1 John - Commentaries by Frederick George Patterson

Words of Truth: Volume N1, First Epistle of John, On the

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The characteristics of John's Epistles, as we have before remarked, differ from those of Paul. In Paul's writings we have the subject of righteousness, in those of John we have moral deliverance-new life in Christ. We have not Churches addressed—as Galatia, Colosse, and Ephesians; but individuals in various circumstances, as the "Elect Lady," "Gaius," &c. And is it not a great comfort to enter into the thought that God has a personal interest and delight in us? We do not become lost in the "great congregation," though we have our proper place in that also. But the joy is, that my God has delight in dealing personally with me, my own self, and this thought is established especially in John's writings.

You will remember our dwelling on the characteristics of John, when we reached verse 19. As in the Gospel, the Lord Jesus had not to excommunicate Judas, but he was forced out by the weight of His presence; so here the House of God is called to intensify her atmosphere in such a way, that those of contrary minds could not stand it, and this is a far higher kind of discipline. We must give heed and listen to both Paul and John, but there is a very marked difference between them. Could the sinner sport before Christ? He could come and welcome, with his sorrow for sin, but never with its defilements. So, beloved, if the House of God were in her true position, we should see this 19th verse in power amongst us. It may be, that we do not constitute the House of God, but still, when we do meet together, we should breathe an atmosphere, so filled with the glories of Christ, that an opposer could not endure it.

In verse 20, a new characteristic is displayed, and this shows us more of the varied glories of the Spirit. When Paul speaks of the Holy Ghost, he calls Him a seal—an earnest. John speaks of Him as an unction. Paul shows the Holy Ghost given me as a seal of my present faith and condition, and as an earnest of future glory. Most beautiful to find the Spirit come to verify what I am, and to ensure what I shall be! Yes, more than that, He comes to make me what I am. In John we have the Holy Ghost as the unction, which forms the soul anew; I am made a new creature! John does not speak of the Holy Ghost as a pledge of the future, but as making me what I am, in His own energy and power forming me a new creature.

There are varied characteristics of the Spirit, just as we see in Christ, the varied glories of David, Solomon, and of the Son of the Father. In Christ we see a constellation of glories, and we must neither confound nor separate them. And when we see the Holy Ghost as earnest, seal, and unction, each one speaks of Him as Divine. John is much in company with the early part of Genesis, he does not look at the dispensations, but speaks of the truth, which the Holy Ghost uses; truth which forms you, as opposed to Satan's lie, the lie of the third of Genesis; truth which was brought to you by "That eternal life which was with the Father." We are begotten by the word of truth, in combination with the Spirit of truth. When God visits us by the Holy Ghost the seed of God is sown, making us new creatures. God has then a new object in the soul, and He does look at it. It is not the flesh, but what is of the Spirit which is His object, and He does look at it with delight, and deals with it, to cultivate and enlarge it here and to glorify it hereafter.

Verse 21. —Not that you do not know these things already; he speaks because you do know them, and because you know that there is no alliance between truth and lies.

Verse 22. —John then goes on to show that the spirit of Antichrist is here. Beloved, I would ask you, what it was which was done by the lie of the serpent? Did it not rob Adam of Eden, of Eve, of happiness, and of life? Did it merely rob him of these things? No. It separated him from God. Satan's lie could not have depraved Adam without separating him from God. It did indeed rob him of all these things, but it also robbed him of God! By faith God is restored to you! It is not only that you have a new nature, but faith sends you back all the way to God. You obtain what Adam never lost, you receive blessing far greater than his; you get Jesus as the Christ; the Father and the Son. Truth recovers you from the effects of the lie of the serpent, and gives you back your God. Adam lost the Lord God, in the garden, and in his creation glory; he ought to have walked uprightly, but he lost Him. Now you have regained Him; and that is deeper, richer glory than ever Adam had in Eden. You have found that the living God can become Jesus of Nazareth. You have seen Divine glory displayed in the Father and Son, and you have an unction from the Holy One.

Well may we stand before such a Gospel and say (as one did), "It is the greatest wonder outside God Himself!" The hosts of angels who kept their first estate—the creation of the earth and heavens-take what you please, there is nothing like the cross of Christ. There is nothing to match with the incarnation leading to the crucifixion. Yes, beloved, in one blessed person He traveled along the road; in that same person He suffered, rose, ascended up to the right hand of God. Adam did not know this. What theater was there whereon such grace might be displayed? It is your sin that has formed the platform for displaying the full glory of God. Dark background-do you say? Yes, well, you surely say it—a background of apostasy, but a brilliant foreground, bright with the full glory of God. In this light you stand, and he who denies it is Antichrist.

Verse 24. —Now this is pressed upon you, that you should not take Adam's course, but let the word abide in you. Do not let it slip. "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," was a simple word, but Adam let it slip; it did not abide in him. Do you abide in it? Go back to God, and abide in the mysterious glory of the Father and the Son! Oh! how He has undone the mischief! He has taken meat from the eater, and from the strong sweetness. How magnificently has the truth outdone the lie! The lie never deprived me of all I possess now; the truth has taken occasion by the lie, to bring meat out of the eater.

“Let that, therefore, abide with you which ye have heard from the beginning;” that is, from the beginning of the gospel. Had Adam ever such promises? No; he had not indeed. If Adam had walked uprightly, he would have lived a forfeitable, defilable life. The life you possess is neither the one nor the other, but a triumphant, victorious life! In returning you receive more than you had lost-a richer, better life altogether.

Just suppose Adam to have obeyed, what would have been his term of life? As long as his obedience. He obeys today; well, he lives for today. He fails tomorrow, and he dies tomorrow! But you have got eternal life! As Jesus said, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”

Verse 25. —John is not an argumentative writer. He does not give long arguments on any given subject. You might take it up, every verse, and study it apart. Not but there is fine moral connection, but you might pause at every verse. In Romans, Paul gives you arguments on righteousness; and in Hebrews on the priesthood, and you have the means of seeing your title without a cloud; but here it is the thoughtful soul, pausing over every step.

Verse 26. — “These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.” The serpent is as ready to seduce as ever. He would seduce you from Christ, and from the unction of the Holy One. You are as much in company with seducers now as in old days; but then, beloved, you have the anointing! (Adam had it not.) The seductions are very subtle, but you have full security.

Paul helped the Church at Corinth to look at its security. John goes to the individual saint and helps him to see his own security. Paul says, I betrothed you as a fair virgin to Christ; beware! I would fain present you chaste. This is ministerial guardianship. With John it is anointed guardianship. The Spirit brings out of the treasures “things new and old.” In all, we see the exquisite multiformity of the mind of Christ.

“And ye need not that any man teach you.” Are you conscious of this glorious personality? We should abide in our God, the loving God, from whom Adam fell. We are not merely recovered from Adam’s depravity, but also from his alienation. Wonderful secrets these! And yet this is not a favorite writing. Ah! the plummet sinks too deep for our souls. We would rather have Romans, or to run through other books; but oh, to cherish those things that shut us up to God. There the anointing secures us, in the very face of all seducers. Paul warns as an ecclesiastic, but John tells you—yourself to let these secrets have their tale in your own souls.

We shall leave the 29th verse as an introduction to the 3rd chap.; and now look at the depravity of the old nature by the light of the new. It is not that the bad Adam nature becomes better; no, that is left to perish, but we make a perfect escape out of it, by receiving from Christ a new nature, which is actually undefilable! And these are the provisions that grace makes ours.

Words of Truth: Volume 6, Notes on 1 John 3:10-24

The way in which the Apostle brings out the contrast between the two families in the world is very striking-the children of God and the children of the devil. It is a great point for intelligence of the subject unfolded in this Epistle, and helps us greatly to understand it. The characters of these two families are given according to the nature of their birth. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” “He that is born of God doth not commit sin.” It is not a, question of the two natures; Christ really becomes our life, just as Adam was our life. The Apostle does not speak of another life at all, nor here of modifying circumstances; it is not the point he is on. He insists that there is this nature; “he cannot Sin, he is born of God.” Christ is our life; he does not look at another life. It is not duty or progress here, though both are right in their place; it is life, and a babe has life as much as an older person. “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin.” It is not he ought not to sin, nor that if you attain to a certain point you will stop sinning; no, it is the positive communication of nature, it is not his nature to do it. “His seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” That was the proof that he had Christ’s nature. “Therefore that holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.” The flesh is not born of God, we are born of God; that which is born has that character. He is testing these two natures; what they are, and how they are shown.

