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**COMMENTARY**

**DARBY'S SYNOPSIS OF THE  
BOOKS OF THE BIBLE  
PART 2: NEW TESTAMENT**

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## John Nelson Darby, 1800-1882

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# 1 JOHN

The epistle of John has a peculiar character. It is eternal life manifested in Jesus, and imparted to us — the life which was with the Father, and which is in the Son. It is in this life that believers enjoy the communion of the Father, that they are in relationship with the Father by the Spirit of adoption, and that they have fellowship with the Father and the Son. God's own character is that which tests it; because it proceeds from Himself.

The first chapter establishes these two latter points: namely, communion with the Father and the Son, and that this communion must be according to the essential character of God. The name of Father is that which gives character to the second chapter. Afterwards it is that which God is, which tests the reality of imparted life.

The epistles of Paul, although speaking of this life, are in general occupied with setting before Christians the truth respecting the means of standing in the presence of God justified and accepted. The epistle of John, that is to say, his first, shows us the life that comes from God by Jesus Christ. John sets God before us, the Father revealed in the Son, and eternal life in Him. Paul sets us before God accepted in Christ. I speak of what characterises them. Each respectively touches on the other point.

Now, this life is so precious, manifested as it is in the Person of Jesus, that the epistle now before us has in this respect quite a peculiar charm. When I, too, turn my eyes to Jesus, when I contemplate all His obedience, His purity, His grace, His tenderness, His patience, His devotedness, His holiness, His love, His entire freedom from all self-seeking, I can say, That is my life.

This is immeasurable grace. It may be that it is obscured in me; but it is none the less true, that that is my life. Oh how do I enjoy it thus seen! How I bless God for it! What rest to the soul! What pure joy to the heart! At the same time Jesus Himself is the object of my affections; and all my affections are formed on that holy object.\*

[\* And this is morally very important; while it is in Him, not in myself, that I rejoice and delight.]

But we must turn to our epistle. There were many pretensions to new light, to clearer views. It was said that Christianity was very good as an elementary thing; but that it was grown old, and that there was a new light which went far beyond that twilight truth.

The Person of our Lord, the true manifestation of the divine life itself, dissipated all those proud pretensions, those exaltations of the human mind under the influence of the enemy, which did but obscure the truth, and lead the mind of men back into the darkness whence they themselves proceeded.

That which was from the beginning (of Christianity; that is, in the Person of Christ), that which they had heard, had seen with their own eyes, had contemplated, had touched with their own hands, of the Word of life — that was it which the apostle declared. For the life itself had been manifested. That life which was with the Father had been manifested to the disciples. Could there be anything more perfect, more excellent, any development more admirable in the eyes of God, than Christ Himself, than that Life which was with the Father, manifested in all its perfection in the Person of the Son? As soon as the Person of the Son is the object of our faith, we feel that perfection must have been at the beginning.

The Person then of the Son, the eternal life manifested in the flesh, is our subject in this epistle.

Grace is consequently to be remarked here in that which regards life; while Paul presents it in connection with justification. The law promised life upon obedience; but life came in the Person of Jesus, in all its own divine perfection, in its human manifestations. Oh how precious is the truth that this life, such as it was with the Father, such as it was in Jesus, is given to us! In what relationships it sets us, by the power of the Holy Ghost, with the Father and with the Son Himself! And this is what the Spirit here first sets before us. And observe, how it is all grace here. Farther on, indeed, He tests all pretensions to the possession of fellowship with God, by displaying God's own character; a character from which He can never deviate. But, before entering on this, He presents the Savior Himself, and

communion with the Father and the Son by this means, without question and without modification. This is our position and our eternal joy.

The apostle had seen that life, had touched it with his own hands; and he wrote to others, proclaiming this, in order that they also should have communion with him in the knowledge of the life which had been thus manifested.\* Now, inasmuch as that life was the Son, it could not be known without knowing the Son; that is, that which He was, entering into His thoughts, His feelings: otherwise He is not really known. It was thus they had communion with Him — with the Son. Precious fact! to enter into the thoughts (all the thoughts), and into the feelings, of the Son of God come down in grace: to do this in fellowship with Him; that is to say, not only knowing them, but sharing these thoughts and feelings with Him. In effect, it is the life.

[\* The life has been manifested. Therefore we have no longer to seek for it, to grope after it in the darkness, to explore at random the indefinite, or the obscurity of our own hearts, in order to find it, to labor fruitlessly under the law, in order to obtain it. We behold it: it is revealed, it is here, in Jesus Christ. He who possesses Christ possesses that life.]

But we cannot have the Son without having the Father. He who had seen Him had seen the Father; and consequently he who had communion with the Son had communion with the Father; for their thoughts and feelings were all one. He is in the Father, and the Father in Him. We have fellowship therefore with the Father. And this is true also, when we look at it in another aspect. We know that the Father has entire delight in the Son. Now He has given us, by revealing the Son, to take our delight in Him also, feeble as we are. I know, when I am delighting in Jesus — in His obedience, His love to His Father, to us, His single eye and purely devoted heart — I have the same feelings, the same thoughts, as the Father Himself. In that the Father delights, cannot but delight, in Him in whom I now delight, I have communion with the Father. So with the Son in the knowledge of the Father. All this flows, whether in the one or the other point of view, from the Person of the Son. Herein our joy is full. What can we have more than the Father and the Son? What more perfect happiness than community of thoughts, feelings, joys, and communion, with the Father and the Son, deriving all our joy from themselves? And if it seem difficult to believe, let us remember that, in truth, it cannot be otherwise: for, in the life of Christ, the Holy Ghost is the source of my thoughts,

feelings, communion, and He cannot give thoughts different from those of the Father and the Son. They must be in their nature the same. To say that they are adoring thoughts is in the very nature of things, and only makes them more precious. To say that they are feeble and often hindered, while the Father and the Son are divine and perfect, is, if true, to say the Father and the Son are God, are divine, and we feeble creatures. That surely none will deny. But if the blessed Spirit be the source, they must be the same as to nature and fact.

This is our christian position then, here below in time, through the knowledge of the Son of God; as the apostle says, “These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.”

But He who was the life which came from the Father, has brought us the knowledge of God.\* The apostle had heard from His lips that which God was — knowledge of priceless value, but which searches the heart. And this also the apostle, on the Lord’s part, announces to believers. This then is the message which they had heard from Him, namely, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness. With regard to Christ, He spoke that which He knew, and bore testimony to that which He had seen. No one had been in heaven, save He who came down from thence. No one had seen God. The Only-begotten, who is in the bosom of the Father, He had declared Him. No one had seen the Father, save He who was of God; He had seen the Father. Thus He could, of His own and perfect knowledge, reveal Him.\*\* Now God was light, perfect purity, which makes manifest at the same time all that is pure, and all that is not so. To have communion with light, one must oneself be light, be of its nature, and fit to be seen in the perfect light. It can only be linked with that which is of itself. If there is anything else that mingles with it, light is no longer light. It is absolute in its nature, so as to exclude all that is not itself.

[\* It will be found that, when grace to us is spoken of in John’s writings, he speaks of the Father and the Son; when the nature of God or our responsibility, he says God. John 3 and 1 John 4 may seem exceptions, but are not. It is what God is as such, not personal action and relationship in grace.]

[\*\* He who had seen Him had seen the Father; but here the apostle speaks of a message and the revelation of His nature.]

Therefore, if we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not practice truth: our life is a perpetual lie.

But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we (believers) have communion with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. These are the great principles, the great features of christian position. We are in the presence of God without a veil. It is a real thing, a matter of life and of walk. It is not the same thing as walking according to the light; but it is in the light. That is to say, that this walk is before the eyes of God, enlightened by the full revelation of what He is. It is not that there is no sin in us; but, walking in the light, the will and the conscience being in the light as God is in it, everything is judged that does not answer to it. We live and walk morally in the sense that God is present, and as knowing Him. We walk thus in the light. The moral rule of our will is God Himself, God known. The thoughts that sway the heart come from Himself and are formed upon the revelation of Himself. The apostle puts these things always in an abstract way: thus he says, "he cannot sin, because he is born of God"; and that maintains the moral rule of this life; it is its nature; it is the truth, inasmuch as the man is born of God. We cannot have any other measure of it: any other would be false. It does not follow, alas! that we are always consistent; but we are inconsistent if we are not in this state; we are not walking according to the nature that we possess; we are out of our true condition according to that nature.

