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1 John, Part Two

2:12 – 3:1

Exposition by A. W. Pink

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Chapter 21

FORGIVEN CHILDREN

1 John 2:12

“I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake.”

The title of this chapter raises the question, Are there any unforgiven children? To which we reply, Certainly there are—the whole company of God’s elect remaining so while in their natural condition. “But surely such could hardly be denominated ‘*children*’—children of God.” Wrong, they are children of God when they enter this world, though they possess not then the Divine nature, and therefore are as yet unmanifested as such, and unknown either to themselves or to others until they be born again. They are God’s children by eternal predestination (Eph 1:5). It was as such that Christ died for them (Joh 11:52). It is because they are such that, in due time, the Holy Spirit is sent into their hearts (Gal 4:6). But their sins are not forgiven them before they savingly believe in Christ, and that is not until the Holy Spirit is given them and they are quickened into newness of life, for it is impossible that anyone who is dead in trespasses and sins should really feel his dire need of a Saviour and come to Him for pardon. Thus our text speaks of the regenerated children of God whose sins are forgiven.

What a truly amazing thing it is that there should be such a thing as Divine forgiveness of sins—transgressions of God’s Law, affronts to His holiness, rebellions against His exalted majesty. What a marvel that God does not deal with all mankind as He did with the angels when they fell—“*delivered them into chains of darkness to be reserved unto judgment*” (2Pe 2:4)! Next to the gift of Christ Himself and the grace we receive from His fullness (Joh 1:16), forgiveness of sin is the greatest blessing God bestows, and therefore does it head the list of benefits for which the Psalmist blessed the Lord with all his soul (103:2,3). Forgiveness may be defined as that judicial act of God whereby the penitent believer is released from the guilt of his transgressions against the Law, without receiving any satisfaction at his hands or inflicting any punishment upon him. It is the remitting of the penalty which he had incurred. It is a revoking of the sentence of justice, an acquittal of his person before the bar of God. It is described in Scripture by a variety of expressions, which serve to open unto us the nature of the thing itself. Several of them are brought together in Psalm 32:1,2.

Before proceeding any further to develop the principal subject of our verse, let us outline its contents. “*I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake.*” Five things call for consideration.

- The connection between that statement and what precedes as well as follows.
- The significance of “I write unto.”
- The appellation which is here given to those addressed—“little children.”
- The reason why the apostle sent this epistle unto them—“because your sins are forgiven.”
- The ground of this blessing—“for His name’s sake.”

First, the relation between 2:12-14, and its context. Hitherto we have had before us the fellowship of the Father with His children: the nature of that fellowship, the means appointed for its maintenance, and the obligations and privileges which the same entails. Now we are introduced, as it were, to the different members of God’s family, notice being taken of their several ages or stages of growth, with their corresponding spiritual attainments. But before John begins to divide the family into its component parts he addresses himself to the whole thereof, comprehending them all under the endear-

ing expression of “*little children*,” announcing their sins to be forgiven. That was in strict accord with his central design in this epistle: “*These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life*,” (v. 13), for a saving faith in Christ which issues in forgiveness is a sure sign that the one exercising the same is already in possession of eternal life.

“These verses (12-14) form a break or interruption in the apostle’s line of argument. There is, as it were, a pause. John calls upon those to whom he writes to consider, not only what he is writing to them, but what they themselves were to whom he is writing: what is their character and standing: what he is entitled to assume in and about them as likely to ensure a fair reception of his message. That was the common apostolic method. It is a courteous and complaisant way of insinuating advice; taking for granted the attainments to be enforced. But it is far more than that, and it is so emphatically here. It is a trumpet call summoning all the faithful to a recognition of their real and true position before God; and that with a view to their receiving aright what His servant is now writing to them” (R. Candlish). In other words, verses 12-14 pave the way for what follows.

While stressing the necessity of a godly walk and a fruitful life, the foundation on which they rest must ever be insisted upon. “Holiness of life ought indeed to be urged, the fear of God to be carefully enjoined; men ought to be sharply goaded to repentance, newness of life, together with its fruits. But still we ought ever to take heed lest the doctrine of faith be smothered—that doctrine which teaches that Christ is the only Author of salvation and all its blessings. On the contrary, such moderation ought to be presented that faith may ever retain its primacy. This is the rule that is presented to us by John: having faithfully spoken of good works, lest he should seem to give them more importance than he ought to have done, he carefully calls us back to contemplate the grace of Christ” (Calvin). In other words, duly to observe the order and balance of Truth. Doubtless there is, too, a designed link with verse 10: real faith, saving faith, “*worketh by love*” (Gal 5:6), and where it exists and is exercised, we may be assured that this results from God’s having pardoned our sins.

“*I write unto you*.” Three things were intimated by that language. First, a holy privilege. It was the conferring of a great favour upon them. If the reader were to receive a letter from the official secretary of the king of England, he would feel himself highly honoured: how much more so to be addressed by one of the ambassadors of the King of kings! Second, a call to duty. As 2:1, shows, “*I write unto you*” is a hortatory expression. I John am telling you what to do, and what not to do: sin not (verse 1), keep God’s commandments (verses 3-5), follow the example Christ has left us (verse 6), love the brethren (verses 7-11), love not the world (verse 15). Give heed then to my injunctions for they are invested with Divine authority. Third, a permanent record: writing conveys the idea of fixedness. The message delivered by the apostle was no mere transient one, allowing a subsequent revision, either of subtraction or addition. It was the imperial and imperishable Word of God for all generations, and a solemn curse is pronounced upon anyone who adds to or takes from the same (Rev 22:18,19). Thereby God’s children are graciously provided for against all the attacks of Satan and his agents, who are ever to be met with “*It is written*”!

“*Little children*.” The word used here is quite another from the one found in the next verse, and from “*newborn babes*” in 1 Peter 2:2. In the Greek there are two different words which are both translated “*little children*” in our English version without distinguishing between them. The one in our text is “*teknion*,” which occurs seven times in this epistle, and in each instance is applied to the whole company addressed: 2:1,12,28; 3:7,18; 4:4; 5:21. The one in verse 13 is “*paidion*,” which occurs again only in 2:18, and is restricted to spiritual infants. The former is a term of affection, and is given to the entire believing family; whereas the latter is a discriminating word, which signifies those who are very young, and in verse 13 is limited unto a particular class in God’s family—the spiritual babes, in contradistinction from the “*young men*” and the “*fathers*.” “*Teknion*,” then, is used of believers of all ages and degrees of growth. This is clear from its first occurrence, for in both halves of 2:1, the whole household of faith is obviously in view: “*My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any one sin, we have an advocate with the Father.*”

The blessing which is predicated in our text of those written unto is not one that is peculiar to any special grade of Christians—as are the attainments of the several classes referred to separately in verse 13, but is true of all alike, for the forgiveness of sins pertains to every one of them. There is a community of life, and pardon is the portion of all saints. By the new life received at regeneration, they are related to God as Father and to each other as brethren; by forgiveness a title is conveyed which makes them heirs of heaven. In verse 12 the apostle postulates that which pertains to every believing child of God; but in verse 13 he describes that which characterizes their respective grades according to their measures of growth. In styling all “*little children*,” John expressed both his authority and his affection: it stamped his address with weight and dignity, and at the same time revealed the warmth of his heart unto them. From the remainder of the sentence he would have them know that it was out of love to Christ and to them that he penned this letter: not to distress, but to promote their spiritual happiness and mutual affection one to another.

“I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you.” “As this epistle is what we style a catholic epistle, so the address is suited to this, and a universal blessing which belongs unto and is actually bestowed on all the members of the true Church of Christ is expressed. This is the reason he assigns for writing to them, and why he so lovingly addressed them. He had before declared that the blood of Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth them now, in the present tense, from all sin. He then proceeded to declare if any of them should sin, they had in Christ an all-prevailing Advocate. He was with the Father. He was their righteousness and their atonement. Then he showed what the true and spiritual knowledge of this, and communion with Christ in the blessings and benefits of the same, would consequently and evidentially produce. And now he addressed them because they were the pardoned ones of God. Thus here is consolation, abounding consolation, increasing consolation for them. They were brought to the knowledge of the Father and the Son; they were admitted into fellowship with Them; they were in Christ, pure and righteous. He was their High Priest before the Majesty in the heavens. Their sins were completely taken away, and they were in their individual persons pardoned” (S.E. Pierce).

“For Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon Thee” (Psa 86:5). What a word is that in Nehemiah 9:17, *“Thou art a God of pardons, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness”!* It was on the basis of that blessed fact that Daniel prayed, *“To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against Him.”* In Psalm 32:1, forgiveness of sins is likened, first, to a removal of them: *“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven”* is literally *“whose transgression is lifted up”*—taken off him because laid on Christ. Second to a covering of them—by the blood of Christ. Sin is nauseous and abhorrent to the eye of the Holy One. Third, to a non-imputation of them: they are not reckoned to his account, because charged to his Surety. In Isaiah 43:25, to a blotting out of sins; in Luke 7:41,42, and Matthew 6:12, to the cancellation of debts; in Hebrews 8:12, to God’s no more remembering them—thinking no further about them, His justice having been satisfied; and in Isaiah 1:18, to a washing of them *“as white as snow.”*

It is therefore very clear that one grand design of a Gospel ministry is the assuring and comforting of the saints, for unbelief is ever at work within them, and Satan constantly engaged in efforts to destroy or at least disturb their peace. No small part of the work assigned to the Lord’s servants is so to set the person and work of the Saviour before His redeemed that, by occupying their hearts with the same, they will be lifted out of themselves and delivered from their fears. The forgiveness of sins of those who believe is one of the first blessings announced by the Gospel: in fact there is no true proclamation of God’s good news where that is not plainly set forth. When the Lord Jesus gave the great commission to His apostles, He declared, *“that repentance and remission [forgiveness] of sins should be preached in His name among all nations”* (Luk 24:47), and accordingly we find that when Peter was sent to Cornelius and his friends he asserted of Christ, *“To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins”* (Act 10:43). Paul, too, bore witness at Antioch, *“Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him all that believe are justified from all things”* (Act 13:38,39).

The object of Divine pardon is a penitent believer, and the fruit thereof is a longing and determination to please the Bestower of it. *“And He said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven... Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace”* (Luk 7:48,50). Faith is as necessary in an instrumental way as Christ’s satisfaction in a meritorious way: *“that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me”* (Act 26:18). Christ purchased remission of sins, faith puts us in possession of it. It is fitting that those who are indebted to Christ for this benefit should give up themselves to Him, both in a way of dependence and of submission, putting their case into His hands as the Advocate with the Father, and devoting themselves in subjection to Him, for He is *“the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him”* (Heb 5:9). Evangelical repentance issues from the renewed heart’s sorrow and horror of sin—which cost the Saviour so dearly. Saving faith is that which clings to Christ as our only refuge and hope. Gratitude flows forth in affection to Him: *“Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven [in their own apprehension], the same loveth little”* (Luk 7:47).

This Divine pardon of sins is free, no charge being exacted of its subject: *“the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace”* (Eph 1:7). Our redemption and recovery cost us nothing, and since it be by grace, then without our deserving. *“Ye have sold yourselves for nought; and ye shall be redeemed without money”* (Isa 52:3). It is bestowed without respect to anything in us or from us: *“and when they had nothing [wherewith] to pay, he frankly forgave them both”* (Luk 7:42). Thus it is wholly gratuitous. *“I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions, for Mine’ own sake”* (Isa 43:25)—whatever God does in our salvation it is to glorify His mercy, and out of compassion for our misery. *“For Thy name’s sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great”* (Psa 25:11): the penitent believer has no other plea but the honour of God’s name engaged by gracious covenant. Well may we exclaim, *“Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage?”* (Mic 7:18).

Divine forgiveness is full: “let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon” (Isa 55:7). And since He does so “according to the riches of His grace,” we may be sure it is neither niggard nor grudging. Possibly the reader has acknowledged a fault unto a fellow Christian, and he has said, “I forgive you,” but in such a tone of voice and expression of countenance that you felt you had been just as well without such a pardon. But when God forgives, there is—as Luke 15:20 reveals—just as much joy in His heart as there is in the recipient’s. God does things not by halves, but perfectly: “who forgiveth all thine iniquities” (Psa 103:3), canceling the whole, so that not one is left on record in His book. A partial forgiveness would not shed sufficient glory on the blood of the Lamb. As John Gill said of His atoning sacrifice, “It reaches to all sins: original and actual, secret and open, past, present, and to come.”

Divine forgiveness is final. When God pardons it is not merely for a season, but for ever. His sentence is irrevocable, releasing the believer from the whole guilt of his transgressions, so that the triumphant challenge goes forth, “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?” (Rom 8:33,34). His sentence is never repealed; the saint is fully discharged from all punishment, for the Law can demand no penalty from him. “Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea” (Mic 7:19), and the ocean, my reader, never casts up anything which has sunk into its depths. When God pardons sin it is never charged again to the culprit: “their sins and iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb 10:17). Divine forgiveness is permanent and continuous because of the everlasting value and validity of Christ’s atonement. It is the standing office of Christ to act as the great High Priest of His people, and His blood has not only cleansed, but “cleanseth from all sin.”

The great assize is indeed at the last day, but God is exercising His judicial office even now. “Verily He is a God that judgeth in the earth” (Psa 58:11) weighing every action, passing verdict on each person, forgiving or not forgiving. The final judgment is but a public proclamation and execution of the same. As Manton so aptly pointed out, there is a three-fold distinction between God’s forgiving us now and then. First, during this life the sentence of the Law may be revoked, but then it is definitive and peremptory. One who is now condemned by the Law may be absolved. Every son of Adam is “condemned already” (Joh 3:18), and he binds that condemnation upon himself if he dies in his unbelief and impenitence, in contempt of the gracious offer of the Gospel. That his state is now capable of alteration is clear from John 5:24, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is [judicially] passed from death unto life.” But at the last great day the sentence is inexorable and irrevocable, and as the tree fell so will it for ever lie.

Second, the Divine sentence is now given in private; then it shall be proclaimed publicly. At conversion the verdict is passed in the awakened conscience according to the Word of God, the Holy Spirit sealing upon the renewed and believing heart some sure promise of God. But when the dread tribunal is set up the sentence will be pronounced by the Judge’s own mouth before an assembled universe, saying either “Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” or “Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” As the believer now has the Spirit’s witness within him, then it will be ratified in open court, the Judge of all the earth publicly exonerating him. Third, then there will be an actual execution of the sentence. Now we have our everlasting portion either by promise or threat; but then both the promise and the threat will be fully made good.

Chapter 22

THE FAMILY GRADED

1 John 2:13,14

“I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.”

All of God's regenerated people are not of the same spiritual stature. Though all of them are quickened into newness of life, made partakers of the Divine nature, and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, yet they vary from one another in several respects. Talents are not bestowed upon them uniformly, there are distinct stages in their growth in grace, their actual attainments differ considerably. In the passage at which we have now arrived, the apostle divides believers into three classes: fathers, young men, and babes. But before he describes their respective characteristics he first addresses himself to the entire family under the endearing appellation of "*little children*," and predicates a basic blessing which pertains unto them all alike: "*your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake*." In our last, we dwelt upon the subject of forgiveness, but had to conclude before reaching the final clause of verse 12, which announces the ground on which God pardons the penitent believer. We shall therefore turn to it now, and consider first the force of "*His*;" second, explain the "*for His name's sake*;" and third, show how He is conjoined with the Father Himself.

Whom are we to understand by "*for His name's sake*"—God or Christ? For the praise of the glory of the grace of the Former, or because of the redemption that is found in the Latter? A careful reading of the whole context supplies a clear answer. In verse 1 it is Christ who is the Advocate with the Father. In verse 2 He is mentioned as our Propitiation. In verse 6 He is presented as our Exemplar. In verses 4, 7 and 8 He is viewed as our Legislator. The new commandment of verses 7 and 8 is definitely from Christ, and so too believers receive the forgiveness of sins for His sake. "*Nevertheless He saved them for His name's sake*" (Psa 106:8). "*O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do Thou it for Thy name's sake*" (Jer 14:7): it is never for the sake of any good thing found in us or done by us. "*His name*" is here to be taken for His person, for that was what gave infinite value to His work. Our sins are forgiven because they were atoned for by Christ, pardon being purchased and procured by the shedding of His blood (Heb 1:3). Our sins were imputed to Christ, laid upon Him. He bore them in His own body on the tree: there He was paid their wages: the debt was discharged, and therefore they are eternally banished from the eyes of the Law.

But though the believer's sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, yet not to the exclusion of the Father. No indeed, for though Christ be mentioned in many such passages without the Father, it is never but as conjoined with Him. Our salvation is a covenant one in which the eternal Three are equally engaged and concerned. Pardon comes from God the Father, but it flows down to us through Christ the blessed Mediator, being the effect and fruit of His mediation. When it is said that "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins*," the reference is unto the Father, who is faithful to His covenant engagements and just to the claims of Christ's sacrifice. So too our glorified Saviour is an Advocate with the Father. And thus here: while the forgiveness of our sins is due immediately to the offering of Christ, being sure proof of the everlasting efficacy thereof, it is equally an evidence of God's grace and the exercise of His righteousness. "*Then He is gracious unto Him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom*" (Job 33:24); "*God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you*" (Eph 4:32). Every spiritual blessing we receive comes to us from the Father's bounty, but through the channel of Christ's glorious and prevalent mediation. The salvation of the triune God shines forth in the person of Christ.

Divine forgiveness can be known only by faith resting on the bare word of God. Reason cannot reach unto it, and often the dictates of conscience are dead against it. Yet a knowledge thereof does not always come to the saint the hour he believes in Christ, though the fact itself does.

"The moment a sinner believes,
And trusts in his crucified God,
His pardon at once he receives,
Redemption in full through Christ's blood."

Yet it is the bounden duty of every Christian to labour after a clear realization of the same: "*Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith* [i.e. with a firm trust in Christ and entire dependence upon Him], *having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience*" (Heb 10:22). Here are some of the marks of a forgiven soul. A spirit without guile (Psa 32:2)—honest with self and in our dealings with God: hence, "*Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity*" (Eph 6:24). Mourning for sin and displeasing of God: "*there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared*" (Psa 130:4). Deliverance from the dominion of sin (Mic 7:8). The forgiveness of others (Mat 6:14).

We turn now to verses 13 and 14. In this world nothing is brought to maturity immediately: instead, everything develops by orderly progress and gradual growth—"*first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear*" (Mar 4:28). The child of God is no exception, for at regeneration he is not fully developed spiritually, as the first Adam was naturally; but, in conformity to his Head, he is born like the last Adam—a babe, who "*increased in wisdom and stature*" (Luk 2:52) until He attained to manhood. All the parts and faculties of the new man indeed come into being at the new birth, but time is needed for their increase and manifestation. The apostle here makes mention of little children, young men, and fathers, and in so doing he grades them not according to their natural ages, nor by the length of time they had been believers, but according to the progress they had made in the Christian life. John himself was well qualified to deal

therewith, for in his own case he knew what it once was to be a babe in Christ. Later, he had also known what it was, under the grace and teaching of the Spirit, to advance to the stage of being a young man in Christ. Ultimately, through the good hand of God, he had arrived at being a “*father*.”

While it be true that the apostle does not here grade the children of God by their natural ages, but rather according to their spiritual attainments, nevertheless he describes the latter in terms which are characteristic of the former, for the different excellences ascribed to each group accord with those which are found in nature. Affection marks the regenerate infant, as it does the physical one; vigorous exploits distinguish the young men, and wisdom the fathers. Little children love to be carried in their parents’ bosoms, to be dandled on their knees, to be taken by the arms as they are taught to walk; and here the spiritual babes are said to know the Father. We are told that “*the glory of young men is their strength*” (Pro 20:29), and the same thing is predicated of the second class in 1 John 2:14; while “*with the ancient is wisdom; and in length of days understanding*” (Job 12:12)—exemplified in the case of the “*fathers*.” Thus the several qualities assigned to the three groups harmonize with the natural properties which pertain to those of corresponding ages.

There are real and marked differences among the people of God: not all of them are of one uniform stature, strength, or growth in godliness. Some are sheep, others are lambs, and are to be dealt with accordingly (Joh 21:15,16). Some are strong, others are weak (Rom 15:1). Some are “*babes*,” others of “*full age*” (Heb 5:13,14). All are fertile, yet not all in the same measure: “*and brought forth, some thirty, some sixty, and some an hundred*” (Mar 4:8); similarly we read in John 15 of “*fruit*” (verse 2), “*more fruit*” (verse 2), and “*much fruit*” (verse 5). Yet though there be different degrees of grace, knowledge and attainments among the sons and daughters of the Lord, they are all alike dear unto Him. Then let us not despise the least degree of grace in others. There was a time when the father in Christ was but a babe, and the time may come when the babe shall grow into a father. If by grace we have been enabled to go “*from strength to strength*” (Psa 84:7) and “*from glory to glory*” (2Co 3:18) let us bless God, for we have nothing to boast of. “*Who maketh thee to differ from another [not only from the unregenerate, but also from thy feebler and more ignorant fellow Christians]? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?*” (1Co 4:7).

Though the distinctions made by the apostle in our text respect not their natural ages, but rather their different measures of grace, still it is to be observed that God has always had His people of all sorts and sizes. Of “*little children*” we may cite Samuel, who was called at a very early age (1Sa 2:18); Timothy, whom Paul reminded “*from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*” (2Ti 3:15). Little children also raised their hosannahs to the Son of David (Mat 21:15,16), and He did not despise them, but defended them. Among young men, we think of Joseph, David (1Sa 17:33,37), and Josiah, who “*while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father*” (2Ch 34:3). Among the “*fathers*” we read of “*Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple*” (Act 21:16), and of “*Paul the aged*” (Phi 9). And thus it is still: some are plucked as brands from the burning while of tender years, others in the vigour of youth, and others when nearing the close of life. Here too God displays the sovereignty of His grace.

It requires to be pointed out that all babes in Christ do not grow up into spiritual young men, nor do all Christian young men attain the status of fathers. In some instances they are taken home soon after their conversion, but in the majority of cases their development is checked through failing to make a proper use of the means of grace, and hindered by a number of other things. There are many who make a promising start, but later their zeal abates, they backslide, and become a grief to their brethren. To the Corinthians Paul had to say, “*And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ*” (1Co 3:1); while to the Hebrews he complained, “*For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat*” (5:12). On the other hand, there are those who progress steadily and make such proficiency in the school of Christ that, long before their heads are hoary, they can say with David, “*I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Thy precepts*” (Psa 119:100).

That the believer ought to make constant advance in the Christian life is obvious, for we are expressly exhorted to “*grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*” (2Pe 3:18). To the Ephesians Paul wrote, “*That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine... but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ*” (4:14,15); and to the Corinthians, “*Brethren, be not children in understanding; howbeit in malice be ye children; but in understanding be men*” (1Co 14:20). Nevertheless, the fact remains that it is with individual Christians as it was (and still is) with corporate companies of the saints. To those at Rome Paul could say, “*your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world*” (1:8), but of the Galatians he had to say, “*Ye did run well; who did hinder you?*” (5:7). To the Thessalonians he declared, “*your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth*” (2Th 1:3); whereas of the Ephesians it is recorded, “*thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works*” (Rev 2:4,5).

In many instances growth in grace is far from corresponding with the increase of age. There are many professing Christians, and not a few real ones too, who are old in years and of long standing in the Church, yet are they but little children in knowledge and experience: they neither attain unto an apprehension of the deeper things of God, nor are they competent to counsel those who are much younger than themselves. How often we behold a verification of those words of Job 32:9: "*Great men are not always wise: neither do the aged understand judgment.*" How few really spiritual Christians there are, qualified to restore a brother who has been overtaken in a fault (Gal 6:1). Mortified young believers are far more spiritual than older ones who indulge their fleshly appetites and inordinately seek the things of this world. The youthful Elihu used milder language and better arguments when reasoning with the afflicted patriarch than did the three friends who were greatly his seniors. Gracious abilities come not from age, but from the Spirit. Those whose thoughts are formed and whose ways are regulated by the Word of Truth are wiser than they who confer much with flesh and blood.

While the differences between the three classes in the school of Christ are more or less clearly marked (probably much more so in the apostle's day than in ours), yet we need to be upon our guard against so partitioning off believers in our mind that we attribute all the knowledge to the fathers, or all the strength to the young men. That would be contrary to Scripture and experience alike: as the fathers have strength, so the young men possess knowledge, though not to the same extent. So too if the young men in Christ overcome the wicked one, so do the babes in their measure and degree—and the fathers also. It is also to be borne in mind that Christian experience is not always uniform or unvarying even in the same individual. The mature saint may in some respects be as weak as the most recent convert, and in certain regards be tempted as fiercely as the young men. In general, we may say that God so orders His providences with the different members of His family that each of them is given opportunity to exercise and make manifest these Christian characteristics in due course, so that in their season those graces shine forth with greater clearness.

It will be noted that the apostle addresses the several classes according to the order of their dignity and responsibility; whereas in Ephesians 5 and 6 it is the order of grace, for in each instance of the reciprocal relations it is the inferior party who is first exhorted, the wives before the husbands, children before their fathers, and servants before their masters. To notice first the weaker vessel, or the one occupying the lower place, is according to that wondrous grace which led the Lord of glory to take upon Him the form of a servant. Nothing in the Scriptures is without significance and importance, for they are the Word of Him who is a God of order. A further example of what we are here calling attention to is found in the contrast presented between the parable of the labourers (Mat 20) and that of the talents (Mat 25:14-30). In the former, where the Lord was acting in sovereign grace (verse 15), He began by rewarding the one who had done the least, who had wrought only one hour; but in the latter, where responsibility was in view, the one who had received the five talents was dealt with before those who had received only two and one.

In accord with the different grades of intelligence and attainments among His people, the Lord graciously calls a variety of servants, whom He equips to minister unto them. The ministers of Christ are not all of the same spiritual stature, nor are they alike qualified to be of most help to the several classes in Christ's school. Thus we are told that "*He gave some apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ*" (Eph 4:11,12). The first two of those offices have become obsolete, but the last three mentioned still obtain, and they correspond closely with the three groups mentioned in our text: the evangelist being best suited to the babes in Christ, the pastor to the young men, and the teacher to the fathers, who are capable of receiving profounder instruction than either of the others. Our Lord Himself, the perfect Servant, was Divinely fitted for and actually discharged all three functions, for not only did He go about evangelizing, but He went forth to "*teach and preach in their cities*" (Mat 11:1, and cf. 4:23); as did also the most gifted one of His ambassadors—thus the two things are quite distinct.

There are many who mistakenly suppose that all God-sent preachers are the same. In one sense they are, all being commissioned by Him and clothed with His authority; but they are not alike furnished to meet the peculiar needs of the several classes of the saints. There are ministerial "*young men*" and "*fathers*," as well as among the rank and file of believers. Since there are always far more spiritual babes than fathers in the churches, the Lord appoints a greater number of His servants to minister "*the milk of the word*" unto those, and endows fewer of them with the ability to give forth "*strong meat.*" As Paul informed the Corinthians, "*But we will not boast of things without our measure, but according to the measure of the rule which God hath distributed to us, a measure to reach even unto you*" (2Co 10:13). His traducers were accusing him of egotism and blaming him for ranking himself with such wise and eminent men as they deemed themselves to be. He refuted their charge, insisting that he had not gone beyond either the capacity or the territory which God had assigned him. The "*rule*" is the determiner of both the gifts and the sphere of each servant of God, and the "*which God hath distributed*" shows that He bestows them in varying measures.

Still more to the point was his statement in the first Corinthian epistle, "*For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers*" (4:15). Upon which S.E. Pierce said: "None ever respected such as the Lord sent

more than did Paul; yet he did not think alike of all them as it respected their station, qualities, and usefulness to the souls of men. Some of them were instructors in Christ, and they could go no further: the Lord Himself had neither fitted nor designed them for anything beyond this. It was a great honour conferred upon them to be such; yet they should be content and not exalt themselves above their brethren by thinking they were the only ministers who are useful in the Church of Christ. Most assuredly fathers in Christ are superior to them, and their usefulness must be of more service and importance. As amongst such are real saints the Lord will have the threefold division kept up, of fathers, young men, and babes in Christ, so He will have ministers suited to each of these. And whilst they shall all be useful in their respective situations, yet they cannot be so in the same way. The ministerial fathers will ever be distinguished from others. Their use will be of another kind from that of the brother who is to encourage the young men in Christ, and quite distinct again from those who feed the babes.” As there are always many fewer fathers among the saints, so far fewer men capable of ministering to them.

The links between what is said in verse 12 to be the common portion of all the believing children of God and what is predicated of them in verses 13 and 14, where they are divided into three classes, are more or less apparent. First, *“I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning;”* however lengthy or full be their acquaintance with Christ, their experiential knowledge of Him began by proving the sufficiency of His atoning blood to cleanse them from all the guilt of sin. Second, *“I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one:”* such victory was not possible unless there was the assurance of sins forgiven, for, as Revelation 12:11, declares: *“they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb:”* that is by faith in that blood. Third, *“I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father:”* but such a privilege and blessing cannot be apart from the Saviour, for, as He said, *“no one cometh unto the Father, but by Me”* (Joh 14:6). It is blessed to see that the sins of the weakest babe are as truly forgiven him as are those of the maturest father. It is also to be noted that the forgiveness of sins is accompanied not only by the knowledge of the Father, but by conflict with the wicked one too.

Chapter 23

THE FAMILY DELINEATED

1 John 2:13,14

“I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.”

In the verses before us the saints are viewed according to their several levels in the school of Christ, and the excellences ascribed to them correspond with and are proper to their stages of growth. In addressing the *“fathers,”* they are viewed not according to their age, but to their spiritual development. That which is here predicated of them is *“ye have known Him that is from the beginning.”* We think *“that is”* should be deleted, for this supplement inserted by the translators is quite unnecessary, the reference being to the One spoken of in the opening verse of our epistle. They had known Him from the beginning of their spiritual history, from the day when Christ had first been graciously revealed in them (Gal 1:16). Doubtless some of them had personally seen and heard Christ in His incarnate state at the commencement of the Christian era. That which distinguished them from the young men and babes was that they had acquired a deeper, fuller, and richer acquaintance with Him. In their earlier days they were occupied with His work, what He had done and obtained for them. Later, they were more taken with their exploits and achievements, what His grace and strength had enabled them to accomplish. But now it was Himself that engaged their hearts and minds: the wonders and perfections of His blessed person which enthralled them.

“I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phi 3:8) is the language and longing of a *“father.”* That which characterizes such is a clearer insight into the marvels and mysteries of His ineffable person, of His manifold glories, of His distinctive offices. They know Him as the God-man Mediator. They apprehend

something of His covenant engagements, and of His prophetic, priestly and kingly functions. They discern Him to be the Centre of all the Divine counsels (Eph 3:11), the image of the invisible God, the Firstborn of every creature (Col 1:15). They know Him as “*the power of God and the wisdom of God*” (1Co 1:24), and as the One in whom all the promises of God are yea and amen (2Co 1:20). They know Him as the Head of the Body the Church (Col 1:18), yea, as “*the head over all things to the church*” (Eph 1:22), angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him (1Pe 3:22). They not only know Him as a personal and all-sufficient Saviour, but they have gone on to apprehend what He did for God and what He finds in His Son, as the One who magnified His law and made it honourable, glorifying Him in this very scene where He has been so grievously dishonoured: the One of whom the Father says, “*Mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth*” (Isa 42:1).

“*I write unto you, fathers:*” the reference is to all that he says in this epistle. Though they had known Christ from the beginning and had so grown in grace and in the knowledge of Him, yet what he wrote was as much needed by them as by their younger and more immature brethren. No child of God ever gets beyond the need of instruction, exhortation and comfort in this life. The very fact that the fathers are so well acquainted with Christ should make them the more amenable and receptive to the apostle’s message. They had proved what a good master the Lord Jesus is to serve: how patiently He had borne with their dullness, how graciously He had pardoned their sins, how faithfully He had supplied their every need; and therefore they ought the more readily to attend unto the words of His servants. The proved goodness of Christ should engage them to lively gratitude, fervent love, and devoted obedience. They should be examples unto and the guides of their juniors. They must not abate in their zeal or entertain the idea that it was permissible to be less diligent and earnest than formerly, still less be puffed up with their attainments, but rather pray and strive to continue “*increasing in the knowledge of God*” (Col 1:10).

“*I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one.*” This second class comprised those who had emerged from their spiritual infancy, though they had not arrived at that maturity of growth the fathers had attained unto. What is here predicated of them has sorely puzzled not a few, yet if it be regarded in the light of the general analogy of faith, and more particularly with respect to John’s style of making abstract and absolute statements, it should present no serious obstacle. Whatever difficulty is here presented, let us be careful to avoid increasing the same by reading into it what is not there. The apostle did not say the young men had overcome the flesh. It is a most significant fact, and one which needs to be kept in mind, that while this epistle speaks of overcoming “*the wicked one*” and of overcoming “*the world*” (5:4) it makes no mention of believers overcoming their evil nature. They are indeed bidden to mortify their corruptions (Col 3:5), and in varying measures all the regenerate do so, for the grace of God effectually teaches its recipients to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world (Tit 2:12); but nowhere does Scripture affirm that any saint “*overcame the flesh.*”

Thus, “*ye have overcome the wicked one*” is not to be understood absolutely and unqualifiedly, but relatively and within certain limits. These “*young men*” had successfully encountered the first temptations and trials which attended enlistment under the banner of Christ and their consequent separation from the world, so that Satan had been unable either to drag them down into his evil ways or to shut them up in the dungeon of despair. As they had continued following on to know the Lord, they had received many setbacks and been sorely wounded in their conflict with the powers of evil, yet Satan had been foiled in his efforts to induce them to give up the fight. That leads us to point out that the Lord’s people are far more aware of their defeats than they are of their frequent overcomings. Nor is the reason of that hard to discover. As we are naturally far more conscious of a painful illness than of our good health, so the Christian’s falls are more evident to him than are his victories—the more so since the latter be gained while his eyes are fixed on Christ rather than on himself.

Satan never succeeds in prevailing finally or totally over any child of God. He is bent on the destruction of all the saints, but in no case can he accomplish his full desire—the intercession of Christ prevents him from so doing. In every instance those words of His hold good, “*I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.*” Nevertheless, that does not release us from the necessity of taking unto us the whole armour of God, or from the duty of unremitting watchfulness. Our very striving against the Devil is one degree of conquest. God does indeed postpone the full and ultimate victory, yet if we continue to resist the Devil we are not overcome by him. When he gains a temporary advantage over us, causing us to disgrace our profession and dishonour the name of Christ, he strives his utmost to drive us to abject despair, or to persuade us that we have committed the unpardonable sin; but if a sense of our failure drives us to our knees in humble and sincere confession to God, then we defeat his hellish designs. Poor Peter failed sadly in the high priest’s palace, and experienced an awful fall; nevertheless, when he went out and wept bitterly he overcame the wicked one.