The subject of the Epistle is this life in us. In the Gospel it is the life come into this world in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Coming into the world as a man, He was the light of men; light to show them the path, and light to lead them, adapted to them in that way, and so we read, “His delights were with the sons of men.”

In 1 John 1:1 you get the word of life, the life in Him; in ch. 2 “which thing is true, in him and in you.” It is now communicated to the believer; we have received it through faith. “In him and in you,” that is the great subject of the Epistle; the divine life of Christ and in Christ, and Christ in us. “At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you” (John 14:20), is our conscious condition. When He goes up on high He says, I am in my Father, then it is that we are in Him, and then He is in us; it is that last fact which comes out here. The Holy Ghost is brought in at the end of the chapter, and we see the action and character of that life.

Christ was infinitely more than a man too—you could not talk of a man being in the Father, but in glory it is so. When He is in glory we are in Him, and He is in us. It is the life of Christ in us, the life of Jesus in our mortal body. The Son of God first, then children of God; for that is the word John uses for those who are of the family. His godhead always remains distinct. If I speak of His own person, He is “the first-begotten” and in resurrection with us He is “the first-born among many brethren.”

In Matt. 3 heaven is opened, the Holy Ghost rests on Him, and the Father says, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” That place is for us, but after redemption; in John it is especially by the communication of life, that Christ has become our life— “Christ liveth in me.” It is not here that I am crucified with Christ, though that is a fact; but it is a nature born of God—he is looking at a man as born of God; that is what you are, and nothing else. It is a real manifestation and communication of life through, the Son: He becomes our life, and then it is in us, and then manifested to others.

“In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil” (v. 10). I do not know what they are till they are manifested. God may be working in their hearts, so I cannot call them children of the devil; but if I see open enmity, then I know a child of the devil is under the

power of Satan. If I had God’s mind of course I should know what would become of him, but I have not. The Jews were. Abraham’s children, but not morally so Jesus says, “Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word”-i.e. you must have the divine thought in order to understand the divine speech, which was but the utterance of it.

The traits of life are these-righteousness and love to the brethren (vv. 7, 10). I may be kind to a stranger—that is not family affection, nor relationship, which we find here. You never see it said that God so loved the church, nor that Christ loved the world. It is really so, only wrong verbiage. Christ loved the church, it is a specific relationship, and that is where love shows itself. I cannot have the same relationship to everybody as I have to my father and mother. Christ loves the church-His body and His bride. I have certain characteristics of affection which flow from relationship. Life shows itself in these two characteristics—obedience (righteousness) and love to the brethren. We see both in Christ. If His life is in me, these two things come out; many details come in, but these are the characteristic traits of God’s children, and this is what we have here. “In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil; whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother” (v. 10).

In the beginning of the Epistle we are brought into the highest blessing, into a state in which we have common joys and feelings with the Son. A person may say, oh, that is too high for me—but if you are not in that state you are all wrong; if the Holy Ghost is in you He cannot give you other thoughts, for He is the spring of all. Of course, I have conflict to keep myself in that state, consistently in it. Fellowship must be according to God’s nature —we walk in the light as God is in it. Why, people are pretending to great love, and here they do not love the brethren! Satan can change himself to an angel of light. If it is not the Spirit of truth, it is not the Holy Ghost, for the Holy Ghost is the Spirit of holiness, and if you are not walking holiness that will not do. And a man may be stern for the truth but not in the Spirit of Christ, just as he may talk of love, and not have the truth. You find. Christ sometimes severe, because it was necessary. There was no individual character in Christ, He is perfection. Man is always yielding or firm. We see in Christ perfect obedience to the Father, and He has given us His own will, and given us commandments— “Commandments,” do not shrink from the word. It must be obedience to be righteous.

If it is a commandment, I do it as obedience. Supposing that you could have hindered Christ’s obedience, it would have been hindering His perfection. Authority over one is the essence of obedience. Righteousness is displayed in obedience and love to the brethren. Now that we have a conscience we see the rightness of it, and we have a new nature—and we delight in it, we are sanctified unto obedience. It is called the “law of liberty,” because my nature delights in the thing I am commanded to do. There are three laws in James—The whole law, the royal law, and the law of liberty. Though the divine nature makes it liberty, it still makes it obedience. Christ never had a nature that wanted to go its own way. God’s will was the spring of His actions. A man who has no will exhibits real practical lowliness in walk—Christ was that. The character of this righteousness is not merely conscience, for a natural man has that. It is not law, that addressed itself to the nature which was lost, but the obedience of the Christian is of such a character that its delight is to obey, because it is in direct communication with God. The obedience of a Christian is a nature that delights to obey.

Christ takes His place as a Man in absolute obedience to His Father, and in positive love to those who were given Him out of the world. “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.” The disciples are His friends, not ‘He His disciples’ friend— “I have called you friends.” I have relationship with Christ, and it is exceedingly important to know that there is a love that Christ has for His friends, and to be consciously in that place. “Put on, therefore, as the elect of God:” you are in that place, as in that place let us see the things that belong to it. Those two things are never separated; if I am one of the family, love to the brethren and obedience to the Father all go together, all goes on within this circle. It is important to walk in the consciousness of this relationship. Those who are Christ’s should, along with the preaching of forgiveness, understand that He brings us into this place, and that we walk according to it. We must behave like children in the father’s house. If I love a person very much, I love his children; if I go with them where the father has forbidden them, that is not loving them as children who have to obey their father, but amusing myself. I cannot love my brethren for my Father’s sake, if it is not in obedience.

The characteristic of Christ’s love was service—selfishness likes to be served, love likes to serve. Christ took the lowest place— I am among you as one that serveth.” Divine love delights to serve. Another thing, His was companionable love: look at Him going about among His disciples, (and how stupid they were!) He was affable in all His ways. Notice, too, that it is above all the evil that it has to go on with, but it is above it all in patience. Look at the Lord with His disciples—He is a servant, His love has its spring from a source—which does not depend on anything in us, so it goes on and abides; its spring is in God, and, therefore, it is thoughtful and considerate.

It is a great thing, when walking in the Church of God, if you cannot think with people, to think for them. The love will suit and adapt itself; because it is from above. You have that which is always in service unless in communion, and that is the highest thing, not sentiment, and there is danger lest it should be that. Paul picked out every bit of good he could in the saints to whom he wrote, and then he rebukes them—he opens their hearts to receive the rebuke of love. We cannot always go on without the anxiety of love, as Christ could. Anxiety draws out love, still “be careful for nothing,” not even for the Church. Love must always have its anxieties, but it has the grace and love of Christ to resort to. If you separate obedience and love, one or the other is false—if I am a child, I have my brethren to love.

There is another mark of a child of God at the end of the chapter (v. 24). “And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.” We are made partakers of the divine nature, and these are the three tests:

“Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you” (v. 13). You are to expect that; there were many heretics at that time, and he is guarding them against them.

“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (v. 16). I have learned this love in Christ laying down His life—there is no limit to it. If you want to learn its measure, give up yourself. There is no measure short of what Christ did. It is the same principle in Eph. 4 “Be ye kind one to another tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ hath forgiven you.” You are God’s children; now walk in love, as Christ did. I want a love above all the evil of the world, not loving my neighbor as myself, but giving myself up as Christ did. He gave Himself to God—there is perfectness of motive—the more unworthy the object, the greater the love. He gives Himself up for us, perfectly worthless ones, but to God, who is a worthy object. We have learned love in “He laid down his life for us,” now we ought to do it for the brethren.

“And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him”—assurance of heart, not for us but God—it is intercourse and fellowship with the Father: you must have a good conscience and a free heart. It is the same with a child and his father; in order to have confidence in God, you must have your heart not condemning you. If my heart condemns me, I may be sure of His mercy and the advocacy of Christ, but my heart is not assured before Him; it will not do to say I am saved only—here is a person with relationships, and if my heart condemns me, there is no confidence; it is of all moment that our souls should have the distinct consciousness, and walk in the relationships in which God has set us. May the Lord give us to be diligent in heart, to know what Christ was—to be before God, and serve Him as He did.

Words of Truth: Volume N1, First Epistle of John, On the

We have before observed, that one leading blessed thought in the Epistle of John is this, that the breach made by Adam’s fall is more than repaired in Christ. We have not here our judicial restoration, but our moral restoration. Paul gives us the judicial restoration, but John the moral.