Moreover, walking in the light, as God is in the light, believers have communion with each other. The world is selfish. The flesh, the passions, seek their own gratification; but, if I walk in the light, self has no place there. I can enjoy the light, and all I seek in it, with another, and there is no jealousy. If another possess a carnal thing, I am deprived of it. In the light we have fellow-possession of that which He gives us, and we enjoy it the more by sharing it together. This is a touchstone to all that is of the flesh. As much as one is in the light, so much will we have fellow-enjoyment with another who is in it. The apostle, as we have said, states this in an abstract and absolute way. This is the truest way to know the thing itself. The rest is only a question of realisation.

In the third place, the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

To walk in the light as God is in it, to have fellowship with one another, to be cleansed from all sin by the blood; these are the three parts of christian position. We feel the need there is of the last; for, while walking in the light as God is in the light, with (blessed be God) a perfect revelation to us of Himself, with a nature that knows Him, that is capable of seeing Him spiritually, as the eye is made to appreciate light (for we participate in the divine nature), we cannot say that we have no sin. The light itself would contradict us. But we can say that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us perfectly from all sin.\* Through the Spirit we enjoy the light together: it is the common joy of our hearts before God, and well-pleasing to Him; a testimony to our common participation in the divine nature which is love also. And our conscience is no hindrance, because we know the value of the blood. We have no conscience of sin upon us before God, though we know it is in us; but we have the conscience of being clean from it by the blood. But the same light which shows us this, prevents our saying (if we are in it) that we have no sin in us; we should deceive ourselves if we said so; and the truth would not be in us; for if the truth were in us, if that revelation of the divine nature, which is light, Christ our life, were in us, the sin that is in us would be judged by the light itself. If it be not judged, this light — the truth which speaks of things as they are — is not in us.

[\* It is not said “has” nor “will.” It does not refer to time, but to its efficacy. As I might say such a medicine cures the ague. It is its efficacy.]

If, on the other hand, we have even committed sin and all, being judged according to the light, is confessed (so that the will no longer takes part in it, the pride of that will being broken down), He is faithful and just to forgive us, and to cleanse us from all iniquity. If we say that we have not sinned\* (as a general truth), it shows not only that the truth is not in us, but we make God a liar; His word is not in us, for He says that all have sinned. There are the three things: we lie; the truth is not in us; we make God a liar. It is this fellowship with God in the light, which in practical daily christian life, inseparably connects forgiveness, and the present sense of it by faith, and purity of heart.

[\* When speaking of sin, the apostle speaks in the present tense, “we have”; when speaking of sinning, he speaks in the past. He does not take for granted we are going on doing it. It has been a question whether the apostle speaks of first coming to the Lord, or subsequent failures. I answer, he speaks in an abstract and absolute way: confession brings through grace, forgiveness. If it



is our first coming to God, it is forgiveness; it is in the full and absolute sense. I am forgiven with God: He remembers my sins no more. If it is subsequent failure, honesty of heart always confesses, then it is forgiveness as regards the government of God, and the present condition and relationship of my soul with Him. But the apostle, as everywhere, speaks absolutely and of the principle.]

Thus we see the christian position (v. 7); and then the things which, in three different ways, are opposed to the truth — to communion with God in life.

The apostle wrote that which relates to the communion with the Father and the Son, in order that their joy might be full.

That which he wrote according to the revelation of the nature of God, which he had received from Him who was the life from heaven, was in order that they should not sin. But to say this is to suppose that they might sin. Not that it is necessary they should do so; for the presence of sin in the flesh by no means obliges us to walk after the flesh. But if it should take place, there is provision made by grace, in order that grace may act, and that we may be neither condemned, nor brought again under the law.

We have an Advocate with the Father, One who carries on our cause for us on high. Now this is not in order to obtain righteousness, nor again to wash our sins away. All that has been done. Divine righteousness has placed us in the light, even as God Himself is in the light. But communion is interrupted, if even levity of thought finds place in our heart; for it is of the flesh, and the flesh has no communion with God. When communion is interrupted, when we have sinned (not when we have repented; for it is His intercession that leads to repentance), Christ intercedes for us. Righteousness is always present — our righteousness — "Jesus Christ the Righteous." Therefore, neither the righteousness nor the value of the propitiation for sin being changed, grace acts (one may say, acts necessarily) in virtue of that righteousness, and of that blood which is before God — acts, on the intercession of Christ who never forgets us, in order to bring us back to communion by means of repentance. Thus, while yet on earth, before Peter had committed the sin, He prayed for him; at the given moment He looks on him, and Peter repents and weeps bitterly for

his offense. Afterwards the Lord does all that is necessary to make Peter judge the root itself of the sin; but all is grace.

It is the same in our case. Divine righteousness abides — the immutable foundation of our relationships with God, established on the blood of Christ. When communion, which exists only in the light, is interrupted, the intercession of Christ, available by virtue of His blood (for propitiation for the sin has also been made), restores the soul that it may still again enjoy communion with God according to the light, into which righteousness has introduced it.\* This propitiation is made for the whole world, not for the Jews only, nor to the exclusion of any one at all; but for the whole world, God in His moral nature having been fully glorified by the death of Christ.

[\* Here the subject is communion, and hence actual failure is spoken of; in the Hebrews, we have seen, it is access to God and we are “perfected for ever,” and priesthood is for mercy and help, not for sins, save the great act of atonement.]

These three capital points — or, if you will, two capital points, and the third, namely, advocacy, which is supplementary — form the introduction, the doctrine of the epistle. All the rest is an experimental application of that which this part contains: namely, first (life being given), communion with the Father and the Son; second, the nature of God, light, which manifests the falsehood of all pretension to communion with the light if the walk be in darkness; and third, seeing that sin is in us and that we may fail although we are cleansed before God so as to enjoy the light, the advocacy which Jesus Christ the righteous can always exercise before God, on the ground of the righteousness which is ever in His presence, and the blood which is shed for our sins, in order to restore our communion, when we have lost it by our guilty negligence.

The Spirit now proceeds to develop the characteristics of this divine life.

Now we are sanctified unto the obedience of Jesus Christ; that is to say, to obey on the same principles as those on which He obeyed; where His Father’s will was the motive as well as the rule of action. It is the obedience of a life to which it was meat and drink to do the will of God: not as under the law, in order to obtain life. The life of Jesus Christ was a life of obedience, in which He enjoyed the love of His Father perfectly, tested in all things and so proved perfect. His words, His commandments,

were the expression of that life; they direct that life in us, and ought to exercise all the authority over us of Him who pronounced them.

The law promised life to those who obeyed it. Christ is the life. This life has been imparted to us — to believers. Therefore, the words which were the expression of that life, in its perfection in Jesus, direct and guide it in us according to that perfection. Besides this, it has authority over us. His commandments are its expression. We have therefore to obey, and to walk as He walked — the two forms of practical life. It is not enough to walk well: we must obey, for there is authority. This is the essential principle of a right walk. On the other hand, the obedience of the Christian — as is evident by that of Christ Himself — is not that which we often think. We call a child obedient, who, having a will of his own, submits himself at once when the authority of the parent intervenes to prevent his accomplishing it. But Christ never obeyed in this way. He came to do the will of God. Obedience was His mode of being. His Father's will was the motive, and, with the love that was never separate from it, the only motive of His every act and every impulse. This is obedience properly called christian. It is a new life which delights in doing the will of Christ, acknowledging His entire authority over it. We reckon ourselves to be dead to everything else; we are alive unto God, we are not our own. We only know Christ inasmuch as we are living by His life; for the flesh does not know Him, and cannot understand His life.

Now, that life is obedience: therefore he who says, "I know him," and does not observe His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. It does not say here, "he deceives himself," for it is very possible that he is not self-deceived, as in the other case of fancied communion; for here the will is in action, and a man knows it, if he will confess it. But the reality is not there; he is a liar, and the truth in the knowledge of Jesus, which he professes, is not in him.

There are two remarks to be made here. First, that the apostle takes things always as they are in themselves in an abstract way, without the modifications that are occasioned by other things, in the midst of which, or in relation with which, the former are found. Second, that the chain of consequences which the apostle deduces is not that of outward reasoning, the force of which is consequently on the surface of the argument itself. He

reasons from a great inward principle, so that one does not see the force of the argument unless one knows the fact, and even the scope, of that principle; and, in particular, that which the life of God is in its nature, in its character, and in its action. But, without possessing it, we do not and cannot understand anything about it. There is, indeed, the authority of the apostle and of the word to tell us that the thing is so, and that is sufficient. But the links of his discourse will not be understood without the possession of the life which interprets what he says, and which is itself interpreted by that which he says.

