3 John 1 (George Vicesimus Wigram) 60771

Remarks and Notes on John's Writings, Epistles, The (1)

His life here below, His humiliation,. perfect life, and expiatory death and resurrection having taken place, the Lord Jesus tarried a while ere quitting the earth to take His place in heaven at the right hand of the Father. All the scenes of the Gospel were in the desert, upon earth. But He being glorified as Son of Man, with the glory which, as Son of God, He had with the Father before the world was, the Holy Spirit' descended on the day of Pentecost, in order to form the church, which was to take His place as witness upon earth. And what is her means of giving light and of being sanctified? It is the eternal life which she received at the hand of Jesus at the right hand of God. In the epistles Christ Jesus, in whom is eternal life, is always hidden in God; but His church is ever upon earth, and this life is the subject of the Epistles Of John; His life, as a river, whose source is in God, which flows from the Lord Jesus at the right hand of God, and which has a history peculiar to itself. It is very important, seeing that Satan is upon earth, and that he can act upon the flesh, by means of the world, to have instructions direct from God Himself, with regard, not only as elsewhere as to the disorders connected, with that life, the sicknesses, weaknesses, etc., to which the children of God, as such Who walk not well, are exposed, but also of the experiences, according to the Spirit of God, of that life in itself in them. This it is which we find in the Epistles of John.

1. The first Epistle: 1 (Chap. 1. 1-5.) Testimony rendered to what John and the apostles had seen, yea, handled of the Word of Life, for faith in that is the only means of having communion with the Father and with the Son. Remark here that the light has been given to us once for all, by the Son, in Ills humiliation but it is assured to us, in that He is now upon the throne of God, and God has there expressed His thoughts about Christ's course on earth. Am I in the light of that grace? Have I, for myself, that eternal life? Thereupon I have new wants and needs, and God gives me-

2. (Chap. 1. 6-xo.) Instruction with regard to that life, and it in me, when I am in the presence of God; in the hidden place, in spirit there, where the stream which passes through each soul unites it to the Fountain-to Christ in God. Having of His grace, not only in Him, but also by the Spirit in myself, eternal life, I walk, through grace, according to the light, in communion and without guilt, by reason of the blood of Christ (ver. 6, 7); yet, moreover, I have there a painful lesson to learn. For my body being as yet unrenewed, the light reveals to me and makes me conscious of the state of sin in which God found me, and of the sins which are the fruit thereof. Certainly, if I see what I am in myself when I am in the light of such a life as that which Christ led on earth here below, and gave in atonement ere He took the place on high where I see Him, I shall necessarily feel the contrast between what He is and what I am; between myself and that in Him which perfectly fitted Him to be both victim and righteousness; between what I am and He is, whose glory is presented to me in Him. If in the presence of God I rejoice in Christ, I also necessarily am humbled on account of what I myself am. Life is assured to me in Him, in Him who was put to death for my sins, in Him, in whom the glory to which I am predestinated is shown to me; but what a painful contrast between what I am in myself and what He is, what I am in Him! Contrast, greater far than that which exists between our respective circumstances. I see it by faith, and I see it in perfect tranquility of soul, because His glory now, in which my eternal life is secured, and whence it flows, is a glory consequent upon the death He endured by reason of, in order to free me completely from, the guilt of that which I am. Nevertheless, though this experience be humbling, it is healthful. Such is one point of view. Then we have this life regarded as seen in the various parts and members of the family in which it is found: each division of the family having something special to it.

Thus, 3. (Chap. 2:1-11) gives us the marks by which we may recognize the life in another: separation from evil, obedience, and love of the brethren. The old commandment (ver. 7) which had ever existed and been in evidence from the threshold of Eden-lost, downwards, is obedience. For, how can two walk together unless they be agreed. The divine nature never changes; of necessity the poor sinner must yield to' God and His ways; but besides this, there is a new commandment, which attaches more immediately to the holiness of discipleship in Christ, viz., brotherly love (ver. 8). This truth could not hold good before that a. risen Christ became the One in whom the saints were presented before God. But the liberty of the children of God being assured in Christ, before God, and being assured in them also (which is true in Him and in you), brotherly love might be proclaimed as a sine qua non of eternal life.