This overcoming of the wicked one by the saints—for the experience is by no means restricted unto the “*young men*” class—is in fulfillment of the terms of Genesis 3:15, for it is to be carefully observed that that remarkable prophecy is concerned not only with the serpent and the Saviour, but also with their respective seeds. The members of Christ have

fellowship, in their measure, with the Head, both in His sufferings and in His victories. As it was not the serpent alone (though chiefly, and as the instigator of others) who bruised Christ's heel, for both Jews and Gentiles were gathered together against Him (Act 4:27), so it is not Christ alone (though He pre-eminently and His seed subordinately) who obtains conquest over the Devil. Thus the triumph of the Captain of our salvation over the arch-enemy of God and His people is twofold: personal and immediate, mediate and instrumental—in and by His soldiers, for He loves to have them share with Him in all things. Believers overcome the wicked one not only representatively in their Head, but personally through His strength, and therefore the glory is still His. In this respect also they are *“predestinated to be conformed unto the image of God's Son.”*

Far too little thought has been devoted to the terms of Genesis 3:15, in their application unto the children of God. While the Redeemer Himself be its prime subject, His redeemed are by no means to be excluded. They certainly have part in the conflict and are bruised in the heel by the serpent, and to them also extends the promise of bruising his head. This is confirmed by the fact that the *“enmity”* exists not only between Satan and Christ, but also between their respective seeds. This is according to the promise of *“if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him”* (2Ti 2:12). Their victory is set forth in the New Testament in very language drawn from Genesis 3:15. When the seventy, as representatives of all Christ's ministers, said, *“Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through Thy name,”* He replied, *“I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you”* (Luk 10:17-19). To the saints Paul wrote, *“The God of peace shall bruise Satan [more completely] under your feet shortly”* (Rom 16:20): it is indeed God who treads him down, but it is under their feet he is trodden.

“I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father.” This accords with and is the fulfillment of the covenant promise: *“all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest”* (Heb 8:11). It is at this point that experiential Christianity begins: an apprehension of the Father's love in Christ, the realization that He so loved them as to give His only begotten Son for them. It is their privilege, wisdom, comfort to know God as *“Father.”* It was His grace that chose them in Christ, His Spirit who was sent to seek them, His power that begat them. In natural life the very first thing which babes and little children discover is an acknowledgment—in their infantile way—of their parents, owning them by their names (*“papa and mama”*) in distinguishing them from others. And thus it is spiritually: the spirit of adoption is given them *“whereby they cry, Father, Father”* (Rom 8:15). The distinguishing act of babes in Christ is to own God as their Father, expressing in their way their attachment to Him, their delight in Him, their dependence upon Him, lisping out His name in their praises and petitions before the throne of grace. None can approach Him with any confidence or freedom until they know God in this relation—their Father, because the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In verse 14 the apostle changes from his threefold *“I write”* of verse 13 and twice uses *“I have written.”* Why such repetition? For the purpose of emphasis: to make clear his warm affection for them, his deep concern for their spiritual welfare, and to emphasize the privilege and honour conferred upon them. At least six different explanations have been given of the change of tense, only two of which strike us as being feasible. The first is that John here contemplated his epistle from two different mental standpoints. Originally, his mind dwelt upon what he was engaged in penning (1:4); later, he contemplated his completed production (5:13). It was as though he said, I am telling you this and that; afterwards, remember what I told you. Second, that John was pondering a changed situation. He was then in the body, though very aged, and could not be here much longer. Soon his what *“I wrote”* would become what *“I have written.”* Considered thus, there is a pathos in it which is quite affecting: I write to you as a dying man; treasure what I wrote as my last charge to you.

“I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him from the beginning” (verse 14). They knew Him so as to approve of Him, trust in Him, and make Him their All in all. Theirs was not a bare theoretical and historical knowledge, but a spiritual and saving one, an experiential and heart-affecting knowledge, which receives the Truth not only in the light of it, but in the love of it (2Th 2:10). Their knowledge is more deeply rooted (Col 1:23) than is that of the babes or young men. It is more influential (Phi 1:9): their love is more stable (Eph 3:18): they are more settled in the Truth against error (Eph 4:14). They are more prudent, having learned to moderate their affections and activities within the bounds of sobriety (Tit 2:2). Nevertheless, despite their maturity of knowledge and experience, they require to be written unto, needing the same counsels, admonitions and encouragements as did their juniors. As one quaintly said, *“The oldest Christian needs to go to heaven with the Bible in his hand.”* They are not yet out of the reach of temptations, and need to beware lest a sense of security begets carelessness. Their responsibility is greater too: to see that the purity of the Gospel is preserved and discipline in the churches maintained.

“I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one” (verse 14). In making that statement the apostle was certainly far from seeking to flatter them, for he did not say *“ye have made yourselves strong.”* No, he was simply making a sober statement of fact. In so doing he

first gave honour unto the Holy Spirit, for their state and achievements were the results of His operations in them. Second, he was giving expression unto his own personal joy: it was a matter of delight to him that they had, by the grace of God, emerged from a state of infantile weakness, and had reached this state of health and vigour. Third, it was said by way of encouragement to them. If on the other hand it be our duty to rebuke and reprove what is evil in fellow Christians, it equally becomes us to recognize and own whatever good is in them. A word of cheer and stimulus is often a real help. If there be a time to “*break down*,” there is also a time to “*build up*” (Ecc 3:3). Paul did not hesitate to tell the Thessalonians “*your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth*” (2Th 1:3).

But what are we to understand by “*ye are strong*”? Relatively. Through using the means of grace, by increased spiritual knowledge, by appropriating the strength which is in Christ Jesus (2Ti 2:1), through exercising the graces of the new man, by improving (profiting from) the varied experiences through which they had passed, and by the assisting operations of the Spirit, they had developed from babes into a higher spiritual stature and were better able to use their spiritual muscles. It is written, “*They that wait upon the Lord [which refers not so much to an act, but is descriptive of an attitude taken by all the regenerate who are in a healthy condition] shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint*” (Isa 40:31). It is indeed true that the believer’s strength, like his righteousness, is in the Lord, yet as there is an imparted righteousness (1Jo 2:29), so also a communicated strength. David acknowledged, Thou “*strengthenedst me with strength in my soul*” (Psa 138:3), so that he was no longer feeble in himself. There is such a thing as outgrowing spiritual babyhood and weakness, though not continued dependence upon the Lord. There is such an experience as going on “*from strength to strength*” (Psa 84:7) and being able to do all things through Christ strengthening us (Phi 4:13). But as increasing holiness is accompanied by increased realization of our filthiness, so increased strength makes us more conscious of our weakness.

“*And the word of God abideth in you.*” Though we would not exclude a reference here to the personal Word Himself (Joh 1:1; Rev 19:13), yet we consider that it was the written Word which John had primarily in view. It was by Christ living in them, putting forth His life and light in their souls, that they were strengthened. Nevertheless, it is by means of the written Word, by faith and meditation thereon as it abides in our renewed minds and hearts, that Christ lives and dwells in us. Hence that designation of the Scriptures when Paul exhorted the Colossians, “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom*” (Col 3:16). The two cannot be separated: it is by the written Word that Christ indwells the believer, as it is Christ who teaches how to use the Word. Thus this second clause is first of all explanatory of the preceding one, making known to us the principal means and source of the strength of these young men; as it also serves to define the nature of their strength, as inherent, something within themselves. It is by means of the pure milk of the Word that the babe in Christ grows (1Pe 2:2). It is by that Word—through faith’s exercise, and meditating thereon, and the Spirit’s blessing—that the believer is quickened (Psa 119:25,28, etc.). And it is by that Word abiding in him that he becomes strong, that the faculties or graces of the new man are developed and energized.

“*And the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.*” Thus the second clause is linked with both the former and the final ones, casting light upon each. It was by means of the Word of God dwelling in them that they were strengthened, and equally so was it the means of their overcoming the wicked one. The question “*Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?*” receives answer “*by taking heed thereto according to Thy word*” (Psa 119:9). So, too, David declared, “*By the words of Thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer*” (Psa 17:4)—so blessedly exemplified by his greater Son in His conflict with the Devil (Mat 4). The Word of God is expressly designated “*the sword of the Spirit*,” for it is the one offensive weapon given us to be used against the enemy (Eph 6:16,17). “*And the word of God abideth in you*” may also be regarded as being itself the grand proof that they had “*overcome the wicked one*,” for he had not been able to take away the good Seed sown in their hearts—as in the case of the wayside hearer (Mar 4:15; Joh 5:38), nor had he succeeded in inducing them to sell the Truth. In view of what follows in 1 John 2:18-26, we consider that the principal meaning of “*ye have overcome the wicked one*” in verse 14 is that they had withstood his attempts to poison their minds with fatal error.

Chapter 24

THE WORLD PROHIBITED

1 John 2:15

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

The connection between our present verse and the foregoing ones may not be apparent at once, but a little reflection will make it evident that it is linked more or less closely to all that precedes. As we have previously pointed out, the contents of verses 12-14 were designed to pave the way for what follows. John would duly impress his readers with what the riches of grace had made them in themselves, and this in order to prepare them to respond cheerfully to the prohibition of verse 15. In view of what they now were in relation unto God in Christ, they should the more readily and heartily detest that which is directly opposed to Him. As we have repeatedly observed in those sections of the epistle already traversed, John is fond of presenting the Truth under the form of sharply defined antitheses. It is so again here. Having described the several members of God’s family, he sets over against them the world. They are solemnly reminded that they have to live their lives in an evil and hostile environment, and therefore are they warned against its menace, and instructed how to carry themselves toward it.

At the beginning of our chapter the apostle had announced, *“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not;”* and to enforce that injunction he had stated the broad and basic principles by which the characters of believers are to be formed and their conduct regulated. They must fix their eyes upon the One who is their Advocate with the Father, keep God’s commandments, and walk even as Christ walked (verses 1-6). Then he had descended from the general to the particular: calling upon them to exercise love unto their brethren (verses 7-11). Next, he had expressed some strong assurances (verses 12-14)—addressed to the different grades of Christians to whom he was writing—which were designed as motives and incentives unto a compliance with the exhortations to which he now returns. Following the command to love the brethren is the dehortation *“Love not the world.”* It gives additional point and weight unto these precepts if we bear in mind that they are not only rules for the direction of conduct, but also tests by which we are required to examine and measure ourselves, for proof that we personally possess a saving knowledge of the Truth.

As the apostle proceeded to develop his subject and pursue the several designs which he had before him when writing this epistle, the different tests which are presented become increasingly searching, and the line of demarcation between a valid and an invalid Christian profession is drawn more sharply. On the other hand, the characteristics and walk of the regenerate are so delineated and their portion and privileges so described, that their comfort and assurance should be proportionately deepened. Thus it is both a needful and a salutary thing for every one of us carefully and honestly to try himself by each of these admonitions and precepts. As J. Morgan pointed out, *“Without conformity to them we are not entitled to conclude that ‘we know’ Christ or that we are ‘in Him’ by faith. As, therefore, we would have our evidences clear of a saving interest in Him, and would enjoy the assurance of a living faith, we must cultivate a close conformity to the manner of life enjoined by the apostle.”* It is with such considerations before us that we should prayerfully ponder the interdiction of our present text, and, instead of viewing it abstractedly, suffer ourselves to be searched by it.

There is also an undoubted link between verses 15-17 and that which was before us in verses 9-11. There John had contrasted those who walk in darkness and those who abide in the light, and, as Haupt strikingly pointed out, *“Here again (verse 15) is the ‘darkness,’ though in its concrete form, where its kingdom is to be found.”* It is not sufficiently recognized that the world is the domain where darkness works and holds sway. Nor is it sufficiently realized that, morally, darkness is not an objective thing only, but a subjective one too, an operative force within man; yet Scripture speaks expressly of *“the power of darkness”* (Luk 22:53, Col 1:13) and *“the rulers of the darkness of this world”* (Eph 6:12). Darkness is as truly the animating principle in the unregenerate as light is in the saints. All that is outside of God in Christ is under the dominion of sin and Satan, which is but another way of saying that it is the realm of darkness. That is the fundamental reason why the world is not to be loved by us: it is the very antipodes from Him who is light, as is made very plain in the verses which follow, where its hideous features are depicted.

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” This verse contains one of the innumerable proofs of the Divine authorship of the Bible, for its teaching concerning the world is at direct variance with the beliefs and sentiments of humanity. If on the one hand that which is of

great price in the sight of God (1Pe 3:4) is despised by the world, on the other hand that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God (Luk 16:15). Now if there be anything which is highly esteemed by man it is the world. He thinks highly of it, and speaks loudly in its praise, for he regards it as his world. Since it be that which his labours have produced, man views the world with pride and satisfaction, boasts of its progress, and is assured that it will yet develop into a real Utopia. Certain it is then that none of mankind ever invented such a statement as "*Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God*" (Jam 4:4). Equally evident is it that our text never originated with the human mind.

The Bible uniformly condemns the world. Again and again Christ and His apostles indicted and warned the saints against it. When the Son of God became incarnate and tabernacled among men, "*the world knew Him not*" (Joh 1:10); yea, He declared, "*Me it hateth*" (Joh 7:7). He insisted that the whole world was of less value than a man's soul (Mat 16:26). He intimated that its cares and the deceitfulness of riches were the thorns which choked the Word and made its hearer unfruitful (Mat 13:22). He solemnly said, "*Woe unto the world because of offences*" (Mat 18:7). He announced that Satan was its prince (Joh 14:30). In reference to the Holy Spirit He stated, "*whom the world cannot receive*" (Joh 14:17). He averred, "*I pray not for the world*" (Joh 17:9). He "*gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world*" (Gal 1:4), and therefore are His people forbidden to be conformed to it (Rom 12:2). The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God (1Co 3:19). "*Ungodliness and worldly lusts*" are linked together (Tit 2:12). 2 Peter 2:20 mentions "*the pollutions of the world,*" while 1 John 5:19 informs us that "*the whole world lieth in wickedness.*" Such declarations as these are radically opposed to all the beliefs and philosophies of men.

The above passages greatly need pressing today upon all professing Christians: "*all,*" we say, genuine saints not excepted. A careful pondering of the same makes it very manifest that this dehortation "*love not the world*" is no incidental or secondary one, but rather one which is fundamental unto vital godliness. It is therefore a matter of great practical importance that we obtain a right understanding and definition of the world, the "*things that are in it,*" and especially of what is meant by loving the same; otherwise, how can we rightly keep this precept? There are some conscientious souls who are very apt to distress themselves needlessly through incorrectly interpreting the same, supposing that to have their thoughts engaged with secular things while performing their daily duties is a species of worldliness, and a contravention of this injunction. But that is not so: God requires every able-bodied person to be engaged in some useful occupation: "*work with your own hands*" (1Th 4:11), and "*if any would not work, neither should he eat*" (2Th 3:10).

Honest industry is incumbent upon all, and if our calling be a lawful one, then we should apply our minds to the same: "*Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might*" (Ecc 9:10). "*Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds*" (Pro 27:23). If there be an eye single to God's glory and a conscientious performance of duty, He is as truly honoured and pleased by the farmer as by the preacher, the labourer as his employer. Indolence or inattention to practical matters is very far from being an evidence of spirituality: "*Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit, serving the Lord*" therein (Rom 12:11) is one of the marks of a true disciple. It is not sinful to trade, to be industrious in the same, and to acquire money; yet constant watchfulness is necessary lest we be captivated and ensnared: "*if riches increase, set not your heart upon them*" (Psa 62:10). Many a prosperous merchant has been a man of deep piety, and his wealth a power for good. Nor is it wrong for a Christian man to lay up in store for his family, agreeably to the bounty of the Lord toward him (2Co 12:14; 1Ti 5:8).

No. Scripture does not require the saints to renounce the duties of relative life, or to become careless in the discharge of them. The proper evidence of being a Christian is not merely to talk about Divine things, but (by grace) to walk according to the rules of God's Word in whatever position Providence has placed him: whether as a master or servant, husband or wife, parent or child, bearing rule or yielding obedience as unto the Lord. Diligence and fidelity in the management of temporal affairs are to be maintained, yet without a sinful conformity to the world. It is indeed necessary that the believer should ever bear in mind that "*the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for Himself*" (Psa 4:3), and that as a stranger and pilgrim in this scene he must abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul (1Pe 2:11). Yet that is far from signifying that he is to make himself conspicuous as an oddity. There is a happy medium between a sinful compliance with the world, being a slave to its opinions and an imitator of its fashions, and a scrupulous singularity which repudiates the spirit and liberty of the Gospel, and which is in reality nothing but a spirit of self-righteousness.

"*Love not the world.*" In this and all similar passages the "*world*" is both a society and a system. The members of it are described as "*men of the world, which have their portion in this life*" (Psa 17:14). Their chief good consists of the things of time and sense: their consuming desire is to crowd as much as possible of earthly joy into the present. Of each of its prosperous citizens it is said, "*Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength; but trusted in the abundance of his riches*" (Psa 52:7). As a system, it is under the dominion of Satan: he is its "*prince,*" regulating its policy and politics; its "*god*" (2Co 4:4), directing its religions. It is therefore the embodiment of his spirit, bearing his image and wearing his livery. Thus it is said of the unregenerate that they walk "*according to the course of this world, according to*

the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph 2:2). As Christ declared to some of its most respected devotees, "*Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will [desire and are determined to] do*" (Joh 8:44); they listen willingly to his solicitations and readily credit his lies.

Considered morally, rather than materially, the world is synonymous with the kingdom of Satan (Mat 12:26) or the unregenerate part of mankind, together with the things on which they set their hearts: all that is outside "*the kingdom of God*"—where His authority is owned. "It is the reign or kingdom of '*the carnal mind*' which is '*enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.*' Wherever that mind prevails, there is the world" (A. Candlish). It is fallen human nature acting out itself under the influence of the Devil, fashioning the framework of society after its own tendencies. Its very spirit is hostile to godliness, for it is dominated by carnal ambition, pride, avarice, self-pleasing, and sensuous desires and interests. Its opinions are false, its aims selfish, its pleasures sinful, its influence thoroughly demoralizing. The maxims which govern it, the springs which operate it, the ends which it seeks, are earthly, sensual, devilish. Its politics are corrupt, its honours empty baubles, its smiles fickle. Even to its own votaries it is a thing of bitter disappointments, for it is full of illusions and fierce rivalries.

Now since the world is the sphere of rebellion against God, His people are commanded not to love it. They are not to esteem it as their portion or treasure. They are forbidden to set their affections upon it. Love is the supreme affection in whatever heart it dwells. It is jealous and will brook no rival. Its very nature is to make everything else subordinate to the object on which it is set, whether that object be God, a human creature, riches or pleasure. To love the world is to give it the first place in our hearts, to idolize it, to make everything else subordinate to the acquisition and enjoyment of it, to despise whatever comes into competition with it. Where the world be loved, it possesses and governs the soul, overcoming the scruples of conscience and the principles of integrity, for its influence is subtle and insidious, powerful and perilous. It dominates many who do not suspect it. To love the world is to make its vanities the chief objects of our pursuit, to share its friendships, to court its smiles, to conform to its ways, and to find our happiness in what it yields. Since the world is openly antagonistic to God, for any of His people to love it is to exercise a spirit of hostility to Him—it is to act a traitor's part, to hold converse with the enemy's camp.

Even the habitable earth in which we reside must not be cherished by the Christian as though it were his eternal dwelling place: for "*this is not your rest, because it is polluted*" (Mic 2:10). As Henry remarked, "It was never intended to be so: it was designed for our passage, but not for our portion; our inn, but not our home... let us therefore sit loose to it, live above it, and think of leaving it." All the time we spend here is but a night in comparison with eternity. Even the patriarchs were not satisfied with Canaan, though, it flowed with milk and honey; instead, they "*confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth,*" and desired a better country, that is a heavenly, "*wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He hath prepared for them a city*" (Heb 11:13,16). A loathness to leave this earth indicates that our affections cleave too much unto it. To be content with such a sinful scene as this is sure proof that any individual is in a sad state of heart. It is because of their proneness to cleave to it that God so often embitters this world unto them.

"*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.*" In the second clause the apostle descends from the general to the particular. One may renounce the world as a whole, and yet the heart still clings to some of its parts. Even an unregenerate religionist may separate himself from the grosser aspects of the world, refusing to have fellowship with the giddy and frivolous, scorn its carnal attractions, and yet remain a thorough worldling at heart. He may have no sympathy with its tone and spirit, and yet certain objects in it possess great attraction for and have power over him. It is all the same in essence whether I love the world collectively or any of the single things which comprise it. It is not sufficient that I eschew the ways of the world, I must also detach my affections from everything which seeks to claim them. I must not delight in anything which would cause me to lessen my esteem of Christ and heavenly things. I am not to value any object if it hinders the performance of my duties Godward, dulls my relish for His Word, or chills the spirit of praise and prayer. I am to prefer nothing to spiritual things. I may use many of the things that are in the world, but I must not abuse them, trust in them, or place my happiness in them.

Manton most helpfully pointed out:

"God doth not require that we should love nothing, think of nothing, but Himself: the state of this life will not permit that. But God must have all the heart so far (1) that nothing be loved against God—a prohibited object is forbidden: sin must not be loved. (2) Nothing above God with a superior love: '*he that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me*' (Mat 10:37). (3) Not equal with God, for then our love is but a partial and half love, divided between God and the creature. God above all, and our neighbour as ourselves. God can endure no rival. Love to man is but the second commandment, and must give way to the first. (4) Nothing apart from God, but as subservient to Him: God in the creature, Christ in His members: myself, wife, children, natural comforts in God and from God."

The Christian's love is to be reserved for God, and not thrown away upon anything which is averse to Him, and therefore whatever present and sensible things exert a malignant influence upon the mind, as opposed to the influence and effect which spiritual and future things should have upon us, are to be shunned.

As "*love not the world*" is not an order forbidding the believer to have any intercourse with the society of the world or to engage in commerce therein, so love not the things that are in the world is not a prohibition against his making a moderate use of the comforts and conveniences of this life, agreeable to the station to which the Lord has appointed him here. Christians are not required to cut themselves off from all contact with their fellow men and retire into a monastery or convent; nor are they directed to abstain from pleasant food or the wearing of clothes which become their station; still less is it wrong for them to admire the wonders and beauties of God's handiwork in the material creation. While he is bidden to be temperate in all things, yet it is no virtue for a saint to adopt the austerities of the Spartans or to practice the bodily mortifications of the Brahmins. There is a "*strictness*" which arises from ignorance rather than knowledge, and a self-denial which is the fruit of fanaticism rather than spirituality. To be wholly concerned about externals is to gratify the spirit of self-righteousness, for it is possible to starve the body while feeding pride.

"*If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*" It comes to the same thing whether the love of the Father refers to His being shed abroad in the heart, or ours to Him, for the one cannot be without the other. If my prevailing desires be for the things which are in the world, if I conform to its carnal manners, comply with its sinful demands, and would do anything rather than antagonize it, then obviously I am an unregenerate person. If my affections be set upon the world which hounded His Son to death, and which hates His people in proportion as they see His image in them, how can the love of the Father dwell in me? It is impossible: the world, which lieth in the wicked, and the Father are irreconcilable, for they are diametrically opposed. Since they be thoroughly incompatible, love for the world and love to God cannot dwell together in the same heart. That was plainly taught by Christ: "*No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other*" (Mat 6:24). Both cannot rule the soul, for their governments and commands are contrary: their spirit and their course are diverse. Each person has to choose which of the two claimants for his heart shall be served and loved. Each Christian is required resolutely to resist the world in every respect in which it draws him away from God, and refuse to comply with it at the cost of disobeying Him.

Here are some tests by which the reader should examine himself to determine whether he loves the world or the Father. Which do you seek with the more fervour: the wealth and honours of the world, or the riches of grace and the approbation of God? Which have the greater attraction: the pleasures of the world, which are but for a season, or those pleasures at God's right hand, which are for evermore? Wherein lies your confidence: in the money you have "*laid up for a rainy day,*" or in the living and faithful God, who has promised to supply all the need of His people? Which occasions the deeper sorrow: a temporal loss, or the severance of fellowship with God? Which are you spending more money upon: personal comforts and luxuries, or the circulation of God's Word and the spread of His Gospel? What most dominates your mind: thoughts and schemes after worldly advancements, or resolutions and efforts to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord? Do your "*good intentions*" materialize, or are they empty dreams?

Chapter 25

THE WORLD DESCRIBED

1 John 2:16

*"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."*

The Divine precepts ought to be as highly esteemed by us as God's promises; and if they be not, something is seriously wrong with our hearts. They are as much an integral part of God's Word, are accorded a place of quite as much prominence, are revealed by the same Spirit, and rest upon the same foundation. They proceed from the self-same love,

and are designed equally for our good. When God gave His commandments unto Israel, it was that, by their obedience, *“it might be well with them, and with their children”* (Deu 5:29). The preceptive part of the Gospel is designed to be our director in the path of filial obedience, the rule of our duty, and the standard at which our love is ever to aim. If it be true that God is glorified by our faith as we trust Him to fulfill His pledges, it is none the less a fact that He is honoured by our submission as we cheerfully keep His statutes. And if it be true that our hearts are strengthened and our lives enriched by laying hold of and feeding upon God’s promises, it is equally the case that we are greatly the gainers by cherishing and heeding His precepts. *“His statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good”* (Deu 10:13). Walking according to God’s Law is the only way to true happiness (Psa 119:1).

What has just been pointed out receives illustration in connection with our observing the precept of 1 John 2:15. It is both our wisdom and our welfare to comply with the prohibition, *“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world,”* for, as a whole and in all its parts, it is the deadly enemy of God’s children. One of the distinctive properties of the Bible is that all its precepts are directed unto our affections. They are not intended to fashion the mere external, but are meant to mould the inner man. Satan is well aware of that, and therefore he is ever seeking to turn our affections away from God and wed them to the world. The very fact that we are enjoined, *“Love not the world”* intimates that its supreme assaults are upon the heart. It is only by heeding this commandment that we shall be delivered from the world’s fatal snares. It is therefore a matter of the deepest practical moment that we walk in separation from this deadly menace to spirituality, for in proportion as we fail to do so will there be a forfeiting of God’s smile and the loss of peace of conscience. Any measure of love of the world will stunt our growth, deprive us of joy in the Holy Spirit, undermine our assurance, and bring down upon us the chastening rod of God.

That is God’s design in regeneration: *“I will put My spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes”* (Eze 36:27). But though the Christian has renounced the world, with its God-defying and self-pleasing ways, yet for the enjoyment of communion with God in Christ, and to avoid the grieving of His Spirit, he needs to be continually on his guard that the world does not again possess his heart, for not only is it all around him, but its dominating principle (the *“flesh”*) is still within him—a deputy to do its evil work. By nature we were wedded to the world, thoroughly entangled in its vanities, and naught but love to God and heavenly things delivers the heart from its thralldom. It is indeed a most humbling thing that believers should be told to *“love not the world,”* yet they require that injunction, and ought to turn the same into earnest prayer, daily seeking grace that they may be Divinely enabled to decline its temptations and to mortify their desires after its carnal attractions, remembering that by the cross of Christ the world is (legally) crucified unto them and they unto the world (Gal 6:14). If we diligently endeavour to cultivate a spirit of contentment with the temporal portion which God has given us, however small a one it be, then we shall be delivered from lusting after the husks which the swine feed on.

It is altogether unreasonable for any man to look for satisfaction in anything which this world has to offer him, for how can material and transient things meet the needs of a soul that has been made for eternity? No real, still less any lasting, good is to be found in this world. Abundant proof of that is supplied by the book of Ecclesiastes. There we have placed upon imperishable record the experiences of one who was permitted to gratify every lust of the flesh. The resources at his command were practically limitless. He was a king, and not a poor one, but possessed of abundant means, so that he was able to procure everything that money could purchase. He surrounded himself with every conceivable luxury, form of pleasure, and object of beauty. His palace was filled unstintingly with everything the senses could crave. And what was the outcome? Was he able to say, *“All is very good, I can now rest in the enjoyment of what I have acquired”*? Very far from it. After he had taken his fill of all its pleasures, drunk deeply from all this world’s streams, he declared that *“all is vanity and vexation of spirit.”* And, my reader, if Solomon could find no satisfaction in all his worldly possessions and pursuits, none who comes after him will ever do so.

Since God’s commandments be designed for our good, a careless neglect of them cannot but be harmful. In proportion as we imbibe the spirit of the world, our breathings after God are stifled and the soul becomes dull in holy duties. As one cannot handle pitch without soiling oneself, neither can a believer take a deep interest in the politics of the world without suffering loss spiritually. Conversely, the more we delight ourselves in the Lord, the less relish shall we have for the things on which the unregenerate set their hearts. The two things work in inverse ratio: love to God weans the soul from love to the world. Now the outstanding evidence of love is obedience: a fixed resolve to please Christ in all things. As He declared, *“If a man love Me, he will keep My words”* (Joh 14:23). Then how fervently should we pray for more love to Him (Eph 3:17,18; Phi 1:9). How we should meditate daily upon His manifold perfections and feast on His excellency. How diligently we should cultivate a closer and more constant communion with Him. How we should keep short accounts with God, and make a practice of promptly confessing every known sin. How we should discipline ourselves and love the creature in subordination to Him.

“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” (verse 16).

As the opening *“For”* indicates, that is said by way of explanation and amplification of the previous verse, which is an instance of the gracious condescension of our God. We ought ever to give a ready and cheerful obedience to the Divine precepts on the bare authority of their Author, without His advancing any reasons for them, and whether or not we can perceive the wisdom and benevolence of the same. Sufficient for us to act on the merely revealed will of the Most High. It is not for us to ask the why or the wherefore, but to comply with His demands without demur or delay. But sometimes it pleases the Lord to elucidate, as He expounded His parables unto the apostles. Such is the case here: in support of the prohibition of His *“love not the world,”* He adds that all that pertains to it is evil, corrupt, and therefore to set our affections upon it is quite incompatible with devotion to God; equally so does love for such a world make clear demonstration that the love of the Father is not in such a person.

Here are the contents and sum of the world: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. It is clear that the apostle is not referring to the natural world, which is full of the glorious handiwork of its Creator; but to the corrupt world of sense and sin, all in it which is esteemed by its carnal citizens, which shapes their thoughts, moves their affections, directs and consumes their energies. Those evil propensities and principles are said to be *“in the world,”* yet it is evident that they are principally in the subject rather than in the object. They are said to be *“in the world”* because the world gets into the heart, incorporates itself in the affections, and occupies its throne. As faith and God’s promises should be *“mixed”* (Heb 4:2), so temptations twine themselves around men’s lusts. Thus we do not have to go very far in order to frame a Scriptural definition of what constitutes the corrupt *“world:”* it is not something outside us, but within ourselves. It is not that which our natural hand can touch or our natural eye see, but that which fallen man carries in his own bosom. The world is simply the aggregate of all the hearts of unregenerate men that now dwell upon the earth. The external world only carries into practice the principles acting in its subjects, putting into operation the sin which is ever working in them.

The things that are both in and of the world are divided into three classes, according to the three dominant inclinations of depraved human nature. *“The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life”* are the three harpies of man’s polluted soul to which the things of the world minister. Those are the prolific wombs from which issue all our sinful acts: the roots which convey life and sap unto that which appears openly above the ground; the branches on which grow all the evil fruits which abound in human life. Those are the *“strongholds”* of Satan which command all about them. They are the mighty conquerors of all mankind. It was so at the beginning, for it was through those avenues that the serpent attacked and overcame Eve. The inspired account is very brief, but its language corresponds exactly to what is here before us. First, we are told that *“the woman saw that the tree was good for food:”* there was *“the lust of the flesh”* at work. Second, *“and that it was pleasant to the eyes:”* there was *“the lust of the eyes”* operating. Third, *“and a tree to be desired to make one wise;”* there was *“the pride of life”* active, and yielding to the same, she disobeyed her Maker and took of the fruit.

Let us now take a separate look at each of these evil propensities: *“evil”* we say, for sin has so vitiated the whole of man’s being that though the objects that God has provided for his needs be wholesome, yet the affection with which men crave them is impure. When the term *“flesh”* is employed in the Scriptures with a moral force, it is commonly used in the larger sense, as taking the whole of that corrupt nature which we inherited from Adam and bring with us into this world. So in its wider signification *“the lusts of the flesh”* is an expression which usually takes in all the works of our corrupt nature, whether in the understanding, by vain imaginations and evil thoughts; in the affections, by inordinate longing or unlawful inclinations; or in the will, by perversity and stubbornness. But here, since they are distinguished from the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, the *“lusts of the flesh”* are to be taken more strictly and narrowly for the sensual appetite: the immoderate craving for soft and sumptuous living, the intemperate use of pleasures, meats and drinks, all such things as gratify the body. While it be true that in the catalogue given in Galatians 5:19-21, the horrible products of the flesh are headed by different forms of immorality, yet they are by no means confined thereto.

The lusts of the flesh, then, include the giving way to any form of intemperance, as well as uncleanness: the craving for and responding to any of the things which excite the irregularities and inordinate hankerings of the animal appetites, as in the case of Esau, who made a god of his belly. They comprehend every form of pampering the body, whether it be a feeding of it more than is required for its natural sustenance, or spending more time in sleep than is necessary. When God created man, He endowed him with an appetite for food, for marriage, for the beauties of Eden; but sin perverts those appetites and carries them to excess, so that their gratification becomes, only too often, gluttony, uncleanness, covetousness. Everything that pleases either the body or the mind, and gives us pleasure distinct from God Himself, may be included therein. Though men differ considerably in their constitutions, interests, pursuits, habits, and objects of desire, yet from first to last it all comes to the same thing; it is not of the Spirit or of grace; whatever be craved, whether something gross

or refined, it is for the pleasing of carnal self. We have had but two common fathers, Adam and Noah, and both fell by indulging their fleshly appetites: Adam by eating, Noah by drinking.

“*And the lust of the eyes;*” that is the second main avenue by which the world gains entrance into the heart. We contract far more sin through our visive organs than any of us are aware of, for they are the inlets to the mind, setting objects before the fancy which leave an impression and taint which are very difficult to get rid of. It is not so much the object beheld as the pleasure felt in seeing it, and the longing to possess the same. This then is the spring of wantonness, covetousness and avarice. But as from the lust of the flesh proceed not only the gluttony, drunkenness and immorality which the baser and more brutish part of mankind is taken up with, but also the inordinate love of pleasure, vain company and carnal delights with which the more refined are so often bewitched, so the lust of the eyes is not to be restricted to an evil gazing upon unlawful objects, but from it spring all forms of earthly-mindedness, and immoderate yearnings for the acquisition of a thousand things, such as costly apparel, jewels, elaborate home furnishings, sight-seeing, etc. In the mental realm, it creates a curiosity to pry into the unseen and tamper with things which pertain to the darkness rather than to the light.

Scripture abounds in solemn examples of those who fell into grievous and fatal sins through indulging the lusts of the eyes: Lot’s wife (Gen 19:26), Shechem (Gen 34:2), Potiphar’s wife (Gen 39:7), Achan (Jos 7:21), Samson (Jud 16:1), David (2Sa 11:2). Like children, we can scarcely see a pleasant object without wanting to possess it: Ahab, not content with his palace gardens, fell sick for Naboth’s vineyard (1Ki 21:4). What need is there, then, for us to pray, “*Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken Thou me in Thy way*” (Psa 119:37). That is a request for restraining grace, that we may be enabled to look away from whatever entices us to evil. It is by our optics being fastened upon the world’s attractions that the heart is infected with the love of them, and thereby alienated from Divine things. But prayer is not sufficient: there must also be a walking circumspectly and cautiously. If we pray “*lead us not into temptation,*” we are also required to watch that we do not enter into it (Mat 26:41). The more we are engaged with the beauties of the Lord of glory, the more will our hearts be delivered from the glittering toys of the world, and the less envy shall we have when beholding “*the prosperity of the wicked*” (Psa 73:3).

“*And the pride of life,*” which is the last of the evil triad. The word for “*life*” here is not ‘*zoe*’ which expresses essential being, but “*bios,*” which has to do more with the eternal life of man as pertaining to the natural world. The pride of life consists of vying with and outvying one another; in every possible way. It gives rise to a conceit of ourselves and a contempt of our neighbours, producing a spirit of self-superiority and arrogance. It grasps after power, seeks the chief places in the world, coveting positions of elevation, authority and influence, so that one may have dominion over his fellows. It may assume the extreme form of the tyrannical dictator, but it is just as truly active in the woman who aspires to be the mistress of a few servants. It thirsts after admiration, adulation and applause. It strives after the honours and dignities of the world, craves a position in society which will convey prestige and repute. It therefore seeks a variety of situations and circumstances which have in them an appearance of happiness and satisfaction in self-advancement. It loves pomp and parade, is fond of flattering titles and a glittering show. It covets a name or renown, eagerly pursues popularity, so that one may be distinguished above others.