I return to the text. “Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected.” It is in this way that we are conscious that we know Him. His “word” has rather a wider sense than His “commandments.” That is to say, while it equally implies obedience, the word is less outward. “Commandments” are here details of the divine life. His “word” contains its whole expression — the spirit of that life.\* It is universal and absolute. Now this life is the divine life manifested in Jesus, and which is imparted to us. Have we seen it in Christ? Do we doubt that this is love; that the love of God has been manifested in it? If then I keep His word; if the scope and meaning of the life which that word expresses is thus understood and realised, the love of God is perfect in me. The apostle, as we have seen, always speaks abstractedly. If in fact at any given moment I do not observe the word, in that point I do not realise His love; happy intercourse with God is interrupted. But so far as I am moved and governed absolutely by His word, His love is completely realised in me; for His word expresses what He is, and I am keeping it. This is the intelligent communion with His nature in its fullness, a nature in which I participate; so that I know that He is perfect love, I am filled with it, and this shows itself in my ways: for that word is the perfect expression of Himself.\*\*

[\* Fundamentally they are not different. This is affirmed in verse 7: “The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning.” One might say with perfect truth that the commandment is the word of Christ; but I question if it could be said that the word is the commandment. And this makes one conscious of the difference. The contrast of verses 4 and 5 is remarkable, and has its source in the possession, and the intelligent and complete consciousness of the possession, of the divine life, according to the word, or its non-possession. He who says, I know Him, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; for this truth is

only that which the word reveals. And if we live of the nature of which the word of Christ is the expression, and thus by the word know Him, we obey that word. In another aspect, if we are in possession of this life, partakers of the divine nature, the love of God is in us; we have the commandments of Christ, His word, the perfect love of God, a walk according to the walk of Christ, the communication of the life of Christ so that the commandment is true in Him and in us, the walk in the light, the love of our brother. How rich a chain of blessing! The pretensions here spoken of are — to know Christ, to abide in Him, to be in the light. The proof that the first pretension is justified is obedience. Then, if we abide in Christ (which we know by keeping His word), we ought to walk as He walked. That the last pretension is a true one is proved by love to our brother. In the second, the walk is maintained at all the height of the walk of Christ, as our duty: but this walk is not presented as a proof that we abide in Him, that we keep His word. Observe that it is not said, “We know that we believe” — this is not the question here; but, “We know that we are in Him.” — Let me add here, that the apostle never uses these proofs, as they are so commonly used, to say, “hereby we doubt.” It is quite certain from verses 12, 13, that he treats them as all forgiven or he would not have written, and as having the Spirit of adoption — even the youngest and feeblest. Others sought to make them doubt; and he writes that their hearts might be assured before God, that they might not be seduced into doubting, as if they had not a full Christ and a full Christianity — eternal life. It was the means of keeping and holding fast assurance when they had it, when they might have been shaken, not of obtaining it. They were forgiven, they were sons. When others would make them doubt, he writes that they may be fully assured that they have no reason to doubt.]

[\*\* This, I doubt not, is the true meaning of John 8:25. “In the principle of my nature, in my being, that which I am saying to you.” That which He said was essentially and completely that which He was. That which He was is that which He said. Now it is this life which is imparted to us; but it was the love of God among men and in man. And this life being our life, and the word of Christ giving us the knowledge of it, and this word being kept, His love is realised in us in all its extent.]

Consequently we know thus that we are in Him, for we realise that which He is in the communion of His nature. Now if we say that we abide in Him, it is evident, from what we have now seen in the instruction the apostle gives us, that we ought to walk as He walked. Our walk is the practical expression of our life; and this life is Christ known in His word. And since it is by His word, we who possess this life are under an intelligent responsibility to follow it; that is to say, to walk as He walked. For that word is the expression of His life.

Obedience then, as obedience, is thus far the moral characteristic of the life of Christ in us. But it is proof of that which, in Christianity, is inseparable

from the life of Christ in us: we are in Him (compare John 14:20). We know, not merely that we know Him, but that we are in Him. The enjoyment of the perfect love of God in the path of obedience, gives us by the Holy Ghost the consciousness that we are in Him. But if I am in Him, I cannot indeed be what He was, for He was without sin; but I ought to walk as He walked. Thus I know I am in Him. But if I make profession to abide in Him, my heart and spirit to be wholly there, I ought to walk as He walked. Obedience as a principle, and through keeping His word, and so the love of God perfected in me, knowing that I am in Him, are the formative principles and character of our life.

In verses 7 and 8 the two forms of the rule of this life are presented — forms which, moreover, answer to the two principles which we have just announced. It is not a new commandment which the apostle writes unto them but an old one; it is the word of Christ from the beginning. Were it not so, were it in this sense new, so much the worse for him who set it forth, for it would no longer be the expression of the perfect life of Christ Himself, but some other thing, or a falsification of that which Christ had set forth. This corresponds with the first principle, that is, obedience to commandments, to the commandments of Christ. What He said was the expression of what He was. He could command that they should love one another as He had loved them. Compare the Beatitudes.

In another sense it was a new commandment; for (by the power of the Spirit of Christ, being united to Him and drawing our life from Him) the Spirit of God manifested the effect of this life by revealing a glorified Christ in a new way. And now it was not only a commandment, but as the thing itself was true in Christ, it was so in His own as partakers of His nature and in Him; He also in them.

By this revelation, and by the presence of the Holy Ghost, the darkness disappeared,\* passed away, and in fact the true light shone. There will be no different light in heaven: only then the light will be publicly displayed in glory without a cloud.

[\* The force of the word is “the darkness is passing and the true light already shines.” There is much darkness yet in the world. As to the light, it has actually shone.]

Verse 9. The life, as in John 1:4, is now found to be the light of men, only the brighter for faith that Christ is gone, for it is through the rent veil it shines most brightly. We have had the pretension to know Him discussed — to be in Him; now that of being in the light, and this before the Spirit of God applies in detail the qualities of this life, as a proof of its existence, to the heart, in answer to seducers who sought to terrify them by new notions, as though Christians were not really in possession of life, and, with life, of the Father and the Son. The true light now shines. And this light is God; it is the divine nature; and, as that which was a means of judging the seducers themselves, he brings out another quality connected with our being in the light, that is with God fully revealed. Christ was it in the world. We are set to be it, in that we are born of God. And one who has this nature loves his brother; for is not God love? Has not Christ loved us, not being ashamed to call us brethren? Can I have His life and His nature, if I do not love the brethren? No. I am then walking in darkness; I have no light on my path. He who loves his brother dwells in the light; the nature of God acts in him; and he dwells in the bright spiritual intelligence of that life, in the presence and in the communion of God. If any one hates, it is evident that he has not divine light. With feelings according to a nature opposed to God, how can it be pretended that he is in the light?

Moreover, there is no occasion of stumbling in one who loves, for he walks according to divine light. There is nothing in him which causes another to stumble, for the revelation of the nature of God in grace will assuredly not do so: and it is this which is manifested in him who loves his brother.\*

[\* The reader may compare here, with much instruction, what is said in Ephesians 4:17 to 5:12, where these two names of God, the only ones used to reveal His nature, are also used to show our path and the true character of the Christian; only according to that which the Holy Ghost gives by Paul — the counsels and work of God in Christ. In John it is more the nature.]

This closes as an introductory statement the first part of the epistle. It contains in the former half, the privileged place of Christians, the message giving us the truth of our state here, and the provision for failure: that ends with chapter 2, verse 2; in the second half, the proofs the Christian has of the true possession of the privilege according to the message: obedience, and love of the brethren, knowing Christ, being in Christ, enjoying the perfect love of God, abiding in Him, being in the light, forming the condition which is thus proved.

Having established the two great principles, obedience and love, as proofs of the possession of the divine nature, of Christ known as life, and of our abiding in Him, the apostle goes on to address Christians personally and to show us the position, on the ground of grace, in three different degrees of ripeness. This parenthetical but most important address we will now consider.

He begins by calling all the Christians to whom he was writing, “children,” a term of affection in the loving and aged apostle. And as he writes to them (chap. 2:1) in order that they should not sin, so he writes also because all their sins were forgiven for Jesus’ name’s sake. This was the assured condition of all Christians: that which God had granted them in giving them faith, that they might glorify Him. He allows no doubt as to the fact of their being pardoned. He writes to them because they are so.

We next find three classes of Christians: fathers, young men, and babes. He addresses them each twice, fathers, young men, and babes (v. 13): fathers, in the first half of verse 14; young men from the second half, to the end of verse 17; and babes from verse 18 to the end of verse 27. In verse 28 he returns to all Christians under the name of “children.”