In Paul’s writings we have much about righteousness and a little about life; in John’s we have life all through, and he shows our present condition to be far beyond that which Adam lost. Adam had God as creator-the framer of the world and of Eden—and that was a very blessed thing. It was a blessed condition to be able to stand naked in the presence of God. But you have your God as Redeemer, a far richer way than Adam knew Him! You have Him as Redeemer, and as Father, Son, and Spirit. You have the relationship of a child, far beyond that of Adam in innocency.

This third chapter opens with sonship. Your sonship far exceeds that of angels. They are sons in virtue of creation, having never lost their first estate. You have a sonship, by adoption; and now, even your very nature is superior to that of Adam. Adam’s nature was innocence-yours is righteousness. God cannot put you higher. “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” Therefore the world does not know you, any more than it knows Him. It is an atheist world; yes, an atheist world that had its Maker in it, and yet knew Him not.

And here we might dwell a little on the fullness of Scripture. Matthew gives us the history of the unbelieving Jew rejecting his Messiah; John shows the atheist world, not knowing its Saviour. No; and it does not know you either. Oh wonderful place of sympathy and connection with Christ!

Verse 2. — “Now are ye the sons of God.” Tell me, can you ever be more accepted, more pardoned, more received, than now? Glory will yet have more to do, but grace has done its business. Both grace and glory have taken you up. If you were sick, you would like to see a skillful physician; if you wanted anything made, you would put your material into the hands of a good workman. Grace and glory are your workmen, and I ask you, Could you be better off?

You are here told of these two wonderful workers. Grace has done her utmost; glory shall work by and by. We know that when Jesus shall appear, we shall he like Him; you will reflect Him. As surely as the moon reflects the sun, so the Church will reflect Christ.

(To be continued.)

Hymn.

O God! how precious unto Thee

Is Thy beloved Son,

In whom Thou lost perfection see,

Thy holy, blessed One!

When He, in flesh, the desert trod,

He lov’d to do Thy will;

His bosom glow’d, His feet were shod,

Thy pleasure to fulfill.

The sole-begotten, He reveal’d

Thyself, unto Thy praise;

“The Father,” until then conceal’d,

Was seen in all His ways.

As in His life, so in His death,

He was devoted still—

For us, in love, resigned His breath,

Obedient to Thy will.

He glorified Thee on the earth,

Thy work by Him was done;

And Thou, who knewest all His worth,

Did’st glorify Thy Son.

Now crown’d and seated on Thy Throne,

He is Thy joy and rest;

And we who are, through grace,

Thine own, In Him are fully bless’d.

He’s preciousness itself to Thee,

To us He’s precious, too,

Who in Him every beauty see,

And Thine own glory view.

Words of Truth: Volume 4, Herein Is Love

It constantly occurs to one in reading such passages as the fifteenth verse of this chapter, that although such things are plainly set forth in scripture, yet the truth of it is but little entered into by Christians. “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.” Many would resent the thought of not confessing the first clause, who would be afraid and unable to own the positive result as theirs, which flows from such a confession. They don’t even know what it means— “God dwelleth in him, and he in God.” The real truth and power of the presence of the Spirit of God in us, because we are redeemed and cleansed, is not believed. How little a person believes his body is the temple of the Holy Ghost. Of course I do not now speak of the mere hypocrite; but of one who does really confess that Jesus is the Son of God, the One in whom we trust.

There are those who are arrested by such a thought, and are really unhappy and miserable because they can’t say it is theirs. They are unable to do so because they see their own unworthiness, and they estimate the thing from what they find in themselves; reasoning from what they are to God, instead of what God is to them. This state is dispelled, by the soul being taken off its own estimate of itself, to God’s estimate of Christ. Then Christ takes the place of the estimate of self, and there is deliverance, and the heart is free. God brings the soul who thus groans for deliverance to a crisis, where there is nothing left but being cast completely upon His free and sovereign grace, and then deliverance is known. A death-bed is often an example of this. God’s word not only produces the groan of a soul for this deliverance; but meets the groan with deliverance also.

See the way that God brings Israel to the Red Sea—to a point where they could not get out, then He says, “Stand still and see the Salvation of the Lord.” Israel might have been dreaming of escaping from Egypt or not in days before; here they must learn that none but God can deliver and He does so. He not only produces the groan for deliverance, but brings the deliverance and the joy of it, by giving us the Spirit of adoption in our hearts.

God would have us happy with Himself, and would have us conscious of our salvation. If you can rest tranquil not knowing it, you are in a bad state. Do you think a child would be right to say, “I don’t know whether my father loves me or not, and I am content not to know?” But the delivered heart can say, (v. 16,) and God would have it say, “We have known and believed the love that God path to us.” But it is impossible to know it if I am looking at my own state toward God: for it depends upon the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. When we do not know that, we are not Christians in a true sense; and if so, how are we to love “Christ?” Am I to expect people to live as becomes children of God, till they know they are children of God? Can one be expected to fulfill the duties of wife or child, servant or master, until such a relationship is there? The relationship must exist first. Thus Christian responsibility and duty flow from a relationship known and enjoyed.

“Beloved let us love one another, for love is of God; and every one that loveth, is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love.” (v. 7, 8.) But you say, “How can this be? My heart is very cold: I hope I love: I hope I have not deceived myself; but I don’t feel I love like this.” You must be a partaker of the divine nature first. You will never understand the feelings of a nature till you possess it. How could you understand angelic nature unless you were an angel?

Verse 9 is the answer to this. Here I get something outside myself altogether. Here I learn God’s love. It is manifested to me. “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.” Now I understand what God’s love is. I don’t look into my own heart to see do I love Him. I find it manifested towards me, a poor lost sinner, outside myself altogether.

Suppose a person is loving me deeply and truly, do I look into my own heart to know that it is so? I may look there to see if I love him; but not to see if he loves me; the more so when he has given me full proof of it, I learn it by his acts. People reason in such a way in divine things; that if they so reasoned in human things, it would be treated as positive folly.

The Apostle's reasoning in verses 9 to 17 has wondrous beauty. He begins with me, a poor ruined sinner, dead by nature, guilty, and needing cleansing, and shows me that God has thought about me all along the whole way till the day of judgment; and that on God's side there was nothing but love! I find the whole condition of a man taken up from being a sinner, till the day of judgment. I am dead in sins-He sends His Son that I might live. (verse 9.) Guilty, and He provides a propitiation and cleanses me. (ver. 10.) As a saint He perfects His love in me, by giving me His Spirit to dwell in me for my journey; (verses 12, 13.) so that I have communion and joy by the way; and when I look on to the judgment I have boldness, not "hope," but "boldness!" Well, I say, and how have I treated Him? Cast Him out of the world when He came in the activity of His love to me! His love is active—and He sends His Son to die. He manifests it thus to me, and this is the return I have made Him! It is "not that we loved God, but that He loved us."

Now (ver. 11) the exhortation to love, on our part, is in its right place, "we ought (surely) also to love one another." "If God so loved us," dead and needing life; guilty, and needing cleansing; when we did not love God, He did love us, and sent His Son that we might live through Him, and have a propitiation for our sins. Wondrous love!

Compare John 1:18 with ver. 12. In the former, Christ declares the Father as He knew Him "an only begotten Son" who is in His "bosom." This love is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. What do we see in Him here below? A holiness that could not be sullied, carrying God's love into a world where there was nothing but unholiness. It was holiness that nothing could enfeeble, displaying a love that nothing could fathom.

In verses 12 and 13 we have communion, now we have tasted His love, and we can "testify" (in ver. 14), "That the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world;" and then He says, that "whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God." God says this, He does not ask you to think or reason about it. As He does not let you off in passing an opinion as to Yourself, and your own love to Him in ver. 10; neither does He let you off here as to your opinion about Him.

How do you treat the fact of God dwelling in you? He does this by His Spirit. There is nothing tells on the conscience like this fact. How do you treat such a guest? The grace of God in a man's heart is a tender plant in an unkindly soil which even a light thought will injure—a light thought grieves the Spirit of God who dwells in us. Hence He exhorts us— "grieve not the Holy Spirit of God whereby ye are sealed unto the day Of redemption." (Eph. 4:30.)