This “*pride of life*” expresses itself in many ways. It evidences itself in an ostentatious display, like the strutting of a peacock, so that there may be an outshining of our neighbours. It induces many to attempt the keeping up of an appearance which they can ill afford. It leads to much hypocrisy, a pretending to be and have what is possessed not: seen in facial make-up, the wearing of imitation jewelry, etc. It causes people to become the slaves of fashion and to be in bondage to the foolish conventions of the world, as, for example, extravagant and expensive funerals far beyond their means. Nor is this affectation of repute, lust for power and love of ostentation by any means confined unto those who have the largest incomes and most opportunity for gratifying themselves. It works just as powerfully in the poor and humble as it does in the rich and exalted. The peasant may be loud in his condemnation of the greed of the capitalist and denounce his prodigalities, but place him in the same position of affluence and influence, and often he proves to be worse than those whom he formerly censured: it is only the force of his present circumstances which prevents him from making the show he would like to.

The “*pride of life*” includes much more than either the lust of the flesh or the lust of the eyes. They are restricted either by their end—the satisfying of our carnal desires, particularly those of the body—or by their instruments—the gratifying of the senses. But pride is not thus restricted. Man is ever prone to be puffed up by conceit of his own excellence: his strength, beauty, wisdom, talents, graces, achievements. It is, then, accurately designed, for it spreads through all the enjoyments and comforts of life: the entire span of our mortal existence, from the cradle to the grave, being its sphere. As Manton remarked, “He ascribes a universal and unlimited influence, and calls it ‘*the pride of life*’ because it taints every action, it serves itself of every enjoyment, it mingles with other lusts. Other vices destroy only their contraries: covetousness destroys liberality, drunkenness sobriety; but pride destroys them all. There is nothing so low but it

yields fuel to pride: the hair, which is but an excrement, is often hung as a bush and ensign of vanity. And there is nothing so high and sacred but pride can abase it; like mistletoe, it grows on any tree, but most upon the best.”

It will therefore be evident that these springs of evil are set forth in a climactic order: sensuality, covetousness, pride. Little as the majority may suppose, the last one is more heinous than the others. Sensuality is the corruption of the lower part of man’s being, an unlawful gratifying of his bodily appetites; but pride is the corruption of the higher part of his nature—the lifting up of his understanding and spirit. By sensuality man sinks to the level of the beasts, but by pride he rears up against God, and enters into fellowship with the Devil, for “*being lifted up with pride*” was his condemnation (1Ti 3:6; and cf. Isa 14:12-14). It was bad enough for the conceited king of Babylon to exclaim, “*Is not this great Babylon, that I have built?*” (Dan 4:30) but it was far worse when the haughty monarch of Egypt asked, “*Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go?*” (Exo 5:2). Thus does this abominable pride inflate puny creatures of the dust and cause them to exalt themselves against the Most High.

Chapter 26

THE WORLD DOOMED

1 John 2:17

“*Love not the world*” (2:15): either its policies or its pleasures, its maxims or its methods, its trends or its ends. Refuse all intimacy with its subjects. That prohibition is enforced, first, by the solemn consideration, “*If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*” The great Searcher of hearts cannot be deceived: if I am living for the enjoyment of the world and seeking to win its favour, then I am waging warfare against heaven, bidding open defiance to the Lord of hosts (Jam 4:4). Anyone who makes the world his portion or supreme good is dead in sin. It is impossible to keep God’s commandments and to be on good terms with His open enemies.

*“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh,
and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.”*

This is the second reason why we are not to love the world: because the principles which operate therein, and the food which it provides for them to feed upon, are essentially evil. We are forbidden to set our affection upon things which gratify the carnal nature, which pander to a disordered imagination, and which minister unto pride. The world supplies an elaborate menu for its subjects. There are stalls and shows in Vanity Fair designed by its prince to appeal unto all tastes and temperaments.

It should be pointed out that those three propensities of fallen human nature have had a corporate embodiment in that monstrous system which God has suffered for so long to devour both the souls and bodies of millions of mankind. We refer to “*the mother of harlots,*” which for the last thousand years has had the effrontery to term herself “*The Holy Catholic Church*” and “*The Bride of Christ.*” If there has been any religious organization outstandingly characterized by these three evils, it is undoubtedly the Papacy. What but “*the lust of the flesh,*” in its grossest form, has marked her gluttonous prelates, the “*indulgences*” which they sell to their poor dupes, and the moral filth which has obtained in her convents and monasteries—as converted nuns and monks have frequently testified? What are her imposing cathedrals, her elaborate ritual, her gorgeous vestments and her spectacular processions but so many alluring appeals to the “*lust of the eyes*”? And what are the flattering titles assumed by her dignitaries, the Pope’s usurpation of the alone prerogatives of Christ, and his claim to rule over kings, but clear evidences of “*the pride of life*”? And the more worldly other allegedly “*Christian*” denominations become, and the closer they draw to Rome, the more conspicuous are the same elements and features in them.

In glorious contrast with what has been before us above, let the child of God ponder and feast upon the blessed ways of Immanuel, and bow in admiration and adoration before Him who differed as much from them as does the light from darkness. When about to descend to this earth, He “*made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant*” (Phi 2:7). He was born not in a palace, but in a cattle shed. During the years that He remained in this scene, He disdained its pomp, and sought not His happiness in it. Yet the unworldliness of Christ was not that of the hermit, but of One whose ministry was upon the stage of public action, among all classes of people. When He selected the twelve apos-

bles, who were to be His most intimate companions, and later His ambassadors, He chose not the mighty, the noble, or the wise of this world, but humble fishermen and a despised tax-gatherer. So far was He from seeking the limelight that, after He had healed the sick, again and again He bade one and another, “*See thou tell no man*” (Mat 8:4; 9:30; 12:16). When His brethren after the flesh said, “*If Thou do these things, show Thyself to the world,*” He refused their request, and later went up to the feast at Jerusalem “*not openly, but as it were in secret*” (Joh 7:4,10)—unannounced, unobtrusively.

After the Lord Jesus Christ had performed many mighty works, and the same had been noised abroad, Simon and his fellows said unto Him, “*All men seek for Thee,*” but He replied, “*Let us go into the next towns*” (Mar 1:37,38): rather than receive the plaudits of the crowd, He moved on. Instead of courting popularity, He ever shunned it. Said He, “*I receive not honour from men*” (Joh 5:41). In Mark 7:17, we are told, “*And when He was entered into the house from the people*” (and cf. 3:19; 9:28,33)—He went about doing His Father’s business quietly and unostentatiously. Upon His transfiguration, He charged those who beheld it, “*Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead*” (Mat 17:9). When it became necessary to make a public presentation of His royal claims, He entered Jerusalem not in a chariot, but seated upon an ass—the King of meekness. He averred, “*the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me*” (Joh 14:30). There was no lust of the flesh, no lust of the eyes, no pride of life working within the Lord Jesus; and therefore naught to which the corrupt things of the world could appeal. Not only so, but positively there was everything in Him to repel them, for He was “*the Holy One,*” against whom all the shafts of the Devil were aimed in vain.

Having explained at some length what is signified by the three evils announced in verse 16, let us return to the apostle’s principal designs in our passage, which were to warn the Lord’s people, and to expose graceless professors, for in neither the Old Testament nor the New does God own anyone as a lover of Him save he who keeps His commandments and walks in separation from the world. The Church and the world are sharply distinguished entities, their members two opposing companies. Therefore does God say to the former, “*Walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind*” (Eph 4:17): instead, they are required to keep themselves “*unspotted from the world*” (Jam 1:27), “*hating even the garment spotted by the flesh*” (Jud 23), witnessing against the world (Heb 11:7). The world makes its appeals to all of the bodily senses, but its main object is to capture the heart, for until that citadel be won all its arts and devices have failed; but the moment the heart is taken, man becomes the world’s captive, even though (to borrow the language of another) “he be bound in the silken fetters of love.” Hence the supreme importance of our complying with the precept, “*Keep thy heart with all diligence*” (Pro 4:23), for it is the throne where either Christ or Satan rules.

Solomon tells us that “*a threefold cord is not quickly broken*” (Ecc 4:12), nevertheless the grace of God can and does effectually deliver from the love of pleasure, riches, honours, as appears with more or less clearness among the regenerate. A striking case in point is that of Moses, for we read of his “*choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin [the lust of the flesh] for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt [the lust of the eyes] ... By faith he forsook Egypt,*” abandoning his position there as “*the son of Pharaoh’s daughter,*” thereby disdaining the pride of life (Heb 11:24-27). Note well, my reader, the repeated “*by faith*” in those verses, for only so far as that grace be healthy and active will the saint be impervious to both the delights and the terrors of the world: “*this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith*” (1Jo 5:4). Faith occupies the soul with invisible and eternal realities, and as we are engaged with them the things of time and sense lose their hold upon the heart. A sight of “*the King in His beauty*” and a sense of His dying love are the surest means of breaking their power.

“I thirst, but not as once I did,
The vain delights of earth to share:
Thy wounds, Emmanuel, all forbid
That I should seek my pleasures there.”

As the Christian desires to ascertain whether or not he is growing in grace, let him frequently measure himself by this standard: Am I becoming less worldly? He may be innocent of all forms of intemperance and of a spirit of covetousness, he may not envy the prosperity of the wicked or join with them in their vanities, but is he indifferent to their opinion, caring not whether they smile or frown upon him? Is the reader afraid of being called “*peculiar*” because he ignores its fashions and defies its conventions? Nothing; is more pitiful than to see a citizen of heaven in bondage to the whims of Satan’s children: certain it is that if his daily life does not offend them, he is not being faithful to his Master. We shall become less worldly only as our love for God in Christ increases and becomes more vigorous, and therefore, as it is more important to act grace than to be assured that we have it, we should set ourselves with all our might to strengthen our love to the Lord, and then shall we know that we love Him. The example which Christ has left us should make it easier to deny ungodly and worldly lusts. How fully did He manifest His contempt of the world and all the glory thereof! Let us not affect a greater eminence in it than He had. If He was “*a Man of sorrows*” in this scene, does it become any follower

of His to be addicted to its pleasures? If they called Him *“Beelzebub”* should we compromise in order to escape *“bearing His reproach”*?

“Is not of the Father, but is of the world.” This is the third dissuasive against setting our affections thereon. Observe, first, that the apostle did not say *“is not of God,”* but *“is not of the Father,”* just as in the foregoing verse he had said, *“If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”* As the Devil is opposed to Christ, the flesh hostile to the Spirit, so the world is antagonistic to the Father and hates His children (3:13). *“All that is in the world... is not of the Father.”* The things of the world are termed *“the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life”* because they are the objects of them: just as the *“doctrine of Christ”* (2Jo 9) is called *“the faith”* (Gal 1:23; Jude 3), because it is the object of faith. Those three principles are the springs of action in its citizens; all that takes place in this mundane sphere (as considered apart from the Church and the operations of the Spirit) issues from them: every motive-power at work within the ungodly may be traced thereto. In its turn, the world caters fully for and to them. For the first there are carnal delights to entice the soul from the strictness and severity of the Christian profession. For the second there are all kinds of material profits and illicit gains to allure. For the third there are preferments and applause which the natural man is so fond of. Those sensible objects to which the old nature is so inclined are ever present, seeking to divert the heart from God and heavenly-mindedness.

“All that is in the world... is not of the Father.” They are not of His creation, for at the beginning He pronounced all things, including our first parents, *“very good.”* No, as Christ declared of the field wherein tares were sown after He had sown it with wheat, *“an enemy hath done this.”* The idolatrous desire after its objects attached not nor pertained to them originally, but resulted from the fall. Nor are they of His infusion: *“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away [from the path of rectitude] of his own lusts”* (Jam 1:13,14). All such evil lusting is the outcome of indwelling sin. Nor are they of His preceptive will. He has not provided them for any such purposes, nor prescribed them to be so misused. And certainly such perversity of them is not of His approbation. No, rather are they *“of the world”* as it *“lieth in the wicked one”* (5:19), which does not, in either its prince or its subjects, respect God’s laws, acknowledge His claims, or seek to glorify Him. Such unlawful cravings are the effects of man’s apostasy and subjection to Satan, who now makes whatsoever is in the world to be his baits to seduce men into further sin. Thus, loyalty to God and regard for the welfare of our souls require that such a world be renounced by us, and every inordinate longing after it mortified.

“And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof” (verse 17). Here is still another reason why God’s people are not to love the world, an argument drawn from the vain and vanishing state of mundane things and man’s enjoyment of them. Those words may be understood two ways: relatively and absolutely, in regard both to ourselves and itself. In themselves, and in the pleasure which the ungodly derive from them, the things of the world are only transitory and can afford no lasting satisfaction. *“The fashion of this world passeth away”* (1Co 7:31). There is a *“fashion”* or outward form, which in its incidentals alters in each age and generation, after which its deluded votaries order their lives, being carried along hither and thither by the ebb and flow of its tides. Its customs and habits, its styles and modes, its pleasures and amusements, are ever varying. Yet it is by this very means that the multitudes are more and more deceived. The objects they sought so eagerly yesterday fulfilled not their expectations, so with equal earnestness they pursue the same or other objects today, assured that the attaining of them will rejoice them; only to find them broken cisterns which hold no water.

“And the world passeth away.” It is but an amusing pageant: its alluring shows and sights are like a revolving stage, with its scenes changing rapidly, one set of actors soon following another. How frequently do houses and estates change hands. How many a monarchy has been overturned in this century, how many a kingdom had its boundaries altered, how many of its proud cities reduced to rubble. How frequently do riches take to themselves wings and fly away. *“Change and decay in all around I see.”* Its beauty is only transient, vanishing almost as soon as it appears. Its *“fashion”* is but an appearance, for there is nothing substantial in it. Its pleasures soon pall: the laughter of fools is compared to *“the crackling of thorns under a pot”* (Ecc 7:6)—a momentary blaze which disappears in smoke. Its honours are evanescent and disappointing. Its smiles are artificial and fickle. *“And the lust thereof”* Calvin pointed out that *“lust”* is here used metonymically, as signifying the objects coveted, or the things which captivate the desires of men; the things they deem most precious are but a shadowy phantom, which fails them in the hour of need. The carnal joys of the wicked are like the present sufferings of the saints—relatively *“but for a moment,”* but instead of working for them *“a far more exceeding eternal weight of glory”* they issue in everlasting shame and woe.

“The world passeth away” also has reference to its citizens, for *“all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass”* (1Pe 1:24). All mankind is in a perishing condition, hastening to the grave. The tombstones in our cemeteries bear solemn witness to the brevity of life: far more die in infancy and childhood than in old age. No class is exempt, the wealthy equally with the poor being often cut off in the prime of life. *“For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass... so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways”* (Jam 1:11). The uncertainty

and transiency of mortal life is something which worldlings desire to forget, and therefore do they “*put far away the evil day*” (Amo 6:3), death being feared by them because it will summon them into the presence of their righteous Judge. The shortness and instability of life are set forth in the Scriptures by many comparisons: the wind (Job 7:7), a leaf before the wind (Job 13:25), a shadow (Job 14:2), the flower of the field (Isa 40:6), “*vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away*” (Jam 4:14), so unsubstantial and unreal, so impermanent and soon over, is human life, and all the prosperity, magnificence and enjoyment that may have attended it.

Oh, my reader, at most we have but a little time to spend in this scene, and that little will soon be gone. “Then why set our hearts on worldly enjoyments? or why be overwhelmed with earthly cares? Possess what you must shortly leave without allowing yourself to be possessed by it. Why should your hearts be much set on what you must quickly resign?” (S. Brown). Hold loosely all earthly things. Build not your nest in any tree here, for the whole forest is doomed to destruction. Even now the world is under the judgment, the curse, the wrath, of a sin-hating God. That is evident every time we see a funeral, for death is the wages of sin, and daily we behold that grim reaper at work. Neighbors and friends, known and loved by us, are suddenly cut down. Soon the world will pass away absolutely and finally. It is not eternal: it had a beginning, and it will have an end. God has appointed a day when it shall no longer exist to oppose Him; and when that day arrives “*the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up*” (2Pe 3:10), and all its unsaved inhabitants will be cast into the lake of fire, there to be tormented day and night for ever and ever (Rev 20:10).

“*But he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.*” It is not, as might be expected from verse 15, “*he that loveth God,*” but the fruit and proof thereof which is here named, for obedience to God is love in action. Nor is it simply “*he that knoweth and [theoretically] approveth the Divine will,*” but rather the one who actually performs it. This is the grand design and end of God’s work of grace in the soul: to make its subject the doer of His Word. The saint is here viewed not as an object of God’s everlasting love, nor as one for whom Christ purchased redemption, but rather as one who has been transformed by the renewing of his mind and made an obedient child. This is very searching. As Peter declared, “*God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him,*” (Act 10:35,36). And as his Master taught, “*For whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother*” (Mat 12:50); “*blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it*” (Luk 11:28); “*they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life*” (Joh 5:29). “*Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life*” (Rev 22:14). Such passages as those are almost universally ignored by Antinomians, who are for ever crying up grace at the expense of holiness.

“*He that doeth the will of God:*” not grudgingly but heartily; not bits of it, but the whole. Such is the character and conduct of Wisdom’s children—the very opposite of the worldling’s. They willingly submit to God’s authority, seek to please Him in their daily lives, walk in the Law of the Lord. Not flawlessly so, but evangelically, sincerely, so that of his deviations therefrom the believer can honestly say, “*That which I do I allow not*” (Rom 7:15), condemning himself for, mourning over and penitently confessing the same. There is no such thing as sinless perfection in this life, either in being entirely rid of love for the things of the world or in doing the will of God. But “*he that doeth the will of God*” is characteristic of a Christian. And such a one “*abideth for ever,*” which imports far more than personal continuance (for such will be the case with all the unregenerate), namely in the favour of God and shall be eternally blessed. He shall abide for ever in the possession of that substantial good which he has been enabled to make choice of. Such a one is the heir of eternal life, a member of that kingdom which cannot be shaken. Durable riches are his, a crown of glory awaits him, fullness of joy and pleasures for evermore at God’s right hand.

Chapter 27

THE LAST TIME

1 John 2:18

“Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.”

Why is this verse prefaced with the particular address, “*little children?*” What is meant by “*the last time?*”? What is signified by “*antichrist?*”? Who are referred to by the “*many antichrists?*”? In what way did the presence of many antichrists make it evident that the last time had even then begun? Why is this statement brought in at this point? What is the precise importance and value of it unto us today? In seeking to answer these questions and expound our present verse we are mindful of the fact that we shall clash with the teaching many of our readers have sat under, and therefore they will not readily accept a part of what we are about to advance. Moreover, it will differ from the prophetic outlook which we held personally in the early days of our Christian life. But we must write according to the measure of light God has vouchsafed for us, and request our friends to heed prayerfully the injunction, “*Prove all things; hold fast that which is good*” (1Th 5:21).

Why does our present verse open with the words “*little children?*”? The term ought to have been translated “*babes*” in order to distinguish it from that which is used in 2:1,12, etc. There the one employed is a term of endearment, being a general one in its scope, applied to the whole family of God. But the one found in our text is a descriptive and distinguishing one, being used only of the lowest grade of God’s children, namely spiritual infants. It will be remembered that in 2:12, John had employed the comprehensive term “*teknion*” when expressing his tender regard for all the saints. Then in verse 13 he had graded them into three distinct classes: “*fathers,*” “*young men,*” and “*babes,*” designating the last “*paidion,*” which term occurs again in this epistle only in the verse now before us. In verse 14 the “*fathers*” and in verses 15-17 the “*young men*” were each addressed a second time. Now in verses 18-27 the “*babes*” are again written to. Thus we perceive once more what care the apostle devoted to the structure of his epistle, and how particular he was to follow a strict and logical order. In 2:28, the general designation “*teknion*” is again found, to denote a resumption of address to the whole company. Hence it is apparent that, through failure to observe the plan followed in the context, the Revised Version erred in beginning a new paragraph with verse 18.

Not only did the due balancing of this section (the speaking twice to each of the three classes) require that verse 18 should be directed to the “*babes,*” but in view of its contents there was a peculiar propriety in addressing it to the third and youngest group. It was really a word of warning to them. As the young men are most in danger of being allured and spoiled by “*the world,*” so the babes are the ones most liable to be beguiled and poisoned by the “*antichrists.*” It was therefore peculiarly pertinent to put the young converts on their guard, for being more inexperienced and less established in the Faith, they were apt to give ear unto those who were desirous of corrupting them. Though not so pointed, it was indirectly the equivalent of Paul’s exhortation to the Ephesians, “*That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive*” (4:14). It is sad to see how little taken to heart are those words of Christ, “*Take heed what ye hear*” (Mar 4:24). Many professing Christians are as careless in this matter as ignorant children playing with sharp and dangerous weapons.

“*Little children, it is the last time.*” The order of words in the Greek expresses it still more emphatically: “*Little children [the] last time it is.*” The word here translated “*time*” (*hora*) signifies an indefinite period, be it long or short. It is rendered “*season,*” “*day,*” “*hour,*” “*instant.*” The Revised Version gives “*it is the last hour.*” Personally, we prefer “*the last time.*” By affirming that it is the last time we consider the apostle was announcing that the Jewish economy had passed away—the temple lay in ruins, its priesthood no longer functioned, Jerusalem was trodden down by the Gentiles. Still more definitely, he was averring that this Christian economy is the final one. Calvin (in his Institutes) pointed out, “*And for this reason the dispensation under which we live is designated in the Scriptures as ‘the last time,’ ‘these last times’* (1Pe 1:20), ‘*the last days*’ (Act 2:17), that no one might deceive himself with a vain expectation of any new doctrine or revelation.” This Christian dispensation is the one during which the history of this world will be brought to a close: whether or not it will include within its scope and be terminated by what is known as “*the millennium*” we are not prepared either to affirm or deny; but this we must believe, that no separate and distinct age will follow the present one.

The coming of God’s Son to this earth in human nature introduced the concluding season for this world, in which all its affairs will be wound up. But as Barnes pertinently remarked, “*The apostle does not, however, say that the end of the world would soon occur, nor does he intimate how long this dispensation would be. That period might continue through many ages or centuries, and still be the last dispensation.*” The concluding era of God’s gracious government over men had arrived. “*The world’s history is divided into two sections. The first is the preparatory, and the second is the final. The incarnation of Christ is the goal of the first, and the starting point of the second. John the Baptist, who closed the first period, might have written, ‘It is the first hour.’ And yet the life of John the Baptist was synchronous with the life of John the Apostle, who said, ‘It is the last hour.’ But between those two Johns there stood the milestone that divided the world’s history. To pass that way-mark was to pass from the preparatory to the final, from the old to the new, from law to grace, from prophecy to fulfillment. Before Christ one day had been as a thousand years, but now a thousand years were*

as one day” (Levi Palmer). So mighty and revolutionizing the change effected by the advent of God’s Son, that henceforth time is measured more by events than by duration. The birth, death and resurrection of Christ, and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, were events which represented more than all the previous “hours” or seasons of human history.

The proofs for the Scripturalness of the above assertions are many and decisive. It was “*when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman*” (Gal 4:4), as it is in this “*dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one [“family”—3:15] all things in Christ, both which are in heaven [the holy angels], and which are on earth [redeemed sinners]; even in Him*” (Eph 1:10). “*Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come*” (1Co 10:11): not the end of the material world, but (as the Greek means) of the ages. All previous ones were but introductory: they furnished the types, this one has the substance. The last of those periods which God has assigned to the duration of this earth is the present order of things: no new administration of it will follow this era. “*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son*” (Heb 1:1,2). Finality has been reached: God has nothing further to communicate unto mankind. Christ is His ultimate revelation (compare “*last of all he sent unto them his son*”—Matt. 21:37): in Him there is the finishing of the unfolding of God’s mind, the conclusion of the making known of His will. There will be nothing higher, nothing further; what God has spoken through Christ will continue unaltered to the end of time.

Another apostle declares that Christ was “*foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you*” (1Pe 1:20). The Messianic age was at once the consummation of all that preceded it and itself the ultimate Divine economy. So also Jude reminded the saints that they had been forewarned how that there should be “*mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts*” (verse 18), and that this prediction was being fulfilled before their very eyes. Some have wrongly concluded from 1 Peter 1:5, that “*the last time*” is yet future. There Christians are informed that they are “*kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.*” While the “*salvation*” there mentioned is still future, for it has reference to the completion of their redemption (their resurrection and glorification) when the Lord Jesus shall “*appear the second time without sin unto salvation*” (Heb 9:28), when the open vision of Him will perfectly conform us unto His holy image (1Jo 3:2); yet that blessed hope will be realized and that glorious event will take place “*in the last time*” and not in some subsequent age lying beyond the close of this present one. “*John announced ‘that it was the last time’ or the last dispensation, which God intended to introduce on earth, under which He would establish the kingdom of His Son... and this kingdom should continue till all enemies were put under His feet*” (T. Scott).

As indicated above, this Christian dispensation is designated “*the last time*” for two reasons: first, in relation to former times, which were introductory, paving the way for it; second, in relation unto the remainder of human history, for at the end of it the curtain will fall. There is nothing in the expression itself to determine the length thereof, nothing to intimate that it might not last longer than any previous one or be even more protracted than all others put together. Certainly Christ gave no intimation that His absence would be a brief one. Instead, He foretold that “*while the Bridegroom tarried*” all would slumber and sleep. He spoke of His departure as “*travelling into a far country,*” and said that “*after a long time*” He would return and reckon with His servants (Mat 25:14,19). “*Since then nineteen centuries have dragged their weary round, but compared to what happened in John’s day, they would not make one hour. And time’s hour glass may yet contain other centuries, or millenniums, or even half an eternity, but compared to what took place in the first century of the Christian era, they can only be as moments or minutes. It is the last hour (or time), although its moments may be centuries, and its minutes millenniums*” (Levi Palmer).

We shall give here only the briefest of answers to the third question, reserving our fuller remarks thereon for verse 22 (D.V.). Suffice it now to say that an “*antichrist*” is an antagonist of Christ and a corrupter of His doctrine. From those words “*ye have heard that antichrist shall come,*” it is clear that the saints of those days, even the youngest of them, were taught to expect that, so far from Christianity making a speedy and complete conquest of the world, there would be fierce opposition against it; that the servants and followers of Christ would be no more acceptable to the unregenerate than was their Master. Yet it must not be supposed that they were entertained with a cheap sensationalism under the guise of “*expounding prophecy,*” but rather were they informed that it was God’s will that the enmity which He put between the serpent’s seed and Christ’s seed would continue until the end. Therefore they must be prepared to encounter false prophets, and persecution if they withstood them. Implicitly, this “*ye have heard that antichrist shall come*” was a solemn and urgent exhortation unto believers to contend earnestly for the Faith, and to instruct new converts in the duty of watchfulness against deceivers.

Nor is there any need for us to say much upon the “*many antichrists*” of the apostle’s day, the chief reference being to the Gnostics and to such men as Hymenaeus and Philetus (2Ti 2:17,18). In view of the faithful instruction and warnings which Christians were then receiving from the ministers of God, there was no excuse for any of them being taken

unawares and imposed upon. But alas, how sadly were such warnings generally disregarded is only too evident from history. The Christ-hated doctrine of Balaam and the Nicolaitanes (Rev 2:14,15), and the suffering of one who called herself a prophetess to seduce His servants (2:20) were the precursors of many others in the next three hundred years, and by the close of the sixth century almost the whole of Christendom was as completely deceived as though God had given no warning against the anti-christ, and for almost a thousand years there followed what are known as the “*dark ages*.” Concerning antichrist Calvin remarked, “They who suppose that he would be only one man are indeed greatly mistaken,” and then pointed out that such influential heretics as Cerinthus, Marcion, Ebion, etc., “were members of that kingdom which the Devil afterward raised up [in the papacy] in opposition to Christ.”

The question, In what way did the presence of many antichrists make it evident that “*the last time*” had even then begun? also admits of a short and simple answer. As increasing infirmities and failing faculties are sure signs that old age is upon us, so the presence of antichrists was proof that the true Christ had come, and since He had ushered in the final era for this earth, naught remained but the judgment of God—His longsufferance alone postponing the same. The outstanding characteristic of all former ages was the rejection of the Truth, not only in man’s refusal to be subject to God’s Law but particularly that revelation which He had made through the prophets concerning His Son; whereas the most prominent feature of this dispensation is the reception of error, especially seen in the corrupting of the Gospel. As the presence of counterfeit money argues the existence of the genuine, so those who set up themselves against the person and kingdom of Christ are tacit but real witnesses unto the same. The fact that those false prophets received such a welcome and favourable hearing in John’s day was proof that, to use the language of 1 Peter 4:7, “*the end of all things is at hand*.”

As to why John brought in 2:18 at this point in his epistle, several reasons may be suggested. First of all, it gave point to his preceding statement. In verse 17 he had said, “*the world passeth away*,” and now he declares, “*it is the last time*”—its harvest was ready for the sickle. Thus, second, it was a note of imminency and urgency. In the whole context John had made it clear that the world in which believers are left as witnesses for Christ is a very evil one, and here they are informed that it has entered upon the final stage of its history. It must be “*the last time*,” for the lowest depths of human depravity have been exhibited in the world’s treatment of God’s Son: the climax of its sinfulness appeared in His precious blood being despised and trampled upon by man’s unbelief. Moreover, the presence of the “*many antichrists*” was a fearful omen that the final catastrophe was impending, for their evil activities made unmistakably plain the determined and continued antagonism of the world unto Christianity. How evident it is that our present verse, so far from beginning a new paragraph, is a continuation of what went before. In verse 16 we behold how the “*darkness*,” mentioned in verses 9 and 11, had corrupted the world; here we see the darkness opposing the Truth.

Third, verse 18 was brought in for the special benefit of babes in Christ, who are less suspicious of false prophets, and not yet able to say of Satan “*we are not ignorant of his devices*” (2Co 2:11). Therefore they needed to beware of teachers of error lest they make shipwreck of the Faith, for the words of such “*will eat as doth a canker*” (2Ti 2:17). The very name “*antichrists*” should awaken the deepest horror and concern, for it imports that they are opposed to Christ and all who adhere to Him, ready to rob them of every blessing enjoyed in Him. The fact that there were many of them intimated that on every side were deadly enemies unto faith and holiness. Of this they “*had heard*.” No truth which was profitable had been kept from them; everything the apostles had heard from the lips of Christ they faithfully committed to their converts. It therefore behoved them to make a proper use of such instruction, especially since so much contrary to sound doctrine was prevailing. Finally, since this era is the completion of all previous ones, great are the privileges and obligations of the saints.

The practical importance and value of verse 18 for us today lies, principally, in our noting and taking to heart its moral connection with verses 15-17, where a number of reasons are advanced why we must not love the world, while here we are warned against antichrists. There is a far more intimate relation between the state of our hearts and the receptivity or repulsion of our minds to error than is commonly supposed. Yet that relation is not far to seek nor difficult to understand. The doctrine of Scripture “*is according to godliness*” (1Ti 6:3), and therefore just so far as the heart be in a sound and healthy state will the holy and searching truth of God be acceptable to it. As John points out a little later concerning the false prophets, “*They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them*” (4:5). Such charlatans quote (and misquote) sufficient of the Bible to deceive the unwary, but they are careful to omit everything unpalatable to the unregenerate, which rebukes carnality or calls to a closer walking with God. They deliberately tone down the Truth and prophesy “*smooth things*.” And “*the world heareth them*,” because their rotten hearts fully accord with such preaching.

As we pointed out in a previous article, the world is the sphere where the darkness reigns, and therefore the more a believer comes under its influence the less spiritual perception will he have and the less ability to “*try things that differ*” (Phi 1:10). It is in God’s light that we see light (Psa 36:9), and morally speaking we are far from Him when our affections be set upon things on earth. It is only so long as the sheep follow Christ (walk according to His example, in obedience to

His commandments) that “*a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him*” (Joh 10:4,5). In proportion as the soul finds its satisfaction in Christ will the world repel it; but when the heart grows cold unto Him, the things of the world appeal to it. The first century supplies numerous examples of that sad fact, and not a few wonder how it was possible for so many of the early churches to be corrupted (Rev 2:14,15,20); the explanation is found in “*thou hast left thy first love*” (2:4). When a soul or church does that, the door is open for the entry of every possible abomination.

We have an illustration in the case of Isaac of a believer being deceived when his heart is not right with God. How came it that he was tricked by so clumsy a device as Jacob’s? He knew that the voice was Jacob’s; were then his neck and hands a surer test? Surely not. Then how are we to account for his being imposed upon in a way that no man of the world, with common sense, would be? The answer is, because he was out of communion with the Lord, and when that be the case with any saint he is likely to be deceived by the grossest of shams. It is quite clear from the preceding record that the eye of faith in Isaac was as dim as his natural ones, otherwise he would have discerned the sinfulness and madness of trying to fight against the Most High. He was displeased at God’s appointment regarding his two sons, that the elder should serve the younger (Gen 25:23). He deliberately sought to turn the purpose of God into another channel, and in his intention gave to Esau the blessing which God had said should be Jacob’s. It was the flesh and not the spirit which was dominating him, and that dulled even his natural judgment.

First, Isaac had done wrong in making Esau his favourite, and that because of the venison he provided for him (25:28). Second, he condoned Esau’s act in marrying a Hittite (26:34), for as 27:1 indicates, he continued to show partiality unto him. Third, in his old age and as death drew near, he yielded to the lusts of the flesh, determining to gratify his carnal appetite by eating of his savoury meat. No wonder his judgment was blinded. But later, when he was made conscious of his failure to recognize Jacob and of his attempt to set aside God’s choice, he “*trembled very exceedingly*” (27:33). Then it was that his slumbering faith awoke, and the scales fell from his eyes. Now he bowed to the Divine will, and in spite of natural prejudice said of the one who had tricked him, “*yea, and he shall be blessed.*”

Now as the allowing of carnality dulls the judgment of a believer, so does the entry into his heart of a spirit of worldliness; consequently he is likely not only to be imposed upon by natural things, but to mistake error for truth. “*If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine*” (Joh 7:17). In order to spiritual perception there must be a steadfast refusal to follow the ways of the world. Error always flourishes most in the soil of worldliness, and it is there that the antichrists meet with success.

Chapter 28

APOSTATES

1 John 2:19

The first of those “*perilous times*” announced to take place in “*the last days*”—i.e. the Christian dispensation—had begun. Those “*having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof... ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*” had appeared in John’s day; men of whom it had to be said: “*Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith*” (2Ti 3:5-8). The Spirit’s prediction in 1 Timothy 4:1 was likewise receiving a fulfillment: “*in the latter times [i.e. the present era] some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.*” Impostors and heretics were rising apace: antichrist had already begun to show himself in the false teachers and seducers who were his forerunners. It was therefore necessary for the apostle to make reference to a very great evil which had broken out among some of the congregations of the saints, for these apostates had formerly been numbered among and had enjoyed fellowship with them. As Jude also declared, “*For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness*” (verse 4), by coming out in their true colours as the opposers of His Christ.

“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.”

The opening word of our present verse at once makes it apparent that it is closely related to the preceding one, for the “they” has its antecedent in the “many antichrists” of verse 18. There John reminded the newly converted that they had heard antichrist should come, and that many of his tribe were even then in existence, whereby they might know that the last period of the world’s history had already dawned. It must be “the last time,” for God has nothing further to reveal, and therefore it is naught but His longsuffering which prolongs this final hour. Since it be the concluding season for mankind, no higher privileges will ever be vouchsafed to those on earth, and no other means of grace appointed by God than those which are now in existence: hence the urgent force of that exhortation, “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?” (Heb 2:3).

