

THE EPISTLE OF ETERNAL LIFE

A PRACTICAL EXPOSITION OF
THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN
TO HELP THOSE WHO DESIRE
TO LIVE TO THE GLORY OF
GOD AND IN A MANNER WELL-
PLEASING TO HIM

George Goodman

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AN EXPOSITION OF THE
FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

BY

GEORGE GOODMAN



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GLASGOW - - 229 BOTHWELL STREET, C.2
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Foreword

THESE papers were first published in the *Friend's Witness*, and are now reprinted that they may have a continuing usefulness.

They have been given as addresses in various places, and have often been asked for in a permanent form.

The aim is practical rather than critical, my desire being to help those who desire to live to the glory of God and in a manner well-pleasing to Him. May He graciously use them to this end.

GEO. GOODMAN.

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The Epistle of Eternal Life

AN EXPOSITION OF THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

The Introduction

Chapter i. 1-5

JOHN often speaks of himself as the "disciple whom Jesus loved" and we always think of him as such; but the Lord called him "Boanerges," a Son of Thunder, and as we read this Epistle we find in it language of such power that we feel the name is justified.

Yet John was a silent disciple. It is very rarely that we read of him speaking in the Gospels, unlike Peter (whom he could nevertheless outrun—John 20. 4), he is seldom to the front. No doubt he thought all the more deeply.

But John is chosen of God to write no fewer than five books in the Holy Scriptures—the Gospel bearing his name, three epistles, and the Apocalypse.

He has the pleasing habit of telling us why he wrote, and this is very helpful.

He tells us that he wrote the Gospel "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through His Name."

From this we see it was written to unbelievers; it set forth Christ as the Object of faith in all the

majesty of His person, words, walk and work, and this in order that as faith believed on and received Him, the unspeakable gift of eternal life might be received and enjoyed.

Thus it was to unbelievers that they might have life.

The Epistle is different. It is addressed, "unto you that believe" (v. 13), and not to receive, but "that ye may *know that ye have* eternal life."

The Gospel is to bring life, the Epistle to give the assurance of it.

But this is only one of several reasons why the Epistle is written.

If we look at the opening verses we have three other reasons stated. They are:

(1) *To show us "that eternal life,"* that is, its true nature, character and how it manifests itself in conduct.

(2) *That we may have Fellowship* with others who are enjoying it.

(3) *That our joy may be full.*

Truly, goodly reasons for writing, that we may have understanding, assurance, fellowship and joy in the possession of the Eternal Life. The Life that is Life indeed. Let us look, then, at vv. 1-4, which we may call:

THE INTRODUCTION. He begins, as he did his Gospel, by directing our attention at once to the Lord Jesus Christ, who "was from the beginning," that is, of course, the One who was from Eternity, since no beginning can be thought of when He was not.

In the Gospel He is "The Eternal Word," but in the Epistle He is "That Eternal Life" (v. 2), in each case who was "with the Father and was manifested unto us."

John speaks of the familiarity he had with "The Word of Life." He heard and saw Him, he looked earnestly upon Him, as one who ponders deeply over a thing, he even handled Him, and now it is his delight to declare what he had thus seen and heard for our joy.

But he is not giving another historical account of the Word made flesh, and dwelling among us full of grace and truth, but rather of the Life that was and is in Him as it is manifested in those who have been born from above.

In other words, those who have Eternal Life have the life He manifested when on earth, and should therefore "walk as He walked" (2. 6).

It is to show how this Eternal Life manifests itself in us that he writes.

THE DIVISION OF THE EPISTLE. A cursory glance at the Epistle shows that it is fairly equally divided into two parts. The first part has for its text, "God is Light" (1. 5), the second, "God is Love" (4. 8 and 16).

These two characteristics of God are, of course, the distinctive qualities of Eternal Life; for the new life we receive at our regeneration is a life of *light*, so that we become children of light and walk in the light; and a life of *love*, so that we are distinguished and known by our love to one another and walk in love.

What beautiful figures of God these are, the two most unspeakably lovely things we know, one in the physical world "Light," and the other in the moral world "Love." Think of God thus, and remember the new life in Christ has these two qualities as its distinctive features. This is insisted on throughout the whole epistle, as will appear.

THE TEXT of the first part.

The Apostle, having introduced his subject and stated the purpose of writing, announces his text, "God is Light" (v. 5). "*This, then is the message*"—"God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all."

Eternal Life is a Life of Light—there is and can be no darkness associated with it any more than one can think of darkness in connection with the Living God.

Our Lord Jesus insisted so often upon this subject. He Himself was the Light of the World; those who follow Him should not walk in darkness, but have the Light of Life and become, in their turn, Children of Light.

They must keep "a single eye," "having no part dark," when their whole body shall be full of light, "as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light." They are to let their light shine so that all coming into their houses will see the light. They are to be, in fact, like Himself, the light of the world (Matt. 5. 14), lights shining in the darkness.

THREE PROPOSITIONS. "If we say."

It will be observed that the rest of the chapter is divided into three parts, each beginning with the words, "If we say" (see vv. 6. 8 and 10). The intention is to insist in detail on "Light" (Truth and absolute Sincerity) in all our dealings with God.

Three "If We Says"

Chapter i. 6-10

WE saw in the Introduction and Text of this Epistle that the Eternal Life we are considering is a Life in the Light. God, being Light, in whom is no darkness at all, cannot have any fellowship with darkness; those, therefore, who walk in light, must be above all suspicion of deceit or untruthfulness.

What they say must be true, the conduct must bear out the words. Indeed, if there is life it cannot but discover itself in light. Darkness is death, Life is light—this is to be the recognised foundation of all that comes after—Light, Truth, Sincerity. Purity of motive and heart is the first and great outstanding mark of eternal life.

As pointed out in the first paper, the chapter is divided into three propositions, each beginning with, "If we say."

THREE FALSEHOODS. The expression "If we say" introduces three false statements. They are:

1. (v. 6) A suggestion that fellowship with God can be enjoyed while walking in darkness.

2. (v. 8) An allegation that we have no sin.

3. (v. 10) An assertion that we have not sinned.

Each of these is discussed in turn, and found

unable to bear the light. Note the judgment pronounced on each.

On the first suggestion, "We lie, and do not the truth" (v. 6).

On the second allegation, "We deceive ourselves, and the Truth is not in us" (v. 8).

And on the third assertion, "We make Him a liar and His word is not in us" (v. 10).

Truly in these denunciations we hear the voice of our Boanerges, the Son of Thunder. And yet we are so prone to talk like this. There are those whose lives will not bear the light, who can yet talk and sing of fellowship with God, of great blessings and wonderful experiences.

Only recently I heard a young girl of eighteen announce publicly that she was "purified from all sin," while others claim that they have not sinned for so long.

As though to anticipate these claims, the Apostle states them and then deals in turn with each of them.

* * * * *

1. If we say WE HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH HIM AND WALK IN DARKNESS. This, says the Apostle, "Is a lie." Fellowship with God and a dark walk cannot consist together. Directly darkness is allowed, fellowship ceases. Sin instantly snaps the thread of communion. We are put to the choice. Darkness and no fellowship with God, or fellowship with Him and no darkness. To profess or think ourselves to be enjoying both is not to "do the truth," that is not to act truthfully.

BUT THE REMEDY is at hand. It is to walk in the light as He is in the light (v. 7).

To walk in the light is to walk in the known will of God. As He reveals His mind to us, as we hear His voice saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it," we are to respond with the prompt obedience of faith—obedience from the heart, and the light will be sweet to our eyes and no darkness will overtake us; but any turning aside to folly, any wilful refusal to obey, and at once we have stepped out of the lighted path and are in darkness.

There are TWO BLESSINGS for those who walk in light.

(i) *Fellowship* is enjoyed with all others who are walking in the same light. Our fellowship is with the Father and the Son (v. 3), and it is also with another—sin separates, light unites hearts.