From the 12th verse to the 28th, he considers the divisions of the family according to age and distinctive peculiarities. The sins of every individual member of that holy family are altogether pardoned; but besides this (which is true of Christ), there are blessings according to the Spirit: one may be a babe, a youth, or a father in Christ; for the family is divided thus into three classes. The fathers rest in Him; the youths have overcome the wicked one; in Him the babes have known the Father. Such is the peculiarity of each class according to the Spirit. First, in principle (ver. 13, 14); secondly, in detail (ver. 14-27). It must be noticed that there are two words, different in sense one from the other, both of which are here rendered " little children." The first is found in verses 1, 12, 28 (τεκνια) offspring, " children of the family," Which all are, who are of it, whatsoever be their age. The other (παιδια) infants, babes, is found in verses 13 and 18. The specialty of one that is such is to inform itself in the doctrine of Christ, even as it already has the Unction by which it knows all things; that of the youths is to make application of this doctrine, and in practice to overcome the world, even as they already in Christ have done; that of the fathers, who, by the blessing and knowledge of the babe, and by means of the faithful conduct of youth in Christ, find themselves on the other side of the world and of the flesh, is to rest and abide there. It is worthy of remark, that ver. 13 and 14 add nothing to the truth of the fathers; that he exhorts the youths to act in their circumstances according to the victory they already have in Christ; and having assured the babes that they have need of nothing (ver. 20), "You have received the Unction of the Holy One and know all things," yet, he adds, and that very formally, instructions; yet not as teaching, so much as in brotherly love, recalling things well known..In the 28th verse, the name is 'generic, "offspring," and not the specific one of " babe."

But we are in the desert; and it is there, in us, that the experience of that life of which John speaks is made. We have then not only relationship with God and Christ in heaven, and relationships one with the other, and, therefore, as, individuals, and according to the Spirit,

duties to fulfill, as in setting aside Satan (as the babes by entrance into truth), the world (as the youth), and the flesh (as the fathers); but there is a contrast between the church and the world, where she is-between the family of God and the family of Satan. It is this which follows:—

" Every one that doeth righteousness is born of God" (chap. 2:29). Loved of God, unknown to the world, waiting for the Lord of glory, we have to purify ourselves even as He is pure. We have eternal life in Christ; obedience is the natural fruit thereof: sin is the fruit of a state of condemnation and, alienation from God. Obedience to God and love toward the brethren are set in contrast with one's own will and hatred, God and the Devil, and the principles which pertain to the two families of these two, are in question. It may be well, perhaps, to state a truth which each child of God knows to be true, but which is found in the comparison of chaps. 3 and 1.

When I find myself in the direct presence of God, as in communion with Him, I feel not only that I am eternally pardoned, but that I am also in myself a poor sinner: this is chap. 1; the three truths of which are the spirit of obedience, the enjoyment of gratuitous pardon, and the perception that there is in us sin. But if we turn to the third chapter, I find myself placed in the presence of the world; that is quite another thing. As the light of the sun at mid-day hides the light of a lamp so effectually that naught indeed but the black wick will be seen, so when we find ourselves in the presence of God, that which is of us will be seen, and the measure of light we give will go for nothing, in the presence of the Perfect Light that is there. But place that lamp in a dark night, and it shows all around it, and the contrast between its light and the darkness all round is palpable. Such is the light which makes manifest the darkness of this world. Being in the world, the church can say, net only "We are of the Father of Jesus; and you are of the father of this present evil world:" but also, "We are holy, and we do the will of God our Father; and you are sinners, and you do according to your own will." I admit that it is the divine nature-the divine nature which we have received of Christ-which is our blessing in this third chapter, as it is in the first. But in the first, it is the eternal life which makes us sensible of the true character of that which we were, and of that which we are in ourselves, when we find ourselves in communion with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. In the third chapter, it is the eternal life acting in holiness, and showing (not the weakness of the vessel, which humbling lesson is yet a part of our sanctification, but) the strength of the life to accomplish in us (by means of faith and hope, according to the presence of the Holy Ghost) the will of God, which is put in contrast with the works which those do who are not ours all around us. The position of the family of God, the privileges, hopes, light, love in practical exercise, the separation or contrast with the world, by means of faith and the Spirit, is the substance of the third chapter.