It was most needful that the saints should take notice of what the apostle had alluded to. First, to prevent them from being carried away with the error of the wicked, and thereby fall from their own steadfastness. The only safeguard against that was to continue cleaving unto the Lord, and maintain fellowship with Him by walking in separation from the world. It is when the heart departs from its anchorage that it is liable to be “tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine.” When the soul is not at rest, the mind cannot be: instead, it is ever seeking some fresh object to afford it satisfaction. It is the unstable who are always on the wing after some new opinion. King Saul forsook the Lord before he turned to the witch of Endor, as those mentioned in 1 Timothy 4:1, departed from the Faith ere they gave heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. A tender conscience is slow and cautious in receiving the Truth, and for that reason holds tenaciously to the same when assured it has it. A tender conscience examines carefully and weighs prayerfully whatever is presented to the mind. Not so a conscience which is seared by the world and put to sleep: with such there is no waiting on God for light, but an independence of mind which leans unto its own understanding, and a consequent running after novelties and an espousing of error.

“They went out from us.” Those antichrists were not men who had from the beginning been open antagonists to the Truth, but, instead, professing Christians. They were not those who took their rise from among the rejecters of the Gospel, but rather were such as had avowed their belief in and acceptance of the same. Formerly they had walked with the Lord’s people, and then had deserted them. The Greek is even more emphatic: “From among us they went out:” originally, they were members of Christian assemblies. The word rendered “us” (*hemon*) occurs again in 1 John 1:3; 3:16,20 (rendered “our”), 21; 4:6; 5:14,15. The statement that they went out signifies more than a local and corporeal departure, namely one in affection and doctrine. It was far more than their forsaking of any particular church for a season, and then walking irregularly: they became leaders of heretical sects contrary to the glory of Christ and the doctrine of His apostles, denying that the Son of God had come in the flesh. They were therefore apostates from the Faith, repudiators of the Gospel, though most of them still claimed to be “Christians,” yea, peculiarly enlightened and eminent ones.

Our present verse makes still more evident the propriety of the whole passage being addressed more specifically to the spiritual babes, for though all of God’s children need to take the same to heart, the younger ones especially so, since they were the ones most liable to be stumbled by the defection of these apostates. It is always a very disturbing and distressing thing for any of God’s people to see some of those whom they regarded as their fellow Christians apostatizing, the more so when such were members of their own local assemblies. Particularly is that the case with the recently converted. In the glow of his first love and newly found joy, his zeal longs to see his unsaved loved ones brought into the fold. But to behold some of those with whom he was in communion forsaking the church is a severe shock to him, and should some of the preachers he had sat under prove to be traitors and set themselves up in opposition to the Truth, that is indeed a shattering blow. Inexperienced as he is, yet unacquainted with the fickleness of human nature and the prevalence of hypocrisy, he little expects to find those whom he considered to be quite orthodox suddenly becoming thoroughly herodox.

By thus going out, those men renounced all subjection to the headship of Christ over His churches. Thereby they proclaimed themselves as hypocrites, devoid of any love to Him and His Word. It was a terrible thing to do: they were guilty of the fatal sin of apostasy. They started up new sects, drew away many disciples after them, and corrupted the worship of God. In so doing they disrupted the unity of the Faith, producing disorder in Christendom. Now, says the apostle (for such was the scope and design of his words here), be not shaken by this sad sight, for, first, you were forewarned that “antichrist should come,” and therefore instead of being perplexed and staggered by what you are now witnessing it should strengthen your faith. Second, as I have told you, the appearing of these many antichrists furnishes proof that “the last time” has come. Third, it was a word of warning for them to take heed unto themselves, to keep their hearts with all diligence, and to close their ears unto the horrible doctrines which were being propagated by these false prophets. Finally, there was, as he went on to state, a needs be why God permitted this tragic occurrence—that the line should be drawn between the genuine and the spurious, the latter being exposed for what they really were.

“They went out from us.” There have always been such. Even Moses had to say, “Certain men, the children of Belial, are gone out from among you, and have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city, saying, Let us go and serve other gods”

(Deu 13:13). There were false prophets in Israel as well as true ones, as Jehoshaphat discovered (1Ki 22:6,7). Through Jeremiah the Lord said, "*Hearken not unto the words of the prophets ... for they... prophesy a lie in My name*" (27:14,15). Ezekiel was told to "*prophesy against the prophets of Israel*" and to pronounce a "*woe*" upon them (13:2,3). Zephaniah declared, "*her prophets are light and treacherous*" (3:4). At the beginning of His ministry the Lord Jesus gave warning, "*Beware of false prophets*" (Mat 7:15). The church at Jerusalem found it necessary to send word to the Gentiles, "*Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain men which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment*" (Act 15:24): The carnality and unbelief of men's hearts always assure a welcome unto those who speak smooth things in order to win disciples. In his second epistle, Peter announced, "*there shall be false prophets among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies,*" adding "*and many shall follow their pernicious ways: by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of*" (2:1,2).

"*But they were not of us.*" John is very definite in repudiating these apostates, careful to point out that they were never anything more than nominal Christians. They had professed faith in the Gospel, had been baptized, received into fellowship with the Lord's people, and been admitted to His table; some of them had, perhaps, been church officers. John first informs us whence these antichrists sprang, and then he disowns them, denying that they were living branches of the Vine. They originated in Christian assemblies, but forsook the same. It was that which made them the more dangerous, for they knew the better how to sow their pernicious errors, and deceive the unwary. They were falsehearted professors who had cast off the sacred privileges of communion with the regenerate, and acknowledged no obligations to them. They pretended to have greater light, calling themselves Gnostics, or knowing ones. But the apostle here gives the lie to their proud boast, and then states a reason for and an explanation of their conduct: "*they were not of us*"—they were never of one heart and soul with God's people, for such love the Truth above everything on earth, and abhor whatever detracts from it. "

They were not of us." It was very necessary to make this clear, for apparently the Church had produced these vipers and nurtured them in her bosom: John therefore denies that they ever belonged to Christ—"as chaff, though mixed with wheat on the same floor, cannot yet be deemed wheat" (Calvin). They had not obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which had been delivered unto them: so far from being all that they seemed, they were but wolves in sheep's clothing. So it has been ever since. Almost all the heresies which have plagued the churches throughout the centuries originated from persons who were once in good standing in the assemblies. When some old error is revived, it is generally by those who were disaffected to the saints and apostatized from the Truth. Though for a season associated with believers, yet they were never united to them in spirit. As it was in the days of our Lord, "*many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him*" (Joh 6:66)—they were but nominal "*disciples,*" for verse 64 tells us they were of those "*that believe not.*" Paul warned the Ephesian saints, "*Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them*" (Act 20:30); and also lamented, "*Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world*" (2Ti 4:10).

Strange as it may appear to those who closely examine our present text, it is one of the verses appealed to by those who deny the eternal security of the regenerate. Arminians quote it in proof of their contention that it is not only possible for those who have been saved by Divine grace to fall away and be lost, but that many such have actually done so. But certainly there is nothing here to support their erroneous theory, but that which directly refutes it. Instead of furnishing an example of real Christians falling from grace, it is evident that the characters which are here in view never had any grace. Though their names had been registered upon an earthly church roll, they were never written in the Lamb's book of life. They may have had much head knowledge and zeal, but they were destitute of true piety. First, the apostle expressly declared "*they were not of us,*" and then he added "*for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us.*" Instead of belonging to the company of God's elect, they were reprobates. This is the case with all who repudiate the Truth and become teachers of error—they were never genuinely converted. It is a fundamental article of the Faith that no regenerate soul is ever suffered finally to apostatize: the honour of God is concerned in the preservation of such, the efficacy of Christ's redemption secures it, the sufficiency of the Spirit's indwelling and operations effects it.

A sound expositor always feels himself to be on the safest ground when he is able to interpret Scripture by Scripture: that is when he can locate another passage which is more or less parallel with the one before him, which uses different language but treats of the same subject. If he knows his Bible, he will naturally turn to Jude, for the distinctive theme of that epistle is "*apostasy,*" the second half of it describing in detail the character of the false prophets in this "*last time.*" Now our present text and the nineteenth verse of Jude are a case in point, for the one throws light upon the other, the latter affirming: "*These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.*" The first clause corresponds with John's "*they went out from us.*" It was not a brief lapse or temporary break in fellowship from the Church which is here in view, but an entire and total forsaking of the same, an unwillingness to be amenable any longer to its doctrine and dis-

cipline, and that because of worldly ends and the affectation of vainglory. The second half of the verse amplifies John's "but they were not of us:" they were 'sensual'—the Greek word being rendered "natural" in 1 Corinthians 2:14—unregenerate; "having not the Spirit" and therefore without any inward restraint upon their carnality, pride, and avarice—unsaved, abandoned by God.

"For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us." There was not need for the supplementary "no doubt" of the translators, in fact it tends to weaken the apostle's positive announcement. In those words he was supplying proof of his assertion in the foregoing clause. The force of his argument may be stated thus: the regenerate are endowed with a spirit of perseverance and run the race that is set before them, therefore those who quit the race and become apostates could never have been renewed in their hearts. It is the solemn engagement of God's everlasting covenant that He would put His fear into the hearts of His people, promising "they shall not depart from Me" (Jer 32:40)—from faith to infidelity, from Christ to Belial. Thus it is that steadfastness, loyalty and endurance are among the surest marks of the new birth. Said our Lord, "If ye continue in My word, then are ye [not "shall become such" because of so doing] My disciples indeed" (Joh 8:31, and cf. 1Co 15:2; Heb 3:6,14). Those who have been Divinely quickened will most assuredly remain true to the faith and persevere in holiness to the end of their earthly course. Such may indeed experience many a "fall," (but they "shall not be utterly cast down"—Psalm 37:24).

The new birth is a being made partaker of the Divine nature (2Pe 1:4), and while that is far from signifying that they are deified, it does mean "such moral qualities as may be imparted to the creature" (Manton). That which is received at regeneration is sometimes called "the life of God" (Eph 4:18), because it is a vital principle of action; sometimes the "image of God" (Col 3:10), because they bear a likeness to Him. One of the "moral qualities" which is imparted to the Christian is that of stability. We read in the Psalms that "the goodness of God endureth continually" (52:1), that "the glory of the Lord shall endure forever" (104:31), that "His righteousness endureth forever" (111:3), and that "His mercy endureth for ever" (136:1). As Christ declared, "they shall never perish" (Joh 10:28). Such a thing is impossible, for they were "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1Pe 1:23). Thus it is that constancy characterizes them: "and now abideth faith, hope, charity" (1Co 13:13). Those graces may indeed wax and wane, but be quenched they shall not. God's children are deeply rooted trees, and not chaff which the wind blows away.

"They would have continued with us." Those words were written for the encouragement of believers who feel their own weakness and have no confidence in the flesh; and not to provide a pillow for the presumptuous, nor for slothful fatalists. While they show that no Christian will fall from grace and be lost, yet they do not ignore his responsibility. They include within their scope not only the faithfulness of God in renewing their inner man day by day, but also the discharge of their duty in the use of means. The same power that made them Christians keeps them, yet "through faith" (1Pe 1:5)—through the exercise and cultivation of faith, and of all other graces, and not independently thereof. Remember that it is only by cleaving firmly to the words of God's lips that we can keep ourselves from the paths of the destroyer (Psa 17:4): then heed the injunction "Prove all things" (1Th 5:21), and give not place to "itching ears." It is not sufficient for us to shun the hearing or reading of false teaching; we also need to be constantly on our guard against inward defection, mortifying our lusts, and taking heed to the first decay of our love. It is much cause for thankfulness when we can truly say, "I have stuck unto Thy testimonies" (Psa 119:31).

"But they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." In this clause John states the reason why God had suffered the presence of antichrists, therefore it would probably be more perspicuous to supply "But [this occurred] that they might be made manifest," for the "they went out" was already definitely stated. Such characters are raised up by God to disturb the peace of the churches in order that the true may be distinguished from the false. Error serves as a flail to separate the wheat from the chaff. "For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (1Co 11:19). Let some plausible and popular preacher come forward with an old error decked out in new clothes, and empty professors will at once flock to his standard; but not so those who are established in the Truth. Thus, by means of false prophets, God purges His garner, and makes it appear who are the ones who hold the Truth in sincerity. The genuine gold endures every test to which it is subjected. Those who turn away from orthodoxy to heterodoxy must not be regarded as real Christians. Had these men been truly one with God's people in a personal experience of His saving grace, nothing could have induced them to apostatize.

As God Himself raised up these antichrists for His own wise reasons, so He also caused them to forsake the assemblies of the saints—to make it evident that they were but formal members, and of a totally different family from His own children. Previously they had every appearance of being the genuine article, but by their defection and opposition to Christ they were now revealed as counterfeits. He who searches the heart and tries the reins was determined to give definite proof that they were unregenerate men. Let them boast as loudly as they pleased of being among the Lord's beloved ones, their conduct gave the lie to such a claim; they never had any root in Christ, but were merely external and tempo-

rary followers. Those whom God gives up unto strong delusion to believe a lie are such as never truly received His Truth in the love of it, for none of His people are ever suffered to deny the Faith after their conversion. Since they never “*knew the grace of God in truth*” (Col 1:6), He left them to the pride and corruptions of their hearts and the wiles of Satan, to be deceived into the espousing and propagating of fatal heresies; and though they drew many professing Christians after them, their divisions served a useful and necessary purpose, inasmuch as they made manifest those who were the friends and those who were the enemies of Christ.

Chapter 29

OUR ANOINTING

1 John 2:20

*“But ye have an unction from the Holy One,
and ye know all things”*

From what was before us in the last article it is clear that the preaching of the apostles themselves did not result in the conversion of all who were convinced of its verity. From a very early date God made it appear that the Gospel net enclosed bad fishes as well as good ones (Mat 13:47,48), that not all who took upon them the name of Christ were His disciples indeed. What Paul predicted in Acts 20:30,31 was soon fulfilled: nominal Christians apostatized from the Faith, disturbed the peace and harmony of the churches, prejudicing many against God’s faithful servants, alluring such to follow them and organize themselves into heretical sects and schisms. Yet both 1 John 2:19, and Jude 19 furnish conclusive proof that such men were devoid of true piety. It is therefore a mark of God’s goodness and mercy unto His people when His providence so orders it that those who are not one with them at heart, but who in fact hate all that is holy, should withdraw from them. It is a blessing to the churches when those who are determined to walk after their own lusts forsake their fellowship, for while they remain they are but Achans who draw down the judgment of God upon the whole congregation.

Some of the very worst sins men are guilty of may be committed under the purest preaching of the Gospel and the most spiritual administration of its ordinances. The antichrists referred to by John are a definite case in point. None can be supposed to have clearer light externally into the doctrine and practice, worship and discipline, of genuine Christianity than those apostates enjoyed; yet none ever sinned more willingly and perversely. We too have beheld those who departed from the Truth: men like blazing comets for a season, professing to have superior light and sanctity, who are greatly admired and secure a large following, yet who are of their father the Devil. Yet such occurrences should not shake the saints. When Paul made mention of two heretics of his day, “*who concerning the truth have erred... and overthrow the faith of some,*” he at once added “*nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure*” (2Ti 2:18,19)—the combined effort of Satan and all his agents cannot shake it. “*The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations*” (Psa 33:11). His Church is built upon the Rock of ages and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Paul then went on to say, “*The Lord knoweth them that are His,*” which means not only that He recognizes them amid the mass of professors (which we are not always able to do), but that He loves them and makes all things work together for their good. Then the apostle added, “*Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.*” The fact that God overrules the perfidy of apostates to His own glory and the good of His people, by making manifest hypocrites on the one hand and those who are approved of Him on the other, does not excuse the former nor must we palliate their awful guilt, but shun them as a plague. And while those who by grace remain steadfast to Christ and His Gospel are not to be stumbled by the infidelity of graceless professors, yet they are to take the same to heart and turn it into earnest prayer, crying, “*O let me not wander from Thy commandments*” (Psa 119:10). Say not in a spirit of fatalism, If I have been born again I shall never perish, for God gives warning, “*Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall*” (1Co 10:12). God has not promised to preserve the reckless. To affirm that He will preserve us whether or not we use the means of grace is not the language of faith, but of presumption and impiety. True faith produces a spirit of humility and self-distrust. True faith causes us to work out our own salvation “*with fear and trembling.*”

“But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things” (verse 20). This is in sharp and blessed contrast with what has been before us in the preceding verses, and shows the gracious provision which the Lord has made for *“His own,”* to preserve them from embracing fatal error. The antichrists had formerly been admitted to communion with the saints, but their subsequent apostasy proved that (like Judas) they had been hypocrites from the beginning. They were of the world and not of God, for His Truth dwelt not in their *“inward parts”* (Psa 51:6). Had they been born of Him they would have remained faithful to Christ and His Gospel. God permitted them to forsake the assemblies of His saints to make it evident that they had never received the anointing which is from above. By their defection they only made more apparent the real people of God, who will not sell the Truth at any price. Many appear to take the yoke of Christ upon them, but afterwards fall away and return to their wallowing in the mire; but those who are effectually called persevere unto the end, for the Spirit has been given to be with them *“for ever”* (Joh 14:16), and the prevalent intercession of Christ ensures their preservation (Heb 7:25). Thus the distinction between the two classes is made to be seen more clearly.

The relation of our present verse to the one immediately preceding, which mentions the going out of certain ones from the churches, was well expressed by J. Morgan: *“They had been exposed to the temptation of false teachers, and they did not endure the test. They were drawn away by the speculative errors presented to them, and so evidenced that they were not ‘rooted and grounded’ in the Truth. On the contrary those whom the apostle commends in our text had remained firm in the midst of all attempts to seduce them from the faith.”* Thus the blessedness of our present verse is greatly enhanced by the sharp antithesis presented in the foregoing: the former supplying a dark background to bring out into clearer relief the excellence of this gift of the Saviour’s—the antichrists, the anointing. Those words clearly intimate that John entertained no fear that any of the saints would apostatize and bring reproach upon the cause of Christ. They had received such an unction from above as enabled them to understand and lay hold of those things which belonged to their everlasting peace, and which insured their perseverance in the Faith.

Brief though our present verse be, it possesses a fullness which no expositor or commentator can exhaust. It treats of that which in our day receives but scant attention. It speaks of one of the outstanding benefits and blessings which God bestows on His people. *“But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.”* What is meant by the *“unction”* (or *“anointing,”* for that is the meaning of *“chrisma,”* and it is so translated in verse 27) which believers are here said to have? Who is meant by *“the Holy One”* from whom it comes? What is signified by *“and ye know all things”*? In what sense or senses do they *“know”* them? Important questions are these, yet none of them is difficult to answer. We shall, however, consider the second one first, and ponder the Anointer, then the anointing, and last the anointed.

Who is the Anointer or *“Holy One?”* It is surprising that one of Albert Barnes’s acumen should say it is the Holy Spirit, for there is not the least room for doubt that it is the Lord Jesus Christ who is here in view. As the Son of God, He is essentially holy, as appears by comparing Isaiah 6:1, with John 12:41. In His humanity, impeccably holy (Luk 1:35). In His life upon earth, ineffably holy (Heb 7:26). In His official character He was prefigured by Israel’s high priest, who wore upon his forehead a plate of pure gold on which was inscribed *“Holiness to the Lord”* (Exo 28:36). In Old Testament prophecy He was designated the *“Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel”* (Isa 41:14, and cf. 54:5). In the days of His flesh the demons owned Him as *“the Holy One of God”* (Luk 4:34). After His ascension the apostles referred to Him as *“the Holy One”* (Act 3:14). Thus it is abundantly clear from the Scriptures that *“the Holy One”* is one of the Redeemer’s Divine titles: for as none but God is essentially holy, and Christ is the Holy One, then He must be God!

Further, that the Lord Jesus is the person from whom God’s people receive an unction appears from the fact that not only is He the *“Holy One,”* but He is also *“the Christ”* or the Anointed One. He was not only chosen and ordained to the mediatorial office, but furnished for the same by anointing. During the Old Testament economy, prophets, priests and kings were anointed unto and confirmed in their office by anointing (Lev 8:12; 2Sa 5:3; 1Ki 19:16), pointing forward to Him who should be, in His own person, Prophet, Priest and Potentate alike. The anointing of the Redeemer was announced in Messianic prophecy: *“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me; because the Lord hath anointed Me to preach glad tidings unto the meek”* (Isa 61:1). That was fulfilled at His entrance upon His public ministry, when *“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil”* (Act 10:38), the historical reference being to what is recorded in Matthew 3:16, when the Spirit of God descended like a dove and lighted upon Him. It was the furnishing of the God-man Mediator with all the necessary gifts for the discharge of His office (Isa 11:1,2). Immediately after, He was said to be *“full of the Holy Ghost”* (Luk 4:1).

The Lord Jesus is denominated the Messiah (the Hebrew term) and the Christ (the Greek) from this unction of the Spirit, for each of those two titles signifies *“The Anointed One.”* At the triumphant completion of His work, when He ascended into heaven, the Saviour was again anointed by God—anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows (Heb 1:9), when He received the Spirit to pour out upon His disciples; there termed *“the oil of gladness”* to celebrate His victory and exaltation, and to denote His deliverance from any further trouble and distress. As Peter declared of Christ on the day of Pentecost, *“Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise*

of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this” (Act 2:33). “I beheld...a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth” (Rev 5:6). In each of those passages the ascended Christ is seen dispensing this gift, conferring the Spirit on His people. In His mediatorial work Christ fully met all the claims of God upon His people, and in proof thereof He has been given the Spirit to communicate to them. This is clear from Galatians 3:13,14: Christ’s gift of the Spirit is the result of His removing God’s curse from us, and thereby putting away our sins. His forerunner declared, “He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost” (Mar 1:8).

Christ had referred to the Comforter thus: “whom I will send unto you from the Father” (Joh 15:26). And again, “If I depart, I will send Him unto you” (Joh 16:7). Such passages as those contain the balancing truth to Isaiah 11:1-3; 61:1,2, where the Mediator is viewed as subordinate to the Spirit; but in Revelation 3:1, He has the Spirit, in John 15:26, He promises to send the Spirit, and in Acts 2:33, He actually bestows Him; so there we see the Spirit subordinate to the Son. Put the two together, and we learn that there is a conjoined mission in which the Son and the Spirit act in unison for the salvation of God’s elect: the Son effecting their redemption, the Spirit applying it. Moreover, while the Spirit is from Christ, likewise His great mission is to direct souls to Christ. “As the Spirit never acts but in and through Christ with respect to His people, so Christ is never received but by and with the influences of the Spirit. They are as united in Their operations as in Their essence” (Ambrose Serle). That Christ received the Spirit to bestow upon His redeemed was blessedly prefigured in the anointing of the high priest, of which we read, “The precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments” (Psa 133:2)—reaching to the lowest of his members!

“But ye have an unction from the Holy One.” Believers have nothing but what they have in and from Christ: it is “of His fullness” that all of them receive “and grace for grace” (Joh 1:16). The Spirit is given to Christ immediately, to us derivatively, for in all things He has the pre-eminence. “For God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him” (Joh 3:34), whereas in our case “unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ” (Eph 4:7). The Spirit dwells in Christ by radiation, in us by operation. Therefore as communicating to us by the Saviour He is denominated the “Spirit of Christ” (Rom 8:9) and “the Spirit of His Son” (Gal 4:6). This is one of the vital points on which “the Greek Catholic Church” errs, for she insists that the Spirit proceeds from the Father only. That is a most serious error, for there is no higher exhibition of the Godhead of the Saviour than the fact that He is represented in the Scriptures to be the Possessor and the Sender of the Spirit to His redeemed: nothing more clearly demonstrates the full equality of the Son with the Father. It is a decisive proof of His deity, for no mere servant of God, however exalted his station, could possibly confer such a gift as the Spirit Himself.

There was a peculiar propriety in saying that the believer’s unction is “from the Holy One,” for the purpose of the same is to make him holy. As Haupt rightly pointed out, “The fundamental idea of anointing in the Old Testament is the setting apart of an object from a common use to the service of God—from the world to holy fellowship. It must be remembered that things as well as persons—the vessels of the tabernacle, etc. (Lev 8:10,11)—were anointed in order for a separation from a profane to a sacred use. The stone which Jacob anointed was set apart as the place where God had manifested Himself (Gen 28:18).” Thus, here, the anointing is both the communication of a spiritual gift and an operation which separates the individual from the world and all that is opposed to God, consecrating him to Him. It was so with the Lord Jesus Himself, for the coming of the Spirit upon Him was both the endowing of Him for His mediatorial work (Isa 61:1) and the Divine setting apart of Him unto His mission (Mat 3:16,17). Thus it is with His members. The unction He received He imparts to them. He is the Anointer, they are the anointed ones, and as such the christs of the Christ, He being designated “the Christ” (Mat 16:16), “the Christ of God” (Luk 9:20), “the Lord Christ” (Col 3:24) by way of eminence.

The Holy Spirit is the vital bond of union with Christ. The One cannot be without the Other. If we have Christ as our Saviour, we have the Spirit for our Indweller. When Christ takes possession of anyone, He puts the Spirit within him: if he lacks the latter, he has no saving interest in the former. That is unmistakably clear from, “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His” (Rom 8:9). He who claims to belong to the Lord Jesus and gives no evidence of being indwelt by the Spirit of Christ lacks the only irrefragable proof which establishes the validity of his claim, and thus his profession is falsified. We cannot be Christ’s “fellows” (Heb 1:9) unless we are His brethren or companions, and that cannot be without partaking of His anointing. This it is which distinguishes “the wise virgins” from the foolish ones, the actual possessors from graceless professors, the former having “oil in their vessels” (Mat 25:4). In due course, all of God’s elect receive this unction: “Now He which establisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God” (2Co 1:21)—a decisive proof that Christ, our Anointer, is Divine. At regeneration we are made members of Christ’s mystical body, partakers in our measure of those gifts and graces which our Head received without measure.

Both Christ and His Church come under this office-act of God the Spirit, for as the Redeemer could not have been the Messiah without His unction, neither could the Church have been His spouse without the same. As it was from the

Spirit's unction that the Lord Jesus received His name "*the Christ*," so it is from their being anointed ones that believers receive their name—Christians (1Pe 4:16), signifying that they are anointed with the Spirit. This it is which is the distinguishing mark of every truly born-again soul; he is made the temple of the Holy Spirit. Yet we say again, it is not the Spirit who anoints us: rather is He the unction wherewith we are anointed by Christ. Even where the Saviour Himself was concerned, the Spirit was not the Anointer, but His anointing, for He was anointed by the Father (Act 4:27). Our anointing is by a holy Saviour (Rom 8:2) to fit us for holy converse and walking with Him. It is received out of His fullness (Col 2:9,10). We can have no gift or grace but in and by and from the Lamb of God. The love of the Father centers in Christ Jesus our Lord and flows through Him to us (Rom 8:39). The apostle, then, would keep our eyes fixed on Christ, the Holy One: then let us praise Him for this "*unction*," which is the fruit of His death for us.

The anointing of believers sanctifies and consecrates them as kings and priests unto God (Rev 1:6) as those persons were typically during the Old Testament era. "Whereas, therefore, those titles denote the dignity of believers in their especial relation unto God, by this unction they are peculiarly dedicated and consecrated unto Him" (John Owen). The Spirit then takes up His abode within their hearts with all His graces, operations, gifts, and enablings. He does so on a twofold basis. First, on the ground of redemption: in the types, the oil (emblem of the Spirit) was always placed upon the blood (Lev 14:14,17)—it is on the ground of atonement accomplished that the Spirit comes to believers, which at once sets aside human merits. Yet, second, there must be a moral fitness as well. The Spirit of God will not dwell within unbelieving rebels: "*After [or "when"] that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise*" (Eph 1:13). When we repudiate all idols, surrender to Christ as Lord, and trust in the efficacy of His sacrifice, the heart is prepared for the Spirit to enter and take possession for Christ's use. When we give up ourselves to Christ, He owns the dedication by making our bodies the temples of the Holy Spirit, there to maintain His interests against all the oppositions of the Devil.

"*But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.*" The first benefit which believers have by this anointing is an illumination of their minds. Not that the Spirit imparts any superior mental endowment, or that anything over and above what is contained in Holy Writ is revealed to them: rather does He enable them to perceive what the natural man cannot discern (1Co 2:14), by His effectual application of the Truth to their hearts. In order to see, two things are necessary: the organ of vision within, and light from without—the Spirit imparts the former, the Scripture furnishes the latter. Their knowledge is such as to deliver from fatal delusions and preserve them from apostasy. As Levi Palmer aptly declared, "The departure of the antichrists [verse 19] shows the supreme importance of our abiding discipleship. But in order thus to abide it is necessary to have what may be called a Divine tuition, whereby we may be able to detect error. Neither heart nor intellect will do—nothing can be sufficient less than the '*seven eyes, which are the Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth*' (Rev 5:6; R.V. margin). It is this power of spiritual discernment which all believers receive in the gift of the Spirit."

Chapter 30

CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE

1 John 2:21

"I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth."

"*But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things*" (verse 20). It is important to perceive the intimate connection between those two things: the believer's anointing and his knowledge are related as are cause and effect. Not only are the regenerate separated from the world by this unction, but they are also distinguished from the unregenerate in point of essential knowledge. The gift of the Spirit consecrates their souls and bodies as His temples to dwell in, and His gracious operation within imparts to them the true knowledge of Divine things. As we saw in our last, when we dwelt almost entirely upon the first part of the verse, the Spirit which Christ received without measure He communicates to His redeemed in a degree suited to finite creatures. In consequence thereof they are sharers, in their measure, of His knowledge, so that they can say, "*we have the mind of Christ*" (1Co 2:16). Himself the Wisdom of God, His saved ones

are the children of wisdom (Mat 11:19), the children of light. Thus, from another angle, verse 20 is a reiteration of “*which thing* [namely the exercise of brotherly love] *is true* [is realized] *in Him and in you*” (verse 8): in Him originally, in us derivatively; in Him essentially, in us reflectively; in Him perfectly, in us faultily.

“*But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.*” The last clause, equally with the first, calls for the expositor, that its meaning may be made clear. It is another example where we must distinguish between the sound and the sense of Scripture. To take the “*ye know all things*” at its face value, without restriction, would be to affirm that the regenerate are omniscient—a manifest absurdity. Let this be duly noted by those who are so fond of saying, “Scripture always means what it says, and requires no explaining by man.” There is not a little in the Bible which requires a Divinely qualified teacher to interpret, for it is God’s general way to make use of such in “*opening*” His Word to the rank and file of His people. “*Ye know all things*” signifies that those who have received the Spirit are given a saving apprehension of the fundamental parts of the Gospel, so that they are brought out of darkness into God’s marvelous light, and thereby fitted to commune with and obey Him. Believers can say that God “*hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true*” (1Jo 5:20), and knowing Him they know all things which are necessary to their everlasting well-being. “*And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent*” (Joh 17:3).

We can have no saving and sound knowledge of Divine things without this anointing, for the natural man is incapable of discerning spiritual things. All the teaching of men, even of the Lord’s most faithful and eminent servants, is inefficacious without it. God cannot be apprehended merely by the intellectual faculty, for He is spirit (Joh 4:24), and therefore can be known only by those who are made spiritual. A living knowledge of God consists of a personal discovery of Him to the heart, such as conveys a true, supernatural, affecting realization of His surpassing excellence. When He makes such a discovery of Himself to the soul, its favoured recipient exclaims, “*I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee*” (Job 42:5), as a glorious Reality. Note well, John did not say “*we know all things,*” but “*ye:*” it was not a privilege peculiar to the apostles. Nor is this an experience reserved for the “*fathers*” in Christ only: rather is it shared by all the renewed. Said the Saviour to His Father, “*Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes*” (Mat 11:25). Contextually the “*and ye know all things*” means that by the gracious teaching of the Spirit believers are granted an experiential and effectual knowledge of Divine things so that no propagator of error can fatally deceive them. He alone can impart that wisdom which secures against delusions. The Spirit of Truth communicates such a personal and practical acquaintance with the things of God as preserves from total apostasy. Still more narrowly: they are admitted into a saving acquaintance with the person and work of Christ, which the antichrists denied. Not that any are vouchsafed a perfect knowledge, for in this life we only “*see through a glass, darkly*” (1Co 13:12); nor all Christians to the same degree and extent. But each one has so opened to him the mysteries of grace that he is secured against all the ruinous cheats of the enemy: it is to be noted that in 2 Corinthians 1:21, “*establisheth*” and anointing are linked together. If, however, the “*and ye know all things*” be interpreted in the light of the general Analogy of Faith, it has a much wider meaning. “The whole truth concerning Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Father, in all its bearings on the Divine character and counsels, as well as on human experience and hope” (Calvin). Let us amplify the second part of the Reformer’s definition.

It is with the desire to help some of our weaker and fearing brethren that we now enter into detail. Such are inclined seriously to doubt that they have “*an anointing from the Holy One,*” for so far from being assured that they savingly “*know all things,*” they are painfully conscious of their ignorance. Then, first, those who have received this anointing are firmly persuaded that the Bible is the Word of God, so that they doubt not its inspiration, nor question its authority. A work of grace is attended with a spiritual conviction of the judgment of the reality and certainty of Divine things. Its subjects are assured of the truth of the Gospel, so that they no longer halt between two opinions of its Origin. God’s way of salvation ceases to be a doubtful thing to them. These are matters which are settled in their minds beyond any dispute, so that they value them above all else. They know the Bible to be God’s Word, for it has judged and searched them, exposing the secrets of their hearts. They have the weight and power of it on their souls.

Second, they have a humbling and experiential knowledge of sin: not merely from an awakened conscience, but more immediately from the anointing they have received. The former occupies the mind more with sin’s consequences, the latter with its nature. The Holy Spirit is the great Convicter of sin (Joh 16:8). It is an essential part of His office work to remove the scales from the eyes of those in whom He operates, so that they behold Him in the light of God’s holiness. As He does so, the soul perceives the awful sinfulness of sin: its excuselessness, its filthiness, its vileness; that it is “*that abominable thing*” which the Lord hates (Jer 44:4). The soul now realizes what all sin really is, namely a revolt against God, an opposition to Him, the outbreaking of the heart’s inveterate enmity against Him. The Holy Spirit brings to light the hidden things of darkness and makes the convicted soul recognize that the whole of his life has been one of self-

seeking and self-pleasing, of continuous insubjection to God. That brings him to condemn himself as a guilty criminal, as a vile leper, and to take his place before God in the dust.

Third, they know what real repentance is: not only theoretically, but practically. As the sinner learns what he is in himself—in a state of depravity, darkness and death, utterly unfit for the presence of God—he is overwhelmed with horror and anguish. God now reproves him, setting his sins in order before his eyes (Psa 50:16-21), so that he exclaims, “*my sin is ever before me*” (Psa 51:3). “*The arrows of the Almighty*” stick in his heart (Job 6:4), so that he cannot get rid of them. He is made to feel what an evil and bitter thing it is to treat his Maker with contempt. He realizes that he has acted toward God with the basest ingratitude, abusing His goodness, perverting His mercies, despising His authority. His comeliness is turned into corruption (Dan 10:8), and he cries, “*Woe is me! for I am undone*” (Isa 6:5). He is filled with the most poignant sorrow for having offended so infinitely gracious a Being as the Majesty of heaven. He confesses: “*Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight*” (Psa 51:4).