When Paul speaks of all things being ours, he speaks of death too, being all gain, but he never says judgment is ours. When he thinks of judgment he thinks of terror. But the effect of having judgment before his eye makes him think of others. "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men;" and it is well to test ourselves in view of the judgment seat—when that day comes, hope is all over! There is no good in a judgment seat at all if sinners are not condemned there. People when they think of grace reason thus: "I am a poor sinner, and the cross just suits me." Well so it does, (though you should not remain there you should go on through the rent veil into God's presence.) But can you say, "I am a poor sinner, and the day of judgment just suits me?" Al you say, no it does not. Therefore it is well that you should look at it in the face. When you do, how do you feel? Are you trembling and uncertain whether He is for you or against you, because of the sins which you have committed which He would then have to judge? But how has He ordered it? Why, before it comes, He has interfered in another way; He has given His Son to put away the sins He then would have to judge. Thus He has thought of everything all the way through! Very right to have lowly thoughts when I come to the cross with my sins. Lowliness becomes me when I think of God's blessed Son dying there. But when I think of judgment I have boldness—no lowliness there, because "as He is, so are we, in this world." Not as He was, but as He is. Am I to wait till the day of judgment to know whether He is righteousness enough for me? God hath made Him to be righteousness for me now! All that I was He has died for; all that I am is seen in Christ before God. Love looked upon us when far away from God in the land of our degradation, and God has provided for us all the way through!

Oh, but you say, does not this make light of responsibility? No, reply I, it establishes it. I can't be a naughty child until I am a child—very bad when one is so; and hence I judge all in my ways that is unfitted to me as a child of God—is the enjoyment of a relationship which never can be broken, and I have to behave myself as one in whom God dwells.

Words of Truth: Volume 6, 1 John 4

We have before noticed the three tests or marks of a believer in the previous chapter (verses 7, 10, 24). I must remark a fourth at the commencement of our chapter, before proceeding with my subject. This is, listening to the words of the apostles themselves. After their time it could no longer be a test; but then, what they taught was a test of all else. Whoever does not give heed to them, and bow to the Word of God by them, is not of God. " He that is not of God heareth not us." "Us" is very distinct and definite. The Church never teaches—it is taught. The apostles assembled the Church and taught much people. (See Acts 11:26.) To whomsoever God has given gifts, they teach, but an assembly never teaches; it has to confess the truth. Teaching belongs to those whom God has made teachers. Another thing, to be remembered is, that revelation is not inspiration, though in common parlance the words are often confounded. A revelation is a positive, definite thing, learned of God. He has revealed something that men's thoughts do not know. God's Word is a test of everything else. "He that knoweth God heareth us." That which was from the beginning—that which God revealed we know we know only what it is, and it is a test of all else that can be. But the question is, to whom was the Word written? To those in office? No; to all the people—to all Christians. I find that the Word of God is addressed by the apostles to those who listen, and if you do not hear it, you are not of God. The more you search and find out the place that the Scriptures hold, the more certain you become that they hold this place. If my child disobeys my commands, he disobeys me. In speaking of the Word of God in Heb. 4 you read, "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight," &c. There is no difference made between the Word sent, and the living Word, Christ. The Word of God is the expression of His heart and thought; and rejecting it is rejecting Him. It is a great thing, beloved friends, to get things simple. If you reduce revelation to inspiration, it is gone.

Revelation commands me, as being of God. Paul expresses it when he says to the Thessalonians, “When ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Thess. 2:13).

There is a remarkable connection between life, and the love of God dealing with us. We live by the life of Christ. But life alone would often create restlessness of soul. If I did not find testimony enough in myself, I might become uneasy, and doubt whether the life existed in me after all. This is dealt with here; and he takes up the love of God the other way, and casts us over on the fact that this love is in God Himself (v. 7). That is the real connection in which to view all experiences. The evil is when we look at our experiences—though it is better to have them; but we should look out from them at Christ. The effect of having the Spirit of God is, to take me out of my experiences, and bring me to Christ as He is in Himself. Suppose I have such and such an experience that distresses me—well I must go off to Christ: the experience is not wrong, but looking at it, and not out of it at Christ, is wrong. When I do know myself, if I have not something besides myself, in a certain sense it is all over with me. You see here, bow, while the apostle requires the experiences of life, he leads the soul out of them to another.

If I have love to the brethren (verse 7) I am born of God. I have no such thing in nature. I must have the nature of a being, though I am not necessarily on an equality with that being, to know what he is. I know what it is to be a man, because I am a man. So if a man has the divine nature he knows God. Of course he has much to learn, but in a sense he knows God (e.g., as light and love). Well, how is that shown? One characteristic of it is, love to the brethren. O, but someone says, I am so cold, so imperfect, so wanting in love; I do not know what to think of myself. I get out of myself in verse 9. “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.” I must have the divine nature to know and understand God, but He takes us clean out of ourselves, to show us that which is totally outside of us, and of that which is not in ourselves at all, but in God. He loved me. when I was dead—when there was nothing that I could find in myself. “He sent his only-begotten Son,” and I see love in God, it is manifested, and in Himself. Now, my eye can rest in looking out of myself. I could not see it if not in myself too, but He has manifested it in sending His own Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Then He goes on to say that it is not in my heart at all. “Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us.” It is manifested not only in acts but in nature. Now I have what it really is. It is not in my loving God at all, though it will produce that. It is another thing, for when I was hatred to God He was love to me (verse 10). Then He goes on to the day of judgment. First, it is in God, and then manifested to us when we were sinners. It is not only independent of motive in God, but “God commendeth His own (for that is the word) love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” (Rom. 5:8.) There is nothing in me to draw it out but sinfulness and wickedness. In true love you always find a thoughtfulness about the state of the object of love. The love that is in God is perfect thoughtfulness about me, and this is blessedly brought out here. Why should He send His Son that we might live? I was dead as regards God, though if dead to Him, alive enough in my wicked will. I was wicked, and He sends His Son as a propitiation (v. 10). I was dead, and He sends Him that we might live (v. 9). He gives the object of His infinite delight for me when a sinner dead in guilt. That which spares nothing when there was no motive, and stints nothing, is perfect divine love. Now He sees perfectness in the ones for whom He gave His Son. “He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel.” He did not leave out righteousness. In the work of the Lord Jesus, God was perfectly glorified in righteousness, and on this ground the love of God towards poor sinners can be righteously free. God cannot have sin in heaven; therefore, if He does not put it away, He must put me away. The source of it all was the supreme and sovereign and self-springing love of God in doing that which was needed for man; and He was perfectly glorified at the Cross, and it goes beyond propitiation, because it puts man in glory.

Mark another thing. Not only are the sins gone, but I am gone, “that we might live through Him.” I do not live through Adam now, I live through the Son of God; therefore my place now with God is, if you take up righteousness (v. 10), in virtue of the propitiation—if you take life, it is life in Christ (v. 9).

Now I have the perfect certainty of the manifestation of this love. I look to the God who has done it all, and I say, He is love. Supposing that I have a child who says, I love my mother quite enough—well, I say, you do not love her at all. But supposing a child says the contrary, and mourns over the feebleness of her love, I say that she loves her mother more than the other. True love is, “not that we loved God, but that he loved us.” I have learned God through my sins, and the place where I learn His love is, not in my love to Him, but in His love to me when I did not love Him. It is a love that is infinite in its way of dealing. Sins and self are set aside, so that now the life that I live, “I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.” “Not I, but Christ liveth in me.” Then (v. 14) I have the love manifested, and I believe it, (v. 16). The whole principle is brought out in verses 9 and 10. So that now I find, “If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.” If God has loved us in such a manner as this, why, we must love our brethren.

“If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath: given us of his Spirit.” Nowhere we have the springs and enjoyments of it in a saint. We have seen God’s love to a sinner, and by the Holy Ghost, which has “shed abroad” the love of God in our hearts, we learn it in a saint. Why, if I have God dwelling in me, what more can I seek? We have been washed from our sins, and the Holy Ghost can come and dwell in us because we are clean. You will find this still more striking if you look at John 1:18: “No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” I cannot know a man till I have seen him. The only-begotten one has declared the Father, and manifested Him to the earth in the sight of men. The one who, as a present thing, is enjoying the absolute perfectness of the Father’s love, has seen the Father (v. 12). All is concentrated in Himself, the only begotten. Now, supposing I told you what my father was. Well, I must tell you what he is to me, for that is how I know him; and this is precisely what Christ does. It resulted in giving perfect confidence to the vilest of sinners. If you were to ask me to explain it, I could not; just as if you were to ask me to explain the sweetness of honey, I could not—you must taste it. Here this blessed One declares what the Father was in His own person. In a certain sense the Comforter is substituted for the person of Christ on the earth: “I will not leave you comfortless.” He was with them when on earth, but not in them. He had to take man into heaven in His own person, and to send the Holy Ghost down to man on the earth. “Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.” This is known by the Comforter. And “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost.” (Compare chap. 3:24, 4: 13). No saint ought to be satisfied without knowing that he dwells in God; and if he does not know God as the sanctuary of his heart, he is not in a right state. The first thing to know is that He dwells in us: “Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us,” and the next thing is to know that we dwell in Him: “Hereby know we that we dwell in him and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.” He comes and dwells in us, and His love is perfected in us; it came to us as sinners, but now His is perfected in us (verse 12). We shall be kept safe against mysticism by the fact that it was to me as a sinner, and is still God’s love, not mine at all. Can I measure what is infinite? No.

