

1 John - Commentaries by Walter Thomas Prideaux Wolston

Handfuls of Purpose, Overcoming: Its Secret (2:12-29)

(Matthew 4:1-11; 1 John 2:12-29)

It is, perhaps, not known to all, because many are young in the knowledge of the Lord, that the expression found very frequently in the epistle of John, "little children," has a peculiar meaning in two places in the epistle, which I will point out to you. You will find "little children" a great many times in the epistle, but you may safely score out the word "little" in every one of those places, except in verses 13 and 18 of chapter 2. The word the Spirit of God uses commonly in the epistle is "children." That is common to the whole family. It includes every child in God's family.

For instance, in the first verse of chapter 2, it is, "My children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not." A child of God is not supposed to sin. It does not say that he does not, but he is not supposed to practice sin, but righteousness, since the end of the chapter shows that he is born of God. "If ye know that he is righteous, know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him" (vs. 29). The child is expected to resemble the Father.

In the twelfth verse again it is, "I write unto you, children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake." Every child of God knows that his sins are forgiven. I want to be distinct about this at the beginning, because, if you are not clear as to the forgiveness of sins, you will not be able to enter into that which is in the verses that follow.

It will help you, to notice that from the thirteenth verse to the close of the twenty-seventh verse is a little parenthesis. In that section of the epistle you will observe there are three classes addressed, Fathers, Young men, and Little children, and addressed twice over. The apostle addresses all the classes in verse thirteen. Then, in the first half of the fourteenth verse, he addresses the fathers, and in the last half of the verse, he addresses the young men, and so continues to the end of verse seventeen. And then in the eighteenth verse again, you get, "Little children," that is, the babes in Christ, and their instruction continues to the end of verse twenty-seven.

You have thus three classes in the family of God, which are marked off from each other by a spiritual condition which is the result of growth and experience. It is not a question of age as regards the length of time you may have known the Lord. But it is spiritual growth, and spiritual progress. There are fathers, and there are those that are young men, but there are those also who are babes. And to them, with great affection, the apostle writes more fully than to the others. Elsewhere in the epistle the instruction is what belongs to all God's children in common.

And now, first of all, before I touch the three classes, look at the twelfth verse: "I write unto you, children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake." Now, it is very blessed to see that is where God starts. If a believer in His Son, you are in His family, and you are there as a perfectly, and absolutely forgiven child. You are there as a child, and the first thing you know is this relationship. There is one thing too that every child of God is entitled to know, and supposed to know, and that is, that his sins are all forgiven. He is in the enjoyment of the blessed knowledge that everything that was between him and God has all been put away by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the testimony which is proclaimed in the gospel. "Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 13:38). That which the gospel presents, every child in the family of God is supposed to enjoy, for it is the common property of every member thereof, and, if he does not enjoy it, he is not in the privilege of the family.

Well now, come to that which is specific. "I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning" (vs. 13). What marks a father is the knowledge of Christ. He knows Christ. Christ is before him. It is Christ that forms his life. It is all Christ. Christ his soul feeds on, Christ he is sustained by, Christ he is upheld by. He has not a thought, so to speak, apart from Christ. Christ is the subject of his conversation. In fact you will know a father by this. And the saint that is not this is not a father. We may just as well let our souls feel the truth of God's Word. "Ye have known Him that is from the beginning." Christ indeed is everything to the one who is a father.

Oh! there is something very blessed in meeting with a saint that is in this condition. You cannot go near that Christian without being impressed. The soul that is living in the abiding enjoyment of Christ, is a father. And observe, the apostle can say no more. Because to know Christ, to know the love of Christ, to be in the enjoyment of that which is unfolded by Christ is everything, beloved friends, to the believing and loving soul. Because what will be our joy forever is Christ. Our hearts will delight in the ever-deepening enjoyment of the knowledge of that blessed One, who fills the very heart of God with joy.

Then he passes on to the young men. "I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one" (vs. 13). That which marked them is this, they were superior to the wiles and the power of Satan. Now so far from Scripture supposing that Satan is to overcome us, you see that what it records of a young man is this, that he possesses an energy of soul that leads him so to walk, and so to act, that Satan is overcome. How that takes place I think we learn in a later verse.