Fourth, they know Christ as the sinner’s Saviour. They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. None but those with an urgent sense of need really turn unto the great Physician. It is only those who are conscious of being heavily laden who come unto Christ for relief and rest. Yet so legalistic and self-righteous is the human heart that, generally, a convicted sinner sets about his reformation and gives himself earnestly to religious performances, hoping to find peace for his conscience therein. But proving all self-efforts to be utterly vain, he is driven to despair. Then it is that his heart is prepared to welcome the good news of the Gospel. Then it is that this anointing gives him to see that Christ is in every way suited to his wretchedness, that His finished work is perfect, that His blood and righteousness require nothing whatever to be added unto them, that His so-great salvation is free, without money and without price. The blessed Spirit now works faith in such a soul, causing him to place his entire confidence in the Lord Jesus for the whole of his salvation. Now it is that he personally knows Christ to be an all-sufficient Saviour.

*“I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth,
but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth” (vs. 21).*

Once more the apostle inserts an explanatory word (compare 1:4; 2:1,12-14), stating why he has penned this section of his epistle. The frequency with which he did so strikingly evinced his modesty. Can the reader imagine “the Pope” of Rome, when sending a message to his “cardinals and priests,” condescending to give any reason for his conduct? No indeed, he is far too self-important and arrogant to do so. Not so this honoured ambassador of Christ, who almost apologizes for writing what he has. He pauses to assure them that it is not because he deems them to be uninstructed, nor because he fears they are unsound, or even wavering, in the Faith. Those are points on which the saints are very tender, resenting any suspicion upon their orthodoxy. Thus, this explanatory word of John’s was not only a mark of his humility, but a delicate consideration of their feelings as well. He would at once relieve their minds by letting them know that he entertained no doubts about their spiritual intelligence, but assured them that, since they had received an unction from the Holy One, he was fully persuaded that they were savingly acquainted with the Gospel in all its parts.

Yet as we first ponder this verse as a whole, there seems to be somewhat of a lack of coherence between it and the remainder of the passage of which it forms a part. After consulting many expositors, we consider that J. Gill best perceived its force. He suggested that the apostle was here obviating an objection which he saw might be made against what he had last said. Since he acknowledged that they “*knew all things*” why was it necessary for him to write as he was here doing? To this question John replies that he writes to them not as ill-informed but as instructed ones. They “*knew the truth*”: the Father as “*the God of truth*” (Jer 10:10); Christ as the embodiment of the truth (Joh 14:6); the Spirit as “*the Spirit of Truth*” (Joh 15:26); the Scriptures as “*the word of truth*” (Eph 1:13), by which the truth is to be defended and confirmed. If they had not “*known the truth*,” it had been to no purpose for him to write them about the antichrists. Moreover, though they were already taught of God, it was very proper for him to declare afresh those things which were most surely believed by them (Luk 1:1), that they might be still further established in the Faith and fortified against false doctrine.

The connection between our present verse and the preceding one appears too in that there the “*ye know all things*” (as the result of the Spirit’s anointing) is here defined more definitely as a knowledge of “*the truth*,” and therefore qualified to detect error. As Calvin expressed it, “they would be able readily to distinguish between light and darkness because they had the Spirit for their Guide.” From the above paragraph it will be seen that we do not restrict “*the truth*” in our text to either the personal Word or the written Word. We are always chary of limiting any biblical expression., Christ Himself is “*the truth*,” because the whole Truth of God is summed up and embodied in Him. Equally, as Christ said to the Father, “*Thy Word is truth*” (Joh 17:17). Even where the Truth is already known, there needs to be “*precept upon precept, line upon line*” (Isa 28:10). As Jude said, “*I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this*” (verse 5), and Paul: “*To write the same things to you, to me is not grievous, but for you it is safe*” (Phi 3:1). Not only are

the eyes of our understanding opened gradually, but memory is weak, affections sluggish, and much opposition is made by the flesh. Truth requires to be driven home, blow upon blow, if it is to be fixed "*as a nail in a sure place.*" Christ often repeated the same thing.

Having shown above something of the scope and contents of the believer's knowledge, let us now consider the kind or nature of it. There is a real and radical difference between the knowledge which a Christian has of the things of God and that which non-Christians may obtain of them as there is between the substance and the shadow cast by it. The latter is but "*the form of knowledge*" (Rom 2:20), a merely traditional, intellectual and historical knowledge, such as children have when they are taught to read and memorize the Scriptures without believing or understanding them. Later, it becomes an opinionative knowledge, so that they form their own ideas about certain doctrines or aspects of the Truth, and are able to discuss and dispute about them; yet it cannot be said of them that "*wisdom entereth into*" their hearts (Pro 2:10). They do not act out what they talk about. Yet there is a further degree of this speculative and theoretical knowledge, which may in some measure exercise their conscience and work upon their natural affections so as to offer opposition to temptations from without. They may be influenced thereby to lead moral and decent lives, so as to escape "*the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the [not "their"] Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*" (2Pe 2:20), yet their knowledge falls far short of conforming them to the image of God's Son.

The difference between gracious and graceless professors as to their knowledge lies not so much in the matter as in the manner of it. Some of the latter may greatly outstrip the former in the extent of their theological lore, and yet know nothing yet as they ought to know, nothing in a right manner, nothing spiritually; whereas the excellence of a believer's knowledge lies not in the largeness of his apprehension of Divine things, but that he sees them in the light and knows them in the power of the Spirit, so as to produce communion and walking with God. "*The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power*" (1Co 4:20), which means that the rule or dominion which God has over the hearts of His children is not a theory but a reality; it consists not in bare notions, nor in confident assertions, but in God's working effectually in the soul. "*For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance*" (1Th 1:5) inclining the heart to heavenly things. When the effects and fruits of the Gospel are accomplished in the inner man, an indelible and affecting impression is made upon the soul, such as the apostle had reference to when he said "*even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you*" (1Co 1:6).

Christian knowledge is an experiential one. The different aspects of Truth are no longer abstract propositions to him, but are by the effectual operation of the Spirit wrought into the very warp and woof of his soul. Hitherto he had at best only a nominal information of them, but now he has an inward and intuitive realization of the same. To the Jews Christ said, "*I am not come of Myself, but He that sent Me is true, whom you know not*" (Joh 7:28). Despite all their boasted belief in the one only, true and living God (Rom 2:17,18), they were at heart complete strangers to Him: well informed theologically, they had no spiritual union with Him. Nor had the writer or the Christian reader until they could say, "*For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*" (2Co 4:6). It is only by an inward revelation that He is savingly known: "*and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me*" (Gal 1:15,16).

Christian knowledge is a soul-humbling and self-abasing one. That knowledge of Divine things which is received in a natural way from men or from the reading of books "*puffeth up*" (1Co 8:1), producing self-esteem and presumption. But that spiritual knowledge which comes from God reveals to a person his empty conceits, his ignorance, his worthlessness. The teaching of the Spirit convinces the soul what a miserable failure he is, how very far short he falls of measuring up to the standard of conduct set before him, what horrible corruptions indwell him, and that makes him little in his own eyes. Among those born of women was not greater than John the Baptist: wondrous were the privileges granted him, abundant the light he was favoured with; yet he felt that "*I am not worthy to unloose*" Christ's shoe's latchet. None granted such an insight into heavenly things as Paul, yet he regarded himself as being not "*the greatest Bible teacher of the age,*" but as "*less than the least of all saints*" (Eph 3:8).

Christian knowledge is a certifying one. Its glorious Object is no longer known speculatively and inferentially, but truly and immediately: not by a process of reasoning, but directly. He who is spirit and invisible is made visible and palpable to the soul: Moses endured "*as seeing Him who is invisible*" (Heb 11:27)—God was real to his faith though imperceptible to his senses. Believers know "*the grace of God in truth*" (Col 1:6) by a sensible experience. As it is one thing for a friend to call upon us and inform us that the wind is biting cold, and quite another for us to walk with him or her to the bus and have the frost nip our nose and ears, so it is a very different thing to hear the preacher saying God's grace is sufficient for His children, and for them to prove the sustaining power of the same under the most trying and painful afflictions. So, too, to read that God is a prayer-hearing God, and for me to obtain definite and wonderful answers to my petitions. Again, as I ponder Romans 7 I know it is a true and accurate description of the saint's inward conflict, for it is verified in myself.

Christian knowledge is an operative one, for it is not a species of information which adds to our mental store, but an inspiration that stirs the soul unto action. However Scriptural be the notions possessed by the natural man, they exert no sanctifying influence upon him, and yield no godliness of character and conduct. His light is like that of the moon: it quickens not, nor produces fruit; however orthodox, it leaves the heart cold and barren. Whereas the light which the blessed Spirit communicates is like that of the sun: it not only illumines the understanding, but it searches the conscience, moves the will, and sets the heart on fire for God. His teaching is dynamical, having a vitalizing effect upon the whole of the inner man, stirring its subject unto holy endeavours. Spiritual knowledge is intensely practical, altering the disposition, producing obedience, conforming unto Christ.

There are multitudes in Christendom today of whom it must be said that they are “*ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the Truth*” (2Ti 3:7). They are not only regular attenders upon preaching, but many of them are even engaged in running around to one special “*meeting*” or “*communion*” to another, read much religious literature and have their heads stored with a mass of undigested theological details, yet arrive not at an experiential, practical, humbling, operative and transforming acquaintance with the things of God. And why is this? Because they have never received an anointing from the Holy One: that is what makes all the difference! But that anointing gives the regenerate a supernatural and sanctifying realization of the Truth. Not that they know as fully as they ought, or so as to preclude their duty of a diligent application on their part to make further progress therein. While they only “*know in part*” (1Co 13:9), and a very small part, yet they know it in a spiritual and saving way.

Chapter 31

LIES AND LIARS

1 John 2:21,22

Once more there is a very close connection between our present verses and the two immediately preceding them—a point which the expositor requires to keep ever before him. There the line of demarcation is drawn between apostates (verse 19) and the anointed ones. Those who have an unction from the Holy One “*know all things.*” The scope and nature of their knowledge we have already explained: briefly, it consists of a saving and influential understanding of the Truth. It was because he was assured that those to whom he wrote were experientially acquainted with Christianity that John was persuaded they would heed the solemn warnings he was about to pen.

*“I have not written unto you because you know not the truth,
but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth” (vs. 21).*

As. T. Scott well expressed it, “When we are thus established in the great truths of the Gospel, we shall know that no lie is of the Truth, and shall therefore disregard the eloquence, learning, ingenuity, and confidence of those who contradict the Bible; and be satisfied with opposing the express testimony of the Truth itself to their well-varnished and ably defended falsehoods.”

It is by the knowledge of the Truth that the Lord’s people are able to discern whatever be contrary thereto. As an old adage declares, “The line which shows itself to be straight, shows also what line is crooked.” “*No lie is of the truth:*” either springs from it or is according to it, but the very reverse. Error often has a very plausible appearance, and by it multitudes are deceived. Not only is it propagated, frequently, by men of scholarship and seeming spirituality, but their lies are presented in most subtle and attractive forms, appearing to promote the glory of God and the good of souls—were it otherwise, the unwary would not be beguiled. Many a heresy seems to remove difficulties which perplex the thoughtful people of God, to solve doctrinal problems which are a real puzzle to them, to be favourable unto practical piety, and to give peace and happiness to those who accept the same. Nevertheless, if they are not foursquare with the Truth, but really conflict with the same, they are falsehoods, and therefore worthless, pernicious, dangerous. No matter how fair the fruits they bear, how apparently excellent their “*results,*” they are to be rejected and shunned.

That declaration “*no lie is of the truth*” seems rather like a truism—something so self-evident as to need no stating. In reality it expresses a principle of deep moment. First, as S.E. Pierce pointed out, “here we have expressed the transcendent excellency of the everlasting Gospel: there is no darkness in it: there is no lie in it, there is no error can arise out

of it.” Divine revelation is inerrant and flawless: *“Thy Law [not only “contains” but] is the truth”* (Psa 119:142). *“Every word of God is pure”* (Pro 30:5). There are indeed in it *“some things hard to be understood,”* and not a little that is quite beyond our comprehension. It would be very strange were it otherwise, for the finite cannot comprehend the infinite. No amount of searching or inquiry by the keenest intellect can find out God to perfection, nor can it account for many of His ways or explain why He fore-ordained one unto salvation and not another, how the Eternal Three subsist in one essence, how the humanity of Christ never had a separate existence, but was from the first moment of its conception united to His Divine person. These and other mysteries are to be reverently received, and humbly submitted to, for they are true—the mouth of the Lord has spoken them.

Second, this Divine declaration *“no lie is of the truth”* ought to warn all those who profess to be called of God to preach of their solemn duty to be diligent in preaching the preaching which the Lord bids them (Jon 3:2): *“Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it”* (Deu 4:2). Otherwise, they are in grave danger of falling under that terrible indictment, *“The prophets prophesy lies in My name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they speak unto you... the deceit of their heart”* (Jer 14:14). *“Christ is essential Truth. His Gospel is so, in and throughout every part thereof. Therefore no one thing, sentence, or call it doctrine if you will, which differs one hair’s breadth from that which the Lord hath delivered to His church... can be other than a lie”* (Pierce).

Third, *“no lie is of the truth”* was a word of warning against and an exposure of the method employed by those who seek to seduce the saints. It tells us that sophistries and frauds are not necessary in order to support or propagate it. There is no deceit in the Gospel, and there should be none in the handling of it. It requires no fleshly help, and cannot be advanced by cunning and trickery. Alas, how few there are who really believe that unless the Truth itself, under the blessing of God, convicts and converts men, nothing else will. Because they lack faith in the power of Truth itself, preachers resort to all sorts of carnal devices to render their message more palatable to the unregenerate, and those devices are nothing more than lying deceits, dishonest arts. The lure and love of popularity is too strong to resist for those who seek the praise of men rather than the approbation of God. Such preachers think less of the Author of the Word than they do of rendering it acceptable to the carnal mind. Recourse is had to abstruse philosophies, displays of oratory, histrionics, or musical attractions and worldly allurements, rather than the plain and faithful preaching of the Truth itself.

“For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but.. as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ” (2Co 2:17) declared the beloved Paul. A most solemn proof is that of how early the Gospel was corrupted, and a portent of how extensively this evil was to spread among the professed servants of God and expounders of the Truth. The word *“corrupted”* signified adulterated: the mixing of it with a foreign element. Few indeed preserve the purity of the Truth, and fewer still preserve its holy balance or proclaim it in its fullness and entirety. Too many have sought to conciliate opposers by blunting the sharp edges of the Spirit’s sword. They deliberately explain away the most distasteful aspects of Divine revelation. Others resort to dishonest exegesis or attempt to *“harmonize”* the teaching of Holy Writ with the hypotheses of *“science falsely so called.”* But the faithful minister is *“sincere”*—open, above board, without guile. Sent of God, he speaks in His name and conducts himself as in the Divine presence, and refuses to stoop to any form of a lie in order to commend the Truth.

Said the apostle again, We *“have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God”* (2Co 4:2). The apostle disdained his own wisdom, discarded all artifices to win the esteem of his hearers, refused an appeal to the traditions of men, declined to mingle anything human with his Divine message. He abjured and abhorred all dishonest tricks. His sole aim was to show himself approved unto God, and therefore he declared the whole of His counsel, keeping back nothing that was profitable. Even the winning of souls was made entirely subordinate to preaching the Truth in its purity. He therefore used great plainness of speech, and sought to humble and not to flatter, directing his message to the conscience rather than to the intellect or the emotions. *“The veracity of God, and not the reasonableness of any doctrine, is the ground of our faith. It is the work of the Gospel to cast down reasonings against the knowledge of God, and bring into captivity every thought unto the obedience of Christ”* (Reformed Presbyterian Testimony).

Fourth, taking the verse as a whole, its last clause points an important practical lesson. The apostle addressed himself unto the saints with the confidence that they would readily accept what he was writing to them, that they would—like himself—detest and refuse error. That confidence shows that men’s reception or rejection of the Truth turns mainly upon the state of their hearts. Sufficient evidence must indeed be advanced to carry conviction, but if the heart be right, then the mind readily perceives the force of the evidence; whereas if the heart be wrong—prejudiced—no amount of evidence will satisfy it. *“Convince a man against his will, and he is of the same opinion still”* says the old proverb. It is the perversity of the will which so often blinds the judgment: let that be properly disposed, and the understanding will function

properly. If any doctrine of Scripture be hated, no demonstration of its verity by a hundred proof texts will be of any avail—unless God removes the enmity. On the other hand, if the Word be received “*with all readiness of mind,*” and the Scriptures searched daily whether these things be true (Act 17:11), assurance of them will soon be ours.

This deeply important practical lesson was inculcated by Christ when He declared, “*The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness*” (Mat 6:22,23). The eye has no light of its own, but is merely the receptacle thereof, and the actions of the body are directed by the illumination it admits. The “*eye*” is here a figure of the understanding, and by its light conduct is regulated: “*as he thinketh in his heart, so is he*” (Pro 23:7). A “*single*” eye has but one object—God, the pleasing and glorifying of Him. At regeneration the heart is renewed and its vision rectified, the eye of faith is Divinely opened, the understanding is spiritually illumined, and God becomes its all-absorbing object. In consequence, light is seen in God’s light (Psa 36:9), and all the faculties of the soul come under its benign influence. A spirit of discrimination follows, so that the child of God discerns between the voice of Christ and that of a false shepherd (Joh 10:4,5), and by his spiritual judgment he distinguishes between truth and error, loving and heeding the one, eschewing and refusing the other.

But since the children of God be spiritually illumined and able to discern between the truth and error, why are there such differences of belief among them? In fact, there is far more agreement than disagreement. But why not entire unanimity? Because God is sovereign and bestows varying measures of light. But why should anyone who has the Holy Spirit for his Teacher cling to or imbibe any error? Because of indwelling sin: the counteracting of the intellectual effects of the fall, like the nullifying of its moral effects, is not perfected in this life. Yet that is to our shame, and in no wise excuses us. There is nothing but light and truth in God’s most holy Word, and everything in it is expressed accurately. But alas, we do not receive our views wholly therefrom, nor are our minds so brought under the power and spiritual influence of the same as for its contents to be fixed in our understanding exactly as they are in the Scriptures. “*No lie is of the truth:*” error springs not therefrom, but from the darkness and sinfulness of our minds. Human depravity, acted upon by Satan, disposes men to put a false gloss on one passage, to wrest another, and to receive false doctrine.

If we would avoid a lie, we must neither give heed to the reasonings of men upon the Word nor put our own interpretation upon it. Instead, we are to “*hold fast the form of sound words*” (2Ti 1:13), expressing truth in our minds and with our lips precisely as it is formulated in Scripture. Our first concern should ever be a seeking to know the mind of the Spirit therein; and our second to receive it meekly without any cavil or attempt to evade its meaning. It is men’s wrangling over the Word and altering the mode of God’s expression which leads so many into error, and renders them still more susceptible to Satan’s lies. The most effectual way to be preserved from false doctrine and practice is to accept God’s Word at its face value, to believe all that the Lord has spoken. “It should ever be our study and prayer, the utmost aim and bent of our minds, to have the truths of God received into our minds and stated in our understandings exactly as they are in the Word; for there they are expressed as they are in God” (S.E. Pierce). Alas, men prefer their own reasonings and statements thereon, and then turn to the Word to support them.

“*Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son*” (verse 22).

The Greek Interlinear and the Revised Version render it “*Who is the liar,*” not because any specific one is in view, but because the reference is to those who are guilty of the greatest falsehood of all. Who is the liar of all liars? John does not wait for a reply, but at once furnishes the answer: he that repudiates the Messiah, the Anointed of God—he is outstandingly the cheat of men, the false prophet, the imposter. Here then is the link between the two verses: when the apostle said, “*no lie is of the truth,*” he had particularly in view the antichrists or seducers of souls, who were propagating that which was flatly contrary to the Gospel, and as far removed from it as darkness is from light. As Haupt pointed out, “No lie is of the Truth seems so clear and self-evident as to require no explanation; but however plain theoretically, it very little governs the conduct of many professing Christians,” and therefore John is still more specific and amplifies his abstract aphorism with a concrete example.

“*Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?*” Once again we find “*the apostle of love*” refuses to mince words. He calls things by their right names. Love for Christ and fidelity unto the saints required that he declare plainly what their enemies really were. “Such was his zeal for the Truth, he makes no scruple of calling such by this term who would dare pronounce an untruth, let their profession and quality be what they might. We have had instances of this before: If any would venture to say they had fellowship with God, whilst they walked in darkness, he is bold to pronounce this to be a lie (1:6). If any professed they had no inward sinfulness, he declares this to be self-deceit; and it is also willful lying, and truth was not in such (1:8). If any professed himself to be in Christ, and lived carelessly, paying no regard to the Lord’s commandments, he pronounces such an one a liar (2:4). So here, having appealed to those unto whom he wrote concerning the truth of sound doctrine, and that no lie is of the Truth, he goes on to express more fully what he had in his eye and would bring forward” (Pierce).

Note well the particular test here applied, the standard by which preachers are to be measured, namely the person of Christ—the liar is the one who denies Him. Christ is Himself the Truth, and therefore anyone who disowns Him is a false prophet. If we form false conceptions of Him, we cannot rightly apprehend any part of the Truth. “The denial of Christ is the greatest of all sins. To deny Him is not merely to turn away from a truth, but is the forsaking of the Truth. And to change the centre is to alter the whole circumference. If, then, Christ is not the centre of our life, no part of our life can be right. To break with Christ, therefore, is to part with Truth, and of all lies that which denies that Jesus is the Christ is the greatest” (L. Palmer).

“What think ye of Christ is the test,
To try both your state and your scheme;
You cannot be right in the rest
Unless you think rightly of Him.”

The denial that Jesus is the Christ was the fearful and fatal sin of the Jewish nation. They rejected the claims of Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah promised in the Old Testament Scriptures: “*He came unto His own, and His own received Him not*” (Joh 1:11). In so doing, they sinned against the clearest light and fullest evidence. All the predicted marks were found in Him, but they were blinded by prejudice—from false teaching, their own conceits, and worldliness. He was the true light, but they, through their blindness, perceived it not: “*For this people’s heart is waxed gross... their eyes they have closed*” (Mat 13:15). But to deny that Jesus is the Christ has yet both a deeper meaning and wider scope. It is necessary for us carefully to consider exactly what is connoted by “*the Christ.*” It means “*The Anointed,*” and as Candlish pointed out, “This appellation marks not only a certain relation to the Jewish Scriptures, but also, and still more, a relation to God, whose Christ He was.” This raises the question, For what was He anointed?

During the Old Testament economy, prophets, priests and kings were set apart to their several offices by being anointed with oil. Therein they foreshadowed the Redeemer, who was the “*Christ*” or Anointed One from the moment of His birth (Luk 2:11) until His death (Rom 8:34). In this official character the Lord Jesus proclaimed Himself at the very beginning of His public ministry: “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.. And He began to say unto them, This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears*” (Luk 4:18,21). The blessed Spirit had anointed Him to be the Prophet, Priest and King of His people, and it is to designate Him as bearing these offices that He is called “*Christ.*” He was owned as such by His disciples (Joh 1:41; 4:29) and by God (Act 2:36). Thus, to receive or reject Jesus as the Christ has respect to all His offices, and consequently to all the blessing which we may obtain or forfeit by accepting or refusing Him.

Chapter 32

ANTICHRISTS

1 John 2:22,23

What an immense amount of unedifying and worthless rubbish has been written on “*the antichrist*”! Yet that is hardly a thing to be wondered at, since it supplies an object which makes a strong appeal to lovers of the bizarre and sensational. Moreover, it is a subject which offers an opportunity for every conceited tyro to pose as a “*deep student of prophecy.*” Almost endless have been the conjectures as to the identity of “*the antichrist:*” whether an evil system or a separate individual; and if the latter, whether he has yet appeared on the stage of human action, or whether his advent is yet future. The Reformers and almost all of the Puritans held that “*the man of sin*” (which they regard as another title of this infamous character) signified the Papacy. Later, some who claimed to be more enlightened were quite sure that Napoleon Bonaparte was this son of perdition. Influenced by his early teachers and associations, this writer once deemed himself qualified to write a book of three hundred pages thereon (long since out of print), but trusts he has grown wiser with the passing of the years.

During the last three decades many others have speculated upon the personality of “*the antichrist.*” Not a few who were regarded as eminent “Bible teachers” insisted that the Kaiser of Germany filled this iniquitous role, but when the closing years of his career falsified their theorizings, Mussolini (as “the restorer of the old Roman empire”) became their

choice; then as he began to wane in power and be eclipsed by another, Hitler was preferred. Now those men of evil renown have been called to meet their God, Stalin has occupied the prophetic limelight. And so, we suppose, it will continue to the end, for human nature changes not, either in its arrogance, blindness, gullibility or refusal to acknowledge its ignorance. *“Vain man would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass’s colt”* (Job 11:12). There ever have been, and doubtless will continue to be unto the close of this world’s history, men who posed as being wise above that which is written, and a flock of admirers will credit their pretensions and receive as oracles their wild and profitless theorizings.

Disregarding all speculations and controversies upon prophecies which may or may not bear upon the subject (for example, those in Daniel and the Revelation, to which so many appeal), let us concentrate upon the term itself. The actual word *“antichrist”* occurs only in John’s epistles. In other connections the prefix *“anti”* is used in various senses: e.g. over against, contrary to, a substitute for. Thus, abstractedly considered, *“antichrist”* might refer either to one who pretended to be the Messiah or to one who openly opposed Him: a pseudo Christ or a rival. It is by carefully observing how the term is used by the apostle and what he predicated thereof that we must determine its sense. It is true that our Lord announced, *“Many shall come in My name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many,”* which He explained as *“there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders”* (Mat 24:5, 24), but that is nothing to the point of our present inquiry—we consider that history shows those predictions were fulfilled in the first century A.D.

First, John had said, *“ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists ... They went out from us, but they were not of us”* (2:18,19). There we see that the early Christians had been forewarned that the Gospel of Christ would be opposed, that there were many such opposers by the close of the first century, and that such were apostates. *“And hence we learn that antichrist is not a single person, but many: antichrist in the first clause is explained by antichrists in the latter”* (J. Gill). Second, 2:22, identifies those antichrists by describing them as liars against the Truth and repudiators of the Christ of God. Third, John affirmed, *“And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist”* (4:3). As *“the spirit of the world”* (1Co 2:12) has reference to that principle of carnal reason and gratification which regulates its subjects, so *“the spirit of antichrist”* signifies that evil influence which produces hostility to Christ. Finally, he informs us *“For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist”* (2Jo 7). *“From this it is clear that John understood by the word all those who denied that Jesus is the Messiah”* (Barnes).

“Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?” (verse 22).

To deny—either implicitly or explicitly—that Jesus is the Christ is to say that He is not the Messiah, the One announced and promised by the prophets of old. Second, it is to repudiate Him as the one appointed and endued by God to be the sole but sufficient Saviour of sinners. Third, it is the rejection of His person and official work, and that is a sin of the highest magnitude: *“whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God”* (2Jo 9). As Gill remarked *“The one who denied that Jesus is the Christ is not the only liar in the world, but he is the greatest of liars; this is a consummate lie, being opposed to a glaring truth.”* It is the gainsaying of a fact clear and indisputable. It is opposed to the witness of the angels at His incarnation, and to that of His forerunner. It is opposed to the teaching of Him who is the Truth itself, for He clearly manifested Himself to be the Messiah. It flies in the face of His miraculous credentials, which authenticated His claim. It is contrary to the declaration of His apostles, who were eye-witnesses of His miracles, and to the sure Word of God Himself.

The denial that Jesus is the Christ is a sin committed in many different ways and in varying degrees of culpability. Unitarians, who directly and explicitly repudiate His Godhead, are not the only liars and antichrists. There are many opposers in Christendom who indirectly and implicitly deny the Christ of God by devising a false Christ from their perverted imaginations. Thus, Pelagians, and in a lesser degree Arminians, are guilty of this horrible crime, for they transfer to the creature almost all the honour which rightly belongs to the Redeemer alone. And as Calvin pertinently remarked, *“So the Papists at this day, setting up free will in opposition to the grace of the Holy Spirit, ascribing a part of their righteousness and salvation to the merits of works, feigning for themselves innumerable advocates, by whom they render God propitious to them, have a sort of fictitious Christ I know not what: but the living and genuine image of God which shines forth in Christ they deform by their wicked inventions: they lessen His power, subvert and pervert His office. Christ is denied whenever those things which belong to Him are taken away from Him.”*

*“Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?
He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.”*

Those terrible names of opprobrium cannot but fill the renewed heart with holy horror. Yet no terms of infamy and condemnation can be too strong to designate the opposers and blasphemers of the Christ of God. To deny that Jesus is the

Christ is to repudiate His virgin birth, His vicarious character, His redemptive work, for those things were predicated of the Messiah. In the preceding chapter we explained that *“the Christ”* means *“the Anointed One”* and expresses His three-fold office. Thus any man who denies that Jesus is the great Prophet of the Church, the infallible Teacher, the essential Word of God, is an antichrist—an arch-heretic. Anyone who denies that Jesus is the great High Priest, the sole Mediator between God and men, by whose one perfect offering He has perfected for ever the sanctified, is an antichrist—His open antagonist. Anyone who denies that Jesus is the King of the Church, the only one who has the right to command and be obeyed, is an antichrist—His avowed enemy. Yet this is not all that is included: *“he is antichrist that denieth the Father and the Son.”*

The Messiahship of Christ is not an isolated fact: lying behind it is the all-important truth of the Holy Trinity. The denial of Christ is, at the same time, a repudiation of the mysterious and ineffable union which there is between the members of the Godhead. There is a most intimate and unique relation subsisting between the Father and the Son, one which is entirely beyond finite comprehension expressed in such terms as *“the man ... My fellow, saith the Lord of hosts”* (Zec 13:7), so that *“all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father”* (Joh 5:23), for, as He expressly declared, *“I and Father are one”* (Joh 10:30)—co-essential, co-eternal, co-glorious; *“His own Son”* (Rom 8:32) in a way that the regenerate are not: really, though incomprehensibly, *“His own Son.”* Now unless Christ be owned in this highest relation, He is virtually denied in all. Scripture presents the Father and the Son in eternity past, as engaged in mutual council (Zec 6:13). *“A great covenant is negotiated. The Father and the Son, with the Spirit, are, if one may dare say so, in solemn conference together. From the bosom of the Father, in which He is dwelling evermore, the Son receives a commission to come forth.*

“He is appointed Heir of all things. Creation is assigned to Him as His proper work. All providence is to be His care; and, above all, the providence of this spot of earth. Here on this earth, from among a fallen race, He is to purchase for Himself, and for His Father, at a great price, a seed given Him by the Father, and to share with Him the blessedness of His being the Son. So it is announced between the Father and the Son from everlasting; the Holy Spirit being a party to the arrangement, as He is to have a large share in carrying it out. And so, accordingly, in the fullness of time, the Son appears among men. He appears as the Son: on the Father’s behalf, entrusted with His Father’s commission, to be about His Father’s business. He is the Son not merely in respect of His being the Holy Jesus, receiving proofs and pledges of God’s fatherly presence and approval, as any holy being might. He is the Son also, and chiefly, in respect of the work or office with a view to which He is the Christ. He is the Son consenting to be the Father’s Servant, and as such anointed for the accomplishment of the Father’s purpose. Only, therefore, in so far as you acknowledge Jesus as the Christ, do you really receive Him as the Son.

“And denial, whether practical or doctrinal, of the proposition that Jesus is the Christ, is tantamount to a disowning of His personality as the Son. It is only when you recognize Him as anointed to do His Father’s will in the sacrifice of Himself, that you really own Him as the Son. Such, then, is the importance and significancy of the proposition that Jesus is the Christ, considered in itself; and such its bearing on the owning of His person as the Saviour and as the Son. It is a proposition which so vitally affects the essential character of Him to whom it relates, that the denial of it is virtually a denial of Himself ... For, in a word, the completeness of this illustrious personage depends on a full and adequate recognition of His double relation: to us as sinners, as our Jesus; and to God the Father, as His Son. Set aside His being Christ: the anointed Sacrificer and anointed Sacrifice, the anointed Priest and anointed Victim—the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world... and we have neither any Jesus fit to be our Saviour, nor any Son of God worth the owning... Hence he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ is not only a liar: he is antichrist. And being antichrist—setting himself against the Christ—he, as antichrist, denies the Father and the Son” (R. Candlish).

Let none aspire to more *“liberality and charity”* than the one who was favoured to lean on the Master’s bosom: those who are opposed to the person, doctrine, gospel, and kingdom of Christ are liars and antichrists. Those who array themselves against Him and hold doctrines which are hostile to His Godhead, His official character, His redemptive work, are His adversaries. Yet there is no truth so sacred and well attested, but there have ever been those who controverted it. Some have denied the Saviour’s deity, some have explained away the reality and uniqueness of His humanity, and so the reality of His sufferings; while others set themselves against His headship and kingly authority; yet professing themselves to be and retaining the name of Christians, imposing their falsehoods on their deluded followers. In their bitter antagonism to the Lord Jesus, we may discover something more than an ebullition of human depravity, namely the agency of Satan. It is the enmity of that old serpent the Devil against the woman’s Seed. It demonstrates his age-long hatred of Christ and His gospel.

“He is antichrist that denieth the Father and the Son.” How little is this realized today! Scriptural views of the Father cannot be ours if we err concerning the Son. *“No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him”* (Mat 11:27). The Father cannot be known apart from the Son, for He is the One who has *“declared Him”* (Joh 1:18) or made Him known. There is such an ineffable union between Them that He could aver, *“he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.... I am in the Father, and the Father*

in Me” (Joh 14:9,11). Where Christ be denied, the whole revelation of God in and through Him (Heb 1:1,2; 2Co 5:19) is set aside. “As God has given Himself to us to be enjoyed only in Christ, He is elsewhere sought for in vain; or (if anyone prefers what is clearer) as in Christ dwells all the fullness of the Deity, there is no God apart from Him. It hence follows that Turks, Jews, and such as are like them, have a mere idol and not the true God. For by whatever titles they may honour the God which they worship, still, as they reject Him without whom they cannot come to God, and in whom God has really manifested Himself to us, they have but some creature or fiction of their own” (Calvin).

“*Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father*” (verse 23). How wide and sweeping is this solemn statement! No matter what his profession and pretensions, if he in any way denies the Son he cuts himself off from the Father. The Father can only be known (Joh 17:3), approached (Joh 14:6), worshipped (1Pe 2:5) and glorified (Col 3:17) in and through His incarnate Son. Despite their boasted orthodoxy, Jesus Christ said to the Jews, “*Ye neither know Me, nor My Father; if ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also*” (Joh 8:19). To be without the One is to be without the Other. That is abundantly demonstrated in heathendom: their religions are Godless because they are Christless! In like manner, all who acknowledge “*the Supreme Being,*” “*the Architect of the universe,*” or even “*the Almighty,*” and at the same time refuse the Mediator, believe in one who has no existence. Moreover, if wrong views be entertained of the Son, erroneous conceptions of the Father are necessarily entertained. If Christ be the Son only by adoption, God is not His Father. If He be Son merely by office, equally so is the Father. If He be Son only by incarnation or resurrection, the Father is denied.

“*Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father*” as his “*Father.*” This at once gives the lie to one of the most popular and widely accepted errors of the last century, namely “*the universal fatherhood of God.*” In the spiritual and highest sense God is the Father of none save of Christ and His redeemed: “*For ye [namely the saints] are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus*” (Gal 3:26). Where there be no faith in Christ Jesus there is no spiritual sonship, and where that be absent, God cannot rightfully be regarded as our Father. Christ made that very plain when He exposed the empty boast of the unbelieving Jews, who claimed, “*we have one Father, God,*” and to whom He replied, “*If God were your Father, ye would love Me*” (Joh 8:41,42). How can one who despises and rejects the Son have God for his Father—have a filial relation to Him—when there is no bond of union between them? The Father thinks far too highly of His Son to love any who hate Him. He will not set a premium upon those who so grievously insult Him by disdaining His Beloved, for “*Him hath God the Father sealed*” (Joh 6:27).