Then what is the consequence? I never can get out of it. So with God's love.

"And we have seen and do testify, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of 'the world." This is properly preaching the gospel, and what we ought to have, personal knowledge, though not now actually with the eyes. It is absolute grace, but which is known now in the power of it by God dwelling in us. No person is fit to preach the gospel unless he is dwelling in the love he is talking about. Mysticism consists in the love that is in my heart, but the thing that is "shed abroad" is God's love. Mysticism falsely thinks it is some state of man's heart.

Now, we ask, what takes away the pretense of not considering this the actual condition of every Christian? "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God." I get astonished, beloved friends, sometimes, that such passages as these have not touched us more! It is not progress, it is not a high: state of mystical condition. "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God." I delight in that phrase. Supposing I meet a careless Christian, I say to him, 'How are you treating this great guest?' How much have you thought of Him today? If you had the Queen in your house, would you not consider her? Is that the way you have been treating God? Of course it is by the Holy Ghost, that we have God dwelling in us. Supposing I meet a humble, distrustful soul, I say, 'Do you not confess that Jesus is the Son of God?' Oh, yes. Well, God is dwelling in you; He has made your heart His dwelling-place. Where there is carelessness it touches the conscience, and where; there is lowliness it reaches the heart.

(To be continued.)

Words of Truth: Volume 6, 1 John 4

If the blood of Christ has been put on me, the Holy Ghost must bear testimony to my cleanness before God. So in every true Christian God dwells, and He is a sanctuary to us, a dwelling place, where we can and do abide. The title is the blood of Christ. "I am glorified in them," Christ said. By and by it will be perfectly, but now we are called to manifest it in our mortal bodies. The moment I have my place with God in virtue of Christ's work, God can dwell in me. His dwelling down here is in virtue of that work. He never even dwelt with Abraham, though He said that He had brought Israel out of Egypt that He might dwell among them. Christ was alone when in this world. His work was not executed. God was down here as a Man. "Destroy this temple." The temple at Jerusalem was empty, and "the fullness of the godhead bodily" dwelt in Christ. Now the Holy Ghost dwells in individuals, and collectively in them too. Your bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost, and "in whom ye are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." But how perfect, beloved friends, this shows redemption to be! Our place is to have the Holy Ghost thus, between the accomplishment of redemption and the glory. The sufferings are accomplished, but the glory is not come. The Holy Ghost is "the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession." (Eph. 1:14.) We are not waiting for grace. The work of grace has been accomplished, and the Holy Ghost is given to us meanwhile. God does not know such a thing as an unreconciled Christian. It is a great thing to take God at His word! We may be weak in the place, but the place is not uncertain. Our place in virtue of redemption is as simple as simple can be; it is Christ's.

"Herein is love with us (see margin) made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world" (v. 17). When I reach the judgment seat I shall be like the Judge, so it can give me nothing but boldness. We have had in a previous verse (12), "His love is perfected in us," and in this one it carries us on to a day of judgment. His love has been manifested in sinners, and is now enjoyed in a saint, and puts us before the judgment seat perfectly like the Judge. Are we to have boldness now? Yes, in this world. God has said it, and I am to believe it.

Then comes in all the diligence, and prayer, and reading of the Word. John always states our state, and then shows the fruit.

Beloved friends, do you really believe all this? Then I ask, how are your hearts in respect of it? How far have you confidence in God as that He dwells in you? How far as to the manifestation of this love do your hearts live in it? if you have such a guest dwelling in you, what attention do you pay Him? Are we living as if we believed that God dwelt in us? Here we are with a "treasure in earthen vessels," and constantly made to find out our own nothingness. Still, while this is true, He has revealed Himself to us in perfect love, and given us to know that we may walk in the power of it through a world where the Lord Jesus walked perfectly. May the Lord give us to have our hearts emptied of everything not of Christ, that we may be free to, enjoy this perfect love!

All that would justly create fear is gone but to see it so we have to look at the day of judgment. It will not do to think of ourselves as sinners when we speak of judgment: the Cross does for sinners, but not the day of judgment. Often a soul looks at the judgment seat and finds himself not completely at peace: he does not know the righteousness of God. The moment I see my place in Christ, I say, "As he is, so are we;" there is no question of judgment for me. I cannot say, I am as Christ was, I can say "as He is." I am not as He was in His humiliation, but I am as He is in the glory, though it may seem a paradox. Till He died on the Cross the work was not done, though He was going to do it. I am in Christ according to the efficacy of. what. He has done for me, and according to His place with the Father. Christ will come and receive me to Himself, that where He is there I may be. "It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory." I am glorified before ever I get to Christ, just like Himself. He is not the firstfruits of the wicked; it is "they that are Christ's at his coming." He was raised because He was perfectly acceptable to the Father. "Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father." What is the meaning of resurrection from among the dead? It is the firstfruits of it. "If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." The Spirit does not dwell in the wicked, and I am raised because the Holy Ghost dwells in me. I am raised in glory. We come up to give an account of ourselves, and are glorified beforehand. How can I talk of hope in the sense of uncertainty? There is nothing like it. I go right into glory. I am not only saved by what He has done, but I am blest with Him. He is the "firstborn among many brethren."

If I look at my sins, they are all gone; if at my standing, it is in present grace; if forward to judgment, "As he is, so are we." The Christian position is not fear.

“We love him, because he first loved us” (v 19). He does not say we ought to love, but we love it cannot be otherwise. The sense of its mother’s love is love in a child. When I am looking up to one who is above me, I have a sense of the love that one has for me, and that is love. You cannot have divine love revealed in your heart by the Holy Ghost without loving; of course we do not love enough, but still we do love Him. The sense that His love is infinitely beyond all our love is the proof that we do love.

“This commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also” (v. 21). This love is a necessary effect of the nature; but this is not all. It is not a mere fruit of nature; there is a relationship as well as nature, and God must have obedience as well as love. We see it exemplified in Christ when on earth. He says, “That the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do.” The law of liberty does not set aside the commandment. But who is my brother? It is a terrible idea that we cannot know the children of God. “In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil.” How can we have that kind of love if we are not to know who is our brother? If I meet a person, and he is born of God, and I am born of God, we are brothers; nothing can be simpler. The Spirit is the Spirit of truth and the Spirit of holiness. So, supposing that a person comes with a great deal of truth, but without holiness, Ah! I say, that will not do, the Spirit of God is the Holy Spirit. Again, if he comes with great pretension to holiness, but without truth, I say that cannot be the Spirit of God, for the Spirit of God is the Spirit of truth. Satan may deceive us with regard to a person on one side, but he cannot on every side as God can.

A person may say, How do I know I love God? I love His children. We are wandering in a wilderness where there is no way (Psa. 107), but God makes a way for, us, and it is a great thing to want a way. When Adam was innocent he did not want a way. How can I find a way in a world that has departed from God altogether? When I have Christ, I find a way. I have the minutest directions as to how to order my way. I am taught how to do all, and I have God with me all through. A slave did not know overnight what his master would have him do in the morning; neither do we, except as to certain things. The whole principle of a saint is obedience. “By this we know that we love the children of God when we love God and keep his commandments.” If I love you, it is because I love God, so I cannot go with you into disobedience.

Words of Truth: Volume N1, First Epislte of John, On the

This verse commences a profound subject. It introduces to the Divine nature. Having spoken of Jesus Christ come in the flesh, the Spirit ascends to His nature and here it is necessarily abstract thought. This is natural. We must be more abstract in the description of a man’s nature than of his person. Having described the person of Christ, it is the natural business of the Spirit to speak of the Divine nature in its essential qualities and in its manifestations.

As regards this nature, two distinct statements are made, viz., that “God is light,” and “God is love”; but the Spirit lingers more over the second than over the first. “God is light” is the contradiction of the old lie of Satan, which accused God of lying in— “Ye shall not surely die.” “God is love” is the contradiction of the other lie— “Hath God said, ye shall not eat”? Ah, then, He has refused you something; He does not love you. Here, then, are light and love, and they contradict the serpent’s lie; and this, as before remarked, keeps us in company with the early part of Genesis, where individual, and not dispensational matters, are in question.