(ii) *The Blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin.*

This should not be regarded as conditional on walking in the light (though the appreciation and assurance of it are), for we know, from many other Scriptures, that remission of sins (the cleansing from guilt that is by blood) is of Grace, and not of works or walk (Rom. 4. 5).

Rather the thought is that being in ourselves altogether unfit to bear or remain in the light, we can only do so on the ground of the blood, that is, the atoning death of Christ.

"Eternal light, Eternal light,
How pure the soul must be,
When placed within Thy searching sight,
It shrinks not, but with calm delight
Can live and look on Thee."

It is only the finished work of Christ ("the blood") can give us a perfect standing in God's holy sight (Hebrews 10. 14).

"Cleanseth" is the present tense, and has been misunderstood, as if the work of Christ, instead of being "finished," once for all and for always (Heb. 10. 12), were continuous. Of course, this is not so, but the efficacy of the finished work continues, and the conscience finds continuous peace and rest in the assurance of it. In this way the blood "speaketh" (Heb. 12. 24).

The value of the present tense is similar to that of Leviticus 17. 11, "It is the blood that *maketh* an atonement for the soul," that is, it is the property of the blood, it has that value, that it can and does effect atonement. In the case of Christ it is not constantly, but once for all.

2. "IF WE SAY WE HAVE NO SIN." This, the Apostle says, is to deceive ourselves. It is very doubtful whether we shall deceive others. Moreover, it is not true. "The truth is not in us" (v. 8).

It is important, in reading these verses, to remember the distinction between "Sin" and "Sins."

Sin is the tree, sins are the fruit. Sin is the leprosy, sins are the spots. Sin is the same in all, sins vary in ten thousand ways.

We were all constituted sinners in Adam. We all inherit from him the law of Sin and Death which is in our members (Rom. 7. 23).

The exact position of the believer is described in Rom. 8. 10. "If Christ be in you, the body is dead (has in it the law of death) because of sin, but the Spirit is life (has been quickened to new life—born again) because of righteousness."

To deny the presence of this law of sin and death is to deceive ourselves.

But should sin break out into sins, then, on confession, our Heavenly Father forgives us. In this He is "faithful" to promise and "just" in that Christ has died.

"God will not payment twice demand,
Once at my bleeding Surety's hand
And then again at mine."

3. "IF WE SAY WE HAVE NOT SINNED." This, the Apostle says, is to make God a liar and reject His word (v. 10). For often in that word He warns us that in us, that is, in the flesh, is no good thing. In many things we offend all; we not only have sinned, but *do* fall short (see R.V. of Rom. 3. 23) to the end of our lives. Only grace can meet a need like this.

We "fall short," not sometimes but in everything, every time. We do nothing absolutely perfectly.

Christ, in His perfect mind and walk, is the Standard. Let us place ourselves in comparison with Him and see if in all, we do not fall infinitely short, and sinning is falling short.

But we must not despair, for provision is made for the believer's sin in the Advocate and Propitiation (2. 1-2).

Provision to Meet the Believer's Sins

Chapter ii. 1-2

IN writing to these believers not to claim to be sinless or not to have sinned, the Apostle is not excusing sinning, "pleading for sin," as we have been reproachfully told by some extremists. On the contrary, he writes this, "that ye sin not," either by claiming what is not true or by commission of sins.

It is encouraging to true and honest folk to know that their state is not abnormal, that their defeat in the conflict is neither excused nor yet left unrecognised or unprovided for.

No doubt the failures of the saints of God are recorded in Scripture to encourage us in three ways (i) By reminding us that they were men of like passions as we are. (ii) That there was provision made for their recovery. (iii) That though they sometimes lost a battle they won the war, and so may we.

Those who preach total eradication have yet to convince us that it is a superior blessing. Surely to be kept to the battle and overcome in it, is better than having no battle. Till the adoption, to wit, "the redemption of the body," it will still have in it the law of sin as, beyond all dispute, it has the law of death. They are

indeed one and the same, "the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8. 23).

We come then, to the consideration of the PROVISION FOR THE BELIEVER'S SINS. We have an Advocate, and He is the Propitiation for our sins.

Here we are, then, on holy ground. In writing on verse 9 in chapter 1, we were obliged to omit much that should be said. It will be well, then, to look back at this passage and consider the two together.

In both cases a believer only is in view; that is, one who is a child of God by faith in Jesus, who, because of that relationship, can call God, "Father." Our Advocate is *with the Father*, His work is for the children of the household of faith.

In both passages the believer has sinned, but now is a difference.

In the one case, when we sin we *have* an Advocate, there is no "if we confess," as in the previous verse (9).

We have an Advocate and a Propitiation, whether we confess or not.

But we have Parental Forgiveness only "if we confess," when we have also cleansing from unrighteousness. These things need careful discrimination. We must learn the difference between Judicial and Parental Forgiveness. The first being once for all—that is Justification, the other being frequently repeated, even as often as we sin.

God is viewed in Scripture in a twofold capacity—a Judge and a Father. To the world He is a Judge; to His saints a Father.

Now a Judge cannot forgive. In order that

we may escape from his power and judgment he *must be satisfied*, and when so satisfied he acquits or "justifies" the accused.

Our Justification was on the ground of Calvary, when we believed on the Lord Jesus. His work was accounted to us and we were acquitted, eternally justified. So that it could be said, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect. It is God that justifieth" (Rom. 8. 33).

But now we are children of God, and a Father can forgive. He does not bring His failing children before the Judge, but deals with them as a Father with His children, and if they confess their sins both forgives and restores them to the right path.

If, on the other hand, they do not confess, they remain under His displeasure. His Spirit is grieved, and He chastens them in order to correct them (see Heb. 12. 5-13 and 1 Cor. 11. 30-32), and bring them to repentance, confession and forgiveness, and thus to restoration to His favour and the honours of His house.

Let us look at the order then,

(1) If any man sin WE HAVE AN ADVOCATE with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous. The word "Advocate" is the same as "Comforter" in John 14, 16; and 26; 15. 26; 16. 7. It is the Paraclete, one called to help. Thus there are two Advocates, One with the Father for us, One from the Father in us.

When we sin, let us remember there is One at God's right hand who is for us, our Advocate, our Help.

What is AN ADVOCATE? Not one who makes up a case (as the man in the street thinks). No honourable advocate would make up a case.

He is one who *presents* a case for another. If it is a bad case he advises his client to settle out of court or to submit to judgment, but if he has a good case to present he does so with courage and confidence.

Our Advocate has a good case. He does not excuse our sinning—that He cannot do, but He pleads His own finished work, and on that ground claims, with boldness and assurance, that our sins *shall not be laid to our charge*.

On this ground He prevails, and we are not “condemned with the world.” The Righteous One thus prevails for the unrighteous.

(2) AND HE IS THE PROPITIATION for our sins (2. 2).

The word translated “Propitiation” in Rom. 3. 25, is the same as that translated “Mercy Seat” in Hebrews 9. 5. Here, and in 4. 10, the word means the propitiation made at the Propitiatory or Mercy Seat. The thought is the same. Christ is the Mercy Seat where, because of the sprinkled blood, the sinner can meet with God and know that he is accepted. It is to him the evidence of that Finished Work that the Advocate is able to plead on his behalf. The blood sprinkled on the Propitiatory gives him his standing there, reconciled and justified.

And this Mercy Seat, unlike that in the Tabernacle, is a world-wide one, and not restricted to one nation. All, from the whole world, who come to God through Christ find that He is the Mercy Seat (v. 2).

(3) “IF WE CONFESS OUR SINS” (1. 9).

But although the saint of God has no sin laid to his charge, being one of the blessed whom David describes in Psalm 32. 2, “to whom the

Lord imputeth not iniquity," yet he may still continue under parental discipline, in disgrace, as is an erring and unrepentant child.

He (though "justified") yet needs his Father's forgiveness, and this he will receive as soon as he repents and confesses his sin. Then his Father is faithful and just to forgive him, and put right the wrong.

The Responsibility of Profession

Chapter ii. 3-11

THE Apostle now reverts to the main subject, "That we may KNOW."