“*But he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also*” (verse 23). We have placed that sentence in italics, for so it is found in the Authorized Version. As most of our readers are aware, that is to indicate that such words are not found in the Greek, but have been supplied by the translators. This instance serves to manifest the scrupulous fairness of those who produced that edition of the Bible: because it was found in some of the ancient manuscripts, they gave it a place; as it was omitted by others, they marked it as doubtful. The Revised Version includes it in the text without any question, and, we believe, warrantably so. The editorial note in Calvin’s commentary says, “The words are found in most of the manuscripts, and in most of the versions, and in many of the Fathers. Besides, they wholly comport with the usual style of the apostle, whose common practice it was to state things positively and negatively, and vice versa. See 5:12.” A. Barnes tells us that this passage “is found in the Vulgate, the Syriac, the Ethiopian, the Armenian and Arabic versions; and in the critical editions of Griesbach, Tittman, and Hahn. It is probable, therefore, that it should be regarded as a genuine portion of the sacred text.”

Gill pointed out that the second half of verse 23 “confirms and illustrates what is before said: for as he who denies the sonship of Christ cannot hold the paternity of God, so he who owns the sonship of Christ, the second person, maintains the paternity of the first; for those two are correlates and mutually put or take away each other. No mention is made of the Spirit, because, as yet, no controversy had arisen concerning Him.” To which we would add: in Scripture, repetition is always for the purpose of emphasis, and often the same thing is stated both negatively and positively (as in 1:6,7) in order to impress us more deeply with that which is of first importance—as many of our Lord’s weightiest utterances were prefaced with a double “*verily.*” The fundamental truth of our present verse cannot be too clearly and emphatically stated or too frequently inculcated: that only by faith’s acceptance of Christ can we obtain any saving knowledge of God; and that all who believingly receive the Lord Jesus have in fact become the sons and daughters of the Almighty, and are made heirs of eternal life.

“*But he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.*” “*For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us unto God*” (1Pe 3:18). By Christ all that believe are united to the Father, so that He could say, “*I ascend unto My Father, and your Father*” (Joh 20:17). As there is a most intimate relation between the Father and the Son, so there is in the doctrine and knowledge of Them. And as we cannot have the One without the Other, so on Christ’s becoming our Saviour we are received into the Father’s favour. The Father gives Himself to us in His Son, and by receiving the Latter we receive the Former. “*He hath the Father*” for his everlasting Portion: to commune with, to

enjoy, to supply all his need. Thus, not only is the honour of Christ involved in our apprehensions of Him, but our blessings and privileges are bound up therein.

Chapter 33

THE APPLICATION

1 John 2:24

In our present verse John proceeded to make what the Puritans were wont to designate the “*improvement*” of the subject under discussion, by which they did not mean “*to better*,” but rather to employ to advantage. In present-day language, the apostle made a practical application of what he had written in verses 18-23. There he had treated of antichrists, and had explained how it was that believers had been preserved from those deceivers: they had received an unction from the Holy One, by which they had obtained the true knowledge of Divine and spiritual things. Consequently, he addressed them not as those who were ignorant, but as those who were personally acquainted with the Truth. Then, for their fuller information and guidance, he had plainly defined what an antichrist was. Now he made an appeal unto his readers which was based upon the foregoing. In so doing he turned from the false to the true. In the Greek the transition is more marked, for the pronoun “*you*” is placed at the beginning of the sentence, for the purpose of emphasis:

“Ye therefore what ye have heard from the beginning, in you let it abide: if in you should abide what from the beginning ye heard, also ye in the Son and in the Father shall abide.”

Our present text, then, is an exhortation unto the Lord’s people to persevere in the faith, to part not with the Truth, to heed not those who sought to entice them away from it. Thus we see once more that it was John’s aim not only to inform and establish his readers, but also to move them unto the performance of duty. That was the design of all the Epistle writers: urging the saints not to be content with a bare theoretical knowledge of the Gospel, but to seek to get their hearts fired therewith, so that faith and love should be active, and the works of holiness produced. They constantly intermingled doctrinal instruction with moral injunctions, so that the saints should be neither barren nor unfruitful in their knowledge of the Lord Jesus. So again in what immediately follows, for John at once passes from exhortation to remind them of the great promise, and then strikes afresh a note of warning. Therein we may perceive the spiritual wisdom of the apostles in holding so carefully the balance of Truth, and the admirable example which they have left preachers and writers to follow: to weave together that which illumines the mind and that which calls for the action of the will.

“Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning.” As intimated above in the literal translation of our verse, the words “*abide*,” “*remain*” and “*continue*” are the same in the original, and had a uniform rendition been given the repetition had shown more clearly the deep importance which John attached to this precept—a case where exactness was unwarrantably sacrificed to variety. The expression “*let that abide in you*” is designedly antithetical to “*the truth is not in us*” or “*in you*” (1:8; 2:4), which means far more than that they were ignorant or unacquainted with it, namely that the Truth was not present as a vital principle in the soul, as an animating force in their lives. It is not sufficient to hear sound preaching and become mentally acquainted with God’s Word: the same must find a permanent lodgment in the heart if we are really to be benefited by it. Human nature being what it is—weak and unstable—there is a real danger of relinquishing the Truth under pressure of persecution for the Gospel’s sake, or through being absorbed with the “*cares and riches and pleasures of this life*” (Luk 8:14), and thus being only a thorny-ground hearer; yea, such is certain to be the outcome unless we be Divinely preserved—by God’s stirring us up to guard against the same, and by a diligent performance of our duty.

“Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip,” or as the margin renders it, “*run out as leaky vessels*” (Heb 2:1). If they do so, the fault is entirely their own, through failing to give the more earnest heed to them. It is by being believed that the Gospel becomes efficacious, and “it cannot be believed unless it is understood; it cannot be understood, unless it be attended to. Truth must be kept before the mind in order to its producing an appropriate effect; and how can it be kept before the mind, but by our giving heed to it?” (J. Brown). There needs to be a serious and diligent fixing of the thoughts upon that which we hear, a bowing and bending of the will to yield unto it, a placing of the affections upon it, a bringing of the entire man into conformity with

it. Knowledge of the Word must be accompanied by faith therein, obedience thereto, and all other due respects which in any way concern it. Otherwise, it will soon pass out of the mind, like water out of a leaky utensil. *“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain”* (1Co 15:1,2).

“Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning,” namely that Gospel which you have embraced and confessed, that Gospel wherein the person and offices, the atoning sacrifice, and justifying righteousness, of the God-man Mediator is proclaimed, and wherein the example which He has left His disciples to follow is made known. The Gospel and its ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s supper contain a full revelation of the same. As Paul declared to the Galatians, *“before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently [plainly] set forth crucified among you”* (3:1). He is the glorious Object exhibited therein. The Gospel is the chariot in which He rides in His majesty. It is the glass in which He shines forth, by means of which He is seen by the eye of faith, through which His glory is reflected, and by which the adoring beholder is *“changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord”* (2Co 3:18). The excellency, dignity and pre-eminence of His person are there set forth. His fathomless love and abounding grace are there published. His perfect and vicarious obedience, His everlasting righteousness, His cleansing blood, the abiding efficacy of His sacrifice, are expressly declared. His finished work, His blessed victory over the powers of darkness, His triumph over death and the grave, are plainly announced. The Gospel makes known the unsearchable riches of Christ, the glorious inheritance which He purchased for His people, His coming again to take them to be for ever with Himself.

“Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning.” Here we see how the apostle magnified the great ordinance of preaching, by indicating the way in which the good news had been communicated unto them. *“Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Rom 10:17). Christ Himself was anointed to preach the Gospel (Isa 61:1), and commenced His ministry by so doing (Luk 4:21,22). Concerning Him, the Father said, *“Hear ye Him”* (Mat 17:5). When He had completed His ministry, He committed the same work unto His ambassadors, saying, *“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature”* (Mar 16:15), and ever since it has pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe (1Co 1:21). Now it is a very great favour to hear the Gospel proclaimed, to sit under the ministry of one who exalts the Son of God as the sole and all-sufficient Saviour of sinners. *“Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance”* (Psa 89:15); whereas those who know it not sit in darkness and in the region of the shadow of death (Mat 4:16). Still better is it to know it in the heart and understand the reality of it. But best of all for us to abide in the acknowledgment of the Truth and for it to abide in us as a regulating principle.

Every privilege carries with it a corresponding obligation, and therefore those who treat the Gospel lightly incur deeper guilt. *“For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required”* (Luk 12:48). Solemn indeed is the case of those who hear sermon after sermon that faithfully and searchingly warns them of the wrath to come and bids them flee from the same, yet regard them as no more to be remembered than ordinary discourses. Parlous the condition of all who listen to the preaching of God’s Word merely as a tale that is told, to be no more affected and influenced by it, to go on in their giddy way as though they had never heard it; to lay aside all thoughts of it as that which little concerns them; to stifle convictions, withstand reproofs, neglect exhortations, refuse the duties enjoined, reject the offers made, and continue in the very sins they hear reprov’d. Such close their ears to the truth, shut Christ out of their hearts, are possessed of Satan, and heap to themselves wrath against the day of wrath. *“See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven”* (Heb 12:25).

Then *“let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning.”* Of Lydia we are told, *“whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul”* (Act 16:14). She not only listened to but gave heed unto the same, with readiness and resolution. In due proportion to our valuation of the Truth will be our earnestness and efforts to make it our own. *“If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God”* (Pro 2:3-5). Silver and gold lie not on the surface of the ground to be picked up by any lazy person, but can be reached and secured only by hard work and persevering toil. Likewise in order to learn God’s will as He has revealed it the Scriptures must be searched (Joh 5:39), searched daily (Act 17:11), one part carefully compared with another (1Co 2:13). And in order for that Word to quicken, govern, and make us fruitful, it has to be prayed over, meditated upon day and night (Psa 1:2,3), made the food of the soul (Jer 15:16), and put into practice (Jam 1:22), and thereby are we *“thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”*

This exhortation, *“Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning,”* is no casual or trivial one, but one that in varied language occurs and recurs throughout the Scriptures. *“Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of*

thy life” (Deu 4:9, and cf. verse 23; 8:11). “*Let thine heart retain My words ... Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of My mouth.*” “*Take fast hold of instruction: let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life*” (Pro 4:4,5,13): that “*Take fast hold of*” implies that there must be deep interest, determination of purpose, perseverance of effort. “*My son, attend to My words; incline thine ear unto My sayings. Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart*” (Pro 4:20,21), yes, “*in the midst of thine heart*” and not merely on the threshold of it: there only will it be operative, for “*out of the heart are the issues of life.*”

“*Let these sayings sink down into your ears*” (Luk 9:44), by storing them in your memory and ruminating on the same, which is what the mother of our Lord did: “*Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart*” (Luk 2:19). That was in sharp and blessed contrast with the rocky-ground hearers, who though they “*receive the word with joy*” yet “*have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away*” (Luk 8:13). It is not enough to believe or receive the Truth: it must have a permanent place in the soul. As Paul informed the Colossians, Christ would yet present them unblamable and unreprouable to the Father: “*If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel*” (1:23). In order thereto we need to make the Gospel our constant study, to become thoroughly acquainted with the Scriptures, and cordially assent to them, to receive the Truth in the love of it, to feed daily thereon, so that our judgments are formed by its teaching, our hearts cast into the mould of it, our consciences directed by it. Thereby shall we be enriched with true spiritual wisdom and knowledge, and be enabled to walk acceptably before God and adorn the doctrine we profess.

“*Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning.*” The “*therefore*” has in view what the apostle treated of in verses 18-23, and points a solemn warning, as well as presses an urgent duty. Alas, the majority of professing Christians have nothing more than a few notions floating about in their heads, and consequently they are easily swayed by any plausible deceiver, carried hither and thither by every wind that blows, tossed about like a ship with no ballast in its hold. It is not by deliberate intention that so many depart from the faith and give heed to seducing spirits, but through inattention to what they heard at the beginning—because of their indolence and failure to make the Truth their own. The seed which remains on the surface of the ground is quickly devoured by the fowls of the air: only as it becomes “*the engrafted word*” is it able to save our souls (Jam 1:21); and in order thereto we must be able to say with David, “*Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee*” (Psa 119:11). Only as God’s Word is stored and treasured in the heart will the heart be preserved from apostasy.

“*Let that therefore abide in you:*” as a peculiar treasure, as a welcome guest, as your guide by day and companion by night. Imbibe it as the dry ground does the refreshing showers. Yield your entire being to its sway, so that it nourishes your soul, enlightens your understanding, purifies your affections, regulates your will. Let it so abide in you, that it is reduced to practice. Let it abide in you by the exercise of faith, by constant contemplation, by affectionate esteem. “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom*” (Col 3:16). The word “*dwell*” there means “*to keep house,*” to have authority over its arrangements, as having the right to control. We are to be governed by it, to receive our instructions and directions from it. The word “*richly*” signifies “*largely,*” as a whole, in its utmost compass—in contrast with sparsely or fragmentally. Make it your food and drink, your sustenance and strength, your comfort and joy: only by so doing will it have its proper influence over you. Then will the word abide in you not merely as a fact in the brain, but as that which is actually realized in your experience.

“*Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning.*” The second clause conveys a double idea. First, it is an exhortation having the same force as that of Revelation 3:11, “*Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown,*” or shame you by despoiling you of your spiritual glory. You need to be constantly awake and on the alert, for the Devil will seek to rob your soul of that which is more precious than gold or rubies. If, in view of the fact that “*evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived,*” Timothy needed the injunction, “*But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of*” (2Ti 3:14), much more so do the writer and the reader. Having bought the Truth, sell it not. Our adversary, the Devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour; but every believer ought to be able to say, “*by the word of Thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer*” (Psa 17:4). But in order thereto he must store up that Word in his mind, in his affections, in his conscience, so that it is ever ready to hand when needed—as in the case of our Lord when tempted of Satan.

Second, this exhortation imports, Forsake not for any novelties those things you heard at the beginning and which were blessed to your conversion. Be not like the Athenians, who “*spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing*” (Act 17:21); but rather “*ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls*” (Jer 6:16). Of old God complained that false prophets caused His people “*to stumble in their ways from the ancient paths, to walk in paths, in a way not cast up*” by His appointment (Jer 18:15). So too He foretold that a day would come in this Christian era “*when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears*” (2Ti 4:3). It was because of this evil tendency that we find the

apostles went about “*confirming the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith*” (Act 14:22). “*Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning*” means, Give it not up for any new doctrine propagated by antichrists, but cherish the Truth and incorporate it into your life. Spiritual progress, or growth in grace, does not mean that you will ever outgrow the Gospel, yet how many come to despise foundational truth and prefer human speculations on prophecy!

“*If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.*” There is much difference of opinion among the commentators as to whether the “*if*” should be regarded as a conditional or a declaratory one; personally, we consider it is both. That it is conditional is clear from the verb employed in the last clause: it is not “*if that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also do continue in the Son,*” but “*ye also shall*” do so—providing you meet the required stipulation the latter will follow. In other words, the Truth remaining and operating in the soul as a vital principle, exerting a practical power in the life, is the means of maintaining communion with the Son and the Father. As there can be no knowledge of Christ except through or by means of the Gospel, so there can be no fellowship with Him but by believably and adoringly cleaving to the Gospel. As Christ will not walk with those who pursue a course of self-will, neither will He have any concord with one who gives ear to His enemies and treads the path of error. Only by faith in and obedience to the Word is preserved our experiential union with the Lord.

On the other hand, in view of the context it is equally plain that the “*if*” of our present verse is evidential or demonstrative. Speaking of some who had apostatized from the faith John declared, “*They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us*” (verse 19): it was the turning of their backs upon the Truth which made it manifest that they never had any vital union with Christ. So too taught the Lord Himself: unto those who professed to believe in Him, He said: “*If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed*” (Joh 8:31); that is, your perseverance in the faith will demonstrate you to be such in truth—not that they became His disciples by so doing, but that they supplied evidence that they were such as He owned. And again, He averred: “*If a man love Me, he will keep My words*” (Joh 14:23), for true love ever endeavours to please its object. If there be no keeping of His words, no cleaving fast to His Gospel, no walking according to His precepts, no living upon His promises, then the claim to love Him is a false one. Thus steadfastness in the faith and obedience are the marks of our saving oneness with the Son.

“*Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning.*” That clearly presupposes that they had previously received the Truth in the love of it, but that they are exhorted to fix and fasten the same “*as a nail in a sure place*”—by mixing faith therewith, setting their affections upon it and delighting therein. That which you received at the time of your conversion concerning the person, work and salvation of Christ must be the touchstone by which all that you hear and read is to be tested. Great will be the benefits from so doing: thereby you will be fortified against false teachers. As one pithily put it, “*Revise the old Gospel and you devise another.*” We must reserve for the opening paragraphs of the next chapter a further remark on the last half of our verse.

Chapter 34

THE PROMISE

1 John 2:25

“*Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning*” (verse 24) means, in the light of the context, Suffer no enemy of Christ to rob you of the Gospel which was blessed to your conversion; but rather see to it that it becomes more deeply rooted in your hearts. It is of the utmost importance that the perfect revelation of God which has been made in and by Christ should have a permanent dwelling in your souls. Make it your deep concern that it abides in your minds and regulates your thoughts; in your consciences, to convict of sin and restrain it, and by stirring you up to the practice of holiness; in your affections, melting you with sorrow for sin, promoting a higher esteem of Christ and spiritual things; in your wills, bringing them into compliance with those things which are pleasing to God. Let it abide just as you first received it, living thereon. You need not any new revelation from God, but rather a better understanding and closer conformity to what He has vouchsafed to you. “*If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye*

also shall continue in the Son and in the Father.” Here John names one of the benefits derived from obedience to the foregoing precept, namely maintenance of fellowship with God.

Many are the blessings, great the advantages, which issue from a steadfast adherence to the hope of the Gospel and the ordering of our lives thereby. First, it secures us against being deceived by the plausible lies of false teachers. He who feeds upon and delights in wholesome and sweet fruits will refuse that which is bitter and poisonous. He who drinks from the River of life, “*clear as crystal*,” will disdain foul and brackish water. Second, it provides sure evidence of our saving oneness with Christ, and preserves and promotes our communion with Him. The privilege mentioned in the second half of the verse follows, obviously and necessarily, from the performance of the duty enjoined in the first half. The one cannot be without the other: where the Gospel is believably received and affectionately cherished in the heart, there is fellowship with Christ; but where the former occurs not, the latter is unknown. The Lord Himself joined both together when He said, “*If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you*” (Joh 15:7). It is by means of the Word that we receive Christ into our understandings, and by exercising faith thereon that He dwells in our hearts, and thereby we continue in fellowship with Him. The Son is the Medium and Mediator by whom we are one with the Father.

Other passages make known further results of the Word abiding in the soul. For instance, “*The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide*” (Psa 37:31). As Spurgeon expressed it, “The best thing in the best place, producing the best results.” Where holiness is loved and obedience is predominant we are delivered from the slippery paths of sin and error. “*Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee*” (Psa 119:11), for taking heed thereto the heart is cleansed (verse 9). “*My son, forget not My law; but let thine heart keep My commandment: for length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee*” (Pro 3:1,2). Herein lies our interest, not less than our obligation. Long life is the highest earthly good, especially so when peace be added. “*My son, let them not depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom and discretion: so shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck*” (Pro 3:21,22). If the Divine precepts be kept as thy much-loved treasure, as thy daily companion and guide, thou shalt find them to quicken thy soul and adorn thy profession. “*If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you*” (Joh 15:7), for then our desires are regulated spiritually, and we ask not amiss. If the Word dwell in us richly “*all wisdom*” is ours (Col 3:16), strength too, and we “*overcome the wicked one*” (1Jo 2:14).

“*And this is the promise that He hath promised us,
even eternal life.*” (verse 25)

The commentators differ as to whether this statement is to be understood as receiving its fulfillment in the present or in the future: whether it has reference to that which is made good in the believer’s experience in this life, or to the celestial bliss in the life to come. That this verse is closely linked to the one immediately preceding is intimated by its opening word. There, two distinct things are in view: an exhortation, and an incentive to heed the same. Personally, it seems to us that the double idea is continued: the precept being enforced, and the injunction amplified. It is by the Truth remaining and operating in us that we have communion with God in Christ, and thereby the promise is realized now, for “*this is life eternal, that they might know Thee* [i.e. the triune Jehovah] *the only true God, and Jesus Christ* [the alone Mediator], *whom Thou hast sent*” (Joh 17:3). As to the future, heaven is reached only by those who hold fast the hope of the Gospel and abide in Christ. “The sum of what is said is, that we cannot live otherwise than by nourishing to the end the seed of life sown in the heart. John insists much on this point, that not only the beginning of a blessed life is to be found in the knowledge of Christ, but also its perfection” (Calvin).

It will be evident to the careful student that our perception of the precise connection between and the relation of verses 24 and 25 will largely turn upon what we understand to be signified by and included in “*eternal life*.” As we shall show below, that expression has a twofold force and application—a present and a future one—and in both senses the promise of it supplies a strong encouragement for believers to heed the injunction to let the Truth abide and work within them. For it is by adhering to the Gospel that fellowship with Christ is maintained, and in that fellowship “*eternal life*” is experienced in the soul. Equally so it is by faith’s keeping constantly in view the joy set before us in the promise that we are encouraged and strengthened to persevere in the faith. “As surely as you continue in the faith of the Gospel, you may be fully persuaded that this eternal life is actually bestowed on you, belongs to you, and shall be enjoyed by you, in uninterrupted communion with the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in the house eternal in the heavens, for ever and ever” (S.E. Pierce). We shall now consider: the Promiser—“*He*;” the blessing announced—“*eternal life*;” the form of the announcement—by “*promise*;” and the implications thereof.

“*And this is the promise that He hath promised us.*” Without a doubt, the pronoun refers to the Father. First, because that is the nearest antecedent, the One mentioned at the close of verse 24. Second, because of the “order and economy of the sacred Trinity in their operations and actings in the economy of grace. The Father plans all. He proposes all. He provides all. He promises all. He gives all. The Son works from the Father. He performs all. He acts all. He obtains all. The

Holy Spirit, in the order and dispensation of grace witnesseth to all, and sets His seal to all the Father hath revealed and declared concerning His love in Christ Jesus to the elect; as also concerning the person and mediatorial work of our Lord Jesus Christ. So that it can be only that which belongs to the Father which is here asserted. It is a peculiar glory which is the very perfection of the sacred writers to keep up in all their discourses the trinity and proper distinction of the co-equal Persons in the Godhead; and also the order in which they act distinct one from the other; as also the distinct way and manner in which they operate in us, upon us, and within us” (S.E. Pierce). Let the reader note how this order is observed in Matthew 28:19; Ephesians 1:3,4; 1 Peter 1:2,3. Third, because of the clear testimony of 1 John 5:11, “*God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.*”

The blessing announced is “*eternal life*,” which in the following Scriptures is spoken of as the present possession of all who savingly trust in Christ. “*He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life*,” “*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life*,” “*I give unto them eternal life*” (Joh 3:36; 5:24; 10:28). “*God hath given to us eternal life*” (1Jo 5:11). On the other hand, eternal life is viewed as a future prospect in “*he shall receive... in the world to come eternal life*” (Mar 10:30), “*Ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life*” (Rom 6:22), “*he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting*” (Gal 6:8), “*in the hope of eternal life*” (Tit 1:2). Those two sets of passages need “*rightly dividing*,” and adjusting thus. The Christian now has eternal life in Divine promise, and therefore it is certain. He has a title and right to it, because the same has been purchased for him by Christ. He already has it in Christ (Col 3:3). He has it by faith, which is the substance of things hoped for. He has it in hope (Tit 3:7), which is a confident expectation of a future good, and therefore he rejoices therein. He has the earnest in the gift of the Holy Spirit (2Co 5:5). He has the seed (1Jo 3:9) or beginning of it in the spiritual nature which he received at the new birth. But he has it not yet in full possession and fruition.

We come now to consider the form in which the blessing is announced, namely by the Father’s promise. That is more than a purpose, a doctrinal declaration or prophetic prediction. His eternal purpose was something hid in Himself. A doctrinal declaration is a matter making known to us the Divine purpose or will. A prophecy is the foretelling of things yet to be and may concern that which is evil as much as that which is good. But a promise concerns only that which is good. Moreover, the accomplishment of a prophecy is dependent upon God’s power and veracity, but the making good of His promise is secured by His faithfulness and righteousness also. The Divine promises are so many assurances unto us of God’s solemn engagements, by which He has graciously bound Himself to do some good unto or bestow some blessing upon His people. They are so many certifications of His good pleasure concerning them. They declare that He will lavish upon them the riches of His grace, out of His own mere bounty, according to His royal benignity. They are the revealed testifications of His heart who loved them from all eternity and foreappointed all things for them and respecting them. That they might have a true, clear and spiritual knowledge of His good will and favour to them, God has been pleased to set the same before them in hundreds of promises scattered throughout His Word.

The Divine promises, then, are so many declarations to remove some ill or to impart some good unto the objects upon whom God set His heart from all eternity. As such they are a most blessed manifestation of His love unto His saints. Speaking after the manner of men, there are three steps in connection with the operations of God’s love. The first, His inward purpose to exercise it; the last, the actual execution of His purpose; but in between there is the gracious making known of that purpose to the beneficiaries of it—so that they may be assured of and enjoy the same by faith’s anticipation before the realization thereof. While love is concealed we cannot be comforted therewith. Now God, who is “*love*,” not only loves His own, and will in due time fully display His love unto them, but in the interim He will have them informed of His benevolent designs, that even now they may rest in His love and stretch themselves comfortably upon His sure promises. Thereby each of them has reason to exclaim adoringly, “*How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!*” (Psa 139:17), for His promises make evident to us that assertion, “*For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil*” (Jer 29:11).

The triune God is not only the Author and Giver of the promises, but is the sum and substance of them too. All the persons of the Godhead form the subject of these blessed assurances. God the Father is not only the Promiser, but the matter of the promises, for He declares unto His saints, “*I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*” Thus He gives Himself unto them, so that they may have a propriety in Him and all His perfections. God the Son, in His person, His fullness, His suitability and sufficiency, is the promise of His redeemed, being expressly termed “*the mercy promised to our fathers*” (Luk 1:72)—given not only for but to them. God the Spirit, in His sevenfold gifts and graces, is equally the promise of the Church: one of His titles is “*that holy Spirit of promise*” (Eph 1:13). Thus the triune Jehovah makes Himself over unto His elect. No wonder that an apostle says, “*whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises*” (2Pe 1:4). Rightly did Spurgeon remark: “*Greatness and preciousness seldom go together, but in this instance they are united in an exceeding degree: they come from a great God, they come to great sinners, they deal with great mat-*

ters, and they work for us great results.” Everything in the way of blessing, temporal, spiritual and eternal, comes to the believer by way of promise.

“*And this is the promise that He hath promised us, even eternal life.*” Observe the perfect harmony there is between this statement and “*there [namely Zion] the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore*” (Psa 133:3)—how greatly they do err who assert that Israel’s portion was a temporal one only! This is the grand promise, the all-inclusive one, which embraces and comprehends all others. This is the sum of all felicity: of all blessings life is the most desired (Job 2:4), and therefore it is made the emblem of spiritual and eternal bliss. Many things are promised the children of God, but this chiefly, outstandingly; yea, all other things are but steps and means thereto. As eternal death contains the essence of all evils, so eternal life contains the essence of all good. As the good Shepherd assured His sheep, “*I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly*” (Joh 10:10). Life there is to be regarded in its widest possible latitude, as including the whole of God’s so-great salvation. It is a being enstated in His favour for evermore. It consists of a satisfying knowledge of the triune God (Joh 17:3). It is the inward enjoyment of Him, and the conforming of the soul to the image of His Son.

“*And this is the promise that He hath promised us.*” Why that duplicating of language? For a double reason: first, because the promise was made originally unto Christ as the covenant head of His people, and then to the believer in the Gospel; second, because “*eternal life*” has both a present and a future aspect. The former is in view in 2 Timothy 1:9, “*Who hath saved us [in His eternal decree], and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began*”—given to us in Him by solemn compact as our Surety. So again in Titus 1:2: “*In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.*” There was not only a purpose of grace in the heart of God from all eternity, but a real donation of eternal life unto us. “*But hath in due times manifested His word through preaching*” (Tit 1:3): that which was secretly and eternally agreed upon between God and Christ is now made known in the Gospel.

The Gospel message is, “*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*” There too “*everlasting life*” is an expression which is to be regarded as comprehending everything which Christ purchased for His people. Briefly summarized, eternal life is union with God Himself, in, through, and by Christ. “*It is the most perfect fruition of God Himself, and that for evermore*” (Witsius). It begins with the Divine operation of grace in our hearts “*to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*” (2Co 4:6). It continues in our beholding by faith the glory of the Lord as it shines in the Word, by which we are experientially and progressively “*changed into the same image from glory to glory*” (2Co 3:18). It is consummated at Christ’s return, when He will “*change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body*” (Phi 3:21); when in spirit and soul and body “*we shall be like Him*” (1Jo 3:2). It eventuates in dwelling with Him for ever in heaven.

But let us consider more definitely its essential elements. First, it is a life-in-law. When Adam transgressed he incurred a double death—a legal and an experiential one; being cast out of God’s favour and losing the impress of His moral image in his soul. Correspondingly, God’s elect are given both a legal and a spiritual life. It was to the former that Christ referred when He defined eternal life as “*and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life*” (Joh 5:24). That is entirely a judicial thing. In His atoning work Christ did two things: He bore the sins of His people and suffered the penalty of the law; He wrought out for them a perfect righteousness by obeying the precept of the law. Having met all its requirements, Christ merited its reward, which is “*life*” (Rom 7:10;10:5), namely a standing accepted before God in His cloudless favour; and that life is eternal because it is the award of the “*everlasting righteousness*” which He brought in (Dan 9:24). When the first Adam sinned, he forfeited God’s favour and came under the curse of the law; because the last Adam obeyed, He earned for His people the approbation of God and the blessing of the law. Thus they are not only delivered from condemnation or legal death, but they have legal life, which is justification (Rom 6:10,11).

It is most important to see that the believer has life in Christ before he has life from Him. In Christ he has met every requirement of the law, and not only is there now no condemnation to him, but he has received “*the gift of righteousness*” and must “*reign in life by one, Jesus Christ*” (Rom 5:17). In consequence of this, second, “*eternal life*” is a life of grace in the soul, for at the new birth the life of God is imparted and we are made vitally one with Christ. It is then that we pass “*from death unto life*” (1Jo 3:14) experientially, being Divinely quickened. The faculties of the soul are restored to their proper exercise: the eyes of the understanding are opened to see the glory of God, the ears unstopped to hear His voice, the affections raised unto things above, the tongue loosed in praise and petition. And they are infallibly assured that “*He who has begun a good work in you will perform [or “finish”] it*” (Phi 1:6). This too is an intrinsic part of the fruit of the Saviour’s travail (Tit 3:5-7).

Third, eternal life is consummated in everlasting celestial bliss, for God *“hath begotten us again unto a lively [living] hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us”* (1Pe 1:3,4). The spiritual life begun here is fully realized there. Now it is but the bud, then the lovely flower. *“For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now we know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known”* (1Co 13:12). Even now we are made partakers of the Divine nature (2Pe 1:4), but then shall we be perfectly conformed to the image of His Son (Rom 8:29), and eternally share with Him that *“fullness of joy,”* and those pleasures which are at God’s right hand. Thus *“eternal life”* includes a life-in-law, a life in the soul, a life in heaven; or justification, regeneration and glorification.

A few words on the implications of the particular form in which eternal life is presented. First, since it be by Divine *“promise,”* then it is a free gift. A promise supposes that the party making it is under no obligation to grant, and that the one to whom it is made can urge no claim. It is entirely gratuitous (see Gal. 3:18,21). That eternal life is a *“gift”* is asserted in John 10:28, Romans 6:23. Second, it implies acceptance on our part, and that as a *“gift.”* Yet the very act of receiving it involves certain exercises of soul. There must be repentance, or a being sensible of our guilt and the desire for its removal. The exercise of faith, or the extending of an empty hand to receive alms. Those exercises will necessarily be followed by obedience and a holy life. Where there be repentance, there is hatred of sin. Where there be faith, there is gratitude to the bounteous Giver and the longing to please Him. Third, everlasting bliss is also certain, for it is promised by Him who cannot lie. The unchanging faithfulness of God is the guarantee of endless felicity.

Chapter 35

SEDUCERS

1 John 2:26

“These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.”

It is likely that quite a number of our readers will consider that there is little or no occasion for us to devote a chapter to our present subject, or, at any rate, that they feel in no need of anything thereon. If so, they are lamentably ignorant of their own hearts. Anyone who imagines himself to be so well taught and established in the Truth as to be immune from being imposed upon by error is in a dangerous state of mind, for he is possessed by a spirit of pride and self-sufficiency, and therefore very liable to fall a victim to the wiles of the Devil. It is written, *“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall”* (Pro 16:18). There is nothing which God hates more than pride, and where it be allowed He humbles. Pride is *“the condemnation of the devil”* (1Ti 3:6), being that which brought about his ruin. It was the insensate pride of our first parents—the desire to be as God—which plunged the whole race to destruction. Pride or self-confidence was the cause of Peter’s sad fall. Those who think highly of themselves affront God, and will be brought low. *“Be not high minded, but fear”* (Rom 11:20), dear reader. *“When Majesty humbled Himself, shall the worm swell with pride?”* (Bernard).

The Christian is exhorted to *“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good”* (1Th 5:21): to examine carefully and critically everything which he hears or reads, testing it by the Word of God. There is pressing need for him to do so, for there is much error, cleverly disguised, abroad today. As another has pointed out, *“We may know a straight line, and be assured that there is in it no curve, or twist, or angle; and yet much that appears straight will be found to be irregular, and bent, and twisted, when tested by a measuring rod. In like manner we may know the Truth, and yet much that appears to be true will be found false when tested by the Truth Himself. The only perfect line of rectitude is Christ. All who are opposed to Him, in thought, or word, or deed, are liars; even as all watches are false which contradict the sun.”* The Christ of many a pulpit is radically different from the Christ of God, yet because the preacher invests the figment of his own imagination with the name of *“Christ,”* many unlearned and unstable souls are deceived into supposing that it is the Christ of Scripture which is being set before them. It was so in John’s day, and that is why he devoted this section of his epistle to an exposure of the same, and warning the saints against them.

The apostle was very jealous of the spiritual welfare of Christ's sheep, and anxious to secure them from the fierce wolves. In his other epistles he revealed the loving spirit that animated him when he declared, "*I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth*" (2Jo 4), and "*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth*" (3Jo 4). How greatly distressed, then, must he have been to discover that some had forsaken the same and espoused error (1Jo 2:19)! He therefore wrote to instruct and warn those who might be wavering. He knew that in the most enlightened there is much ignorance. In the most determined there is yet irresolution. In the most spiritual there is still corruption. Especially in the case of the newly converted was there a need for precept upon precept, line upon line. His long experience had shown him how many defects and dangers encompassed the most favoured and advanced believers, and how requisite it was ever to address unto them the word of exhortation. In the case before us it appears that he was very hopeful of success in thus addressing them. In verse 21, he intimates that he set the Truth before them encouraged by the belief that there would be found in them a readiness of mind to receive it; while in verse 27 he expresses the confidence that the anointing they had received would ensure their abiding in Christ.

