning to end. In verse 9 we are cheered by the assurance of the double cure, 'forgiveness of sins and cleansing from all unrighteousness.'

In ii. 3, 5 there is implied the possibility of keeping continuously God's commands which exclude every sin and introduce us into the state in which love toward God is perfected. This is inconsistent with sin. John in ii. 14 of his First Epistle writes to the young men because the Word of God abides in them and they have overcome the wicked one. How can this be made to quadrate with constant sinning? We are told in iii. 6 that "whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth seeth him not neither knoweth him."

(Alford.) We know that it is said that it is the old man that sins and the new man does not and cannot. But the old man, if he sins, becomes the ego, the sinning subject under the wrath of God. "Generally," says Haupt, "this view cannot be psychologically sustained which would introduce a total cleavage of the one human constitution, making half the man a sinner -- that is, the old man -- at the very time that the other half is under the influence of the Holy Spirit. All subterfuges of this and similar kinds are exploded by a touch of this passage itself." It follows that every sin sunders the soul from God and makes communion with him and sonship or assimilation to him impossible.

Again, in iii. 8 John solemnly avers that "he that committeth sin is of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin." Finally this is the great criterion by which men are classified as children of God or children of the devil, sinning or abstaining from sin. Age after age, many mistaken scholars have toiled to harmonize John's alleged contradictions and have failed.

(4.) Yet not a few exegetes have found that there is not the least contradiction in this Epistle, that John has been sadly slandered by the failure to note that in the first chapter antinomian objectors appear with the plea that as all sin exists in the body, the soul is perfectly pure and needs no hyssop branch, nor bleeding beast, nor sprinkling priest. Thus the contradictions which were found clouding John's crystal style evaporate when we consider the historical setting of this precious love letter of John to believers in all coming generations. The exegetes who avoid self-contradiction in this Epistle by noting its anti-Gnostic aim are Hammond, Grotius, Bengel, A. Clarke, Bishop Westcott, Dr. A. Plummer; Haupt, Whedon and others. In general it may be said that annotators who have inherited a freedom from the bias of predestinarianism find in this Epistle nothing inconsistent with perfect holiness in him who claims his full heritage in Christ. On the other hand those who have imbibed the five points of Calvinism will be found insisting with the Gnostics that men must sin so long as they are in the body.

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