He begins a series of evidences whereby we may know and recognise the new life given us of God, even eternal Life. "Hereby we know," he writes. The first evidence of new life is obedience to the holy commandment, "His Word."

Just as he divided the first chapter by three times writing "*If we say,*" so now he three times writes "*He that saith*" (vv. 4, 6 and 9), and so sets before us the responsibility of our profession and the stern obligation of living according to that profession. "We ought" is a word he uses several times in his epistles (1 John 2. 6; 3. 16; 4. 11, and 3 John 8). It has the value. *We owe it to God*, to ourselves, and to our fellow-men, to live and act in a manner becoming our words.

God desires truth in the inward parts. Nothing is so abhorrent to Him as hypocrisy. None so called out the censure of the Lord Jesus as those who "say and do not," and we may become unconscious hypocrites, by custom and habit allowing our lips to say what our hearts have departed from.

Let us notice *the threefold profession*. The Apostle speaks of:

"He that saith I know Him " (v. 4).

"He that saith he abideth in Him" (v. 6).

"He that saith he is in the light" (v. 9).

It will be observed at once that these three professions are involved in the common confession of our faith.

All believers profess "I know Him," and all are presumed to be abiding in Him and seeking habitually to walk in the light. Did we deny either of these, we should fairly be regarded as renouncing our Christian life, for to cease to abide in Christ or to walk in light would be to abandon the path of life. So the Apostle insists upon the obligations that such professions entail.

The first is *to keep His Word*.

To say I know Him, and walk in disobedience to His known will, is to be found a liar, in whom is no truth.

For to know God is to obey Him. When Hosea (8. 2), described the repentance and restoration of Israel he says, "*Israel shall cry unto Me, My God, we know Thee,*" and who can know Him who is infinite in wisdom and perfect in love, and not yield the heart and will to Him.

Where that love is perfected (v. 5), that is, has had its true effect upon the heart, there the Word of God is kept; it becomes the joy and rejoicing of the heart.

To keep the word means not only to obey it, but to hold it sacred, to retain it intact, to barter away none of it, to adulterate no part of it, and to add nothing to it; to regard it as the sacred deposit of truth, the revelation of God, and to keep it as a solemn trust from Him.

The second obligation is *to walk even as He walked.*

Not, of course, to do what He did, for His allotted work is not that apportioned to us. God has a purpose and a plan for each of His children, "foreordained that we should walk in," our part being to discover and walk in the will of God.

But we are not copyists—no true artist ever is. We have Christ as our great example, not to do what He did, but to walk as He walked. That is to say, on the same principles, actuated and moved by the same mind and spirit.

What principles moved Him? How did He walk?

(i) *He walked the path of faith.* He so emptied Himself as to become both dependent and obedient (Phil. 2. 7-8); so dependent, as man, that He could say, "The Son can do nothing of Himself" (John 5. 19, 30; 8. 28; 12. 49; 14. 10); so obedient to the Father's will that He became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross (that shameful death!). And these two, dependence and obedience, constitute faith. So He was "the Beginner and Finisher of Faith" (Heb. 12. 2), setting us an example that we should follow His steps.

Space does not allow us to do more than remind ourselves that (ii) He walked *in the Word of God*, never doubting its authority nor accepting any other; "It is written," was His sufficient answer to every challenge; that (iii) He walked *in Prayer*, and (iv.) in "*Love and Good Works*," "Who went about doing good," who "pleased not Himself."

And we who profess to abide in Him, that

is, to be in communion or touch with Him, ought also to walk thus. Verses 7 and 8 point out that this is no new commandment. It is as old as the revelation of God. The Law demanded obedience and love; the "new" element in the commandment is that now we are "in the Light," regenerate, the darkness of our former days is past; the law gave no life and left us blind and dead, but now the True Light shineth we can see, and in that true Light the old command becomes a new one in Him.

The third obligation is to *Walk in Love*. Hatred is darkness—love is light. To walk in light is to love our brother. In this the Apostle follows closely the teaching of the Lord. "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples because ye have love one toward another."

Malice, anger and bitterness blind the eyes—love opens them.

If two brothers fall out it is because one or both are in the dark, for one in the light can suffer but cannot wound. We ought to love one another.

Fathers, Young Men and Children

Chapter ii. 12-15

THE Apostle now (ch. 2. 12-29) exhorts the Children of God in three groups, according to their spiritual growth. Some are mature Christians, whom he calls Fathers; others who, though not mature, are nevertheless strong and vigorous believers, he designates as Young Men, and yet others, young and immature in the faith, he calls Children.

John Newton, in his famous "Cardephonia," adopts the same plan, writing three articles which he names, "Grace in the Bud;" the second, "Grace in the Ear;" and the last, "Grace in the Full Corn," in which he sets out the distinctive features and temptations to which each stage is liable.

For it should never be forgotten that every stage of the Christian life has its peculiar manifestations. Eternal life, like all other life, has different features in the earlier and later stages.

So also has each stage its peculiar dangers and temptations. The temptations of youth are not those of old age, nor those of youth such as beset childhood.

Before, however, addressing the various classes, the Apostle speaks to all under the general term, "My little children" (v. 12). He does this three times in this chapter (vv. 1, 12 and

28), beginning and ending his particular addresses by these general exhortations, using a different word, in these three cases, from that he uses in vv. 13. and 18.

Here it is *TEKNIA*, a term constantly applied to all children of God as such. They are *TEKNIA* because born of God, and because they have received the spirit of Sonship, but when he comes to address those who, by reason of their immaturity, he calls children, he uses the word *PAIDIA*.

If we observe this difference we see that this passage begins and ends with a general exhortation (vv. 12 and 28), and that then each of the three classes is exhorted twice in the following order—Fathers (vv. 13 and 14), Young Men (vv. 13 and 14), and Children (vv. 13 and 18); the first class being addressed very shortly twice, while the second and third are first addressed shortly and then at greater length, as follows—Young Men (vv. 14-17), Children (vv. 18-27).

Let us notice, first, the *Two General Exhortations* to all the Children of God.

They bring before us two great truths, two blessings common to all believers.

1. The Assurance of Forgiveness (v. 12).
2. The Hope of the Lord's Return (v. 28).

We are so familiar with the glorious fact that our sins are forgiven, that we perhaps fail to realise what joy such a definite and dogmatic statement from the Apostle must have caused to the early disciples. "Your sins ARE forgiven." No doubt, no uncertainty, but gracious and confident assurance.

It is such an assurance as the poor woman who wept at Jesus' feet must have realised

when she heard the Lord pronounce the word, "Thy sins are forgiven . . . Go in peace" (Luke 7. 48, 50). Yet He reminds them that it is "for His name's sake"—adding double assurance.

They would probably recall the words of Ezekiel (36. 32), "Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel."

It is such grace that doubly assures the heart and brings deep peace.

It will be noted that the first three addresses begin, "I write"; the latter three, "I have written." The first three are introductory—as though the Apostle would say to each, "I am going to address you on this subject," and then, turning to each in turn again, says, "This, then, is what I have written to you for."

1. *The Address to the Fathers*, verse 13. "Ye have known Him that is from the beginning," and in exactly the same words again in verse 14.

The Children know the Father (v. 13), but the Fathers have attained to that deeper knowledge of the Eternal Son of God that continues an increasing blessedness so long as life lasts—the excellency of the knowledge that Paul desired when he wrote, "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death."

An increasing intimacy is the privilege of those who follow on to know the Lord.

2. *The Address to the Young Men*.

In the first address he describes them, "Ye have overcome the evil one."

This is the true mark of young men in Christ.

They have learned the secret of victory, they have entered into the triumph of Christ by faith, they are no longer servants to the devil.

Otherwise they are still children—babes having need of milk when they should, by reason of full age and use, have been those who had need of strong meat (Heb. 5. 12-14), exercised to discern both good and evil.

But having exhorted them generally, he particularizes in the second address.

Three features mark the young men in Christ.