A "*seducer*" is one who, by means of his blandishments or sophistries, seeks to allure another from the path of rectitude. The ungodly are allured by their own lusts. "*The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour: but the way of the wicked seduceth them*" (Pro 12:26). Even in this life the righteous are "*more excellent*" than others, in their character, their spiritual possessions, and their privileges. But the worker of iniquity is deceived by the way of the world, which tempts and cheats him by its promises of temporal gains, honours and pleasures, and blinds his mind to his eternal undoing. "*He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside [from the paths of wisdom and holiness], that he cannot deliver his soul*" (Isa 44:20). On the other hand, professing Christians are seduced by false teachers, who seek to corrupt their minds and turn them away from the Truth. They tacitly repudiate the total depravity of man, concealing the fact that he is dead in trespasses and sins, completely incapacitated to perform a single spiritual act; and flatter him by assuring him of his "*free will*," and that he has power to decide his own eternal destiny. They pervert God's way of salvation, omitting that which is abasing to pride, and substituting that which is pleasing to the flesh. They preach "*another Gospel*" than that of Christ. By "*cunning craftiness... they lie in wait to deceive*," and "*allure through the lusts of the flesh*" (Eph 4:14; 2Pe 2:18).

Of old God declared, "*Mine hand shall be upon the prophets that see vanity, and that divine lies... Because, even because they have seduced My people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace; and one built up a wall, and, lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar*" (Eze 13:9,10). "The peculiar guilt of these prophets consisted in seducing the worshippers of God into idolatry and iniquity, and encouraging them to harden themselves in impenitence; by assuring them of peace and prosperity at the very time when Divine judgments were about to be poured on them... Thus they acted, as if a man were to build a wall with loose stones or bricks of earth without cement; and others should seek to give an appearance of stability by daubing it over with mortar, made of bad materials, and not properly mixed; and should then expect that such a wall would protect them" (T. Scott). And those men were not heathen soothsayers, but Israelites who claimed to be the mouthpieces of Jehovah. So it is in Christendom: many have entered the sacred ministry as a means to worldly advancement and applause. They pretend to speak in the name of Christ, but they are strangers to Him. They love money rather than souls, and prefer the praise of men to the approbation of God.

"*All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived*" (2Ti 3:12,13). The seducers and the persecutors of God's people are two very different types. The former seek to turn them away from the Truth, whereas the latter oppose them because of their fidelity unto the Truth. The former conceal their real character, but the latter come out in their true colours. The one feign themselves to be friends and helpers, the other make no attempt to disguise the fact that they are enemies and antagonists. The former are harder to detect, and we are very apt to be less on our guard against them. Constant vigilance is required lest we be deceived by their "*good words and fair speeches*" (Rom 16:18). Let us not overlook, but rather be awed by, the striking accuracy of this prophecy. It is not that persecutors would become fiercer and fiercer as the Christian era proceeded, but that evil men and seducers should wax worse and worse. And so it has been historically. Nothing comparable, either in scale or ferocity, has equaled the persecutions of the saints by Nero and others of the Roman emperors who followed him. On the other hand, efforts to corrupt the Truth and beguile Christians by those claiming to be the servants of Christ have increased in number, daring, and subtlety.

The arch-seducer is Satan, who beguiled Eve through his wiles. He pretended to have her best interests at heart and to sympathize because of the restriction placed upon her liberty. He made her imagine that she was mistaken in supposing that she would be injured by eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, that such a thing was quite incompatible with God's goodness and His interest in her well-being. He assured her that, on the contrary, she would be the gainer by partaking of its fruit. The gilded bait was swallowed, and fatal was the result. That was the beginning of his trade in seducing souls, and he has plied it energetically ever since. The Devil is the instigator of innumerable devices to cheat the

unwary and ruin their souls. He often appears as an angel of light, and his ministers are disguised as those of righteousness. Such abounded at the commencement of this Christian era. The Lord revealed their method and aim in the parable where He spoke of the evil leaven being surreptitiously introduced into the meal (Mat 13:33). The epistles contain many warnings against them. Paul declared, "*For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ*" (2Co 11:13-15). It is so today.

The wicked one has many of his seducing emissaries in Christendom, who pose as men of superior enlightenment, with great spiritual zeal and love for souls, yet are engaged in stealthily propagating error and undermining the fundamentals of the faith. And, as we have seen, it was Divinely foretold that these evil men and seducers should wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. The word "*evil men*" signifies wicked, being the same one as used in "*the wicked one*" (1Jo 2:14). They have vile designs, though they appear under "*a form of godliness*" (2Ti 3:5). They are dissemblers, assuming a character which does not belong to them. They are tricksters, beguiling many by their arts to receive as good and true that which is pernicious and false. They are themselves deluded by the father of lies. They jettison the law of God under the pretence of magnifying His grace. They set aside the duty of the sinner to repent and believe, by overstressing his moral impotence. The most searching and humbling sections of Scripture are shelved by an erroneous system of what is termed "*rightly dividing the word of truth.*" Eternal punishment is represented as being incompatible with the goodness and mercy of God.

In other instances, these seducers of souls and corrupters of the Truth introduce, gradually, practices not sanctioned by Scripture, until there is a fully developed system of superstitious observances. Such wax worse and worse both in principle and practice. They grow increasingly ambitious and audacious. An awful example of this is seen in the ever-advancing blatancy and blasphemy of Romanism. In 1854 the dogma of "*The Immaculate Conception*" was invented and announced, Pope Pius proclaiming that the Virgin Mary was absolutely pure and sinless from the womb, and declaring the same to be "*the established doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church*"—thereby ascribing to her body what pertained alone to the Lord Jesus Christ. In 1870 the Vatican Council declared that the Pope was infallible in the execution of all that pertained to his pontifical functions, thus investing him with a Divine attribute. In 1951, amid unprecedented pomp and pageantry, the Pope published the dogma of Mary's Assumption, wherein it was averred that she had been taken "*body and soul into the glory of heaven,*" placing her on a par with the Saviour. The same increasing wickedness is seen in thousands of non-papish churches, whose pulpits are now occupied by men voicing the skepticism (the denial of miracles) of infidels and agnostics.

"*These things I have written unto you concerning them that seduce you,*" or, as the American Revised Version (often more literal and accurate in translating the Greek verb) has it, "*These things have I written unto you concerning them that would lead thee astray.*" The "*these things*" refers to what is contained in verses 18-25, and probably many would be helped if we briefly reviewed their contents. First, it is to be noted that John was here addressing the youngest in the family, the "*little children,*" or "*babes,*" as the word properly signifies. It is the newly converted who, in their ignorance and simplicity, most need to be warned against false teachers. They are informed that this Christian dispensation is "*the last time*" or concluding era of the world's history, so that no further revelation from God is to be expected, and therefore any who claim to be favoured with such are impostors. The character and will of God have been fully and finally made known in and by His incarnate Son (Heb 1:1,2). The presence of "*many antichrists*" furnished evidence that "*the last time*" had even then begun, for their activities demonstrated that the true Christ had come, and since He had ushered in the final age, and they were opposing Him, naught remained but the judgment of God.

Then the apostle intimated that there was no occasion for those young Christians to be stumbled because some of their fellows had given ear to the antichrists and had apostatized from the faith, for he assured them that those renegades were never anything more than nominal disciples. Though they had made a profession, had much head knowledge of the Truth, and appeared to be full of zeal for the Gospel, nevertheless they were graceless souls, strangers to the saving operations of the Holy Spirit. They "*were not of us:*" though members of the churches, they never had vital union with Christ and His people. Their going out made it "*manifest that they were not all of us*" (verse 19). While it cannot but be a distressing and disturbing experience unto God's people to behold some of those deserting the assemblies and proving to be traitors with whom they had enjoyed outward fellowship, yet it should not shatter their own faith, for God often suffers the chaff to be thus sifted and separated from the wheat. The Scripture gives plain warning that there are thorny-ground hearers as well as fruitful ones, that the Gospel net encloses bad fishes besides good ones, that many shall follow the pernicious ways of false prophets.

Next, in verse 20, he assured the babes, "*But ye have an unction from the Holy One,*" which distinguished them radically from the apostates. That "*unction*" is God's gracious provision for His own people, to preserve them from embracing fatal error. That unction or "*anointing*" is the coming of the Spirit from Christ upon those for whom He shed His blood: it is both the communication of a spiritual gift and a Divine operation which separates the recipient from the

world and all that is opposed to God, consecrating him to Him. The first benefit which believers have by this anointing is an illumination of the mind: “*Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.*” The knowledge imparted to the Christian by the gift of the Spirit and His effectual application of the Truth unto the heart is radically different from the wisdom of the natural man, or any mental apprehension of spiritual things which he may obtain. It is a supernatural, spiritual and saving acquaintance with Divine things. It is an experiential and certifying knowledge, by which the soul is infallibly assured of the verity of God’s Word. It is a humbling and conforming knowledge, casting the heart into the mould of Divine doctrine (Rom 6:17). It is therefore a preservative knowledge, which prevents its possessor being fatally deceived by error. It is an operative knowledge which stirs the soul unto holy action.

It was because these babes in Christ were savingly acquainted with the Truth that John thus addressed them, and because they knew “*that no lie is of the truth*” (verse 21). When the eyes of the understanding be opened by God, there is the capacity to distinguish between light and darkness. Because the sheep recognize the voice of the shepherd, they refuse to follow the call of a stranger. Nevertheless it was needful for the apostle to put them on their guard against false prophets, that they might be still further established in the faith and fortified against specious error. Error often has a very plausible appearance, and many are deceived thereby: since they have no inward and saving experience of the Truth, they are unable to discern that which is opposed to it. But those who know and are established in the Gospel are assured that no lie can be found in or deduced from it: as well expect foul water from a clean fountain as heresy in the pure Word of God. Whatever be contrary to the Gospel of Christ cannot be sound and wholesome.

From that general principle John proceeded to point out that anyone who denied that Jesus is the Christ was a liar and an antichrist, and no matter what be his pretensions “*the same hath not the Father*” (verses 22,23)—a repudiator of the Truth, an antagonist of God’s Son, a seducer of souls, and therefore a deadly enemy of the saints. By such fearful names of opprobrium does God stigmatize the corrupters of His Gospel, and warn His people against them. In view of such a menace John made a practical application of the foregoing, exhorting the saints to persevere in the faith and heed not those who sought to entice away from it (verse 24). It is only by means of the Truth abiding in our hearts and operating in our lives that we are rendered immune to the Devil’s lies and kept from apostasy. A cherishing of that which was blessed to our conversion, and the conforming of our characters and conduct thereto, maintains the soul in communion with the Lord, and that will make us turn a deaf ear unto those siren voices which seek to draw us from Him and bring about our eternal ruin.

Finally, to encourage these young converts to hold fast the Truth and shun lying novelties, the apostle: reminded them, “*And this is the promise that He hath promised us, even eternal life*” (verse 25). “*Eternal life*” is both a present possession and a future prospect. It is received by faith’s laying hold of the Gospel offer, and it is realized in the soul just so far as fellowship with Christ is practically maintained by subjection to His will. But the full possession and fruition of “*eternal life*” (the sum of the believer’s blessedness and the climax of his bliss) awaits the world to come, and it is by hope’s anticipation thereof—through faith’s keeping steadfastly in view the joy set before him—that the believer is strengthened to run the race set before him and kept from straying. Now there is nothing more pleasing to God than our making a good use of His promises. First, by collecting them, storing them in our minds, meditating much upon them, and making them our spiritual food. Second, by faith’s laying hold of the same and pleading them before the throne of grace: “*do as Thou hast said*” (2Sa 7:25; and cf. Psa 119:49; Act 27:25). Third, by cleansing ourselves from everything contrary to holiness (2Co 7:1).

“*These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.*” From which we may see, first, that all teachers of error are beguilers of souls—what terrible appellations: liars, antichrists, seducers! How they should be feared and shunned! Second, how needful it is that we be well informed and instructed from the Scriptures, that we may be enabled to detect and reject everything that is contrary thereto. The welfare of our souls and the glory of God demand that we thoroughly familiarize ourselves with the Word of Truth. Third, “it is the duty of a good and diligent pastor not only to gather a flock, but also to drive away wolves; for what will it avail to proclaim the pure Gospel, if he connive at the impostures of Satan?” (Calvin). Error must be exposed and refuted if the minister is to “*take the stumblingblock out of the way of My people*” (Isa 57:14). Finally, we see how that, humanly speaking, we are beholden to the seducers of the first century for not a little in the Epistles, their attacks giving occasion to warn against them. Thus God can bring light out of darkness, and by error make way for a more complete discovery of the Truth.

Chapter 36

OUR ANOINTING

1 John 2:27

“But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him.”

In this verse and the next one the apostle continues and virtually completes what he had said upon the saints' abiding in Christ. Though our text be by no means free of difficulty, yet by carefully noting its coherence with the context its meaning is more or less obvious. In view of the defection of so many (verse 19) and the continued activities of antichrists to draw away others, John had addressed their responsibility and bade them persevere in the faith, and heed not those who sought to entice them away from it. It was their duty to store the Truth in their minds and treasure it in their hearts, to yield their entire beings to its sway and reduce its substance to practice. Abandon it not for any specious novelty (verse 24). In verse 25 an incentive was supplied to encourage and stimulate them in the performance of that duty. In verse 26 a solemn warning is added for the purpose of showing the necessity for their compliance therewith.

The apostle's design, then, in the verse now before us is threefold: explanatory, consolatory, cautionary. First, he states the reason why believers had stood firm under the testing which had shaken and overthrown so many of their fellows. It was not because of any superior native sagacity, but was to be attributed solely unto the gracious and effectual provision which God has made for the preservation of His children from the deceits of Satan. In verse 20 John had stated implicitly how it was that the saints had been delivered from serious error; now he affirms explicitly that they would continue to be kept from receiving lying vanities. Here, as everywhere else in the writings of the apostles, the grand end in view was to remove all ground for boasting from the saints and to move them to ascribe all the glory unto their Redeemer. Our security for abiding in God—in the Father and the Son—is here attributed to that which is imparted to us at regeneration: there is now that within us which preserves from the evil without us; we have been given a sure antidote against the poison of the serpent. At the new birth we received that which ensures our abiding in Christ.

Second, whereas that clear statement redounded to the honour of Christ, for it was from Him that the preservative benefit was received, it could not fail to comfort and assure the hearts of those to whom it was addressed. It must not be overlooked that, at that time, those believers were in special need of solace. They had been witnessing a most mysterious and distressing spectacle. They had seen a large number of their professing brethren forsaking the churches to which they belonged, and not a few of the ministers themselves apostatizing. That was enough thoroughly to discourage mature Christians, and much more so the babes of the family. How strengthening then to their faith to be Divinely assured that the anointing which they had received from Christ was no temporary thing or evanescent experience which would soon wear off, but a durable and effective one, that would stand them in good stead unto the close of their earthly pilgrimage. How comforting to be authoritatively informed that the same Divine illumination which taught them at the beginning and which had imparted to them the saving knowledge of Christ would remain to instruct them so that they would be kept steadfast in the faith and would most certainly abide in Christ.

Third, the above declaration was also intended to animate them unto increased watchfulness and diligence. While our last-made remarks stand in need of no qualification, they do need amplification, lest they be perverted to a wrong use. Such an assurance must not be abused to rashness and self-confidence. However sound and extensive their spiritual knowledge, they had real need of more. There is no remaining stationary in the Christian life: unless we progress, we retrogress. Unless we make good use of what God has given us, we are in real danger of losing what we seem to have (Luk 8:18). In order to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we are required to make daily use of the means which God has provided. This anointing is not given to slothfulness and laziness. It is a vile perversion of this heavenly privilege to make God the patron of negligence and the indulger of the ease of the flesh. This Divine gift increases our obligations: *“for unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required”* (Luk 12:48). Nor must it be abused unto pride and self-sufficiency, so that we look contemptuously upon the more ignorant, for we have nothing good but what we have received (1Co 4:7).

But we must now inquire into the precise nature of this inestimable gift. Some have thought that by this *“anointing”* the Truth itself is intended, that the doctrine of the Gospel which they had received would preserve them from the seduc-

ers warned against. But such a view accords not with either the text or the context, for the truth of the Gospel was the very thing which the antichrists were attacking, and it was a true and experiential knowledge thereof which constituted the saint's safeguard. This "anointing" is here said to abide in those who were the favoured recipients of the same, whereas strictly speaking we are said to abide in the Truth. Again, this anointing is said to teach us all things, whereas the Truth is that which we are taught: thus we must distinguish between that which instructs and that wherein we are instructed. Finally, it must be borne in mind that everywhere else in Scripture the Holy Spirit is said to be the Teacher of the saints, the One who establishes them in the Truth, and there is nothing whatever in our text or the context which requires us to adopt any other signification.

The Greek word for "anointing" in our text is identical with the one rendered "unction" in verse 20, and has reference to one and the same thing. In our exposition of that verse we showed, first, that under the Old Testament economy prophets, priests and kings were appointed unto and confirmed in their office by being anointed with the holy oil, and that they typified the anointing of Christ Himself, with the Holy Spirit (Isa 61:1; Act 10:38). It was from that endowment He was denominated "the Christ," which means "the Anointed One." At His incarnation His humanity received a fullness of the Spirit's grace, being born "that holy thing" (Luk 1:35); at His baptism and entrance upon His public ministry He received a fullness of the Spirit's gifts (Isa 11:2; Mat 3:17); while at His ascension He was anointed with the oil of gladness (Psa 45:7; Act 2:33). "And of His fullness have we all received, and grace for grace" (Joh 1:16)—the grace in us answering (according to our proportion) to the grace which is in Him: foreshadowed of old in the anointing of Israel's high priest, concerning which we read, "The precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard... that went down to the skirts of his garments" (Psa 133:2), reaching to the lowest of his members. In like manner, the believer's anointing is an emanation from Christ.

Christ is our Anointer, and the anointing which believers receive from Him is the Holy Spirit, and thus are the members conformed to their glorious Head, yet with this difference: He was anointed with the Spirit without measure (Joh 3:34), we "according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Eph 4:7). This "anointing," then, is nothing less than the gift of the Holy Spirit and supply of grace which is received from the Anointed One, who is "full of grace and truth" (Joh 1:14). It is an invaluable blessing which cannot be too highly esteemed. It is a Divine gift, "without repentance" (Rom 11:29), never to be recalled or rescinded. It is incorruptible, and cannot be destroyed, being that good part which shall continue with them and which none can take away. This is the "oil in their vessels" (that is, in their hearts) which distinguishes the wise virgins from the foolish ones (Mat 25:4). Both had the "lamp" in their hands; that which differentiates the gracious soul from the graceless professor is something within, namely the indwelling Spirit. By this Divine unction the regenerate receive light into the sacred mysteries of the Gospel, so that they have a saving and satisfying acquaintance with and experience thereof, which effectually preserves them from being imposed upon by counterfeits.

The figure of "anointing" is a very comprehensive one, which more plainly appears when we compare all the passages where the holy oil was used under the Old Testament economy. It was employed with the design of dedicating a thing or a person unto God (Gen 22:18). It was provided for the purpose of illumination, to furnish light (Exo 25:6). It was designed to lubricate and refresh: "oil to make his face to shine" (Psa 104:15). Since it was compounded of sweet spices (Exo 30:24,25), it produced a fragrance in those using the same. In the blessing pronounced on Asher it was said, "let him dip his foot in oil. Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be" (Deu 33:24,25), which, in figurative language, signified the Spirit supplying power for the walk. Now in all these respects the antitypical substance is communicated by Christ through the unction of the Spirit. Thereby believers are set apart and consecrated to God, illuminated and instructed, quickened and comforted, made a sweet savour unto God and unto one another. There are two beautiful allusions unto the last in the Song of Solomon. First, the Spouse says of her Beloved, "Thy love is better than wine. Because of the savour of Thy good ointments Thy name is as ointment poured forth" (1:2,3); while He in turn declares, "How fair is thy love, My sister, My spouse! how much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices" (4:10), where He admires the graces which the Spirit has wrought in her.

Now it is the second aspect of the above which is principally in view in our text, "But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him." No less than seven things are here predicated of this anointing. First, it was from Christ that it proceeded. Those unto whom John was writing had remained steadfast in the Truth, unshaken by heresy, and he would have them know the reason for this or from whence their constancy originated: they were indebted to the Holy One for His unction. Thus were fulfilled the several promises which He made to His disciples ere He departed from this world. "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father... for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you" (Joh 15:26; 16:7). It was the bestowment of the risen Saviour, for when He ascended on high He "gave gifts

unto men” (Eph 4:8)—an earnest of which was imparted when He “*breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Spirit*” (Joh 20:22).

Second, this endowment was a subjective one: it “*abideth in you.*” It is a gracious experience in the inner man, which is entirely beyond the cognizance of the unregenerate. As the Lord Jesus had announced, “*the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you*” (Joh 14:17). This is made good when it can be said, “*For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance*” (1Th 1:5). The external Word is now applied internally. The mind is Divinely illumined, so as to receive a clear, convincing, contenting knowledge of the Truth. At the same time the affections are purified and the heart turned unto God, so that it is fitted for spiritual and heavenly things: this is that “*washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit*” (Tit 3:5). Then it is that the Word is received “*in much affliction* [as we are convicted of our sins], *with joy of the Holy Spirit*” (1Th 1:6) as He makes known to us our Divine pardon. In the latter respect this anointing is “*the oil of gladness*” (Psa 45:7), for the Spirit is a Comforter as well as a Sanctifier. Combine Divine illumination, purification and consolation, and what a sure means are they for establishing in the Truth!

Third, this anointing is a permanent blessing: it “*abideth in you,*” “*that He [the Comforter] may abide with you for ever*” (Joh 14:16). It is very much more than a fitful emotion or brief rapture of spirit which soon gives place to depression; namely, stable, and enduring. Therein it is to be distinguished from our varying frames and feelings. It is indeed exercised and manifested in different ways and directions: sometimes producing groans which cannot be uttered, sometimes bestowing sweet foretastes of celestial bliss. But beneath all surface perception it is exerting a steadying influence, keeping God and eternity before the soul, so that in the hour of temptation or tribulation it turns to Him for succour.

Fourth, this unction is, in itself, sufficient: so truly so that it is affirmed of its beneficiaries, “*ye need not that any man teach you*”—either to convey authority to the Truth, to impart a saving knowledge of it to the soul, or to induce the regenerate to adhere firmly unto it in love and obedience. The Gospel carries its own witness, and when, through the Spirit’s anointing, it is applied to the heart in saving power, it is received “*not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe*” (1Th 2:13).

Fifth, it instructs its recipients: “*the same anointing teacheth you of all things.*” This is fulfillment of God’s new-covenant promise: “*I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord*” (Jer 31:33,34). In the accomplishment of that promise the Lord works so effectually upon and within His elect that, to use the language of another apostle, they are made “*partakers of the divine nature*” (2Pe 1:4). There is a peculiar power accompanying the teaching of the Lord by His Spirit: “*Behold, God exalteth by His power: who teacheth like Him?*” (Job 36:22). So our Lord interpreted His promise, “*All thy children shall be taught of the Lord*” (Isa 54:13), as “*every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto Me*” (Joh 6:45). There is such an efficacy attending the Divine teaching that whosoever is favoured therewith is positively assured that the same is of and from God Himself, for he now has the certifying evidence of its verity within his own soul.

The anointing of believers with the Spirit is for the purpose of giving them an experiential acquaintance and saving knowledge of the Gospel, enlightening their understandings and causing their hearts to receive the same with delight, casting their inner man into the holy image of the same (Rom 6:17). Thereby they are given the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God in Christ, the eyes of their understanding being enlightened, that they may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints (Eph 1:17,18). Such impressions of the holiness, righteousness, goodness and grace of God are indelibly left in their souls that Satan can no longer deceive them with lying substitutes. As another apostle said, “*Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart*” (2Co 3:3). They have received the Spirit which is of God, that they may know the things which are freely given to them by God (1Co 2:12), that they may be assured of their reality, convinced of their value, appropriate, enjoy and embody them in their lives. They now have a spirit of discernment, but flee from hirelings (Joh 10:5).

Sixth, it is genuine and wholesome: “*and is truth, and is no lie*”—no darkness mars the light. Thus it is simple or pure blessing, no heresy being mixed with it. Therefore it is reliable and trustworthy. The Spirit is like a seal, by which the Truth is testified and certified to the soul. “*For while faith ought to look to God, He alone can be a witness to Himself, so as to convince our hearts that what our ears receive has come from Him*” (Calvin). The added words “*and is no lie*” signify that God has so endowed the regenerate with sound judgment and discernment that they will not be deceived by falsehoods, or even left in a state of uncertainty and vacillation about them. There is no danger, no possibility, of anyone being misled by what this holy unction teaches; no erring while we walk according to this direction. Therefore we are

to measure everything by what the Spirit teaches in the Word. Thus not only is it thorough and complete—for “By this teaching of God Himself, they were instructed in all things essential to salvation, and could not be deceived” (Thos. Scott)—it also conveys a conviction which cannot be called into question or shaken by man or devil.

“There is truth and no lie in what the Spirit shows you of the love of God in Christ, and sheds abroad in your heart of that love. Be sure of that, and be not afraid to act upon the assurance of it. There is truth and no lie in what the Spirit opens up to you of the freeness and fullness of the Father’s overtures of mercy in the Son. Be sure of that, and be not afraid to act upon the assurance of it. There is truth and no lie in what the Spirit would have you grasp of the peace which passeth understanding, the hope that maketh not ashamed, the joy unspeakable that is full of glory. Be sure of that, and be not afraid to act upon the assurance of it. There is truth and no lie in that which ye have heard from the beginning, so abiding in you that you abide in the Son and in the Father. That really is the anointing which is truth and no lie. Be sure of that, and be not afraid to act out and out upon the assurance of it” (Robert Candlish).

Instead of now taking up the seventh thing which is here predicated of our anointing (namely that it ensures our abiding in Christ), we defer it to our next chapter, and instead proffer some further remarks upon the oft-misunderstood clause “*and ye need not that any man teach you.*” That language calls for the expositor, to explain the force of its terms, for some ignorant souls who fail to understand the sense have been misled by its sound. Certain fanatics suppose it means that the Christian is independent of all preachers, and therefore have contended for the exclusion of oral ministry from the churches. Now it is obvious that John wrote not to promote a spirit of presumption and unwillingness to be taught by others—his own example contradicted any such idea, for he was then engaged in instructing these very persons. Nor was there any inconsistency between his statement and his practice. He taught the disciples and they were grateful and much edified. Yet supposing him to be withdrawn from them and his pen silenced, it did not follow that they must remain ignorant. The Spirit would teach them, by him and without him as He pleased. The child of God, with the Bible in his hand and the Holy Spirit in his heart, is capable of all spiritual knowledge. Whereas Divine teaching does not supersede ministerial instruction, it does surpass the same.

Chapter 37

ABIDING IN CHRIST

1 John 2:28

“And now, little children, abide in Him; that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at his coming.”

The apostle was engaged in warning professing Christians against false teachers who desired to corrupt them, yea, who had already prevailed with many of their company (verses 18,19). He had shown them up in their true colours, denouncing them as antichrists and liars (verse 22). He had exhorted the saints to hold fast the beginning of their confidence steadfast to the end (verse 24). He had reminded them of the grand promise given for their encouragement (verse 25). Then he assured the regenerate that the anointing which they had received from Christ was no mere temporary benefit, but one which would remain in them as an incorruptible principle of life and light, supplying them with such spiritual discernment as no human teaching could impart. That “*anointing*” consisted, as we have seen, of the gift of the Holy Spirit and His saving grace. It is the Spirit as an illuminator and instructor which is here singled out for particular mention. He teaches nothing but infallible Truth, without the slightest mixture of error. He teaches “*of all things:*” that is, all things essential unto our ingrafting into and continuation in Christ—the essential and fundamental things of the Gospel, whatever be requisite for our obedience to Christ and communion with Him. That all believers are taught, however ignorant they be in matters of lesser importance.

Paraphrasing the excellent Owen, we would say that, first, all Divine Truth which is necessary to be known and believed that we may live unto God, abide in Christ, and be preserved from seducers is revealed in the Scriptures (Act 20:32). Second, but of ourselves we cannot understand the Scriptures unto the ends just specified (1Co 2:14): if we could

there would be no need that we should be taught them by the Spirit (1Co 2:12). Third, by the anointing of the Spirit believers are taught all those things, so that they are enabled to discern, understand and acknowledge them (1Jo 2:27). The Spirit is given to Christ's redeemed for this very purpose: that He may graciously and savingly instruct them in the truth of the Gospel by the supernatural enlightening of their minds, causing the soul to cling firmly unto it with love and delight, transforming them in the whole inner man into the image of the same. Thereby it answers to the anointing of the Lord Jesus with the same Spirit which made Him "*of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord*" (Isa 11:3). "*The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; and He will show them His covenant*" (Psa 25:14). God will not conceal from them the knowledge of His will so far as their salvation is concerned in it, but will teach them the way wherein they should walk if they are to be acceptable to Him.

The general end or design of God in the gift and teaching of the Spirit is to provide for believers remaining steadfast in Christ, and thus verse 27 closes with the emphatic statement, "*and even as it [the anointing] hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him.*" Whatever be required in order to maintain communion with Christ all believers are taught. The especial end in view that is here singled out is preservation and deliverance from all antichrists and seducers, with the lies and false doctrines which they propagate against Christ and His Gospel. The only means whereby we may be kept from such pernicious opinions and ways is by an assured knowledge and inward acquaintance with what is revealed in Holy Writ. Truth is the only antidote against error, and none but the Holy Spirit can lead anyone into the life-giving meaning of the Truth and quicken him into real fellowship with the Lord thereby. Those who lack this spiritual, sure and establishing knowledge, possessing but a bare conjectural and theoretical acquaintance with it, are Christians only in name, receiving the Gospel from men in the letter rather than in the substance of it; and, not being rooted and grounded in the faith, are subject to any wind of false doctrine.

Nothing else ensures stability and fidelity. Man's knowledge, skill, or disputing ability is insufficient to preserve from being inveigled with fair pretences or enticed with the cunning sleights of Satan, where he lies in wait to deceive. Yea, as Owen pointed out, "Temptations may come as a storm or tempest, which quickly drives men from their greatest fleshly confidences. Hence oftentimes those who are forwardest to say, Though all men should forsake the Truth yet would not they do so, are the forwardest upon trial so to do." But this sacred anointing fails none who receive it, and because of it they never fail. First, because His teaching is not merely an external and doctrinal instruction, but an internal and effectual operation. Whereas He makes use indeed of the written Word and teaches nothing but what is revealed therein, He bestows an understanding that we may know Him that is true, and open our eyes so that we may see clearly the wondrous things that are in God's Law. The degree of this knowledge varies considerably, both in the clearness with which Divine things are perceived and in the scope or extent of the same, the Spirit acting according to the sovereignty of His will (1Co 12:11); but none who receives His anointing comes short of whatever be necessary to ensure his abiding in Christ.

Second, the Spirit so teaches as to give a love unto and delight in the things that are taught. This is the next principal cause of action and practice, being that which binds together the different means and instruments of our security, rendering them firm and stable. Even though the mind be informed and perceives a duty, if the will and the affections be not wrought upon and won over unto a hearty approbation of the same we shall never conform ourselves unto them in the diligent performance of that duty. That which is done merely from convictions of conscience, without any gladness of heart, will neither be acceptable unto God nor shall we be constant therein. No matter how well instructed we be by God's ministers, or what light we personally acquire by study, unless there be genuine love of the Truth and the personal practice thereof it will prove insufficient unto our preservation and the saving profession of it. This is the outstanding characteristic feature of this Divine unction: it communicates a delight in the Truth wherein it instructs and promotes a glad obedience to what it requires. When the blessed Spirit by His teaching breathes into the soul a holy and spiritual complacency in the things which are taught, then we taste how gracious the Lord is in them, His Word is rendered sweeter to us than the honeycomb, and we run in the way of His commandments.

This anointing imparts a secret and infallible assurance unto that which is communicated, for "*it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth... He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself*" (1Jo 5:6,10). Then, in such a connection, the "*and ye need not that any man teach you*" should be quite plain to all. They were not ignoramuses who were unacquainted with the Truth. They were not dependent upon Gnostics or any other "*great*" and wise men to indoctrinate them. No so-called 'infallible church' or 'pope' was required to authenticate God's Word and persuade of its verity. As Divinely enlightened they already knew the things John was setting before them. Similarly, Paul wrote, "*But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another*" (1Th 4:9). So here, yet as the well-balanced Calvin remarked, "There is another use to be made of this doctrine: that when men really understand what is needful for them, we are yet to warn and rouse them, that they may be

more confirmed.” As every believer has faith, yet there is need for a further increase of it, so there is ever room for an enlarging and deepening of spiritual knowledge.

“*And ye need not that any man teach you*” is also mentioned to counteract and put down that carnal tendency of idolizing the human instrument. There is a very great danger of this. Young believers especially are apt to think too highly of those who are made a blessing to their souls. Where the affections be fixed upon the messenger rather than upon the message itself, there the teacher comes between the heart and Christ. Nor must we esteem the most gifted as though his interpretation be an oracle of God, but rather test what he says by the Word. It is so easy to fix the eye on the servant who is seen, instead of on his unseen Master. How many go to church hoping to receive something from the preacher, instead of looking to the Lord for a blessing! Though teachers be needed, they must not be relied upon. “*Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?... So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase*” (1Co 3:5,7). What a corrective for preacher-worship is that! Even an apostle could not open their minds to apprehend a single truth unless the Spirit was pleased to bless his efforts.

“*Even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him.*” That is the seventh thing predicated of our Divine anointing: it produces a permanent stabilizing effect, preserving from dangerous error. It so instructs and establishes in the faith, imparts such a spirit of discernment of truth from falsehood, that it is now impossible for Satan to deceive them with his lies (Mat 24:24). It not only illumines the mind, but sanctifies the heart and turns the will Godward. Such impressions are made upon the soul of the holiness, sovereignty and goodness of God, that they are instinctively repelled by any teaching which repudiates the same. They have a spiritual palate which is acute in distinguishing between what is wholesome and that which is poisonous. They have such a love of the Truth that nothing can induce them to sell it. God has given them the spirit “*of a sound mind*” (2Ti 1:7) which enables them to perceive the sophistries of would-be seducers. It conveys to them a wisdom which makes wise the simple (Psa 19:7), which none of the schools of this world can impart. And therefore many an unlettered peasant is often far sounder in the faith than preachers with their classical and theological degrees. Nor is their knowledge confined to merely a few simple truths: they have a deeper acquaintance with the entire doctrine of Christ, being taught in their own experience, and in such a way that none can shake them.

“*Ye shall abide in Him.*” The careful reader will observe that the margin gives as an alternative rendering “*or it*”—that is, the Truth. The Greek allows either. To abide in Christ and to abide in the Truth are here equivalent. In the whole of this passage the contrast is between those who turn from Christ to antichrists and those who remain loyal to Him and steadfast in the faith. The apostle is comforting the distressed believers by assuring them of his confidence in them: that having received from Christ an anointing which had taught them of all things necessary to their salvation and preservation they would endure to the end. He is saying what another apostle declared of the Hebrew saints, “*But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul*” (Heb 10:39). “*To ‘abide in Christ’ is to continue in the true faith and confession of Him, and of all which concerns Him—His truth, His ordinances, His worship. To abide in Christ is to persevere in the truth of His everlasting Gospel*” (S.E. Pierce). To abide in Christ is to have Him for our supreme Object, to centre our affections upon Him, to make Him our centre and circumference—our all in all.

“*And now, little children, abide in Him; that,
when He shall appear, we may have confidence,
and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.*” (verse 28)

Having completed his distinct instructions and exhortations to the fathers, young men and babes (verses 13-17), John returns to and again addresses the whole family collectively under the same name of endearment (*teknion*) as in verse 12. With paternal affection the apostle now exhorts them to abide in Christ. That term “*little children*” was the one His beloved Master had employed that never-to-be-forgotten night when He so graciously instructed the eleven in the upper room on the eve of His crucifixion: “*Little children, yet a little while I am with you*” (Joh 13:33). Doubtless that tender word made a particularly deep impression upon the one who was wont to recline on His bosom, and was tenderly cherished in his memory: so much so that he in turn made use of it when addressing his dear converts. As his mind reverted to the great “*paschal discourse*,” he would recall how that the Saviour had used the word “*abide*” no less than eight times in John 15:4-11, for “*continue ye in My love*” (verse 9) and “*that My joy might remain in you*” (verse 11) are the same in the original as the “*abide in Me*” of verse 4. Now this exhortation “*abide in Him*” is so blessed, so important, and so comprehensive, as to call for a fuller opening by the expositor.