And now he speaks to the little children. "I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father" (vs. 13). Now if you were only converted last night, and you have the sense that God has forgiven you, well, at once, after forgiveness, there always comes the reception of the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of sonship (see Acts 10:43-47; Eph. 1:13). I see in Scripture, that the soul receiving the forgiveness of sins and the knowledge of pardon, by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, receives the Holy Spirit also. You not only receive the forgiveness of sins, but you receive the Holy Spirit.

Peter, when preaching to the household of Cornelius, did not tell them they should receive the Holy Spirit. What he did say was this: "To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins." And then we read, "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all them which heard the word." And I beg you to notice, three verses after, that Peter says, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?"

He told them that, upon believing on Jesus, they should receive the forgiveness of their sins, and we see that they received that blessing, because they received the Holy Spirit also. It is the reception of the Spirit that puts the soul in its new place before God. "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you" (Rom. 8:9). If you are in the Spirit, the mind of the Spirit is life and peace. Further, the moment you have the Holy Spirit, He sheds the love of God abroad in your heart (Rom. 5:5). What is the next thing? The Spirit of sonship. "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Rom. 8:13-16). We are the children of God, and having received the Spirit of adoption, we cry, "Abba, Father." Wondrous words! They are used only thrice in the New Testament. Once by our blessed Savior when addressing His Father, in the agony of Gethsemane's garden (Mark 14:36), and twice they are put into our lips by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6).

How good it is to find the beloved apostle John saying, "I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father." The essence of Christianity is in these words. And, beloved young Christian, let me say this to you, Above all things cultivate the knowledge of the Father. If you leave yourself in the hands of the Spirit of God, He will lead you to a very deep and blessed knowledge of the Father. This is what Christianity really is. It is the revelation of the Father through the Son.

Go and read John's Gospel. You say, It is all about the Son of God. Yes, that is quite true. But the keynote of that Gospel is the word "Father." It occurs a hundred and twenty times. What does the Lord say there? "He that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). Christianity consists in the revelation of the Father by the Son. The Father is made known to all the family by the indwelling of the Spirit of God. Therefore, the first thing you find is this: "I write unto you, babes, because ye have known the Father." And beloved friends, there is nothing more blessed for a soul than the knowledge of the Father.

But I will tell you what I have noticed. I find there are very few children of God today that are in the happy enjoyment of the Father and His love. When John says here, "Ye have known the Father," he contemplates them as in the enjoyment of their relationship to the Father. You know the Lord said to Mary, after He was risen from the dead, "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (John 20:17). Only three days before you might have seen the blessed Lord in the garden of Gethsemane, in the deepest agony, as He contemplated the cup He was about to drink. And we hear Him saying, "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from Me: nevertheless not what I will, but what Thou wilt" (Mark 14:36). Now in the eighth chapter of Romans, I read, "We have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." That is the blessed term of relationship, and enjoyed relationship and affection too. That which fell from the lips of the blessed Lord in the sorrows of Gethsemane, is the very first thing that comes off the lips of a new-born soul, "Father." Again, "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:6). This is normal Christian language, and what the Father is seeking to hear.

Many dear believers in the Lord today, though they be believers, and though they may have received the Spirit of God, enter very little into the enjoyment of the Father, and the knowledge of the Father's love. Therefore, I would say to those here tonight who are young, Oh, seek, above all things, to have your souls bathed in the enjoyment of this blessed realization — I am a child of the Father. Your relationship now, is the relationship of Him who, when here, said, "Abba, Father." Of course we must remember that we are before the Father on the ground of redemption. That is the ground, beloved, that enables you and me by grace now to take up and enjoy this relationship before God.

And here the Spirit of God shows us that life is in the Spirit of the Son. I believe in this epistle it is life in the sons. It is what is made known to the soul, and made good in the soul by the power of the Spirit of God, and the very first thing is this, you know the Father, for every child knows the Father.