The Spirit lingers longer over the love than over the light; not that it is not quite needful to say both “God is light” and “God is love.” If God be not light as well as love, all is over with our souls, and we are left without hope; but the Spirit delights to linger over love, and here (v. 7) He unfolds this subject, showing that not only is God love, but absolutely love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God. All love is of God’s creation. There is no other way of comprehending God. Does the beast understand man? No. 1St Cor. 2 tells me that if you have not the Divine nature, you cannot understand God. If you have derived life from God, you have a capacity for understanding Him—not otherwise. If there is no love in you, you are not born of God; you cannot understand Him.

Verse 8 follows as a matter of course. Not having the nature of God, you cannot know Him any more than the beast knows you.

In verse 9 we have the manifestation of the Divine nature. There are three distinct revelations of God made known to us— 1, His personal glory; 2, His essential glory; 3, His character in manifestation.

We have the glory of God, the invisible God, whom no man hath seen, or can see—the unapproachable God. Here you have only eternally to worship.

We have the Divine nature, which can, and does display itself in action; and 3, we have His character, which may be illustrated, and is so, in the Man Christ Jesus. We are introduced to the glory of God, but no man can penetrate that mystery; it is right to stand inside. This is true, and yet the nature of God can be, and is illustrated: “In this the love of God was manifested.” Every virtue in Jesus was a ray of the Divine character. Simple this is to understand, very blessed to grasp! Thus we are largely and fitly introduced to God. If I am introduced to His nature, it is that I may therein find my own blessedness, while His character compels me to cling to Him forever. Now the nature of God being love, when He set about to manifest it, He did it perfectly. It would be impossible for love to be more entire in its expression, “for God sent his only begotten Son,” &c. God lifts up His love, as it were, before you in its form of perfectness, its meridian glory, and here the Spirit loves to linger.

We have in vv. 9-10, two different aspects of this love-first, that the Son is given, that we might live through Him; second, that He might be the propitiation for our sins. If we read John 6, we find that life comes out of sacrifice. There is no life but in feeding on the slain Lamb. Here we have the two aspects severally given. In the Gospel it is seen that there is no life but in death; sin is put away by the death of Christ.

It will never give me life to look on the Lord Jesus as an example. He is that, but how am I to get rid of my sins? There is no life but by the death that puts away sin, and therefore the voice of Christ links death with sacrifice.

There is another thought on this tenth verse. Love in God is self-originating; it is not so in us. In God, love is an emanation of nature; in you, love is an emanation of the Divine nature, not of your own nature; no, not even when you get it from God. And this is the contrast, that when we compare our love with the love of God, ours is as nothing. How He outshines us! Nothing moved Him to love but His own nature. No attraction of ours based the history of the cross of Christ. Its foundation lay in the Divine nature. We find this in v. 10. We never drew out the love of God, it flowed out spontaneously, and this gift of the Son was the expression of it.

Verse 11.-Humbling, but very precious—very humbling, love in us, is matter of exhortation; it is not so with God. Let me say it, who could exhort Him? Ah! but He has no rival nature, “God is love.” In you there is the rival nature, and there, though you be participant in the Divine nature, you need an exhortation to love your brother. Love is God’s nature, but I am a complete creature, morally composed of principles of love and hatred, and I am therefore the proper subject of the exhortation in v. 11.

(To be continued, if the Lord will.)

Words of Truth: Volume N1, First Epistle of John, On the

We have anticipated v. 12. It teaches us not to sit as scholars, but as worshippers in the presence of the Divine glory—that impenetrable veil. “No man hath seen God at any time.” Jesus said, “not that any man hath seen,” etc. When Jesus says this, we can say, ‘Thou hast seen the Father, Thou hast been in the secret of that light impenetrable to all save Thyself; “the light that no man can approach unto.’” Jesus was in that light which was impenetrable to creation, and if He had not been God, He could not have been there.

Now if we love one another, we are partakers of the Spirit; and if we are partakers of the Spirit, we have the nature of God. God dwelleth in us by His Spirit.

Verse 14. —And by the light of this new nature God is revealed in perfect love, and we can “ testify that the Father sent the Son,” etc. God has through Christ a twofold connection with this world. He has a connection with this world because of Christ-demanding, as another has said, “What have you done with my Son?” God asked of Cain, “Where is Abel thy brother?” What has the world done with Jesus? This is the controversy. But again, salvation is come through Christ; God has sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world. Wonderful it is, to see these things all clustering round Christ.

Verse 15. —We have the text of confession of Christ as a proof of the indwelling Spirit. To be sure we have. What said Jesus to Peter? “Whom do men say that I am?” “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” That is not a revelation of flesh and blood, it is the revelation of the Father. So he that confesses that Jesus is the Christ, dwelled in God, and God in Him. It is a direct, personal dealing with the soul by the Father of lights, this revelation, which carries the knowledge of the Son into the heart. The Spirit delights to linger here, and, to speak as a man, we must excuse Him for it. He has reached the highest heights, and He cannot but linger there. You think there is repetition? Be it so—it is repetition ever grateful to our ears. The Divine Spirit speaks of the Divine nature. He tarries, and invites us to tarry with Him.

Verse 16. — If I can look in the face of Jesus of Nazareth and say, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,” can that be accounted otherwise than by perfect love? It is well to have this re-asserted, for where do you dwell but in love? Can you dwell in power? Never! The throne may have power, but love has a bosom! John could rest on the bosom of Jesus, and we in eternal love. Nowhere but in eternal love! Nowhere but in love find a home! Our communion is in the apprehension of love. Our communion is not with God as a Judge, but as Love. And we are conscious of relationship.

We have love with us, and love in us. Here it is with us, and perfect, if we love one another. A poor perfection, indeed, if compared with the love of God, though good enough for poor creatures-a perfection far outshone (v. 12). Perfection in us is a poor thing when compared to perfection in God (v. 17); which gives those who were His enemies boldness to stand before Him in the day of judgment, with an answer for every demand of the throne. That is the Gospel! Grace has made provision whereby a rebel can stand in the judgment with an answer in his mouth. I love my brethren! No thanks to me. Ah! how the Divine nature outshines me! I defy your imagination to conceive anything finer. The offended God provides His rebel creatures with an answer to His own demands! We see this in Noah, Egypt, and Rahab.

And now what have we to do with judgment? We can measure it, for our righteousness is resplendent as the throne itself. Righteousness is seated on the throne, and the very same righteousness has invested me; for if Christ is the righteousness of God, He is my righteousness also. This righteousness is on me, so I can challenge the throne in my person. The throne has righteousness, so have I. So instead of a controversy, we have communion; we have fellowship, for we have the same glory—Christ. As a matter, then, of course, we have boldness in the day of judgment.

In verse 10 you have the underived love of God; in you love is derived, and there was nothing in you to attract love but your misery.

Verse 19 shows this love in you is only a reflection, it is but a response. In God love originated, and this is well. It is well that the glory of the creation should be co-ordinate with the glory of the Creator. Well we may excuse these varied echoes of truth. The first speaks of place in God for you.

Verse 20. — The brother is supposed to be a reflection of Christ. He is not looked at by the Spirit in his own muddy, turbid condition, but as a reflection of God. Now if you do not love the reflection, how can you love the original? It is not a mere exhortation, but a command to love. The commandment makes the right thing the obedient thing. Suppose you love without minding the commandment, you are doing the right thing, but not the obedient thing.

Having ascended from the person to the nature, we here find commands suited to that nature as communicated to us. And we find a rest and a dwelling-place for the eternal satisfaction of the heart. We are introduced to His glory in His Son, we glory in it; we hear of His moral

character, and find it all manifested in Jesus.

Words of Truth: Volume N1, First Epistle of John, On the

You will remember our having referred to the confession of Peter— “Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God.” The Lord sealed this truth in Peter’s soul, and He seals it still to the heart of every believing sinner. “Flesh and blood path not revealed it unto thee,” etc. This is the simple but important history of the truth, whether given or revealed. It is the revelation of the Father written in the heart of the sinner, not by inbred power, but by distinct revelation. This is the origin of all life amongst us; it comes from the Father of lights. “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God.” The confession of Christ is the fruit of the Father’s revelation, it is the exhibition of that which comes from the Father.