That which characterises fathers in Christ is that they have known Him who is from the beginning; that is, Christ. This is all that he has to say about them. All had resulted in that. He only repeats the same thing again, when, changing his form of expression, he begins anew with these three classes. The fathers have known Christ. This is the result of all christian experience. The flesh is judged, discerned, wherever it has mixed itself with Christ in our feelings; it is recognised, experimentally, as having no value; and, as the result of experience, Christ stands alone, free from all alloy. They have learnt to distinguish that which has only the appearance of good. They are not occupied with experience — that would be being occupied with self, with one’s own heart. All that has passed away; and Christ alone remains as our portion, unmingled with aught besides, even as He gave Himself to us. Moreover He is much better known; they have experienced what He is in so many details, whether of joy in communion with Him, or in the consciousness of weakness, or in the realisation of His faithfulness, of the riches of His grace, of His adaptation to our need, of His love, and in the revelation of His own fullness; so that they are able



now to say, “I know whom I have believed.” Attachment to Himself characterises them. Such is the character of “fathers” in Christ.

“Young men” are the second class. They are distinguished by spiritual strength in conflict: the energy of faith. They have overcome the wicked one. For he speaks of what their character is as in Christ. Conflict they have as such, but the strength of Christ manifested in them.

The third class is “babes.” These know the Father. We see here that the Spirit of adoption and of liberty characterises the youngest child in the faith of Christ, that it is not the result of progress. It is the commencement. We possess it because we are Christians; and it is ever the distinguishing mark of beginners. The others do not lose it, but other things distinguish them.

In again addressing these three classes of Christians, the apostle, as we have seen, has only to repeat that which he at first said with regard to the fathers. It is the result of christian life.

In the case of the young men he develops his idea and adds some exhortations. “Ye are strong,” he says, “and the word of God abideth in you” — an important characteristic. The word is the revelation of God, and the application of Christ, to the heart, so that we have thus the motives which form and govern it, and a testimony founded on the state of the heart, and on convictions which have a divine power in us. It is the sword of the Spirit in our relations with the world. We have been ourselves formed by those things to which we bear testimony in our relations with the world, and those things are in us according to the power of the word of God. The wicked one is thus overcome; for he has only the world to present to our lusts: and the word abiding in us keeps us in an altogether different sphere of thought in which a different nature is enlightened and strengthened by divine communications. The tendency of the young man is toward the world: the ardor of his nature, and the vigor of his age, tend to draw him away on that side. He has to guard against this by separating himself entirely from the world and the things that are in it; because if any one love the world, the love of the Father is not in him, for those things do not come from the Father. He has a world of His own, of which Christ is the center and glory. The lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — these are the things that are in the world and that

characterise it. There are really no other motives besides these in the world. Now these things are not of the Father.

The Father is the source of all that is according to His own heart — every grace, every spiritual gift, the glory, the heavenly holiness of all that was manifested in Christ Jesus, and that will be — all the world of glory to come, of which Christ is the center. And all this had only the cross for its portion here below. But the apostle is speaking here of the source; and assuredly the Father is not the source of those other things.

Now the world passes away; but he who does the will of God, he who, in going through this world, takes for his guide, not the desires of nature, but the will of God — a will which is according to His nature and which expresses it — such a one shall abide for ever according to the nature and the will that he has followed after.

We shall find that the world, and the Father with all that is of Him, the flesh and the Spirit, the Son and the devil, are put respectively in opposition. Things are spoken of in their source and moral nature, the principles that act in us and that characterise our existence and our position, and the two agents in good and evil that are opposed to each other, without (thanks be to God!) any uncertainty as to the issue of the conflict; for the weakness of Christ, in death, is stronger than the strength of Satan. He has no power against that which is perfect. Christ came that He might destroy the works of the devil.

To the babes the apostle speaks principally of the dangers to which they were exposed from seducers. He warns them with tender affection, reminding them at the same time that all the sources of intelligence and strength were open to them and belonged to them. “It is the last time”; not exactly the last days, but the season which had the final character that belonged to the dealings of God with this world. The Antichrist was to come, and already there were many antichrists: by this it might be known it was the last time. It was not merely sin, nor the transgression of the law; but, Christ having already been manifested, and being now absent and hidden from the world, there was a formal opposition to the especial revelation that had been made. It was not a vague and ignorant unbelief; it took a definite shape as having a will directed against Jesus. They might for instance believe all that a Jew believed, as it was revealed in the word;

but as to the testimony of God by Jesus Christ they opposed it. They would not own Him to be the Christ; they denied the Father and the Son. This, as to religious profession, is the true character of the Antichrist. He may indeed believe or pretend to believe, that there shall be a Christ; yea, set himself up to be it. But the two aspects of Christianity (that which, on the one hand, regards the accomplishment in the Person of Jesus of the promises made to the Jew; and, on the other hand, the heavenly and eternal blessings presented in the revelation of the Father by the Son), this the Antichrist does not accept. That which characterises him as Antichrist is that he denies the Father and the Son. To deny that Jesus is the Christ is indeed the Jewish disbelief that forms part of his character. That which gives him the character of Antichrist is that he denies the foundation of Christianity. He is a liar in that he denies Jesus to be the Christ; consequently it is the work of the father of lies. But all the unbelieving Jews had done as much without being Antichrist. To deny the Father and the Son characterises him.

But there is something more. These antichrists came out from among the Christians. There was apostasy. Not that they were really Christians, but they had been among the Christians and had come out from them. (How instructive for our days also is this epistle!) It was thus made manifest that they were not truly of the flock of Christ. All this had a tendency to shake the faith of babes in Christ. The apostle endeavors to strengthen them. There were two means of confirming their faith, which also inspired the apostle with confidence. Firstly, they had the unction of the Holy One; secondly, that which was from the beginning was the touchstone for all new doctrine, and they already possessed that which was from the beginning.

The indwelling of the Holy Ghost as an unction and spiritual intelligence in them, and the truth which they had received at the beginning — the perfect revelation of Christ — these were the safeguards against seducers and seductions. All heresy and all error and corruption will be found to strike at the first and divine revelation of the truth, if the unction of the Holy One is in us to judge them. Now this unction is the portion of even the youngest babes in Christ, and they ought to be encouraged to realise it, however tenderly they may be cared for as they were here by the apostle.

What important truths we discover here for ourselves! The last time already manifested, so that we have to be on our guard against seducers — persons moreover issuing from the bosom of Christianity.

The character of this Antichrist is that he denies the Father and the Son. Unbelief in its Jewish form is also again manifested — owning that there is a Christ, but denying that Jesus is He. Our security against these seductions is the unction from the Holy One — the Holy Ghost, but in especial connection with the holiness of God, which enables us to see clearly into the truth (another characteristic of the Spirit); and, secondly, that that abide in us which we have heard from the beginning. It is this evidently which we have in the written word. “Development,” note it well, is not that which we have from the beginning. By its very name it sins radically against the safeguard pointed out by the apostle. That which the church has taught, as development of the truth, whencesoever she may have received it, is not that which has been heard from the beginning.

There is another point indicated here by the apostle that ought to be noticed. People might pretend by giving God in a vague way the name of Father, that they possessed Him without the true possession of the Son, Jesus Christ. This cannot be. He who has not the Son has not the Father. It is by Him that the Father is revealed, in Him that the Father is known.

If the truth that we have received from the beginning abides in us, we abide in the Son and in the Father; for this truth is the revelation of the Son, and is revealed by the Son, who is the truth. It is living truth, if it abides in us; thus, by possessing it, we possess the Son, and in the Son, the Father also. We abide in it, and thereby we have eternal life (compare John 17:3).

Now the apostle had happy confidence that the unction which they had received of Him abode in them, so that they needed not to be taught of others, for this same unction taught them with respect to all things. It was the truth, for it was the Holy Ghost Himself acting in the word, which was the revelation of the truth of Jesus Himself, and there was no lie in it. Thus should they abide in Him according to that which it had taught them.

Observe also, here, that the effect of this teaching by the unction from on high is twofold with regard to the discernment of the truth. They knew that no lie was of the truth; possessing this truth from God, that which

was not it was a lie. They knew that this unction which taught them of all things was the truth, and that there was no lie in it. The unction taught them all things, that is to say, all the truth, as truth of God. Therefore that which was not it was a lie, and there was no lie in the unction. Thus the sheep hear the voice of the good Shepherd; if another calls them, it is not His voice, and that is enough. They fear it and flee from it, because they do not know it.

With verse 27 ends the second series of exhortations to the three classes. The apostle begins again with the whole body of Christians (v. 28). This verse appears to me to correspond with verse 8 of the second epistle, and with chapter 3 of the first epistle to the Corinthians.