Then, the apostle again says to the fathers, "I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning" (vs. 14). What more could he say? Beyond Him there can be no reaching. He is the object and the center of all God's thoughts, and purposes, and counsels. And thus the father, enjoying Christ, and having the whole vision of His soul filled with the glory of this blessed One, who is from the beginning, cannot get beyond that. It is the result of Christian experience. All that is of the flesh is recognized and judged, and only Christ remains. He is ever better and better known. What He is, is realized. This is the most advanced step of Christian experience. There is nothing of self in it. Christ is all. We may be long in reaching this step, but, thank God, it may be reached.

Then, again, he addresses the young men: "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." Now here is a Bible statement. Very often the language of our souls is, "Oh, how weak we are!" Well, in ourselves we are more than weak. But it is a great thing to see the place and the power God gives us. If we are not strong, why are we not strong? I find here that the young men are strong. I think the secret of their strength is this: "The Word of God abideth in you." The evidence of their power is this: they know and keep the Word of God.

Will you turn to the opening verses of Matthew 4? Because where Christ was, when on this earth is exactly where you and I are. His path and ours is the same. We are going through the world, though we belong to another scene; we are children of the Father, and our home is not here. We are passing through this scene, in dependence upon God, surrounded by the very things that surrounded the Lord when here. But there are things that we have that He had not. We have the enjoyment of fellowship, which is a very good thing. He could not have fellowship with any one. He walked alone. But you and I now, we have that which is blessed and happy in our pathway here, the fellowship of the saints of God, and that is a very great cheer as we pass along. You and I have to pass through the same world as the Lord passed through. He had temptations. And have not you had temptations? How do we get on when temptation comes? This is very clear, that the one who overcomes the wicked one, only does it by the Word of God.

Let us now look at Matthew 4 You see there are three temptations. Observe — “Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil” (vs. 1). It is a very remarkable thing that. The Lord was full of the Holy Spirit. And He is actually said to be led by the Spirit of God into temptation. It was of course absolutely necessary in His pathway. How otherwise could He succor us in temptation? He has known what it was to be tempted in all points, yet without sin. The temptation, you will observe, is threefold. You and I have never known the depth of temptation He knew, for the outward circumstances of the Lord were more difficult than ever yours and mine are. There was no one who ever had so little of the outwardly expressed favor of God as He. Born in one man’s stable, and buried in another man’s tomb, He truly said, “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head” (Matt. 8:20). If it was a question of tribute money, He said, “Show me a penny” (Luke 20:24). Why? He had not a penny. I do not believe there is one here that has not a penny in their pocket. Therefore, outwardly, there was none who ever had so much against him as He. But, oh, inwardly, what joy and peace in the Father’s love!

You see that after He had fasted, and been tempted of Satan forty days, the tempter comes again. It was a last assault on a truly dependent man. And it is very striking, he tempted Christ just like he begins to tempt you. Do you think you are a child of God? He says to Christ, “If thou be the Son of God.” He flings a doubt upon it. It was suggesting a doubt, at the same time suggesting disobedience. “If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.” Jesus does not, like Eve, parley with him. “He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (vs. 4). Now you will find, I think, if you look at these temptations, that they come in a threefold way, just as the apostle says here to the young men, “For all that is in the world, (1) the lust of the flesh, (2) the lust of the eyes, and (3) the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.” The lust of the flesh was the bread, the lust of the eye was all the kingdoms of this world, and then you have the pride of life, that is, display — that you are the object of God’s favor.

Luke presents them in their moral order. The order as given in Matthew, and again as given in Luke, is different. You get the historical order in Matthew. That is the real order. Look at Luke 4, and you will see the difference. First of all there is the bread, and secondly, you have the temptation on the mountain (vss. 5-8). “And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind Me, Satan.” If you have a pencil, take it and score out these words. The Spirit of God did not write them, and the best manuscripts have them not. How they came here is simple. Some one, copying the Scriptures, observed when he came to Luke 4 that there was no command to Satan. Judging that a previous copyist had omitted them by mistake, he inserted them, and that so carelessly that he quoted, not from the fourth, but from the sixteenth of Matthew, where the Lord says to Peter, “Get thee behind Me, Satan” (Matt. 16:23).