Is there anything you would prefer to this? Would you rather that you should discover Christ by the exercise of your own intelligence? The scholarship of man comes by his own intellect. The knowledge of Christ comes by light from without and light within. It is a double revelation. If there were a candle burning on the table, what would I be the better if I had not an eye in my head? The candle may shine, but, if I am blind, I am in the dark still. I want an eye in my body. There is a double action required-the object without and the faculty for observing it within; and both these are from the Father.

Now, the more thoroughly I see my debtor ship, the happier I shall be. I am a poor, dark, impotent sinner. Let me read in this, first, my debtor ship to the Father. If I do believe that Jesus is the Christ, it is because I am born of God. It is no modification of my own old nature, but a new thing by revelation of the Father of lights.

And here, again, we have the Levitical marks of the clean animal. The law made a difference between clean and unclean. They were distinguished by the form of the hoof, etc. So it is in this Epistle. We have the marks of love and obedience. This is moral testimony to my title, and I would not refuse it. I would not refuse to have my title tried by moral tests. Could power of intellect satisfy me? Let me have the proofs of love and obedience.

Verse 4. —(We may leave out the word “for.”) We have a weighty truth brought out here, “ Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world.” Yes, it does, and it does so by Divine necessity. Let me ask you two things: —Was the Devil ever a conqueror? Was God ever defeated? Never! You may lay this up for your comfort, that the Devil has never conquered, and that God has never been defeated. It becomes, therefore, a Divine necessity, that that which is of God is a conqueror—always in victory. You may be a very different instrument from your Lord! He could say, “have overcome the world.” You can but say, “My faith has overcome.” Faith in you does what Jesus did in His own person; but faith can do it, and it is blessed to be brought into the light of this comfortable truth.

I do not deny that Satan gets advantage over us too often, but all advantages do but return to his own confusion. And when Satan seemed to have the victory, when Jesus was under death for a moment—what was it, but to give to Jesus the more splendid victory? He was indeed as truly dead as ever man was, and in a worse view, as being under judgment, but only that He might gain the third day’s victory. If Christ appeared to be conquered, it but set forth His victories; if Satan seems to conquer, it is but for his own confusion.

The thing that is born of God is the power of God in you, gaining Divine victories, because it is of God. New and magnificent truth! I find myself part of that mighty thing which is sent into the battle-field, confident of victory. The flesh must be made a show of, but that which I possess from God is a principle of victory. The Holy Ghost is a Conqueror too, because, greater is He that is in you, than He that is in the world. He that is in the world is the spirit of darkness. God is the God of victory. Let me be humbled that God may be magnified. This lesson must be learned—it may be taught severely to some, and gently to others; but whether by gentleness or severity, we must learn our own good-for-nothingness.

Verse 5, is a glorious truth! It is by dependence we get the victory—by dependence on Jesus. There are two victories which I have share in—one in communion, the other in power. I share with Christ the victory over the world, and the victory over death. “Death is swallowed up in victory.” But when we come to the victory over judgment, we must stand aside and receive it at Christ’s hands. Had you anything to say to the putting away of sin? You know you had not; you are a debtor. Stand by, gaze, and worship at what Christ has done. And now you are called to victory. You must be made a fool of, but you carry the power of God. You possess that which is victory over the world! Ah! we want large thoughts. God’s thoughts are very large, though He confines them within the nutshell of a single text. Large they are and abundant. We want accuracy, too, and we want to learn a lesson from our own inaccuracy.

Verse 6. —Now we are taught how to use the instruments of victory. If I admit that Jesus is the Son of God, let me use this truth. So to speak, let me show a little of this mettle. If Jesus be the instrument of victory, use Him. Lean—lean with all your weight of sins upon His blood, lean heavily. His object in coming here was to cleanse you from your crimson sins; He came not by water only, but also by blood. He could not give you communion but by atoning for your lost condition. Then use Christ. Oh! what a grasp of Him we thus get! A full Christ, very Man and very God-very Man, as one of us, yet God blessed forever! This is a full Christ. He came into this world to make, by His blood, a full provision for sin, and to keep the soul in communion by the washing of water. God and Man in one, He works by water and blood. This Epistle truly demands that we should linger over every word. We might well do it in Ephesians and other Epistles, but here it is imperative, and that because I find myself alone with Christ. I do not care if I be the only saint on earth; for it is to one in such a place of solitude that this writing is addressed. I do not say my heart would not feel it, it ought to feel more than if one were alone. But here I am, as it were, insulated, and this is an immense comfort amidst confusion; I am blessed and I bless Him. Yes! The more the confusion presses, the more the consolation rises.

Verse 7. —I believe that if the Spirit had written these words He would have said, “The Son,” and not “The Word.” “The Word” is an official title, Jesus is the personal title. John is the only one who calls Jesus “The Word.” It is well chosen, and speaks of Jesus as the revealer of the mind of God, as your word reveals your mind. Again, as one has said, “I cannot understand why a record should be wanting in heaven.” I agree with those who reject this v. 7.

Verse 8 should be read in the light of John, chap. 19, 20. When Jesus died, blood and water came out of His side, and when risen He imparted the Holy Ghost to His disciples. In the mouth of these three witnesses is your title established. The blood and water from the crucified Jesus justifies you from sin. The Spirit of the risen Jesus imparts life to you. Cleansed, washed, and justified by blood, you have life by the Spirit. “Receive ye the Holy Ghost.” The law itself received the testimony of three witnesses-on these three your title rests secure. Your mind’s working may give you trouble, but have you read your title clear? Christ having cleansed you by water and by blood, appears in risen power to fill you with an eternal treasure!

Verse 9. —And do we not do this? Of course we do; we dare not but do it. Do you question your friend’s veracity? Will you not take his witness? The witness of God is greater. God had expended His measure of testimony on man when He had given the blood and water of a crucified Christ, and the Spirit of a risen Christ. There are His three witnesses.

There are three ways in which God has presented life to His creatures. There are His elect angels, who kept their first state; in them He maintained life. To Adam He committed life as a stewardship. Adam lost it. In neither of these ways have you life, neither supported nor deposited, but by derivation. You are not independent of a source of life outside you; your life is in Christ, and is therefore infallible —yes, infallible in the risen Jesus. It is better than Adam’s or than angel’s life, for it is a life out of death! Life eternal in its quality. And now would you exchange with Adam or the angels? Would you wish life were committed to your stewardship? Oh, what it is to derive life from Christ!

Verse 10 is exceedingly characteristic of John’s writings. Here we stand in individual connection, independent of all else, church or anything. It is very blessed to have companions on the rugged road, and many are the duties which we must perform, which isolation deprives us of doing, for we cannot do them if we are not in the right relationship.

Our life is not what we trace in angels, but derive from the glorious Head of Life.

John is a mighty writer. He deals with the mighty Son of God, and puts poor believing sinners with Him. If you do not believe you are a sinner, you make God a liar, just as Adam did. God spoke to Adam of death in a world of life, and Adam did not believe Him. God speaks to you of life in a dead world, and if you do not believe His record you make Him a liar. The Spirit is dealing with realities. God can bear with and comfort the feeble-minded, but if I say I am not a sinner, I make God a liar. God sent Jesus to this world, freighted with life for the sinner’s use. Weighty words! Here may we have something for our solitary hours —a link between God and us. “I delight in thy testimonies.” Was this insolence in David? — “I know more than the ancients; I am wiser than my teachers.” No; it was the boldness of faith. There is no humbler thing in the moral creation than for faith to take the place God gives.

Words of Truth: Volume N2, First Epistle of John, On the

There is a very comfortable secret contained in this verse. The apostle writes to those who know the Son of God, to interpret to them all that is involved in that knowledge. They may now know their blessedness, which he wishes to tell them, that they have eternal life. Many a dear soul does not know the blessedness in which it stands in the knowledge of Christ. Surely we ought to know that if Christ has done a work for us, it is that He may bless us. “That you may know that you have,” &c.

When the unconverted are spoken to about Christ, it is to work a change in them; but here it is interpreting Christ as eternal life, to those who believe. There is a large generation who, while they believe in Christ, and would, as much as Paul himself, hate every other confidence, yet do not know the blessed place in which they stand. We must linger still a little here; it is unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God.