(i) *They are strong.* Strong, of course, in the Lord, and in the power of His might.

Many remain babes in Christ all their spiritual lives; unable to feed themselves they must be spoon-fed by others; unable to fight for want both of courage and skill, they must be shielded and nursed by others. They cannot meet the enemy in the gate. But every believer, of any age in grace, should be strong.

(ii) *The Word of God abideth in you.* Both strength and the knowledge of the Word come by diligence, exercise and practice.

There is no royal road to spiritual, any more than to physical strength, so that the young man is strong because he has continued in the Word, allowing it to have free course in him, and exercising himself unto godliness.

(iii) *And ye have overcome the wicked one.* Faith is in itself a victory over the devil. His aim is to destroy by lying. The Lord Jesus told us he is a liar and a murderer. His work is to lie as to the Person of Christ and the Word of God, and by getting men to believe his lies to destroy them.

If, then, a believer has grown strong in faith,

and takes the Word of God as his guide, he thereby overcomes the enemy. What can the devil do with one who answers all his lies and suggestions with "It is written"?

This is "the shield of the faith" which the child of God opposes to all the darts of unbelief hurled by the enemy. Following his Lord, he meets all his temptations with the Word of God. Thus, in principle and practice, he has overcome the wicked one.

The Love of the World

Chapter ii. 16-17

THE love of the world makes its strongest appeal to young men. It is then, when the restraints of childhood are relaxed and liberty enjoyed for the first time, that the real test comes.

If the heart is truly Christ's it overcomes the world (v. 4-5). The young man has but to be warned, as in this passage, to yield the obedience of faith and overcome.

It is for this reason that the Apostle exhorts young men in Christ not to love the world.

He uses the word *KOSMOS*—the other word, translated "world," being *AIŌN*, more properly "age."

Kosmos is the opposite of chaos, and means the ordered state of things.

The *aiōn* is spoken of as being evil (Gal. 1. 4), but the *kosmos* is never so described. It is not evil in itself. Indeed, we read that God so loved the *kosmos* (John 3. 16), that He gave (that is, to death) His only begotten Son—but though the *kosmos* is not essentially evil, it has come under the power of the evil one, who has usurped authority over it, and needed to be redeemed—the whole *kosmos* lieth in the wicked one (v. 19). He has become the prince of this *kosmos* (John 12. 31; 14. 30; and 16. 11), and ruler of its fashions, and even the god of the age (2 Cor. 4. 4).

It is because of this fact, that the world is not essentially evil, that the appeal to the young man is so strong.

"The things in the world" are, in themselves, many of them noble, beautiful, attractive, and even good, but the believer has set his affections on things above, where his Lord sits, and does not turn aside even to good things. Because "I see no harm" in a thing, it is no reason for giving my affections to it. I will not love anything before Christ; His love must dominate all my life. However good the things in the world are, they shall not purchase my soul. I am not prepared to sell myself for all the world can give or contains. Solomon rejoiced in all "under the sun," but found it vanity and "hated life" as the result of loving it all.

The believer can admire the things in the world, he can use them as not abusing them, but, like a pilgrim, he passes by without more than this, for his life has other aims, and his ambition is on higher things, for to him to live is Christ. What is all the world, or the things that are in the world, to this?

Three reasons for not loving the world are next given.

1. *"If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."*

The meaning of this is simple—no man can serve two masters. If the love of God is the dominating motive and constraining power in the life then the world makes its appeal in vain. The love of Christ constrains us, not to live unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us and rose again. But if the love of the world, the delight in things seen, the setting of the heart

on passing treasures, is the real force in life, then the love of the Father is no longer in the man. He need not deny that love, he may even be moved by it when it does not clash with his carnal aims, but this is not to have it in him as the true Guide and Glory of life and motive of action.

How gracious is that expression, "The Love of the Father"—and how satisfying the experience, when the Father's Love, shed abroad by the Holy Spirit in the Heart centred in Christ, fills and pervades the life and thoughts, that "is in him."

2. The second reason for not loving the world is expressed in the words, "*For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.*"

This may be simply explained thus. The world and the things in it make their appeal to the flesh, the eye and the pride. There is no spiritual benefit, but only gratification of the pleasures, the natural desires of the flesh, or the eye, or the indulgence of the pride of life.

The *pleasures of the flesh*, to which the world makes its appeal, are many and dangerous. The man who indulges them becomes carnal in mind and outlook, a lover of pleasure rather than a lover of God, for this appeal is not of the Father but is of the world. We associate the name "flesh" with the lower and baser pleasures, those that appeal to the mere bodily appetites and passions. That many true Christians have been snared by the things of the world, in their appeal to those lusts, is only too sadly true.

The pleasures of the eye, to which the world

so strongly attracts, are the more æsthetic and beautiful things.

Who, for example, would complain of one who found pleasure in art, in the lovely conceptions of the skilled and refined painter and sculptor. No, all that is lovely may, and should, be thought upon; but to give one's life to the pursuit of them; to let Christ go for them, to sell the soul to them, is another matter. That can only end in spiritual shipwreck.

"Let thine eyes look straight on, and thine eyelids ever before thee," is sound advice, for there is a Nobler Object for our contemplation than all the world can show, in the Person of the Son of God.

The pride of life is, in the R. V., translated the vainglory of life. It is, perhaps, the strongest counter-attraction the world has to offer. To be something in the world; to win its applause; to accept its honours, well and honourably deserved; to be highly esteemed; to be rich; to be the world's benefactor and patron—these are not "of the Father." They can only be attained by setting the affections on them, and pursuing them with diligence and determination, and this is to give to the world that which the Lord Jesus claims—our time, our talents and our love.

3. The third reason for not loving the world, and its treasures of "things" in it, is that "*the world passeth away and the lust thereof.*"

Worldliness is, in essence, the love of passing things. As one once said, "Things never satisfy people": the heart is too large to be satisfied with things. Toys may amuse a child till it wearies of them, and the things of the world

are no better in themselves. They are toys if used as an end in themselves. They pass away and leave the life no richer and the heart unsatisfied. The one who lives in and for such things, as Rutherford says, "Builds his nest in a tree that is to be cut down." The things which are seen are temporal: it is the unseen that is eternal.

Not only do the things pass away, but the pleasure of them, too; nothing remains for all the time and love and life spent in the indulgence of them. "*But he that doeth the Will of God abideth for ever.*"

Here we have the cure for worldliness. "The Will of God." To learn what it is for us, to pursue it with all the purpose of our hearts, is the true aim of the believer.

In the will of God, work is done that shall abide, character is formed that shall survive the grave, a crown is gained that shall never fade away.

Let our young men aim at this. Let the world and its things, however beautiful, pass by; we have other business, our hearts are set on other things; we are set on doing the Will of God. Such abide for ever.

The Unction from the Holy One

Chapter ii. 18-29

WE have considered the special addresses to the fathers and the young men, we have now to look at that to the Little Children (PAIDIA—the immature) in ch. 2., vv. 18-29.

He writes concerning those who would seduce them, that is, turn them away from the Truth. This, of course, those young in the faith are peculiarly open to, but the Apostle comforts them with the great truth that they have received the Holy Spirit, whose peculiar office it is to guide and maintain them in the Truth.

So our subject divides itself into (i) The Danger, and (ii) The Safeguard against it.

I. THE DANGER.

This arises from the many Antichrists who have already appeared, although *The* Antichrist has not yet been revealed.

The word "Anti" in Greek means "instead of" rather than "against," and the many Antichrists are those who are not only opponents of the Lord Jesus, but offer themselves and their doctrines as substitutes for Him, the Lord and His Word, the only Authority.

The features by which the Antichrists can be known are two.

(i) *They are Apostates.* "They went out from us." Had they been genuine servants of God they would no doubt have continued with the fellowship of the Lord's people. Their going out revealed them in their true light as "not of us"—the "us" who are of God (v. 19). It is a noteworthy fact that the all modern heresies—the freak religions that have sprung up, or been imported from America, have been initiated by those who once professed the evangelical faith.