But now observe how the command to Satan could not be in Luke’s account. As it exists in our English Bible we should understand that Satan was bidden to depart, and he did not do it, if these words be allowed. On the contrary he remained, and renewed his temptation. But Satan did depart. That is the whole point. He was bidden to depart, and he went. The sword of the Spirit slew the enemy. As it now stands it has the ugly appearance that Satan was bidden to go, and he would not. The simple truth is, that the Spirit of God, leading Luke to write this temptation in its moral order, guides him in entirely omitting the words, “Get thee hence, Satan.”

Luke’s moral order gives us first of all a personal temptation, then the worldly temptation, and lastly, the spiritual temptation. That is the way Satan gets at us. He knows how to tempt us on the personal side; if he cannot get at us that way, he will tempt us on the worldly side; and, if he does not succeed there he will tempt us on the spiritual side. That is the way in which it comes. The personal temptation was to help Himself — make the bread; the worldly temptation, to receive all the kingdoms of the world at Satan’s hands, without suffering, and not from God’s; the spiritual temptation was to test the truth of God’s Word, and he gives Him a text: “If thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down from hence: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge over Thee, to keep Thee: and in their hands shall they bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash thy foot against a stone” (Psa. 91:11-12).

Carefully notice, that Satan leaves out four words of the ninety-first Psalm. The four words are these, “In all thy ways.” Jesus said unto him, “It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord Thy God.” You will observe, it is never the way of a saint to put God to the test. Quite true, the ninety-first Psalm did apply to Him. But it is not the way of a saint to put God to the proof as to whether He would be as good as His word.

Now you will notice, beloved friends, that in each case it is not only that Christ quotes Scripture, but He quotes it as Scripture. He says each time, “It is written.” And it is a very remarkable thing that all the Lord’s answers to Satan are quoted from the book of Deuteronomy (chaps. 8:3; 6:16 and 6:13-14). The Lord gained the victory in every instance by the Word of God. It was the outcome of His blessed simple dependence on God, and of having the Word of God in His heart. He proved the truth of the Word, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee” (Psa. 119:1). Satan retires vanquished. And observe, “Angels came and ministered unto Him.” They delighted to see a man overcome Satan by dependence and obedience. They saw that in Christ. Do they see it in us? The secret of strength lies very much in this: having the Word of God hidden in the heart, and implicitly obeying it.

When I am in a difficulty, do you think the Spirit of God will help me to a scripture I have not laid up in my heart? No! I believe if I have been careless, and lazy, in reading the Word of God, I shall not have the Scriptures really hid in my heart. The Spirit of God cannot bring to my memory a scripture I have never read. And I press this, beloved friends, we cannot over-estimate the importance of having our minds stored with Scripture. “The word of God abides in you,” is what the young men are commended for. Their thoughts were formed by God’s Word. You get the knowledge of God by His Word, and of Christ Himself, first of all, for He was the Word. But then, you and I have to hide that Word in our hearts. And that is why in the 119th Psalm, there are only two verses that do not refer to the Word of God. Study that psalm carefully. “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy word” (vs. 9). Notice the 174th verse, “I have longed for Thy salvation, O Lord; and Thy law is my delight.” It is either the Word of the Lord, or the commandment of the Lord, but in every verse it is the Word. Let us all, therefore, remember the value of Scripture in the history of the soul of a saint.

“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.” The Lord overcame him, we have seen, by dependence and obedience, no matter what the character of the temptation might be. And so, in the history of every saint, the Spirit of God loves to recall and bring to remembrance, in each moment of difficulty, some little bit of Scripture that has been learned in days gone by. But having the Word, the Spirit of God can use it, and it becomes a weapon in His hands against the foe. The result is sure. There will be, in plain language, certain victory. I need not say more to press upon you the great importance of the study of the Scriptures.