In the last verse he speaks of the Spirit: this leads him to another lesson which he had to give, i.e., as to the difference between true religion and that which is false; between that which is of the Spirit of God and that which is of another spirit, not of God, be it of the flesh, or of the world, or of Satan, it matters' not. We must studiously keep ourselves from all religion which is not of God and by Christ; for, there is but God and Satan, Heaven and the world, the Spirit and the flesh. And the Spirit, Heaven, Christ, and God are on one side, as the flesh, the world, and Satan are on the other. Union with one link of a chain unites you to the chain itself. We must not then (ver. 1) believe every spirit, but try the spirits, whence they are. The Spirit of God (ver. 2) acts according to the example which Christ has left us; they which are not thus are not of God. He gives, it seems to me, the life of Christ here below as a touch stone of all the pretensions which we may find of possession of the Spirit; we overcome (ver. 4) them, for they are of the world (ver. 5), and we are of God. Another test is brotherly love, for love is of God,(ver. 7, 8); and the death of the Lord Jesus, in order to give us life, is proof thereof (ver. 9, Jo), and leads us to love one another (ver. 11); this will be a testimony of she presence of God in us (ver. 12) that we are in Him and that He is in us (ver. 13). It is the Father who sent- the Son (ver. 14); to confess Him is to show our fellowship with the Father (ver. 15), is to recognize the love of God (ver. 16) which has placed us in Christ, sheltered from judgment (ver. 17); and this takes away fear (ver. 18), fills our hearts with love toward God (ver. 19), and toward the brethren (ver. 20), which is according to His commandment (ver. 21). Faith in Christ shows that we are the children of God (chap. 5:1).

The fifth chapter gives us additional tests by which to guard against the wiles of Satan. Love towards the brethren and love towards God and holiness must not be separated. Love to God and obedience are but one. This obedience is not painful (chap. 5:2, 3), for our nature, as children of God, is above all that is in the world (ver. 4, 5). But we must hold fast the truth, that Christ, in whom we are more than conquerors, is the same who is come by water and by blood; and the Spirit is the witness. Victory over all that is in the world is assured to us; for He, in whom we believe, is come by water and by blood; and it is the Spirit, who is truth, who renders the testimony to us. The testimony which God renders to His Son is more valid and worthy than that of men (ver. 9). He that believes has received it; he that believes it not, makes God a liar as to that which He has testified of His Son (ver. 10), that is to say, that eternal life is the, portion of him who has the Son (ver. 11, 12) and such is the object of John's testimony.

And therein there is the assurance of having the open ear of God, and of answers to prayer, where our desires contravene not the government of God (ver. 14-17). He who is born of God, sins not: we are of God, and the world is in the wicked one (ver. 19); but the Son has given to us eternal life (ver. 2; may we keep ourselves from idols!

The grand lesson of the second epistle is with regard to the conduct suitable to the faith, in the case of efforts made by a subverter of foundation-truth. Even a female, if she be inside the house, can turn the key against such a one. To be separate, at all costs, from such is the great affair.

The third epistle, on the other hand, guards us in another point. If every one, without reference to others, ought, according to eternal life, to shut the door against him who brings other doctrine than that of Christ, each one is responsible to receive and to uphold the faithful, be we obliged to do so against the current and spite of the opposition of others. We see, evidently, in these two epistles, that responsibility attaches to each individual both as to doctrine and as to practice-whether there be pastors or not, adversaries or none.

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