(ii) *They deny Christ*, and, denying Him, deny the Father also, for this is implied in such a denial (v. 23).

This does not necessarily mean that they have no "Jesus" in their creed—most of them have, but it is "Another Jesus," of which the Apostle Paul warns us (2 Cor. 11. 4), a fictitious character of their own imagining, which bears no relation to the true Christ of God.

Their "Jesus" is a mere man, a created being or a "great idea," and not God, or He died an exemplary but not an atoning death, and did not have a bodily resurrection, and so on in endless variety of vain conceits.

These are the marks of the many Antichrists, the substitutes for the true that seduce the unstable.

2. THE SAFEGUARD.

The provision against these subtle foes is stated as follows, "*Ye have an Unction from the Holy One.*"

The word "Unction" is the same as "Anointing" in verse 27. It refers to the Holy Spirit. It is given from the Holy One, that is, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is according to the promise, "The Com-

forter . . . whom I will send unto you from the Father" (John 15. 26).

The Unction or Anointing is not an influence from the Lord merely, nor a work or effect of the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit Himself.

Every true child of God has been anointed not "by" but "with" the Holy Spirit by Christ. The Unction is the Spirit—He is the Anointing.

Even the youngest little child in Christ has received this unction, for "because ye are sons God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts" (Gal. 4. 6).

New-born babes are as much in the family as the oldest of the children, and have the gift of the Spirit and have been born from above, the promise being eternal life (v. 25).

There is, nevertheless, a responsibility. "So let the Truth abide in you" (v. 24), which ye have heard, for although the Spirit has been given we must walk in the Spirit in order to enjoy His gracious witness and work. To be filled with the Spirit is also to let "the Word of Christ dwell in you richly" (compare Eph. 5. 18 with Col. 3. 16).

3. THE GRACE OF THE ANOINTING.

Having, then, this Safeguard, the Holy Spirit, we consider next how this safeguard is manifested in His operations.

(i) "*Ye know all things*" (v. 20). A strange statement to make concerning "little children."

But it is emphasised, "I have not written unto you because ye know not the Truth but because ye know it" (v. 21).

In what sense is this true? Not, of course, in an absolute sense. One little head could not

carry all the truth there is to be known, but in this sense, that the Holy Spirit is an enlightening and gives "an understanding" (v. 20), a spiritual discernment that enables even the youngest to discover the true from the false.

As though a child had been blind and confined in the dark, and then having his eyes opened, is brought into full light of day, we should say, "Now you see everything," not intending that everything in the world is actually looked upon, but that there is now capacity and light with which to see. All is now perceivable, available and at your disposal.

(ii) *"Ye need not that man teach you."* Again not absolutely, for there are teachers appointed of God, but such have only authority to teach the Word of God, and as to its true spiritual meaning cannot and may not speak *authoritatively*. No man has authority to pronounce upon the true meaning of the Word of God.

True interpretation belongs to God alone. The Spirit alone is the "Interpreter" in the "Interpreter's House" (the Bible).

Each one of us is responsible to seek the Spirit's teaching on the Word for ourselves, and each will be held responsible for the mistakes and failures that have arisen from his running here and there to consult flesh and blood instead of submitting his heart to the enlightenment and teaching of the Anointing he has received.

(iii) *He "abideth in you and is truth."* For God never takes His Holy Spirit from His people; only they are responsible, as He has taught them to abide in Him.

The Practice of Sin

Chapter iii. 1-10

As before stated, the main purpose of this Epistle is to teach how Eternal Life manifests itself in the believer. Other subjects have been dealt with, but the Apostle now returns to his main line.

He proceeds to deal with *Four great Manifestations of New Life.*

Those truly born of God—

- (1) Are righteous and act righteously (2. 29).
- (2) Do not practise sin (3. 1-10).
- (3) Love one another (3. 11-18).
- (4) Walk in His Commandments (3. 24).

We must consider these as they are dealt with in the context.

The last verse of the second chapter, may be taken as a general proposition, enlarged upon later. God is the Righteous One, His character was revealed by Christ in His life upon earth. He "manifested the eternal life" (1. 2), and He was "Jesus Christ the Righteous" (2. 1). Those who are born of Him must certainly exhibit the same characteristics. "Every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him."

Let us notice then—

1. **THE MOTIVES.** Before entering upon the theme of the practice of sin the writer emphasizes the motives that move the true child of God.

(i) *The Divine Love.* "Behold," he says, "the manner of it." We are graced by being called God's children. "Such we are," the R.V. adds, though the world does not discern it (v. 1).

(ii) *The Glorious Prospect.* Now sons, then what? We cannot guess, but one thing is clearly revealed, "We shall be like Christ," for we shall see Him as He is. "He shall appear." Yes, His Coming draws near—"Yet a little while and He that shall come will come." This causes the true believer to purify himself, that he may, as far as possible, be like his Lord when he greets Him in the air.

2. THE FACT. The one who is born of God ceases to practise sin.

The Apostle is speaking in general terms, not absolutely. He does not say a believer never sins—all experience teaches the contrary, and the Epistle recognizes the fact of sin in the believer elsewhere (1. 8-10; 2. 1), but the fact remains that the one truly born of God (a) "sineth not" (v. 6), (b) "does righteousness" (v. 7) (c) "doth not commit sin" (R.V., "doeth not sin") (v. 8), and (d) "cannot sin" (v. 9).

These are strong expressions and need careful weighing, so as, on the one hand, not to water them down lest their value be lost, and on the other not to insist on what is obviously not intended, to the discouragement of the saints.

It is not sinlessness that is urged, but sin-hating, and sin-overcoming, so that there is no longer the reign and practice of sin in the life.

First, then, *sin is defined.* It is Lawlessness

(v. 4, R.V.). It is the throwing off of the authority of God. It is self-will, rebellion and defiance at once of the Love, Word and Will of God.

"I was a wandering sheep,
I would not be controlled."

Such is sin. "We have turned every one to his own way."

Then the *aim of the Gospel* is reasserted. It was the manifestation of Christ in order to take away our sins. The Gospel, let it never be forgotten, is God's remedy for sin.

3. THE MEANING. How are we to regard this passage? What is the true meaning of these strong terms, "Sinneth not," "Cannot sin"? They are, I judge, to be regarded in the following ways:

(i) The definition of Sin helps us. It is Lawlessness. *The believer is no longer a lawless man.* He has come to the obedience of faith. He was an unbeliever, and therefore lawless; he is now a believer, and therefore submissive, trustful and obedient.

In his walk he may stumble, he may be overcome, carelessness or forgetfulness may lead to these "accidents" in his life, but they are accidents and not his habitual practice. If I were asked, "Are you a city-going man," I should reply, "I was, but I retired from city life some years ago."

"But I saw you in the city last week." "True, but that was an exception. I am not now a city-going man." So the believer is not a sinning-man—he was once, but now sin is an accident, a calamity, contrary to all his desire, aim and practice. He is no more a sinning man.

(ii) *His ceasing to sin is conditioned upon his abiding in Christ.* "Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not" (v. 6).

Could we abide in unbroken and uninterrupted communion with our Lord we should cease sinning absolutely. The two things are proportioned—abiding and ceasing to sin.

(iii) *His practice is no longer to sin.* In Colossians 3. 7, the Apostle reminds those believers of the time when they walked in uncleanness and other sins. It was, he says, "When ye lived in them." They walked in them because they lived in them, but now their life was all changed, they no longer lived in such practices.

An old Puritan expressed it thus: "They had no longer any traffic in such things."

Some grosser sins can be and are absolutely forsaken. The drunkard no longer drinks, the swearer never utters an oath, the thief no more steals—they no longer live in these things. The same is true of all sins, the believer is not the practiser of any. Should he be overtaken in any he laments the day as a day of evil tidings.

(iv) *He cannot sin in the sense that his whole heart revolts against it.*

Ask a mother to dash her infant child upon the stones and she will tell you, with a shudder of horror, that she could not do such a thing. Yet once a mother did so, and I ran to pick up the helpless child. "She stumbled, she could not have done it otherwise," you say. True, so does the careless and unwatchful child of God stumble—he could not otherwise sin.