Then the apostle goes further, in addressing the young men, and he says now, Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world" (vs. 15). There are two things, you will observe, in regard to the young men. They are the Word, and the world. I am quite sure of this, if the Word does not engage my attention, the world will. The great point is this, that God has a world into which He wants to bring His children. The Father's world is that scene of which Christ Himself, Personally, is the center. This word of warning is very instructive, for there is many a young man who has at first overcome the wicked one, and then, after a while, he himself has been overcome by the world. If I am not watchful the world will overcome me, and the consequences thereof are sad indeed. He says, "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." That does not mean that a man is not converted, but that, if you love the world, you do not get the love of the Father. The love of the Father is not in this scene. It is in another world altogether. It is the world of which Christ is the moral center.

Then he adds: "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, and the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever" (vs. 17). The Lord Jesus said: "Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, O My God: yea, Thy law is within My heart" (Psa. 40:7-8). When here He did God's will only, and that is why the apostle Paul says, "For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done (what Jesus did) the will of God, ye might receive the promise" (Heb. 10:36). You will find, beloved friends, that all through the New Testament the doing of the will of God is a very important thing. For instance, "Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17). I shall never know what the will of the Lord is if I am not near Him in the history of my soul. That is a clear case. A man who is doing the will of God, is not living for himself. His only thought is to do what God wishes. And that is exactly what the blessed Lord did here. To this we are also called, nay more urged, as Paul says: "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:1-2).

The Apostle John a second time also addresses the "little children," and gives them a long bit of instruction (vss. 18-27). We are in the last time, and there is much opposition to Christ. What is to sustain the babes? The fathers live on Christ, the young men are going on in the knowledge of Christ, and now, you babes, do not you make a mistake. You are surrounded by everything that is against Christ. An opposing element is all round about you, and many Antichrists. They had come into the assembly, but they had gone out. They were really servants of Satan. "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. 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" (vss. 18-19).

"But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things" (vs. 20). It is delightful to see here how the simplest and youngest babe in the family of God has the capacity, by the Spirit of God, to know what is right, as well as what is wrong. One frequently hears this sort of expression, "How can I know?" and, "How shall I be able to meet a difficulty like that?" Perhaps, you have never listened to this word. Read it again. "But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things." There is a capacity, which even the youngest member of the family of God has, to detect what is of God, and what is not of God. It is a principle of immense importance. He knows what is the truth, and what is not the truth.

But, further, "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). Is not that very striking? It is a very remarkable word. There is a divine competency by the Spirit of God, even in the bosom of the youngest saint, to detect what is of God, and what is not of God. The Spirit of God, I need not say, is the divine and blessed competency.

"Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? he is Antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: [but] he that acknowledgeth the Son, hath the Father also" (vss. 22-23). The soul who really knows the Son of God is in touch with the Father. And that is the kernel of Christianity. That must be held firmly. Hence the exhortation: "Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father" (vs. 24). Cleaving close to that which God has given you in His blessed Word, you cleave to what is from the beginning. And what is that? Christ, of course. The revelation of the blessed Son of God, and the Father made known in Him who became incarnate. "Hold on to Him therefore," is the word of the Spirit to the young believer. If that which is from the beginning abides in us, there will be ever-deepening enjoyment of this blessed relationship, in which we stand to God as our Father.

Further, the knowledge of the love of the Father, and of the Son too, will be increased, and we shall enter into the enjoyment which the Father has in the Son. The effect is that you continue in the Son, and in the Father. A wonderful place, beloved, for our souls to be in. We are in the Father, and our hearts are charmed as we behold the beauty of the Son. It is reciprocal joy. "And this is the promise that He hath promised us, even eternal life" (vs. 25). Our souls are set really in the enjoyment of eternal life. It is the knowledge of the Father and the Son.

"These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you" (vs. 26). Here we have the reason of the apostle so addressing the babes. We must not shut our eyes to the fact that there is seduction all round about us. But we get their safeguard immediately presented: "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" (vs. 27). Let us not misunderstand this verse, for I have heard it said, "Oh, I can get on without teaching." I do not think you will. If a man despise teaching, you may depend upon it, that person never grows, or gets on. The Lord has given helps, and teachers. But the point is this, that the young soul has an anointing of the Holy Spirit, and there is no necessity for the teaching of new things. The path is made very plain. The Spirit of God in you is the competency for the apprehension of the truth, and for the enjoyment of the truth, and you do not, in that sense, need anything.