The apostle, having ended his address to those who were all in the communion of the Father, applies the essential principles of the divine life, of the divine nature as manifested in Christ, to test those who claimed participation in it; not in order to make the believer doubt, but for the rejection of that which was false. I say, "not to make the believer doubt"; for the apostle speaks of his position, and of the position of those to whom he was writing, with the most perfect assurance (chap. 3:1, 2).\* He had spoken, in re-commencement at verse 28, of the appearing of Jesus. This introduces the Lord in the full revelation of His character, and gives rise to the scrutiny of the pretensions of those who called themselves by His name. There are two proofs which belong essentially to the divine life, and a third which is accessory as privilege: righteousness or obedience, and love, and the presence of the Holy Ghost.

[\* I have noticed, farther on, the striking way in which God and Christ are spoken of as one Being or Person, not as doctrine as to the two natures, but Christ is before the apostle's mind, and He is spoken of in the same sentence, now as God, now as appearing as man. Thus in chapter 2:28 He comes. In verse 29 the righteous man is born of Him, and we are children of God. But the world did not know Him. Now it is Christ on earth. Chapter 3:2 we are children of God, but in the same verse He appears and we are like Him. But what makes this yet more wonderful is that we are identified with Him too. We are called children because that is His title and relationship. The world does not know us, for it did not know Him. We know we shall be like Him when He appears. We are given the same place here and there. (Compare chap. 5:20).]

Righteousness is not in the flesh. If therefore it is really found in any one, he is born of Him, he derives his nature from God in Christ. We may

remark, that it is righteousness as it was manifested in Jesus; for it is because we know that He is righteous, that we know that “he who doeth righteousness is born of him.” It is the same nature demonstrated by the same fruits.

**CHAPTER 3.** Now to say that we are born of Him is to say that we are children of God.\* What a love is that which the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children!\* Therefore the world knows us not, because it knew Him not. The apostle returns here to His appearing and its effect on us. We are children of God: this is our present sure and known position; we are born of God. That which we shall be is not yet manifested; but we know that — associated with Jesus as we are in the same relationship with the Father, Himself being our life — we shall be like Him when He appears. For it is to this we are predestined, to see Him as He now is with the Father, from which the life came which was manifested in Him and imparted to us, and to appear in the same glory.

[\* See previous note.]

[\* John uses habitually the word “children,” not “sons,” as the more distinctly expressing that we are of the same family. We are as Christ before God and in the world, and so will be when He appears.]

Having then the hope of seeing Him as He is, and knowing that I shall be perfectly like Him when He appears, I seek to be as like Him now as possible, since I already possess this life — He being in me, my life.

This is the measure of our practical purification. We are not pure as He is pure; but we take Christ, as He is in heaven, for the pattern and measure of our purification, we purify ourselves according to His purity, knowing that we shall be perfectly like Him when He is manifested. Before marking the contrast between the principles of the divine life and of the enemy, he sets before us the true measure of purity (he will give that of love in a moment) for the children, inasmuch as they are partakers of His nature and have the same relationship with God.

There are two remarks to be made here. First, “hope in him” does not mean in the believer; but a hope that has Christ for its object. Second, it is striking to see the way in which the apostle appears to confound God and Christ together in this epistle; and uses the word “Him” to signify Christ, when he had just been speaking of God, and vice versa. We may see the

principle of this at the end of chapter 5: “We are in him that is true, that is to say] in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.” In these few words we have the key to the epistle: Christ is the life. It is evidently the Son; but it is God Himself who is manifested, and the perfection of His nature, which is the source of life to us also, as that life was found in Christ as man. Thus I can speak of God and say, “Born of him”; but it is in Jesus that God was manifested, and from Him that I derive life; so that “Jesus Christ” and “God” are interchanged with each other. Thus “He shall appear” (chap. 2:28) is Christ, He is righteous; the righteous one “is born of him.” But in chapter 3:1 it is “born of God,” “children of God”; but the world did not know Him: here it is Christ on earth; and “when he shall appear,” it is again Christ and we purify ourselves “even as He is pure.” There are many other examples.

It is said of the believer, “he purifies himself”: this shows that he is not pure, as Christ is. He needed not to purify Himself. Accordingly it is not said, he is pure as Christ is pure (for in that case there would be no sin in us); but he purifies himself according to the purity of Christ as He is in heaven, having the same life as the life of Christ Himself.

Having set forth the positive aspect of christian purity, he goes on to speak of it in other points of view, as one of the characteristic proofs of the life of God in the soul.

He who commits sin (not transgresses the law,\* but) acts lawlessly. His conduct is without the restraint, without the rule of law. He acts without curb; for sin is the acting without the curb of law or restraint of another’s authority, acting from our own will. Christ came to do His Father’s will, not His own. But Christ was manifested that He might take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin; so that he who commits sin acts against the object of the manifestation of Christ, and in opposition to the nature of which, if Christ is our life, we are partakers. Therefore he who abides in Christ does not practice sin; he who sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. All depends, we see, on participation in the life and nature of Christ. Let us not then deceive ourselves. He who practices righteousness is righteous, as He is righteous: for, by partaking in the life of Christ, one is before God according to the perfection of Him who is there, the head and source of that life. But we are thus as Christ before God, because He

Himself is really our life. Our actual life is not the measure of our acceptance; it is Christ who is so. But Christ is our life, if we are accepted according to His excellence; for it is as living of His life that we participate in this.

[\* In Romans 2:12, the word is used in contrast with law-breaking, or sinning under law. That is, the Greek word here used for what is translated “transgression of the law” is that used for sinning without law, in contrast with sinning under law, and being judged by it. I do not dissemble that this changing what is a definition of sin is a very serious thing,

But the judgment is more than negative. He who practices sin is of the devil, has morally the same nature as the devil; for he sinneth from the beginning: it is his original character as the devil. Now Christ was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil; how then can one who shares the character of this enemy of souls be with Christ?

On the other hand, he who is born of God does not practice sin. The reason is evident; he is made a partaker of the nature of God; he derives his life from Him. This principle of divine life is in him. The seed of God remains in him; he cannot sin, because he is born of God. This new nature had not in it the principle of sin, so as to commit it. How could it be that the divine nature should sin?

Having thus designated the two families, the family of God and that of the devil, the apostle adds the second mark, the absence of which is a proof that one is not of God. He had already spoken of righteousness; he adds the love of the brethren. For this is the message that they had received from Christ Himself, that they should love one another. In verse 12 he shows the connection between the two things: that hatred of a brother is fed by the sense one has that his works are good, and one’s own evil. Moreover we are not to wonder that the world hates us: for we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. If this love is an essential proof of being renewed, it is quite natural that it should not be found in the men of the world. But, this being the case, he who does not love his brother (solemn thought!), abides in death. In addition to this, he who does not love his brother is a murderer, and a murderer has not eternal life. There is the absence of the divine nature, death; but more, the activity of the old man in the opposite nature is there, he hates, and is in spirit the activity of death — a murderer.



Further, as in the case of righteousness and of purity, we have Christ as the measure of this love. We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; we ought to lay down ours for the brethren. Now, if our brother has need, and we possess this world's good, but do not provide for his necessity, is that the divine love which made Christ lay down His life for us? It is by this real and practical love that we know we are in the truth, and that our heart is confirmed and assured before God. For if there is nothing on the conscience, we have confidence in His presence; but if our own heart condemns us, God knows yet more.

It is not here the means of being assured of our salvation, but of having confidence in the presence of God. We cannot have it with a bad conscience in the practical sense of the word, for God is always light and always holy.

We also receive all that we ask for, when we walk thus in love before Him, doing that which is pleasing in His sight; for thus walking in His presence with confidence, the heart and its desires respond to this blessed influence, being formed by the enjoyment of communion with Him in the light of His countenance. It is God who animates the heart; this life, and this divine nature, of which the epistle speaks, being in full activity and enlightened and moved by the divine presence in which it delights. Thus our requests are only for the accomplishment of desires that arise when this life, when our thoughts are filled with the presence of God and with the communication of His nature. And He lends His power to the fulfillment of these desires, of which He is the source, and which are formed in the heart by the revelation of Himself (compare John 15:7).

This is indeed the position of Christ Himself when here below: only that He was perfect in it (compare John 8:29; 11:42).

And here it is the commandment of God which He desires us to obey; namely, to believe on the name of His Son Jesus; and to love one another, as He gave us commandment.

Now he who keeps His commandments dwells in Him; and He dwells also in this obedient man. It will be asked whether God or Christ is here meant? The apostle, as we have seen, confounds them together in his thought. That is to say, the Holy Ghost unites them in our minds. We are in Him

who is true, that is, in His Son Jesus Christ. It is Christ, who is the presentation of God to men in life in man; and to the believer He is the communication of that life, so that God too dwells in him, in the revelation, in its divine excellence and perfection, of the nature which the believer shares in the power of the Holy Ghost who dwells in him, so that love is alike enjoyed and exercised.