A ball will not sink. It cannot, for it is filled with air. But if I hold it under the water it

has sunk for all purposes. Then let me release my pressure and it rises again. So the believer may come under the power of evil and be held down by an enemy power, but when released (in answer to his cry) he rises again. "The righteous falleth seven times but riseth up again."

(v) *The new nature in the believer cannot sin.* "His seed remaineth in him. He cannot sin because he is born of God."

The new creation is "created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4. 24). As we put on this new man so we shall cease to sin.

Let us suppose a pig and a sheep are thrown into a filthy ditch. One enjoys it and turns over the filth with its snout, and the other bleats to get out. So the unregenerate man, even when reformed, is like the sow that was washed returning to her wallowing in the mire, but those whom the Lord calls "My sheep" are clean and cannot continue in the mire.

This, then, is that which enables us to discern between the Children of God and the children of the devil (v. 10).

The Love of the Brethren

Chapter iii. 11-24

THE manifestation of the Eternal Life to which our attention is now directed is the Love of the brethren. Love is a much abused word. It is used to describe the most hateful passions and sins to which it has no semblance whatever. It is more commonly applied to that lazy amiability which the world affects, a peace at any price, a *laissez faire* so long as one is comfortable, that pays no regard to truth or righteousness but would have every one and everything around it pleasant, a form of self-indulgence as opposite to true love as can be well conceived.

The essence of these forms of so-called love is self-gratification, whereas love that is of God, love that was exemplified in Christ, is exactly the opposite.

Love suffereth long and is kind, Love seeketh not its own, Love is the self-sacrificing denial of ease, the willing acceptance of suffering for the good of others and the glory of God.

"We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." (v. 16) is the language of love, and "We love the children of God" when God and His commands are put first (v. 2). To sacrifice truth for desire is the unkindest of all things. Love never works this evil.

This love is not of earth, the world neither understands nor appreciates it. Love is of

God (4. 7), and he that loveth is born of God.

The manner in which the subject is brought before us in this chapter is as follows:

1. Love as the original commandment (v. 11).
2. Hatred the mark of death (vv. 12-13, 15).
3. Love the evidence of life (v. 14).
4. The example of Christ (v. 16).
5. The obligation upon us (v. 16).
6. The practical application (v. 17).
7. The need of sincerity (v. 18).

Let us look at these seven points in turn.

1. *The Message from the beginning* (v. 11).

That we should love one another.

This was the likeness of "God" in which we were made, the moral image of the Invisible God written upon the heart and attested by the light of conscience.

The Law bade man love. The common idea that the Law said "Do" and that Grace said "Love" is wide of the truth. The law was summed up in the two "words"—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," and "thy neighbour as thyself."

From the beginning, and ever and always, God has bidden man love. It is no new commandment, but the message from the beginning. The reference to Cain confirms this. The first two brothers should have loved each other, but the vital difference between them—faith and unbelief—led the one who was of the wicked one to slay his righteous brother. This leads to the second point.

2. *Hatred is the hall-mark of death.*

It marked the first unbeliever, Cain, and he abode in death.

It marks the unbelieving world; do not, then, marvel that it hates those born from above.

Darkness cannot bear light, it must extinguish it.

Hatred is murder in embryo. Were hatred absolutely free to work its will without fear of consequence it would kill its object every time, as despotic tyrants have done. Moreover, hatred murders in other ways than by poison and the dagger.

How many tender hearts have been crushed and broken by studied unkindness or selfish neglect, how many a slighted affection has resulted in an early and premature death.

This is the outstanding feature of the unregenerate man, that he loveth not his brother—he abideth in death.

3. *Love of the brethren is a manifestation of Eternal Life.* “We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren” (v. 14).

Those born of God learn to love and honour all men—they show grace even to their enemies and pray for those who spitefully use them (Matt. 5. 44), but this is not exactly the evidence here mentioned, though it is one of the chief evidences of new birth.

Here the point is, that those born of God have an affinity, a true sympathy, with those who, like themselves, have passed from death unto life. The world has its proverb, “Birds of a feather flock together.” It is true of believers, their associates are the people of God, they realise the truth of the Lord’s word. “All ye are brethren.” It is with these that their hearts’ affections are.

It is said of the apostles, “And being let go they went to their own company.”

Each has his own company. The sinner goes in

the way of sinners, the believer to the Assembly of the Saints. It is where each is most at home, where their hearts find rest.

When Ruth made her great choice she expressed it in these words, "Whither thou goest I will go . . . Thy people shall be my people and thy God my God" (1. 16).

4. *The Example of Christ.* This love of the brethren is enforced by a reference to the example of our gracious Lord.

He loved us, but we know and perceive it in this—that He laid down His life. There is no greater love for a friend than this, that a man lay down his life for him. It is the supreme sacrifice, the very ultimate of love.

5. *The obligation upon us.* We ought (we owe it to our brethren) to lay down our lives for the brethren—because we have been loved thus, and our salvation came to us through such sacrifice. "We ought," is not the obligation of duty, or law, but the constraint of love. Love never counts the cost.

6. *The Practical Application.*

One who can see need, and having the means to relieve it, yet shuts up the fountain of compassion, how dwells the love of God in such a one.

It is an argument used by James (2. 16). To say be ye warmed and fed to a destitute or naked brother, and not to give the needful things, is not faith or love, it is heartlessness.

7. *The need of Sincerity.* To love in word, that is professedly or presumably, and to stop short at the deed is to manifest the fact that we do not know the truth, or, in other words, that the truth has not really got hold of us, has not appealed to us so as to move us, and so become effective through us.

Trying the Spirits

Chapter iv. 1-6

THE Holy Prophets have been, we are told, since the world began (Luke 1. 70).

It would be difficult to believe that the God who made us would refuse to speak to us, and He has chosen to do so by holy men who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

They were men in whom the Spirit of God moved and by whom He spoke.

They are, therefore, to be recognised and heard because of the Spirit of God in them. "Hereby know we the Spirit of God," we read (v. 2)—that is, speaking by the prophets.

But there are other spirits who indwell and speak through men, "unclean spirits," "lying spirits," "seducing spirits" and evil spirits of many kinds, spirits of demons (Rev. 16. 14) who are enemies of God, bent on destruction, and these, too, have their human instruments here called "false prophets," many of whom have gone out into the world.

"I saw," says John in Rev. 16. 13, "three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon . . . they are the spirits of demons working miracles."

These false prophets are often transformed into angels of light; they speak great swelling words and work miracles. No wonder, then, that the Apostle writes to warn us against them

and instruct us how we may discover them and prove (R.V.) them.

First *there is a warning against credulity.*

"Believe not every spirit."

The distinction between faith and credulity is this—that faith must have a Divine Sanction for what it believes. There must be a "Thus saith the Lord" before it will commit itself, whereas credulity has only to be pleased, fascinated or even amused to believe any attractive person or plausible story.

How, then, is the believer to try or prove the spirits, so as to be able to distinguish between the Spirit of God and that of the enemy who comes disguised—a wolf in sheep's clothing?

In the Old Testament the same question is raised—"*How shall we know the Word which the Lord has spoken?*" (Deut. 18. 21). Several answers are given which are of a general and universal application; we can only name them here.

(i) "If the thing follow not . . . the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously" (Deut. 18. 22).

(ii) If the prophet sought to turn them from the Lord (Deut. 13. 1-5) he was to be put to death.

(iii) If the thing spoken was not according to the already revealed Word of God (Isaiah 8. 20), then "there is no light in them."

To which the Lord added the following:

(iv) "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7. 20).

These serve and still serve as outward evidences of the truth of the prophet, but the distinctive feature of the present dispensation is that the Spirit of God has been given to each

believer (3. 24), and it is the Apostle's purpose to teach us how to distinguish His voice from the babel tongues of earth, and the other spirits who presume to speak in the name and power of God.