You have everything in the knowledge of the Lord, but at the same time, one knows what an immense boon it is if a teacher, sent by God, come along, who knows the Word of God better than yourself. You then learn afresh, and are helped to more fully enjoy what the Lord gives. The unfolding and ministering of the truth of God to the soul is ever the Spirit's aim. And bear in mind, what we receive is not for ourselves only, but it is to be circulated. If you do this, you will enjoy it more yourself, and fit yourself, I believe, for God to give you more truth, and more enjoyment of His love.

It is sweet to see here the perfect way in which the babes are set up in this scene, and having concluded addressing these three classes, the apostle comes back in the last two verses of our chapter to the whole family: "And now, children, abide in Him; that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him" (vss. 28-29). He desires that their walk and ways should be such, that the apostles might have credit from Christ in the day of His appearing. A very beautiful desire on the part of a man who had been used of God in blessing to their souls. He longed that their souls should be kept in the abiding, and ever-deepening enjoyment of the love of the Father, and the Son, and that they should be preserved from every error as they passed through this scene.

Thus there are three classes here. A father is in the enjoyment of Christ; a young man is marked by his soul's deep love for the Word of God, and separation from the world; while the babes know the Father, and have a competency by the Spirit of God, to clearly perceive what is, and what is not the truth. May God, in His grace, give us all to set our hearts to go on to learn more of Christ, and thus be true over-comers in a day of seduction and declension.

Christian Truth: Volume 38, Divine Love, Four Consequences of (4:7-19)

Read 1 John 4:7-19

There are many exceedingly beautiful points in this passage, but I will only touch on four of them. There is little of ourselves here; all is about God—what He is and what He does.

By nature, neither you nor I have any confidence in God. It was want of confidence in God that led Eve to parley with Satan. The moment there is any parley with the devil, he gets bolder. All the family of Eve have got their father's and mother's likeness stamped in their hearts—lack of confidence in God. And that is where the gospel comes in. What does it open up to us? I know a poet has written of "Paradise Regained," but it is false. The gospel opens up to us God's paradise, not man's. He displays what He is in Himself, in the life and ways of His Son. What begets confidence in our hearts is this—the discovery of what is in God's heart.

In this epistle God does not say He loves us; He proves it. You might slight the love of God, you may scorn it, you may trample it under foot, but you cannot deny it; God is love!

Where does love come from? from the heart of man? No, from the heart of God. Is there any true, genuine love in your heart to any of God's people? It comes from God. If there be love in your heart to any of God's people, it will come out. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." Chap. 3:14. Not because we say we are converted, but because we love. We cannot know God, and be born of Him, without these blessed characteristics coming out in us. Can you say you love? Then I will tell you something better—you are a child of the Father. Is there anything better in this world than to know God? He is revealed in the Person and life of His Son. "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." John 17:3. "He that loveth not, knoweth not God." You cannot get in contact with Him without loving Him. It is the first mark of a converted soul.

Look how the Apostle, in this passage, unfolds four things. In the 9th verse there is the love of God manifested in sending His Son that we might live through Him. You cannot say God does not love you; you dare not say it. You ask, Why? I answer, Because you are part of the world.

1. LIFE

In the 9th verse there is something God wants you to get which you do not have—life; in the 10th verse He wants you to get rid of something which you do have—sins. If I had written this, I am sure I would have put the 10th verse before the 9th; that is, I would have put the question of my sins first. But no, there is a deeper

thing, the fact that I have not life—eternal life. "In Him was life." No one else had life; life was only found in Jesus.

What is the state that Scripture describes as true of us? Death! We were "dead in trespasses and sins." I grant you, you have natural life, but you cannot be sure of it for twenty-four hours. You have an eternal existence. You will last as long as God lasts, but that is not eternal life. Eternal life is being with Christ—knowing Him—not merely eternal existence.