But what marvelous grace to have received a life, a nature, by which we are enabled to enjoy God Himself, who dwells in us, and by which, since it is in Christ, we are in fact in the enjoyment of this communion, this relationship with God! He who has the Son has life; but God then dwells in him as the portion, as well as the source of this life; and he who has the Son has the Father.

What marvelous links of vital and living enjoyment through the communication of the divine nature of Him who is its source; and that according to its perfection in Christ! Such is the Christian according to grace. Therefore also he is obedient, because this life in the man Christ (and it is thus that it becomes ours) was obedience itself, the true relationship of man to God.

Practical righteousness, then, is a proof that we are born of Him who, in His nature, is its source. In presence also of the worlds hatred, we know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren. Thus, having a good conscience, we have confidence in God, and we receive from Him whatsoever we ask, walking in obedience and in a way that is pleasing to Him. Thus walking, we dwell in Him\* and He in us.

[\* Here dwelling in Him comes first, because it is practical realisation in an obedient heart. His dwelling in us is then pursued apart as known by the Spirit given to us, to guard against being misled by evil spirits. In chapter 4:7, he resumes the indwelling in connection with the love of God.]

A third proof of our christian privileges arises here. The Spirit whom He has given us is the proof that He Himself dwells in us, the manifestation of the presence of God in us. He does not here add that we abide in Him, because the subject here is the manifestation of the presence of God. The presence of the Spirit demonstrates it. But in abiding in Him there is as we shall see farther on, the enjoyment of that which He is, and consequently moral communion with His nature. He who obeys enjoys this also, as we

have seen. Here the presence of the Holy Ghost in us is spoken of as demonstration of one part only of this truth, namely, that God is in us. But the presence of God in us according to grace, and according to the power of the Spirit, involves also communion with that nature; we dwell also in Him from whom we derive this grace, and all the spiritual forms of that nature, in communion and practical life. It is in verses 12 and 16 of chapter 4 that our apostle speaks of this.

Practical righteousness or obedience, the love of the brethren, the manifestation of the Spirit of God, are the proofs of our relationship to God. He who obeys the Lord's commandments in practical righteousness dwells in Him, and He in him. The Spirit given is the proof that He dwells in us.

Now, to make use of this last proof, caution was required, for many false prophets would assume, and even in the time of the apostle had already assumed, the semblance of having received communications from the Spirit of God, and insinuated themselves among the Christians (chap. 4). It was necessary therefore to put them on their guard, by giving them the sure mark of the real Spirit of God. The first of these was the confession of Jesus come in the flesh. It is not merely to confess that He is come, but to confess Him thus come. The second was that He who really knew God hearkened to the apostles. In this way the writings of the apostles become a touchstone for those who pretend to teach the assembly. All the word is so, doubtless; but I confine myself here to that which is said in this place. The teaching of the apostles is formally a touchstone for all other teaching — I mean that which they themselves taught immediately. If any one tells me that others must explain or develop it to have the truth and certainty of faith, I reply, "You are not of God, for he who is of God hearkens to them; and you would have me not to hearken to them; and whatever may be your pretext, you prevent my doing so." The denial of Jesus come in the flesh is the spirit of Antichrist. Not to hear the apostles is the provisional and preparatory form of the evil. True Christians had overcome the spirit of error by the Spirit of God who dwelt in them.

The three tests of true Christianity are now distinctly laid down, and the apostle pursues his exhortations, developing the fullness and intimacy of our relationships with a God of love, maintaining that participation of

nature in which love is of God, and he who loves is born of God — partakes therefore of His nature, and knows Him (for it is by faith that he received it) as partaking of His nature. He who loves not does not know God. We must possess the nature that loves in order to know what love is. He then who does not love does not know God, for God is love. Such a person has not one sentiment in connection with the nature of God; how then can he know Him? No more than an animal can know what a man's mind or understanding is when he has not got it.

Give especial heed, reader, to this immense prerogative, which flows from the whole doctrine of the epistle. The eternal life which was with the Father has been manifested and has been imparted to us: thus we are partakers of the divine nature. The affections of that nature acting in us rest, by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the enjoyment of communion with God who is its source; we dwell in Him and He in us. The first thing is the statement of the truth in us. The actings of this nature prove that He dwells — that, if we thus love, God Himself dwells in us. He who works this love is there. But He is infinite and the heart rests in Him; we know at the same time that we dwell in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. But this passage, so rich in blessing, demands that we should follow it with order.

He begins with the fact that love is of God. It is His nature: He is its source. Therefore he who loves is born of God, is a partaker of His nature. Also he knows God, for he knows what love is, and God is its fullness. This is the doctrine which makes everything depend on our participation in the divine nature.

Now this might be transformed on the one hand into mysticism, by leading us to fix our attention on our love for God, and love in us, that being God's nature, as if it was said, love is God, not God is love, and by seeking to fathom the divine nature in ourselves; or to doubt on the other, because we do not find the effects of the divine nature in us as we would. In effect, he who does not love (for the thing, as ever in John, is expressed in an abstract way) does not know God, for God is love. The possession of the nature is necessary to the understanding of what that nature is, and for the knowledge of Him who is its perfection.

But, if I seek to know it and have or give the proof of it, it is not to the existence of the nature in us that the Spirit of God directs the thoughts of the believers as their object. God, he has said, is love; and this love has been manifested towards us in that He has given His only Son, that we might live through Him. The proof is not the life in us, but that God has given His Son in order that we might live, and further to make propitiation for our sins. God be praised! we know this love, not by the poor results of its action in ourselves, but in its perfection in God, and that even in a manifestation of it towards us, which is wholly outside ourselves. It is a fact outside ourselves which is the manifestation of this perfect love. We enjoy it by participating in the divine nature; we know it by the infinite gift of God's Son. The exercise and proof of it are there.

The full scope of this principle and all the force of its truth are stated and demonstrated in that which follows. It is striking to see how the Holy Spirit, in an epistle which is essentially occupied with the life of Christ and its fruits in us, gives the proof and full character of love in that which is wholly without ourselves. Nor can anything be more perfect than the way in which the love of God is here set forth, from the time it is occupied with our sinful state till we stand before the judgment-seat. God has thought of all: love towards us as sinners, verses 9, 10; in us as saints, verse 12; with us as perfect in our condition in view of the day of judgment, verse 17. In the first verses, the love of God is manifested in the gift of Christ; firstly, to give us life — we were dead; secondly, to make propitiation — we were guilty. Our whole case is taken up. In the second of these verses the great principle of grace, what love is, where and how known, is clearly stated in words of infinite importance as to the very nature of Christianity. Herein is love, not that we have loved God (that was the principle of the law), but in that He has loved us, and has given His Son to make propitiation for our sins. Here, then, it is that we have learnt that which love is. It was perfect in Him when we had no love for Him; perfect in Him in that He exercised it towards us when we were in our sins, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for them. The apostle then affirms, no doubt, that he who loves not knows not God. The pretension to possess this love is judged by this means; but in order to know love we must not seek for it in ourselves, but seek it manifested in

God when we had none. He gives the life which loves, and He has made propitiation for our sins.

And now with regard to the enjoyment and the privileges of this love: if God has so loved us (this is the ground that He takes) we ought to love one another.

No one has ever seen God: if we love one another, God dwells in us. His presence, Himself dwelling in us, rises in the excellency of His nature above all the barriers of circumstances, and attaches us to those who are His. It is God in the power of His nature which is the source of thought and feeling, and diffuses itself among them in whom it is. One can understand this. How is it that I love strangers from another land, persons of different habits whom I have never known, more intimately than members of my own family after the flesh? How is it that I have thoughts in common, objects infinitely loved in common, affections powerfully engaged, a stronger bond with persons whom I have never seen, than with the otherwise dear companions of my childhood? It is because there is in them and in me a source of thoughts and affections which is not human. God is in it. God dwells in us. What happiness! What a bond! Does He not communicate Himself to the soul? Does He not render it conscious of His presence in love? Assuredly, yes. And if He is thus in us, the blessed source of our thoughts, can there be fear, or distance, or uncertainty, with regard to what He is? None at all. His love is perfect in us. We know Him as love in our souls: the second great point in this remarkable passage, the enjoyment of divine love in our souls.