"Hereby know ye the Spirit of God."

1. First, *By the Confession of Christ.*

There is a profession of Christ that is not a confession. Theologians often talk of Christ as an article in their creed, and even patronise Him, who do not in the sense here intended confess Him. Such a confession involves an acknowledgment of and submission to Him as Lord and Personal Saviour, His Authority and Word being received as all-sufficient.

A spiritual man quickly discerns what a teacher really thinks of Christ. One has said, "That which exalts man is of the world; that which exalts Christ is of the Spirit," and again, "One can judge of a man's spiritual state by two things—what he thinks of himself and what he thinks of Christ," not necessarily expressed in word, but in his attitude of mind and conduct.

The Spirit of God honours and exalts the Lord Jesus Christ in all things and at all times.

2. But the Confession is of "*Jesus Christ come in flesh*" (v. 2). Already in the Apostle's day the Gnostics were teaching an Impersonal Christ, a Mystic and Unreal "Word," much like the modern Christian Science. "Jesus"——"the Great Idea," and this fantasy of the human mind the Apostle rejects. It is the Personal Word, Jesus of Nazareth, God manifest in the flesh, that the Spirit of God confesses and bears witness to. All spirits who do not so are not of God (v. 3).

3. *The spirit of Antichrist* usurping the place of Christ and not merely against Him (as we saw) *was anticipated in prophecy*—"whereof ye have heard that it should come," Our Lord spoke of him as the one who should come in his own name, and also warned us, "Many false prophets shall rise and deceive many" (Matt. 24. 11). To be forewarned, then, should be to be forearmed.

4. "*Ye have overcome them*" (as we saw in 2. 14), "*Ye have overcome the wicked one.*"

Faith is itself a victory over all other spirits. Where the Holy Spirit remains ungrieved, He is in the believer greater than the spirit in the world. The believer does not live in doubt and fear. So long as he does not grieve the Holy Spirit, he has a confidence, a courage and a conviction within that enables him to rest in an assured and present victory. The power of the indwelling Spirit is mighty within him; the Prince of this world is foiled and fails every time in the case of those who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.

5. "*The world heareth them.*" Another mark of the Antichristian spirit is the approval of the world.

The normal of the spiritual man is to be hated of the world, to be treated by it as his Lord was. "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you." But when men cease to be guided and taught by the Spirit of God it is soon seen by their winning the ear and approval of the world. The world applauds their broad-minded views, and gladly listens to their brilliant essays, full of worldly wisdom and carnal learning. The offence of the Cross ceases, and the position

outside the camp is abandoned for a more comfortable and man-pleasing doctrine.

6. Whereas "he that knoweth God" has this mark—that *he hears (i.e., heeds) the Apostle's teaching.*

The Apostle speaks with unhesitating authority, "We are of God" (v. 6), therefore all who live and walk by the Spirit will give heed to the Apostle's doctrine (Acts 2. 42).

The world speaks lightly of the Holy Scriptures, and applauds those who, having departed from them, preach more "modern" ideas, but it still remains true, and will eternally, that those who are of God will hear the Word of God.

For His sheep still hear His voice. "I have given them the words which Thou gavest Me, and *they have received them*" (John 17. 8). Hereby we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error (v. 6).

The Love that is of God

Chapter iv. 7-21

WE saw in our first study that this Epistle could be divided into two parts, each bearing a title—the first, "God is Light," the second, "God is Love."

The Evidences of Eternal Life in the first part are those of Light or Truth; those in the second part are those of Love or Grace. Just then as the Lord's life on earth was "full of grace and truth," so also will these things be manifested in the walk of those who are born of Him.

It has been the aim of these studies not merely to set forth the Truth taught in this Epistle, but to do so in the order and sequence in which it is given us by the Holy Spirit. Truth is precious, but truth in the order given of God is doubly precious.

Our passage begins, then, with an exhortation to Love one Another (v. 7), that being the great evidence of our regeneration. We remember that our Lord stated this to be the mark whereby all men would recognise His disciples. "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13. 35).

This is not a forced or artificial thing, but the outcome of our knowledge of God, the fruit of the Spirit in us, the manifestation of the

eternal life received of God when we were born from above.

Seven things are brought before us as to this Divine Love.

1. *The Source of Love.* God is Love, and love is alone from Him (vv. 7-8). We do not merely imitate it, but seek, by communion with Him, to enjoy it. It is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which He has given us. We are made partakers of the Divine Nature, for until we have the nature we cannot know the love, just as a dog could not enjoy the thoughts and emotions of a man without partaking of the nature of a man. This love is not natural product, it does not grow on fallen man—the flesh cannot produce it. It is of God.

2. *The manifestation of the Love* (vv. 9-10).

If we desire to see and know this love in all its fulness, we shall not turn our eyes upon ourselves. Whatever evidences of love are seen in us will ever be partial and imperfect. It is in the Great Love of God in sending His One Son, His Well-beloved, for our salvation and blessing, that its perfection is seen.

This Love is disinterested, and finds its motives in itself, for we read that "Herein is Love, *not that we loved God.*" Objects of wrath became the subjects of His grace, and His own arm brought salvation.

3. *The Purposes of Love* are seen in the same verses (9 and 10). They are twofold. "That we might live through Him" (v. 9), and that He (the Son) might be the Propitiation for our sins.

Cleansing and Life. The purging of guilt by atoning blood, and the gift of life through Him who was sent in this wise that He might

be "the Saviour of the World" (v. 14). The world-wide Saviour, the world's only Saviour.

Thus Reconciliation and Life go hand-in-hand, and are our Salvation.

Then the Apostle moves forward to

4. *The Obligations of Love* (vv. 11-12). Beloved, if God so loved us (or, seeing God so loved us—there is no question) we ought also to love one another.

This is not mere legality, it is the outcome of being partakers of the Divine nature. "He hath given us of His Spirit, and His Spirit is Love."

As men say *Noblesse oblige*, so the dignity of our relationship and standing has put upon us an obligation to walk worthily of so great an honour. As Nehemiah said, "Should such a man as I flee?" (6. 11), or Joseph, "How can I (whom his master has so trusted) do this great wickedness and sin against God?" (Gen. 39. 9).

So ought we, we owe it to our standing, to love one another.

5. *The Privileges of Love* (vv. 13-16). "God dwelleth in us" (v. 12). "We dwell in Him and He in us" (v. 13). The word is the same as that rendered "Abide" in John 15. So here all is summed up in verse 16, "God is Love, and he that dwelleth in Love dwelleth in God and God in him."

Words fail to describe all this may mean in blessedness. Experiences are not the subjects of analysis. So here it is best to receive and delight in the wondrous words, seeking a realisation of them in ourselves. David foresaw the truth when he wrote, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (Psalm 91. 1).

6. *The Perfecting of Love* (vv. 17-18). By this expression we can only understand that the desire of God's heart is realised in the case of those who, having known and believed the love of God, have responded to it in taking up an attitude towards Him that satisfies His love and accomplishes the purposes of His grace.

This attitude of faith in, and response to, God's perfect love reacts upon us in twofold blessing—fearlessness in judgment, and the loss of all fear in the appreciation of perfect love. Only perfect love casts out fear. Is any suspicion left in any matter, in that degree is our rest disturbed, but the assurance that the love is perfect leaves no room for distress.

The reason "because as He is, so are we in this world" (v. 17), may be rendered. We are righteous in Him, even as He is righteous (2. 29), and manifest it in righteous conduct in the world, and are consequently immune from judgment.

7. *Love begetting Love* (vv. 19-21). "We love" (Him does not appear in the R.V.) "because He first loved us." The manifestation and perception of the perfect love begets love in all who truly respond to it. In the brother in Christ there is the manifestation, in some degree, of the likeness of Christ. If this is unrecognised, and fails to produce a reciprocal love, how shall we expect that we shall be found to love God, the unseen, since what we have seen of Him manifested in His children has found no favour with us.

So the theme ends; the Gospel commandment is that loving God we love our brother also.