Eternal life is association with Christ. What does the gospel present? We were all dead men, and God sends His Son to give us life. He might have left us alone.

What an awful thing—to be left alone! But, blessed be His name, He brought in a remedy. "The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world." What we do not have, He sends His Son to communicate; we get all through Christ; we are shut up to Christ.

But you ask, What about the law? Could the law give life? No; Christ gives life; having gone into death, He has brought life and incorruptibility to light. The life of Jesus will not do. We hear a great deal about His life, and very beautiful it is to trace His life and ways on earth, but He had to die for "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Hence we get:

2. PROPITIATION

Not only does God propose to give me that which will fit me for His presence, but He says, Sinner, you have something about you that will keep you out of My presence. So He sends His Son to be the propitiation for my sins. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us." When did He give Him? When we were sinners. The positive side of the gospel is what God gives; the moment you believe, you have it;

the negative side is that my sins are all taken away. He sent His Son, a propitiation for our sins. Do you believe that? The 9th verse gives us His life; the 10th verse gives us His death. On the cross Jesus makes propitiation for sin. He was made sin who knew no sin. He was there, pouring out His soul unto death, meeting all God's claims against sin. Look at it; the Son of the very God against whom you have sinned has made propitiation for the very sins that would have brought you into eternal damnation. Now He is exalted and gone on high; the veil is rent; He is gone back as man; the work is all done for which He came to die. Atonement has been effected by Christ, accepted by God; the fruit—peace—is to be enjoyed by the believing sinner.

What about your sins? you may ask. They were borne by Christ. There is the proof of the love of God to me—of the love of Christ—"God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." Sin was condemned, and sins were blotted out when Christ made propitiation for sin. "Herein is love." Do you want a greater or better proof of love? The heart that believes can say, I now have what I did not have, and I have lost what I had; I have obtained life, and lost my sins.

3. POWER

There is another thing God does (v. 13). He gives us of His Spirit, and that is power. The moment you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ you cease to be a lost sinner; your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost. Look at Eph. 1:13: "In whom... after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of

promise." Note Acts 10:44 also: "While Peter yet

spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word." On whom? On believers. It is the sinner who hears and who believes. He says, I need this salvation. His heart gets plowed up. I would like it, he says; I believe it; and God seals that one with the Holy Ghost. If I bought a flock of sheep at the market, should I drive them home at once? No; I should put a mark on them—my mark—before driving them home. Do you know how God knows His sheep? They all have the Holy Ghost, and the price He paid for them was the precious blood of Christ. The devil's children have their mark; they are spotted with sin. God's children have a lovely mark.

4. BOLDNESS

All this is the fruit of love—God's perfect love. It is love "toward us" (v. 9), love "in us" (v. 2), love "to us" (v. 16), and love "with us" (v. 17). This gives us our fourth point, boldness. We get another "herein" in the 17th verse—"Herein is love with us (as the margin rightly puts it) made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment."

Thus there are four things we get: life, peace, power (by the Holy Spirit), and boldness in the day of judgment. There is no fear in love. God's perfect love casts out all fear, because fear has torment. To paraphrase a common saying, when love comes in at the door, fear goes out at the window.

God's perfect love casts out fear, for "As He is, so are we in this world." Look at these nine monosyllables. Exactly as Christ is, so is the Christian. When he dies? No. When he has attained to a state of perfection? No, "In this world." I know nothing sweeter to the heart, than to see that peerless Man, who was in death, but has gone back to heaven, at the right hand of God; God says, "As He is, so are we in this world." See Him, the Father's delight from all eternity. How is He? Is He on the other side of death? So are we. Is He where no sin can touch Him? So are we. Is He the Father's & light? So are we. If you believe this, you will have life, peace, power, and boldness in the day of judgment. I shall be at His side in that day. He is that One who took my judgment on the cross.

"Bold shall I stand in that great day, For who aught to my charge shall lay?"

He has given us His place—"As He is, so are we in this world." The Lord lead us to rest in Himself, and thus to walk in the enjoyment of His love till we see Him face to face.

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