The apostle has not yet said, "We know that we dwell in him." He will say it now. But, if the love of the brethren is in us, God dwells in us. When it is in exercise, we are conscious of the presence of God, as perfect love in us. It fills the heart, and thus is exercised in us. Now this consciousness is the effect of the presence of His Spirit, as the source and power of life and nature, in us. He has given us, not here "his Spirit" — the proof that He dwells in us, but "of his Spirit"; we participate by His presence in us in divine affection through the Spirit, and thus we not only know that He dwells in us, but the presence of the Spirit, acting in a nature which is that of God in us, makes us conscious that we dwell in Him. For He is the infiniteness and perfection of that which is now in us.

The heart rests in this, and enjoys Him, and is hidden from all that is outside Him, in the consciousness of the perfect love in which (thus dwelling in Him) one finds oneself. The Spirit makes us dwell in God, and gives us thus the consciousness that He dwells in us. Thus we, in the savor and consciousness of the love that was in it, can testify of that in which it was manifested beyond all Jewish limits, that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. We shall see further another character of it.

If we compare verse 12 of our chapter 4 with chapter 1:18 of the Gospel by John, we shall better apprehend the scope of the apostle's teaching here. The same difficulty, or if you will, the same truth is presented in both cases. No one has ever seen God. How is this met?

In John 1:18 the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. He who is\* in the most perfect intimacy, in the most absolute proximity and enjoyment of the Father's love, the one eternal, sufficient object that knew the love of the Father as His only Son, has revealed Him unto men as He has Himself known Him. What is the answer in our epistle to this same difficulty? "If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us." By the communication of the divine nature, and by the dwelling of God in us, we inwardly enjoy Him as He has been manifested and declared by His only Son. His love is perfect in us, known to the heart, as it has been declared in Jesus. The God who has been declared by Him dwells in us. What a thought! that this answer to the fact that no one has ever seen God is equally, that the only Son has declared Him, and that He dwells in us. What light this throws upon the words, "which thing is true in him and in you!"\*\* For it is in that Christ has become our life that we can thus enjoy God and His presence in us by the power of the Holy Ghost. And from this we have seen that the testimony of verse 14 flows.

[\* Note, it is not "was." It is never said in scripture, He left the Father's bosom; but "the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father." As so knowing God, He reveals Him on earth.]

[\*\* This gives us too, in their highest character and subject, the difference between the gospel and epistle.]

We see, also, the distinction between God dwelling in us and we in God, even in that which Christ says of Himself. He abode always in the Father, and the Father in Him; but He says, "The Father who dwelleth in me, he

doeth the works.” Through His word the disciples ought to have believed in them both; but in that which they had seen — in His works — they had rather seen the proof that the Father dwelt in Him. They who had seen Him had seen the Father. But when the Comforter was come, at that day they should know that Jesus was in His Father — divinely one with the Father.

He does not say that we are in God, nor in the Father,\* but that we dwell in Him, and we know it, because He has given us of His Spirit. We have already noticed that He says (chap. 3:24) “hereby we know that he God] abideth in us, because he has given us his Spirit.” Here he adds, We know that we dwell in God, because it is — not the manifestation, as a proof, but — communion with God Himself. We know that we dwell in Him, always as a precious truth — an unchangeable fact; sensibly, when His love is active in the heart. Consequently it is to this activity that the apostle immediately turns by adding “and we have seen and do testify, that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.” This was the proof for every one, of that love which the apostle enjoyed — as all believers do — in his own heart. It is important to notice how the passage thus first presents the fact of God’s dwelling in us, then the effect (as He is infinite), our dwelling in Him, and then the realisation of the first truth in conscious reality of life.

[\* The only expression in the word that has some resemblance to it is “the church of the Thessalonians, which is in God the Father.” This is addressed to a numerous corporation in quite another sense.]

We may remark here that, while God’s dwelling in us is a doctrinal fact and true of every real Christian, our dwelling in Him, though involved in it, is connected with our state. Thus chapter 3:24, “He that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him.” Chapter 4:16, “He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him.”

Love one to another is indeed taken as the proof that God is there, and His love is perfected in us — this to contrast the manner of His presence with that of Christ (John 1:18). But what we thus know is dwelling in Him and He in us. In each case this knowledge is by the Spirit. Verse 15 is the universal fact; verse 16 brings it fully up to its source. We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. His nature is there declared in itself (for we joy in God); God is love, and he who dwells in love dwells in God



and God in him. There is none anywhere else: if we partake of His nature, we partake of it, and he who abides in it abides in God who is the fullness of it. But then remark that while what He is insisted on, His personal being is carefully insisted on. He dwells in us.

And here comes in a principle of deep importance. It might perhaps be said that this dwelling of God in us and our dwelling in Him depended on a large measure of spirituality, the apostle having in fact spoken of the highest possible joy. But although the degree in which we intelligently realise it is in effect a matter of spirituality, yet the thing in itself is the portion of every Christian. It is our position, because Christ is our life, and because the Holy Ghost is given us. “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God.” How great the grace of the gospel! How admirable our position because it is in Jesus that we possess it! It is important to hold fast this, that it is the portion of every Christian, the joy of the humble, the strongest reproach to the conscience of the careless.

The apostle explains this high position by the possession of the divine nature — the essential condition of Christianity. A Christian is one who is a partaker of the divine nature, and in whom the Spirit dwells. But the knowledge of our position does not flow from the consideration of this truth, though it depends on its being true, but of that of God’s own love, as we have already seen. And the apostle goes on to say, “We have known and believed the love that God hath to us.” This is the source of our knowledge and enjoyment of these privileges, so sweet and so marvelously exalted, but so simple and so real to the heart when they are known.

We have known love, the love that God has for us, and we have believed it. Precious knowledge! by possessing it we know God; for it is thus that He has manifested Himself. Therefore can we say, “God is love.” There is none beside. Himself is love. He is love in all its fullness. He is not holiness, He is holy; but He is love. He is not righteousness; He is righteous.\*

[\* Righteousness and holiness suppose reference to other things; thus, evil to be known, rejection of evil, and judgment. Love, though exercised towards others, is what He is in Himself. The other essential name that God bears is “light.” We are said to be “light in the Lord” as partakers of the divine

nature; not love, which is, though the divine nature, sovereign in grace. We cannot therefore be said to be love. (See Ephesians 4, 5).]

By dwelling then in love I dwell in Him, which I could not do unless He dwelt in me, and this He does. Here he puts it first, that we dwell in Him, because it is God Himself who is before our eyes, as the love in which we dwell. Therefore, when thinking of this love, I say that I dwell in Him, because I have in my heart the consciousness of it by the Spirit. At the same time this love is an active energetic principle in us; it is God Himself who is there. This is the joy of our position — the position of every Christian.

Verses 14 and 16 present the twofold effect of the manifestation of this love.

First, the testimony that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Quite outside the promises made to the Jews (as everywhere in John), this work is the fruit of that which God Himself is. Accordingly whosoever confesses Jesus to be that Son enjoys all the fullness of its blessed consequences.

Secondly, the Christian has believed for himself in this love, and he enjoys it according to its fullness. There is only this modification of the expression of the glorious fact of our portion — that the confession of Jesus as the Son of God is primarily here the proof that God dwells in us, although the other part of the truth equally says that he who confesses Him dwells also in God.

When speaking of our portion in communion, as believing in this love, it is said, that he who dwells in love dwells in God; for in effect that is where the heart is. Here also the other part of the truth is equally true; God dwells in him likewise.

I have spoken of the consciousness of this dwelling in God, for it is thus only that it is known. But it is important to remember that the apostle teaches it as a truth that applies to every believer. These might have excused themselves for not appropriating these statements as too high for them; but this fact judges the excuse. This communion is neglected. But God dwells in every one who confesses that Jesus is Son of God, and he in

God. What an encouragement for a timid believer! What a rebuke for a careless one!

The apostle returns to our relative position, viewing God as outside ourselves, as Him before whom we are to appear and with whom we have always to do. This is the third great proof and character of love in which it is complete, testifying, as I have already said, that God has thought on all as to us from our sinful state to the day of judgment.

Herein is love perfect with us (in order that we may have boldness for the day of judgment), namely, that as He is, such are we in this world. In truth, what could give us a more complete assurance for that day than to be as Jesus Himself — like the judge? He who will judge in righteousness is our righteousness. We are in Him the righteousness according to which He will judge. We are in respect of judgment as He is. Truly this can give us perfect peace. But observe, that it is not only in the day of judgment that this is so (it gives us boldness for it), but we are it in this world. Not as He was, but in this world we are as He is, and have our known place already, as needed, and according to the nature and counsels of God, for that day. It is ours as being livingly identified with Him.