To abide, in the language of Scripture, means more than merely to remain in one place. It has a moral force, and signifies to adhere unto. Thus it implies a previous union or connection with a person or thing. To be in Christ, and to abide in Him, are distinct thoughts. In order to abide in Christ, one must first be in Him. The former respects a union which is

effected by the gracious power of God, and cannot be dissolved or suspended. Accordingly, believers are never enjoined to “*be in Christ*,” for that could not be the subject of exhortation, since it already exists as an accomplished fact by new creation. But to “*abide in Christ*” is the subject of injunction, because the exercise of the believer’s responsibility is involved therein. Union with Christ has made possible a life of communion with Him, and that life may be suitably addressed, and is required to respond to His call. Unlike the being in Christ, the abiding is capable of interruption. When assured that “*we are in Him that is true*” (1Jo 5:20), the reference is to a union which cannot be disannulled, to a standing which cannot be shaken. But when we hear the Lord saying “*abide in Me*” (or an apostle repeating His word) it implies that we are exposed to failure at this point, or have already failed therein. It is therefore a word which calls us to vigilance.

In calling upon believers to abide in Christ, John was bidding them to adhere steadfastly to His Gospel, to live in constant dependence upon Him in faith and hope, to render loving obedience to His commandments, to enter into fellowship with Him. Thereby they would have the assurance of being approved disciples, and in the day to come would not be ashamed before Him, as will all hypocrites and apostates. Some may consider it needless, if not meaningless, to press the duty of perseverance when the exercise of it is certain. Having stated so emphatically, “*Ye shall abide in Him*,” why, in the very next breath, enjoin them to do that very thing? Because privileges do not cancel obligations, but rather increase them. While our abiding in Christ is ensured by the grace of the Spirit, that releases us not from the discharge of our accountability. The Spirit is not given to exempt us from the performance of duty, but to enable us to discharge it. It is just because He indwells us that we ought to be the more diligent and faithful. Talents are given us to use, and not to bury in the ground. It is the Spirit’s presence and power which makes failure on our part inexcusable.

The Lord Jesus informed Peter, “*I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not*,” nevertheless, shortly after, He bade him “*Pray that ye enter not into temptation*” (Luk 22:32,40). He who regards those things as being “*inconsistent*” knows nothing yet as he ought to know. In 1 Corinthians 10:13, another apostle definitely assured the saints, “*God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it*.” Then might they not remain passive and be carried down the stream of temptation? No indeed: very different is the use which he makes of that encouraging assurance, namely “*Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry*” (verse 14). He drew an argument from that very promise for the performance of duty. Promises are given for the purpose of quickening industry, and animating us in the use of means. God does not preserve His people by physical force, and compel them to retain their standing in Christ—as He establishes the earth and the heavens by the forthputting of His might. Instead, He is pleased to use rational means which are suited to moral agents. The inward workings of His grace do not set aside or render nugatory external warnings, expositions and admonitions.

In Philippians 2:12,13, Paul employed the same spiritual logic that he had used when addressing the Corinthians: “*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure*.” There he argues that we ought to be active and diligent because God is working in us! Both the willing and the doing are freely ascribed unto God, and yet for that very reason we are to do. He will assist in the performing of it. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for God leaves you not alone. Though the task be far beyond your puny strength, He gives assurance, My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in your weakness. Grace is a dynamic, an operating principle, and, where it dwells, radically affects our thoughts, influences our desires, produces good works. Divine grace cannot tabernacle in a human heart without breaking forth to act in the life. It is evidenced by its fruits. Just because you have received a Divine anointing which assures your spiritual preservation from all seducers of souls, see to it that you abide in Christ—remain loyal to Him at all costs.

We must now consider the reason or the motive by which the exhortation is enforced: “*And now, little children, abide in Him; that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming*.” Christ is now hid from the eyes of the world, for He has gone into heaven itself “*to appear in the presence of God*” (Heb 9:24) as the great High Priest of those for whom He died. But the Scriptures plainly and repeatedly testify that Christ will appear again—personally, publicly (Act 1:11), when He shall sit upon the throne of His glory (Mat 25:31), when “*every eye shall see Him*” (Rev 1:7). In view of this blessed and solemn fact the questions may well be asked, “*But who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth?*” (Mal 3:2). God’s Word makes answer. On the one hand, it assures the saints, “*he that dwelleth [abideth] in love dwelleth in God, and God in him: Herein is our love made perfect [i.e. reaches its designed end], that we may have boldness [confidence] in the day of judgment*” (1Jo 4:16,17). On the other hand “*the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment*” but will be “*like the chaff which the wind driveth away*” (Psa 1:5,4).

In the great day to come, the searchlight of Divine holiness will be turned upon two radically different classes of persons, clearly revealing them for what they are, and each will, righteously, be dealt with accordingly. Those that have done good will come forth unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation (Joh

5:29); or, to cite an Old Testament passage whose language approximates more closely unto that of our present text, Daniel 12:2, speaking of the same event, declares that “*many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.*” The two classes will be separated one from another, “*as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats*” (Mat 25:32). On the one hand, Christ will take vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the Gospel; on the other, He will be glorified in His saints (2Th 1:8,10). That same clear-cut and searching distinction is preserved in our text: those who abide in Christ will have confidence before Him at His appearing; but those who were disloyal and followed the antichrists will “*be ashamed before Him at His coming.*” As the Saviour announced, “*Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels*” (Mar 8:38).

Chapter 38

RIGHTEOUSNESS

1 John 2:29

“If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him.”

“*And now, little children*” (verse 28): in view of all that I have said from verse 12 onwards, and especially from verse 18, let me summarize in this one word, “*Abide in Him.*” Give continued evidence of your loyalty to Christ. Make Him the grand object of your hearts, the centre of your affections, the One with whom you converse daily. Follow the example He has left you. Seek all your joy in Him. Endeavour to become better established in His doctrine. Strive to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Him. It is of the utmost importance that you do so: nothing will so effectually preserve you from error as to keep your hearts and minds fixed on the Lord Jesus. As Calvin remarked, “Faith is not a naked and frigid apprehension of Christ, but a lively and real sense of His power, which produces confidence.” The Greek word for “*confidence*” here literally means liberty of utterance, free-spokenness, as may be seen from its force in Acts 4:13,29,31; 2 Corinthians 3:12. They who abide in Christ, who commune regularly with Him, have freedom of approach and liberty of speech at the throne of grace, for assurance of heart is ever the effect of true piety. “Hence it is that the godly calmly wait for Christ, nor do they dread His coming” (Calvin).

All who trust in the atoning sacrifice of Christ, who genuinely endeavour to live unto Christ, die in Him (Heb 11:13; 1Th 4:14). They shall be raised by Him and be made “*like Him*” (1Jo 3:2), conformed to the image of God’s Son, glorified (Rom 8:29,30). They will meet Him with confidence and joy, for He is the One they most of all desire to behold. But different far will be the attitude and demeanour of those spoken of in verse 19, and all like unto them. Those who originally made profession of faith in Christ, but who turned away from Him unto His enemies, abandoning Him in order to follow the course of this world, will in the day of His appearing shrink from Him with terror and horror. They will be “*ashamed before Him at His coming:*” ashamed of their infidelity, of their mad policy, of their wretched choice of forsaking the living Fountain for cisterns which hold no water. Literally, “*ashamed from Him,*” their guilty consciences causing them to shrink from His holy presence. They will be put to the utmost confusion and dishonour. The word occurs again in Luke 16:3, Philippians 1:20. But, blessed be God, it is written, “*Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed*” (Rom 9:33).

“*And now, little children, abide in Him; that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.*” That admits of two distinct interpretations, though the one by no means necessarily excludes the other. First, the “*we*” may legitimately be regarded as John speaking of himself and his fellow ministers as believers, taking his place alongside those for whom he wrote, intimating thereby that he was himself following the same course and prescribed for himself what he did for them—as he included himself personally in the “*we*” of 1:6,8,9, etc. Second, the “*we*” of 2:28, may also be fairly considered as referring to himself and others as the servants of God—as in 1:1-4, he alludes to himself and his fellow apostles officially. In support of this is the significant change of person from the second

to the first. In verses 20-27 he had uniformly used the “ye,” as a teacher instructing his disciples. He might well have kept to that form of address—he does return to it in the very next verse: “*If ye know that He is righteous.*” In what immediately follows, John had the ultimate in view—the great day of reckoning, when as a minister of Christ he would be called upon to render an account of his stewardship, particularly concerning those who, under God, he had begotten through the Gospel (1Co 4:15).

Looked at from the latter standpoint, verse 28 is to be regarded both as the climax of the entire passage and as an affecting appeal to the Divine love in the saints. Quite a number of weighty reasons and strong inducements had been set before the Lord’s people to turn a deaf ear unto all false teachers, and remain steadfast in their allegiance to Christ; and now they are informed that it is not only to their advantage and security so to do, but in the day to come he will be the gainer thereby: “*And now, little children, abide in Him; that [in order that] when He shall appear we [your spiritual fathers] may have confidence and not be ashamed [of you] before Him at His coming*” That interpretation gives added force and pertinency to the tender form of address—“*little children.*” If you give ear to the antichrists and become followers of them, it will be a serious reflection upon us who were responsible for your indoctrination and establishment in the faith: your infidelity would impugn our fidelity. Thus our text is to be considered as a parallel appeal to the one found in John’s second epistle, and which throws light thereon: “*Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.*”

There is not a little in the New Testament which reveals the special relation which pastors sustain to their children in the faith, and also which clearly intimates that the present conduct of Christians has a close bearing on the minister’s approbation and reward by Christ when He shall make good that word “*My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be*” (Rev 22:12). “*For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ*” (2Co 11:2). He had been an instrument in the Spirit’s hand of moving them to give up themselves to the Lord, and take Him as their Husband and Head, and was much concerned that their affections should not be diverted from Christ, or they receive “*another gospel*” (verse 4). Sustaining such an intimate relation to his converts, Paul was deeply interested in their spiritual welfare, and longed to present them unto Christ at His judgment-seat as those who had conducted themselves consistently with their dedication to Him, so that it would then appear that his labours on their behalf had not been in vain. As he said elsewhere, “*Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man with wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus*” (Col 1:28).

The under-shepherds of Christ will be called upon to render an account unto the chief Shepherd of their ministerial stewardship in the day of reckoning, and therefore are the members of their flocks exhorted, “*Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief*” (Heb 13:17). Ministers are expressly appointed of God for the guarding of their members from error and to warn against those sins which endanger the soul. They will have to render an account of how they discharged their duty, used their talents, redeemed their time: whether those committed to their care were built up in the faith, or whether souls were lost through their neglect—the lives of their members will be witnesses for or against them. It is in view of that solemn reckoning in the future that each minister is exhorted, “*I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom; Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine*” (2Ti 4:1,2) for in that day his service will either be approved or disapproved by his Master.

Thus “*And now, little children, abide in Him; [so] that when He shall appear we may have confidence [His approval], and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.*” Do you be careful how you walk, so that in the day of accounts we may not be put to the blush because you have profited so little from the grace and truth we have ministered unto you. If you give heed to the antichrists, that will be a serious reflection upon us; that we rejoiced over your apparent conversion, baptized you, received you into church fellowship, only for you to fall away and apostatize from the faith. In such a case it would show that our labours were fruitless and our expectations would be disappointed. It would then seem to prove that we had failed to set before you the only preservative from all false doctrine. See here, my readers, the solemn effect of careless walking: it brings reproach on your pastor that he should have such “*seals*” to his ministry. The apostle longed that both he and they together might “*receive a full reward*” (2Jo 8), which would be the case only if they remained steadfast in the faith and in their obedience to Christ. As Paul also reminded the saints, “*For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For ye are our glory and joy*” (1Th 2:19,20, cf. Heb 13:17).

“*If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him*” (verse 29). There is considerable difference of opinion as to how this verse fits into the framework of the epistle. Scarcely any of the commentators make any serious attempt to show its coherence with that which precedes, regarding it more or less as a detached statement. Candlish considered “The apostle passes to a new thought or theme.” Personally, we believe there is

a very close connection between the words now before us and those which we have just finished expounding; yet our recognition of the same will depend largely upon a correct apprehension of the terms used. The opening “if” is not one of doubt, but rather of certainty; it is not the raising of a question, but an appeal to an established fact, having the force of “since”—forasmuch as you are assured that He is righteous. The pronoun has its antecedent in the One the apostle was speaking about in the foregoing verses, namely Jesus Christ. There He is seen as the One who shall separate the precious from the vile, and as the rewarder of His servants: in a word, as “*the righteous judge*” (2Ti 4:8), who shall deal faithfully and impartially with every one.

Whereas it is evident and certain that Christ is righteous, it clearly follows that, “*every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him.*” He that “*doeth righteousness*” is a variant of he that “*abideth in Him*”—his abiding in Christ is manifested by submitting to Him, by actually doing His revealed will. Thus verse 29 is a further word of discrimination, the drawing of the line again between gracious and graceless professors. It announces one of the tests by which we may identify the regenerate and distinguish them from the unregenerate, namely by their conduct, for it is by the fruits which it bears that the tree is known. In sharp contrast with “*the children of disobedience*” (Eph 2:2), the renewed child of God walks in obedience to Him, treads “*the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake*” (Psa 23:3), heeding His precepts and keeping His statutes. Verse 29 is very much more than an aphorism or mere abstract doctrinal statement: it is a clearly implied exhortation, bidding us examine the claims of those who profess to be Christians and desire fellowship with us as such. But this criterion of being a doer of righteousness we are to distinguish between the genuine and the spurious, and thus be delivered from being imposed upon by hypocrites. It scarcely needs pointing out that honesty requires that we first faithfully test ourselves by this rule before we apply it to others.

There has always been a considerable number in Christendom who “*hold the truth in unrighteousness*” (Rom 1:18): Those who are well versed in theology, but devoid of any sanctifying effects therefrom; whose heads are filled with orthodox views, but whose hearts and lives are unaffected thereby. And John was very anxious to preserve the saints from wasting their affections upon those who were not entitled to the same. He would have them equipped to distinguish clearly between those who were for Christ and those who (despite their pretensions to the contrary) were against Him. He would have them know that there is a radical difference between the righteous and the unrighteous, so that they should walk in separation from the latter. All through his epistle he is most insistent on segregating the one from the other (1:6,7; 2:3-5, 9-11; 3:10, etc.). Here again in our text the apostle draws the picture of a real child of God: that there may be no mistaking him, he adds to the statement that he who has received the Spirit and abides in Christ is also a doer of righteousness. It therefore follows that those who are thoroughly worldly and carnal in their walk are not born of Christ. The unrighteous must not be regarded as righteous.

“*He is righteous.*” We are more apt to think of Christ as gracious and compassionate, merciful and tender, than righteous; but there is much said in Scripture about His righteousness. As God He is essentially righteous. As man He is also perfectly righteous, fulfilling the law in thought, word and deed. As Mediator, He was righteous in faithfully discharging His commission and finishing the work given Him to do. He is the Author of that everlasting righteousness which is revealed in the Gospel and received by faith. In Isaiah 11:5, it was announced: “*Righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins, and faithfulness the girdle of His reins.*” In Old Testament times God spoke of Him as “*My righteous servant*” (Isa 53:11), as “*a righteous Branch*” (Jer 23:5), as “*the Sun of righteousness*” (Mal 4:2). By the spirit of prophecy Christ declared, “*I have preached righteousness in the great congregation*” (Psa 40:9). How righteously He dealt with the rich young ruler, exposing the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, reprov’d His own disciples, accepted the awful cup in Gethsemane! Verily, He was the Lamb without blemish and without spot. When the Father crowned Him with glory and honour He bore testimony to Christ, “*Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness*” (Psa 45:7). He is the antitypical “*King of righteousness*” (Heb 7:2). He is expressly declared to be “*Jesus Christ the righteous*” (1Jo 2:1). And by amazing grace believers own Him as “*The Lord our righteousness*” (Jer 23:6), for He has wrought out for them and covered them with the “*robe of righteousness*” (Isa 61:10).

“*If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him.*” It has been objected by those who ought to know better that the “*He*” cannot here refer to Christ, because nowhere else in Scripture is regeneration ascribed to the Son. Even were that the case, the objection would have no real validity—as well deny that it was “*through the eternal Spirit*” that Christ offered Himself without spot to God, because nowhere else are we told so except in Hebrews 9:14. But our text is by no means the sole passage where, by clear implication at least, Christ is represented as the Author of the new birth. He is denominated “*the everlasting Father*” (Isa 9:6), and says “*Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given Me*” (Isa 8:18, and cf. Heb 2:13). God expressly declared of the Saviour, “*He shall see His seed,*” yea, that “*He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied*” (Isa 53:10,11)—what are that “*seed*” and “*travail of His soul*” but those who are “*born of Him*”? As the Son Himself declared, “*Except a corn of*

wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (Joh 12:24). It is by Christ that we are given the power of privilege “to become the sons of God” (Joh 1:12)

The saving operations of God are ascribed to each of the Persons in the Trinity. In one passage we are said to be justified “by the Spirit of our God” (1Co 6:11), though elsewhere that is predicated of the Father (Rom 5:1) and of Christ (Act 13:39). So too the new birth is attributed equally to the Spirit (Joh 3:6), to the Father (Jam 1:18), and to Christ Jesus (Eph 2:10), the new spiritual nature being derived from Him as His “seed” (Psa 22:30). Nor is it at all strange that John should here attribute our new birth immediately to Christ. His chief design in the whole of the context is to exalt Him in the esteem of His redeemed, to evince how deeply indebted they are to Him, and to emphasize the intimate and spiritual oneness which there is between Him and them. Christ is our Advocate with the Father (verse 1). He is the Propitiation for our sins (verse 2). He is our Exemplar (verse 6). He is our Anointer (verse 27). He is the Rewarder of our works (verse 28). And He is the Author of our regeneration. The last mentioned supplies yet a further link with the context, furnishing as it does an additional reason or argument in support of the injunction to constancy. To “abide in Him” is enforced first by the consideration of the great day of accounts, and second by the consideration of the dignity of those called upon to be faithful to Him—they are His dear children.

“If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him.” The twofold “ye know” is closely related to the repeated “teacheth you of all things” and “hath taught you” of verse 27. The anointing Spirit communicates a spiritual judgment and discernment, enabling its possessor to perceive that which is hidden from those who are wise and prudent in their own esteem. It imparts a true knowledge of Christ and the ability to identify their brethren and sisters in Him. Until we have a true concept of Christ’s character, we cannot form a just opinion of those who are His. But further, the anointing Spirit ensures an abiding in Christ, and it is the doing of righteousness which is the visible proof and practical fruit of such abiding; for doing righteousness is a complying with His revealed will. It was so with the Son Himself: “If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father’s commandments, and abide in His love” (Joh 15:10). It was by walking in full subjection to the Father that Christ demonstrated His Sonship. In the case of the Christian this knowledge is first objective—apprehended from the Scriptures; then subjective—realized in experience; then influential—expressing itself in the doing of righteousness; and, therefore, evidential—supplying proof of the new birth.

In our text, then, the apostle enunciates the simple but obvious principle that like produces like, that it is an unvarying law of creation that everything should bring forth “after his kind.” That there must be and is a reproduction of the parent in the child was taught plainly by our Lord. Concerning Himself, “the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do; for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise” (Joh 5:19). To the Jews He said, “If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham.” And again, “If God were your Father, ye would love Me”—nature and conduct must correspond. It did so in their case: “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do” (Joh 8:39,42,44). Since Christ be righteous, those born of Him are righteous: the members are conformed to their Head in nature, character and conduct. But the emphasis is here placed first on what they do rather than on what they are, the one serving to make manifest the other.

Instead of arguing from cause to effect, as in “every good tree bringeth forth good fruit” (Mat 7:17), the apostle reasons from actions back to principles. Where there are righteous works, there must be a righteous principle producing them. Since none of the fallen sons of men be righteous by nature, then the presence of righteous works evinces that the producer has been made a partaker of “the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24). On the one hand, regeneration is the foundation of all righteousness in the soul, being that which inducts us into the kingdom of God (Joh 3:3), when Divine power gives us “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2Pe 1:3). On the other hand, a righteous walk is one of the visible marks of a new birth, for we are “created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Eph 2:10). The emphasis is placed here on the latter because it is the testing of profession which is in view, the drawing of the line between the real and the false. He “doeth righteousness” not in order to be saved, but in demonstration of the fact that Christ has saved him, Only those who bear Christ’s image and walk before Him in the ways of righteousness are born of Him. Those who give no evidence of so doing are either deliberate hypocrites or utterly deluded souls.

Chapter 39

AMAZING GRACE

1 John 3:1

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not.”

Having stated that *“If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him”* (2:29)—which means, in a word, that the performing of good works is one of the sure evidences of the new birth—the apostle’s mind was carried back to the originating cause, namely the eternal love of the Father. The contemplation thereof moved him to break forth into adoring and joyous celebration of the same. But human language is entirely inadequate to express and describe the Divine acts which produce our salvation, and great care needs to be taken lest we either carnalize or unduly restrict the terms that are employed in connection therewith. We agree with Calvin that “when he says love has bestowed, he means that it is from mere bounty and benevolence that God makes us His children... Love, then, is declared here to be gratuitous. There is, indeed, an impropriety in the language, but the apostle preferred speaking thus rather than not to express that the more abundantly God’s goodness has been manifested toward us the greater are our obligations to Him.” Thus by “love” here we understand the Divine benignity or His amazing grace.

The chapter division at this point is apt to mislead, detaching in our minds that which is here said from what immediately precedes: 3:1, is closely connected with 2:29. The thought of sonship is carried forward, with the design of emphasizing the blessedness of such a high dignity and honour bestowed. That is first denoted by the call to “*behold*” it, and then by considering the “*manner*” of the same. So far from regarding 3:1, as the commencement of a new subject the perspicuous Calvin considered that it furnished the second (implied) argument in proving that faith is necessarily connected with a holy and pure life. “The first argument is that we are spiritually begotten after the likeness of Christ: it hence follows that no one is born of Him except he who lives righteously. The second argument is from the dignity and excellence of our calling, for it was no common honour he says that the heavenly Father bestowed upon us when He adopted us as His children. This being so great a favour, the desire for purity ought to be kindled in us, so as to be conformed to His image; nor, indeed, can it be otherwise but that he who acknowledges himself to be one of God’s children to purify himself. And to make this exhortation more forceful, he amplifies the favour of God.”

The apostle was overwhelmed with astonishment as he contemplated the amazing grace which conferred such honour and felicity upon worms of the earth as to call them into the relation of sons. Whether he viewed the ineffable greatness and elevation of the Father, the insignificance and degradation of the subjects, the uniqueness and inestimable value of the blessing bestowed, or the manner and marvel of its communication, he was “*lost to wonder, love, and praise.*” That the Father should ever deign to notice us at all is an act of infinite condescension on His part: that He should so highly distinguish us as to set His heart upon us, choose in Christ, redeem and regenerate lifelong rebels against Him, completely passes knowledge, and so far exceeds human comprehension as to defy expression by tongue or pen. Such a prodigy is without parallel, not only on earth but in heaven also: as T. Scott rightly said, it is “incapable of being illustrated by any comparison”—any attempt to do so beclouds its uniqueness and is only a darkening of counsel by mere words. Rather let us earnestly seek grace to evince our gratitude thereat, and endeavour to walk worthy of such a calling by a humble and obedient walk.

Our text opens with a call to attention, for while the word “*behold*” here is a word of adoring wonderment, an exclamation of astonishment at such a display of grace, yet it is much more than a bare interjection. It is a verb summoning to action. Manton, with his customary thoroughness, showed that there is a threefold “*behold*” in Scripture and that each of them is applicable in this place. First, the behold of demonstration, to denote the reality of the object, as in “*Behold your King*” (Joh 19:14)—there He is before your very eyes, said Pilate unto the Jews. When prefixed to a doctrinal statement, it avers the certainty of it, as in “*Lo [“Behold”] this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good*” (Job 5:27). Second, there is the behold of admiration, which is designed to awaken our drowsy minds when something extraordinary is presented to our attention, challenging our most serious thoughts, as in “*Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow*” (Lam 1:12). Third, the behold of gratulation, rejoicing and delighting ourselves in the privilege, as in “*Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep*” (Psa 121:4)—take comfort therefrom.

Now each of those senses is to be included here: *“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us.”* Behold it with faith and confidence. Though so astonishing and mysterious, entertain not the least doubt about it, for it is certified by a *“Thus saith the Lord.”* Behold it with adoring gratitude. It is of vast importance and inestimable value, so give the same your most careful and prayerful attention. Ponder it deeply, meditate much thereon, that the Father Himself has laid hold of depraved and hell-deserving sinners and made them the brethren of His dear Son. This too is *“the Lord’s doing: it is marvelous in our eyes.”* Behold it with exultation and jubilation, that so blessed a privilege and high a dignity is yours as to be made the children of God, the high favourites of heaven, more closely related to God than the holy angels. How that should bow us in wonderment and worship before the throne of grace! What comfort and consolation should it afford us amid the trials and tribulations of this life! How it should quicken our thankfulness and draw out our affections Godward—the chief motives and springs of Gospel obedience. How it should make us contented with our present portion—if you be a child of God, it matters little what your earthly possessions amount to.

This word *“behold”* is used all through Scripture on particular and special occasions. When the Lord God made mention of the incarnation and mission of the Messiah, He said, *“Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel”*; and again, *“Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him; behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him”* (Isa 7:14; 40:10). When the Father would have us fix our hearts and minds on the person of His co-equal Son, He says, *“Behold My servant, whom I uphold; Mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth”* (Isa 42:1). When His forerunner introduced Him to the Jews he cried, *“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”* (Joh 1:29). During His earthly ministry, Christ prefaced many of His weightiest utterances with a *“behold!”* (Mat 12:42; 23:38; 25:6, etc.). After His ascension, the Lord Jesus declared, *“Behold, I come quickly”* (Rev 22:7,12). So that this word *“behold”* is used in the sacred page by the Father, by the Son, by the Holy Spirit, by the prophets and by the apostles as introductory to the most blessed and momentous subjects revealed and recorded therein. John would have his little children contemplate this glorious truth of the Father’s love with reverence and awe, for he would stir up their pure minds to holy wonderment and admiration. He would have them engage their best thoughts thereon to the ravishing of their souls.

The *“behold”* is intensified by the words immediately following. It is not simply take notice of and adore the love of the Father, but particularly the sort of love which is here in view—the wonderful expression thereof. The question has been raised as to whether the reference be to the kind or degree of His love. Personally, we consider that both ideas are included: its uniqueness and its greatness. According to its usage in the New Testament this expression is a contrastive one. When Gabriel addressed the virgin Mary as *“thou that art highly favoured... blessed art thou among women,”* she *“cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be”* (Luk 1:28,29)—she was mystified by such an unprecedented experience. When the Saviour calmed the raging tempest with a word of command His disciples marveled, saying, *“What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him!”* (Mat 8:27)—they have witnessed the supernatural. *“What manner of persons you ought to be in all holy conversation and godliness”* (2Pe 3:11). which means (in contrast with the wicked) what paragons of virtue you should be—signifying not only the kind but also the degree of piety which God requires from us.

In view of the above examples (to which Luke 7:39 and Mark 13:1 may be added), *“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us”* imports, Consider and adore the nature and extent, the marvel and magnitude, the uniqueness and superlative excellence of that love. It is in marked contrast, both in character and in greatness, with all other. It is incomparable, transcendent, infinite. Its cause is inexplicable; its effects are most glorious. Perhaps this is one reason why the Divine benignity is here termed His love, rather than His *grace*. Love is especially sensitive: *“God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”* (Rom 5:8). Thomas Goodwin pointed out, *“Of all things in God or man love desires to have itself considered and taken notice of, as much as wisdom, and power, or any other thing; therefore he calls on them to behold God’s love. Above all, love desires notice taken by the parties beloved, to whom it is in special directed unto more than any other, for the emphasis lies in the speciality of it; therefore he would not have them run out in general thoughts admiring God’s love to mankind and giving His Son; but as having bestowed Him upon us”*—His dear children.

Our present verse is one of many which illustrates the importance of observing the connection between a statement and the setting in which it occurs—failure to take into account the context conveys a wrong idea of its scope, that which is qualified being taken in an unlimited sense. Such is the case here: a wrong use has been made of it. It is appealed to by those who believe in what is termed *“the universal Fatherhood of God”*—i.e. that all men are spiritually God’s children. Apart from any other consideration, the principles of honest exegesis exclude such an interpretation of this sentence. The question, Who are the *“us”* upon whom the Father has bestowed His love? requires answer. Obviously it is those whom the apostle is addressing. And who are they? 2:29 tells us plainly: they are those that give unmistakable evidence of being born of Christ by being doers of righteousness; and the only ones of whom that is the case are those who have received

from Him the Holy Spirit (verse 27). Thus the *“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us”* has no reference whatever to the unregenerate, nor is any individual warranted in regarding God as his heavenly Father unless he be walking in newness of life and bears His moral image.

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us.” John would have us look not only to the fountain-head or spring of our blessings, attentively consider the matchless mercy shown us, but he would engage our hearts with that which has been communicated to us personally. John is not here calling upon the saints to believe the love wherewith God has loved them, nor is he bidding them receive the knowledge of it into their minds, that they might rejoice over the same in their hearts. Rather is he exhorting them to contemplate that love in its grand original, in its freeness and sovereignty, in its nature and manner, in its gifts and blessedness; that it was actually bestowed upon them—that the Father had not only conceived love toward them, and willed it unto them, but that He had really and truly imparted it to them. That statement is almost parallel with *“the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us”* (Rom 5:5). That is what the *“behold”* directs our attention unto: to ponder and adore that love not abstractly but concretely; that is not simply as it exists within the bosom of Deity, but in its outward manifestation, its actual bestowment upon us.

We are invited to look upon and admire the Father’s love in its infinite condescension, in its gratuitous character, in its blessed application. It is indeed a great wonder that He preserves in being such worthless wretches, supplying our temporal needs, and having any love for us. It is yet more wonderful that His love should be actually engaged toward us. But it is surely most wonderful of all that His love should be communicated to us—given freely, disinterestedly, abundantly. No other cause can be assigned why He should have set His heart upon them other than His own determination: *“Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace”* (Eph 1:5,6). The good pleasure of the Divine will is the originating cause; the manifestation of Divine grace the end and issue of all. That love is not one merely of pity and compassion, but of delight and complacency: as it is written, *“The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing”* (Zep 3:17). To take that into our minds and have it realized in our hearts, to live in the apprehension thereof, is to have real communion with the Father in all the blessedness of His love.

Consider the inestimable privilege which is here specified: *“that we should be called the sons of God.”* The word *“called”* does not here refer to God’s making us His children by an effectual or inward call from death unto life, but rather the acknowledging of us to be His children. It is not the act of regeneration which is in view, but the fact of our sonship which is affirmed. *“In Isaac shall thy seed be called”* (Gen 21:12) means, The children of Isaac shall be regarded and recognized as thy seed. Yea, of Christ Himself after the flesh, it was said to Mary *“that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God”* (Luk 1:35), which obviously signifies shall be acknowledged as such, and not made so. Thus it is here: the Father owning the ones born of Christ—mentioned in the previous verse. When the Father calls us His sons, it is not that He bestows the title upon us, but avers that relationship; as in Romans 9:26, where the apostle quotes from Hosea: *“And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God,”* that is, God recognizes none as His children but those born of His Spirit and conformed to the image of His Son. And again, *“If thou ... call the Sabbath a delight”* (Isa 58:13)—regard and treat it as such.

This is what we are called upon to behold: the fathomless love of the Father in owning us not merely as His subjects or servants, but as His sons. It is a particular and peculiar relationship which pertains to the regenerate, for it is not a blessing which is common to all men. It originates in the Father’s love. It is based upon our union with Christ, our being born of Him. To be a child of God is to be an heir of glory (Rom 8:17), and to be regarded as such by the Father is a confirmation of it. It is a very high honour indeed to sustain this relationship, far, far greater than any which this world can bestow. David asked, *“Seemeth it to you a light thing to be a king’s son in law?”* (1Sa 18:23), then what is it to be acknowledged as a son of the King of kings! *“Since thou wast precious in My sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee”* (Isa 43:4) is His own blessed testimony. What weight should that have with us! What assurance it should convey to our minds! What wonderment it should evoke! Does it not move each of us to admit with the returning prodigal, I am not worthy *“to be called Thy son”* (Luk 15:19)? How it should influence our daily lives: *“Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also loved us”* (Eph 5:1,2).

We must not conclude this chapter without pointing out the principal qualities of the Father’s love. It was spontaneous. Nothing outside God Himself moved Him to it. There was nothing in us to attract it, but everything to the contrary (Eze 16:5,6). It was eternal (Jer 31:3), for God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world and entered into an everlasting covenant of grace with Him on our behalf. It was sovereign, selective and discriminating, for He loves not all; it is peculiar to the elect—*“Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that Thou bearest unto Thy people”* (Psa 106:4). It is

sacrificial, for God “*spared not His own Son*” but delivered Him up to the cross in order that sinners might be saved. Christ shed not His blood in order to induce God to love His people: it was because God loved them that He provided such a costly offering for them. It is infinite. There is a depth to it which none can fathom, a height which none can reach, a length and breadth which cannot be measured. It is invincible. “*Put not your trust in princes*” said the Psalmist, for they will fail you; but God’s love is reliable and cannot be thwarted. It is immutable, knowing no change (Mal 3:6), being without variableness or shadow of turning. Truly His love is unique.

Equally blessed is it to observe how His love is exercised. Behold His foreordaining love “*In love having predestinated us unto the adoption of children*” (Eph 1:4,5). Deuteronomy 7:7,8, shows that election is the fruit of God’s love—likewise does 2 Thessalonians 2:13, teach us. Behold God’s redeeming love: “*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. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins*” (1Jo 4:9,10). Behold His regenerating love: “*But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ*” (Eph 2:4,5). Behold His drawing love: “*I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee*” (Jer 31:3), sweetly wooing us unto Himself. Behold His communicating love: “*The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit*” (Rom 5:5). Behold His comforting love: “*even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation*” (2Th 2:16). Behold His preserving love: “*nothing does or can separate us from it*” (Rom 8:38,39). Thus its manner is as matchless as its nature.

A brief word now on the present modification of our enjoyment of God’s love. “*Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not.*” Though so greatly honoured by the Father, that will not bring you into favour with those who are strangers to Him. No matter how lavish He be in the display of His love toward us, the unregenerate will not value us on that account. The natural man is devoid of spiritual discernment, and perceives not that the saints are “*the excellent of the earth,*” the blessed ones—rather does he regard them as fools and fanatics, who are turning their backs on the happiness of life.

But so far from stumbling the Christian, or even discouraging him, it is just what he should expect. Nor will this esteem be only from the openly godless—it is from professors that the most cruel treatment will come. It was the religious element which persecuted Christ! They perceived not His glory, though it shone constantly before them in His character and conduct, His ministry and miracles; but they were blind, seeing in Him no beauty. Sufficient for the disciple to be as his Master: to be unknown, despised, opposed, is part of our conformity to Him.

The excellency of our sonship is not to be measured by the world’s judgment, for its opinion is worthless. Sufficient for the believer to be assured that his Father loves him, that he has His approbation. Suffer not the slights of godless professors to dim your joy in Him.