Have you ever traced the names of God through the volume of Scripture? It is a beautiful study. In the first chapter of Genesis it is simply “God.” In the second, it is not only the naked, abstract name of God, but the “Lord God”—thus putting Him in connection with, and nearness to man. As we go on through the book, we find the title drawing us still nearer. We find the new name “the God of Abraham.” In the Exodus, when Moses says, “When they shall ask me thy name, what shall I say unto them?” the answer is, “I am that I am”—Jehovah Jah; but not only this—not only the title of the self-existent God—but, “Moreover, the Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; this is my name forever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.” And further on again, when Moses pleaded for Israel in the matter of the golden calf, he was hid in the cleft of the rock, and “the Lord passed by it.” This is the name in which the Lord delighted—a name which declared God as suited to lost and ruined creatures.

I shall not linger here to speak of Isaiah’s Immanuel, but pass on to Matthew 1. Here we meet with “Jesus,” the Saviour; and again, at the close of the ministry, where the time is come for the full display of glory, He commands the apostles to baptize “in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost.” Name, not names, became though three persons, they are but one God. This is the full disclosure of divine glory. We stand in the faith of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

In the book of the Acts the word “name” is much insisted on; often repeated. It is the “name of the Son of God” as here, His name as He now stands, having accomplished all that a sinner needs; having died and risen again. Be it known unto you that when by faith you adopt this name, you adopt all that the Son of God has done for poor sinners. He has been declared to be “the Son of God with power,” &c., &c., and that name is published now all over the world as the only introduction to the true God. When we turn to Revelation 19 we have Jesus as the Rider on the white horse, coming forth in the last display of glory, surrounded by all dignitaries, clad with all the glories that He has earned for Himself.

Just like many matters in the Scriptures, His name becomes gradually disclosed, as we bring the various parts together. It is just in character with the unity of the whole volume.

And let me say, there is nothing so persuasive of the divine origin of the book as this very fact of its unity, and by the variety of its writers—separated by ages, nay, thousands of years; separated by habits, occupations, and sympathies, yet united to form a work divine in

its unity.

The name of Christ unfolds its glories gradually from the bright creation glory of Genesis 1 to the more excellent glory of “King of kings, and Lord of lord.” Yes, God has come into this world to gain honor to Himself forever, and from us! God could let Moses know that He derived more pleasure from the name He got in contact with poor sinners than from His own title of essential glory. His name, Jehovah, He shall be known by, but His name of grace shall be His memorial to all generations. And now we see that it is the expression of the divine goodness to serve others. God prizes such occasions. Would that we could give Him credit for it! He loves to be the God of sinners rather than the God of glory! I have but to trust Him, to know that I have eternal life. Oh! cannot I let myself go and commit myself to Him? Shame, shame, if you do not let yourself go, and slip into His arms!

Verse 14. —There are two thoughts here—it is one thing to be conscious of your personal acceptance, and another to know that your petitions are accepted. You ought to be certain of your own acceptance, you cannot always be certain of the acceptance of your petitions. You do not want assurance (or you should not) of your own acceptance, but you do want to be assured of the acceptance of your petitions, because a condition attaches to them. If I go to a human friend with a request, I must know two things: one is, that he should accept my requirement, the other, that he should accept myself. When I go to God with a request, I should not agitate the question of my own acceptance, yet, I must, of the acceptance of my petitions.

Verse 15. —There are two ways of interpreting this passage in the light of Scripture. It may be spoken of ecclesiastical or of personal (i.e., individual) sin. In 1 Corinthians 11 we have the sin unto death, as an offense in the Church, but there is another sin unto death—it is the sin of Cain. We have it in Acts, “Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish.” Adam sinned against law—it was a sin unto death; but Cain sinned against the remedy for sin. This is the thing noticed in Acts. It is not “ye sinners, but ye despisers,” —despisers of God’s remedy. What can God do further, when you have despised the remedy which He has found for sin? This is sin against the Holy Ghost, which cannot be forgiven.

In Hebrews 10 we have it again, “Treading under foot the Son of God, counting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing.” This is not ecclesiastical, but personal. It is not your sin that proves your ruin, but your despising the remedy. Some think this is ecclesiastical; I do not, for I do not see that John enters, in any wise, into Church matters.

Verse 17. —All unrighteousness is sin. This guards your making light of unrighteousness, even when it is not unto death.

A wholesome exhortation, but a grave conclusion!

Verse 18. — Then again we get the undefilableness of the new nature. The wicked one has neither commerce nor conversation with him—he is morally out of his reach. The wicked one can touch you, but not your new nature. It was not so with Christ. He could predicate of His whole nature what you can of your new nature. He could say that Satan had nothing in him; and so it was, from whatsoever point He was tried. Satan sought to engraft evil, a moral taint, but was foiled; there was “nothing” for him in Christ. You cannot, you would not say that of yourself, but you can say it of your new nature.

Here, again, Christ shines out in contrast to us, and we gladly yield the pre-eminence to Him. If you can say that your new nature is beyond the reach of the wicked one, it is because you owe that new nature to Him. You have your old nature from Adam, but your new nature is of and from Christ, and is, like Him, undefilable.

The world, as we have said, is that thing which is nurtured, framed, and educated by the wicked one, and which lies in his bosom. It came into life by his lies, and is supported by them. But we are in God. The truth has separated us from the world, and given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true.

Read v. 20 with the 8th chapter of John’s Gospel, and we see there the wondrous argument that your understanding must be prepared to know Jesus. “Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my words.” The Jews were worse than Nicodemus asking “How can a man be born again?” Incompetency is worse than ignorance. This is what the Jews betray—incompetency to understand Jesus. He says to them, “You do not understand my words; my very language is that of a barbarian to you.”

It is not alone that the natural man wants a lesson; he wants faculty also to understand. This is a solemn conclusion to this Epistle, though it magnifies the grace of God. Nothing exhausts love—love never fails. Is anything too hard for the Lord? Is anything too great to expect from Him? If I can say this of His power, why cannot I say it of His love? Can I expect too much of His love? Never! So when He finds me incompetent, darkness around and darkness within, He turns both into light. Otherwise the mission of the Son of God has not been answered. But He hath given us an understanding, and now you are debtors to Him for everything, for the lesson and the understanding. It is just what you would like to be, and that forever, “A debtor to mercy alone.”

In conclusion, I would observe that just as Jesus honored the Father, so the Spirit honors Jesus. When Jesus speaks of the Father, it is to hide Himself behind Him. “That they might know thee, the only true God,” &c., &c. So the Spirit delights to look at the Son, and say, “This is the true God, and eternal life.” It is very beautiful to study the economic places of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The Son honors the Father, and the Holy Ghost honors the Son, and in worship of this name we stand, the name in which we have been baptized.

Verse 21 is often used in a very poor, feeble, moral way, as if it were to warn against going after the world. True, the love of money is idolatry, but that is not touched here. We are told to escape from moral idolatry, but the thought here is higher. Go, fashion to yourself all the attributes of beauty, excellence, and wisdom, and mold them into a deity, adorn it as you please with every grace, it is but a creature of your own imagination. Your idolatry may be more refined and theistic than the worship of Jupiter or Juno, but if it be not the God who has revealed Himself in Christ whom you worship, you are but an idolater after all.

Let us now glance over a few of the leading characteristics of this Epistle, as we have spoken of them.

We have God as light and love in contradistinction to Satan’s lie in Eden. Then we have Christ as the manifestation of truth, that Eternal Life which was with the Father. He came into the world freighted with truth, and went back to Heaven freighted with salvation! Glorious journey that was, and full revelation. The Spirit, too, has here one peculiar defined character, it is “Unction.” Other characters He has elsewhere mentioned, is “Seal,” and “Earnest,” but here He waits on Christ as the Spirit of Truth. The Truth of God was to be manifested, and the Spirit of God waited on the ministry, and made it the happy possession of our souls. Then we have the world formed by the lie of the Serpent, and nourished by its vitalizing, kindling power. We have the new undefilable nature, and we have the new life, neither committed to us, nor maintained, but drawn from an indestructible source.

This brings us to victory. The new life being a divine principle, is of necessity victorious. You are often defeated, faith never is—unbelief is made a fool of, faith never. “This is the victory,” etc.

Lastly, we have tests. “He that doeth not righteousness,” etc., etc. Do you not like these tests? Would you not have the Divine nature produce in you its proper fruits? It must prove itself in you, as in Christ, shining forth in righteousness and love. We have God—Christ—the Spirit—the new nature—the victory of faith—and tests.

It is well to muse a little over these things, this wondrous treasury. You are not with the church, but with God. It is blessed to walk with saints; there are duties we cannot fulfill apart from them, it is precious to be with the people of God, but after all the great thing is to be with Himself: The Lord grant that we may know and prize this company! Amen.

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