That Ye May Know

Chapter v. 1-13

THERE was a time in the history of the Church when the Assurance of Salvation was scarcely recognised.

Rome opposes it still, and states that the main plank in every heresy is the Assurance of Salvation.

This need not trouble us, for Rome is no authority. It is to the Word and to the testimony we must turn for sound doctrine, relying upon the Spirit to enlighten us therein (man is no authority, 2. 27).

This portion is, perhaps, the Classic on the Subject, but, like many another truth, it has suffered at the hands of its friends, and to-day men talk of Assurance of Salvation lightly and almost flippantly, who would do well to search their hearts and look more carefully to their foundations. Let us see, then, how the subject is brought before us here.

The first five verses speak of some *Outward Evidences* of the new birth similar to those already considered.

The next three verses (6-8) are an interlude, and speak of *The Triune Testimony* that is yet one.

And the following verses (9-13) tell us, in unmistakable and simple terms, *how we may know we have Eternal Life*.

(1) *The Outward Evidences* of the new birth given here are threefold.

Faith, Love and Victory.

(a) *Faith*. When Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God (Matt. 16. 16), he was told that it was only by revelation from the Father that he could have known this. It is so with all children of God; their faith is an evidence that they have been begotten of God.

(b) *Love*. The same is true of their Love. Christian love is not a natural product. It is distinguished from the common, natural affection, in this—that it keeps God's commandment. That is not love from God that disobeys His Word, for His glory must ever come even before earthly ties.

(c) *Victory over the world* is the third mark of the new birth, a victory gained by faith that sees the vanity of seen things and pierces to the unseen, accounting that Jesus is the Son of God (v. 5), and therefore "dearer than any earthly object seen."

(2) The Apostle then speaks of Jesus, the Son of God, the One who came to bear witness to the Truth (John 18. 37).

He tells us He came *with the water and with the blood* (v. 6, R. V.).

How shall we understand this?

In order to do so let us look back at chapter 4., vv. 9-10. There we are told the two reasons why God in Love sent His Only Begotten Son.

In verse 9, "that we might live through Him."

In verse 10, "to be the propitiation for our sins."

Life and Propitiation.

Now water is a symbol used in Scripture for the Spirit's work (see John 4. 14, and 7. 37-39), and for the life He quickens in us—the Water of Life, as it is so often called.

So may we understand that Christ came with the water of life, that we might have life and that more abundantly (John 10. 10), but not with the water only, for man needed more than life, he needed reconciliation by the atoning blood, so He came with the blood as well.

These three—the Spirit, the new life and the atoning blood, bear witness in full agreement (v. 8, R.V.).

(3) *Our responsibility is to receive and believe the testimony of God*—to refuse it is to deny His truth, to make Him a liar. It is upon this record of God that faith rests with full assurance.

It is recorded that we may KNOW we have Eternal Life (v. 13), if we are truly believers.

What, then, is this assurance-giving Record of God?

It is fourfold (v. 11).

(i) *"God hath given to us Eternal Life."*

This great unspeakable gift of Eternal Life has been given to man, the creature of a day. Oh, wonder of wisdom and grace!

(ii) *"This life is in His Son."* It cannot be had apart from Christ, for it is in Him. It is not only *from* Him, it is *in* Him—inseparable from Him.

(iii) *"He that hath the Son hath the Life,"* for to receive Him (John 1. 12) is to receive life with and in Him. The Lord Jesus said, "I am the Life"; the Apostle spoke of "Christ who is our Life." To have life we must have Christ.

(iv) *"He that hath not the Son of God hath not life."* This is the negative of the previous statement. Only those who have Christ, the Son of God, have the Eternal Life—none other. It is not found elsewhere—morality knows it not, nor religion, nor the thousand new cults of Christendom! Only he who has Christ has Eternal Life. By this we know. The record of God is clear, given that we might know. "Have I, then, the Eternal Life?" Let me answer this other question, "Have I Christ?" Yes or no? It is thus I may know.

Finishing Touches

Chapter v. 14-21

THIS Epistle has, at a casual reading, the appearance of want of sequence, of being broken in thought, but our study of it has no doubt convinced us that the Main Line is clear and distinct. The Apostle started to show us the Eternal Life, and, as a precious diamond turned first one way and then another discovers its varied beauties, so the subject has been unfolded to us, in its many wonderful aspects, as the Epistle proceeded.

At the 13th verse we left off with the Assurance of Eternal Life to those who had Christ—that is, those who believed in the Name of the Son of God. This Assurance produces confidence in Prayer. Only the prayer must be “according to His will” (v. 14).

No one who has confidence in the wisdom and goodness of God would desire anything else, for the true believer seeks not his own glory and satisfaction, but that of his Lord, and, therefore, asking thus, he knows he has what he asks (v. 15). Only one exception the Apostle allows—“There is a *sin unto Death*; I do not say he shall pray for it.”

One privilege of prayer is to intercede for a brother whom we may see sinning; we may ask and obtain life for such an one (v. 16). This may refer to a brother under discipline from God

because of sin, and consequently drawing near to death, for the sin of the soul tends to the death of the body.

It was so with the Corinthians (1 Cor. 11. 30). Some had walked in so disorderly a manner that many of them were weak and sickly, and some had died.

Life is a privilege—an opportunity of further service. It is denied to the wicked who does not live out half his days. It is often withheld from the believer because of his careless and disorderly walk.

The case referred to in James 5. 14-16 is one in point; the prayer of faith saved the "sick," the word "sick" here meaning to "grow weary," as in Hebrews 12. 3, and Rev. 2. 3. Sin was confessed, prayer was made, and the sinner turned from the error of his way, and his soul saved from the death that might have ensued if he had continued in his ungodly walk.

But there is a sin unto Death. As in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, a sin so open and so dishonouring to God that it calls for judgment.

All unrighteousness is sin, truly, but some sin is such that God is more honoured in its judgment than in its pardon.

The Apostle emphasises here what he has already taught, that those born of God do not continue in the practice of sin; they are kept by the power of God, and Satan cannot reach them. This is the other side of the dark picture above.

It is necessary to hold the balance of truth to reconcile the two statements.

Those born of God do not live in sin, they no longer practise it as they did in those sad

days when they lived in it, but a believer may be overtaken in sin, and to such an extent that health suffers, and none can be so wretched as a believer under the power of sin, even to the point of despair and death, may even so greatly dishonour the name of his Lord, and trouble his fellow-saints, that the arrest of his death may be less desirable than that he should be taken out of the way.

The four "*We knows*" (vv. 15, 18, 19 and 20) end the Epistle.

(1) *We know* we have the petitions we ask. The glad assurance of answered prayer (v. 15).

(2) *We know* that whosoever is born of God sinneth not (v. 18).

The glorious assurance of victory.

(3) *We know* that we are of God (v. 19). The wonderful assurance of our new birth unto the household of faith—an assurance that dares to say it, though it involves the consequence. We are saved while the whole world is lost.

(4) *We know* "the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ."

This seems to summarise the whole teaching of the Epistle. Being born of God, we are enlightened and know Christ (as in John 17. 2-3), and not only know Him, but are found in Him, with all that that means.

Having, in this way, accomplished the purpose for which he wrote, as stated in the first verses of the Epistle, to "Shew unto us that Eternal Life which was with the Father and was manifested unto us" (1. 2), he ends thus: "This is the True God and Eternal Life."

The Lord Jesus is the True God, and in Him was manifested the Eternal Life. We have seen how in those who have that life in Him, the same manifestations of eternal life are discovered and enjoyed; it only remains, then, to give a final warning.

"Little children, keep yourselves from idols." Do not allow any misrepresentation of this, the True God, the Eternal Life, to find a place in your heart or life. An idol is a substitute, a false God put in the place of the true. Beware of these falsifications.

There is "another Jesus" in all false creeds which is not the True God, another Spirit which is not the Spirit of God, another gospel which is not a gospel at all (see 2 Cor. 11. 4). Beware of these; keep yourselves from them. Amen.

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