Now in love there is no fear; there is confidence. If I am sure that a person loves me, I do not fear him. If I am only desiring to be the object of his affection, I may fear that I am not so, and may even fear himself. Nevertheless this fear would always tend to destroy my love for him and my desire to be loved by him. There is incompatibility between the two affections — there is no fear in love. Perfect love then banishes fear; for fear torments us, and torment is not the enjoyment of love. He therefore who fears does not know perfect love. And now what does he mean by “perfect love”? It is that which God is, and which He has fully displayed in Christ, and given us to know and to enjoy by His presence in us, so that we dwell in Him. The positive proof of its complete perfectness is that we are such as Christ is. It is manifested towards us, perfected in us, and made perfect with us. But that which we enjoy is God, who is love, and we enjoy Him by His being in us, so that love and confidence are in our hearts, and we have rest. That which I know of God is that He is love, and love to me, and nothing else but love to me, because it is Himself who is so. Therefore there is no fear.\*

[\* It is striking to see that he does not say, We ought to love Him because He first loved us; but we love Him. We cannot know and enjoy love to us without loving. The sense of love to us is always love. It is not known and valued without its being there. My sense of love in another is love to him. We ought to love the brethren, because it is not their love to us which is the spring of it, though it may nourish it in this way. But we love God because He first loved us.]

If we inquire practically into the history, so to speak, of these affections; if we seek to separate that which in the enjoyment is united, because the divine nature in us, which is love, enjoys love in its perfection in God (His love shed abroad in the heart by His presence therefore); if we wish to specify the relationship in which our hearts find themselves with God in regard to this, here it is: “we love him because he first loved us.” It is grace and it must be grace, because it is God who is to be glorified.

Here, it will be worth our while to notice the order of this remarkable passage. Verses 7-10: We possess the nature of God; consequently we love; we are born of Him, and we know Him. But the manifestation of love towards us in Christ Jesus is the proof of that love; it is thus that we know it. Verses 11-16: We enjoy it by dwelling in it. It is present life in the love of God by the presence of His Spirit in us; the enjoyment of that love by communion, in that God dwells in us, and we thus dwell in Him. Verse 17: His love is perfected with us; the perfection of that love, viewed in the place that it has given us in view of judgment — we are, in this world, such as Christ is. Verses 18, 19: it is thus fully perfected with us. Love to sinners, communion, perfection before God, give us the moral and characteristic elements of that love — what it is in our relationship with God.

In the first passage, where the apostle speaks of the manifestation of this love, he does not go beyond the fact that one who loves is born of God. The nature of God (which is love) being in us, he who loves knows Him, for he is born of Him — has His nature and realizes what it is.

It is that which God has been with regard to the sinner which demonstrates His nature of love. Afterwards, that which we learnt as sinners we enjoy as saints. The perfect love of God is shed abroad in the heart, and we dwell in Him. As already with Jesus in this world, and as He is, fear has no place in one to whom the love of God is a dwelling-place and rest.

Verse 20: the reality of our love to God, fruit of His love to us, is now tested. If we say that we love God and do not love the brethren, we are liars; for if the divine nature, so near us (in the brethren near us), and Christ's value for them, does not awaken our spiritual affections, how then can He who is afar off do so? This also is His commandment, that he who loves God love his brother also. Obedience is found here also (compare John 14:31).

Love for the brethren proves the reality of our love for God. And this love must be universal, must be in exercise towards all Christians, for whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and he who loves a person will love one who is born of Him. And if the being born of Him is the motive, we shall love all that are born of Him (chap. 5:1).

But a danger exists on the other side. It may be, that we love the brethren because they are pleasant to us; they furnish us with agreeable society, in which our conscience is not wounded. A counter-proof is therefore given us. "Hereby we know that we love the children of God, if we love God and keep his commandments." It is not as children of God that I love the brethren, unless I love God of whom they are born. I may love them individually as companions, or I may love some among them, but not as the children of God, if I do not love God Himself. If God Himself has not His true place in my heart, that which bears the name of love to the brethren shuts out God; and that in so much the more complete and subtle manner, because our link with them bears the sacred name of brotherly love.

Now there is a touchstone even for this love of God, namely, obedience to His commands. If I walk with the brethren themselves in disobedience to their Father, it is certainly not because they are His children that I love them. If it were because I loved the Father and because they were His children, I should assuredly like them to obey Him. To walk then in disobedience with the children of God, under the pretext of brotherly love, is not to love them as the children of God. If I loved them as such, I should love their Father and my Father, and I could not walk in disobedience to Him and call it a proof that I loved them because they were His.

If I also loved them because they were His children, I should love all who are such, because the same motive engages me to love them all.

The universality of this love with regard to all the children of God; its exercise in practical obedience to His will: these are the marks of true brotherly love. That which has not these marks is a mere carnal party spirit, clothing itself with the name and the forms of brotherly love. Most certainly I do not love the Father if I encourage His children in disobedience to Him.

Now there is an obstacle to this obedience, and that is the world. The world has its forms, which are very far from obedience to God. When we are occupied only with Him and His will, the world's enmity soon breaks out. It also acts, by its comforts and its delights, on the heart of man as walking after the flesh. In short, the world and the commandments of God are in opposition to each other; but the commandments of God are not grievous to those who are born of Him, for he who is born of God overcomes the world. He possesses a nature and a principle that surmount the difficulties that the world opposes to his walk. His nature is the divine nature, for he is born of God; his principle is that of faith. His nature is insensible to the attractions which this world offers to the flesh, and that because it has, altogether apart from this world, a spirit independent of it, and an object of its own which governs it. Faith directs its steps, but faith does not see the world, nor that which is present. Faith believes that Jesus, whom the world rejected, is the Son of God. The world therefore has lost its power over it. Its affections and its trust are fixed on Jesus, who was crucified, owning Him as the Son of God. Thus the believer, detached from the world, has the boldness of obedience, and does the will of God which abides for ever.

The apostle sums up, in a few words, the testimony of God respecting the life eternal which He has given us.

This life is not in the first Adam, it is in the last — in the Son of God. Man, as born of Adam, does not possess it, does not acquire it. He ought indeed to have gained life under the law. This characterised it, "Do this and live." But man did not and could not.

God gives him eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life, and he who has not the Son has not life.

Now what is the testimony rendered to this gift of life eternal? The witnesses are three: the Spirit, the water, and the blood. This Jesus, the Son of God, is He who came by water and by blood; not by water only, but by water and by blood. The Spirit also bears witness because He is truth. That to which they bear witness is that God has given us eternal life, and that this life is in His Son. But whence did this water and the blood flow? It was from the pierced side of Jesus. It is the judgment of death pronounced and executed (compare Romans 8:3) on the flesh, on all that is of the old man, on the first Adam. Not that the sin of the first Adam was in the flesh of Christ, but that Jesus died in it as a sacrifice for sin. "In that he died he died unto sin once." Sin in the flesh was condemned in the death of Christ in the flesh. There was no other remedy. The flesh could not be modified nor subjected to the law. The life of the first Adam was nothing but sin in the principle of its will; it could not be subject to the law. Our purification as to the old man is its death. He who is dead is justified from sin. We are therefore baptised to have part in the death of Jesus. We are crucified with Christ; nevertheless we live, but not we, it is Christ who lives in us. Participating in the life of Christ risen, we reckon ourselves as dead with Him; for why live of this new life, this life of the last Adam, if we could live before God in the life of the first Adam? No; by living in Christ we have accepted by faith the sentence of death, passed by God on the first Adam. This is christian purification: even the death of the old man, because we are made partakers of life in Christ Jesus. "We are dead" — crucified with Him. We need a perfect purification before God; we have it, for that which was impure no longer exists: what exists, as born of God, as perfectly pure.

He came by water — a powerful testimony, as flowing from the side of a dead Christ, that life is not to be sought for in the first Adam; for Christ, as coming for man, taking up his cause, the Christ come in the flesh, had to die: else He had remained alone in His own purity. Life is to be sought for in the Son of God risen from among the dead. Purification is by death.

But it was not by water only that He came; it was also by blood. The expiation of our sins was as necessary as the moral purification of our souls. We possess it in the blood of a slain Christ. Death alone could expiate them and blot them out, and Jesus died for us. The guilt of the believer no longer exists before God; Christ has put Himself in his place.

The life is on high, and we are raised up together with Him, God having forgiven us all our trespasses. Expiation is by death.

The third witness is the Spirit: put first in the order of their testimony on earth, as He alone gives witness in power so that we know the other two; last, in their historic order, for such in fact was that order, death first and only thereafter the Holy Ghost.\* In effect it is the testimony of the Spirit, His presence in us, which enables us to appreciate the value of the water and the blood. We should never have understood the practical bearing of the death of Christ, if the Holy Ghost were not to the new man a revealing power of its import and its efficacy. Now the Holy Ghost came down from a risen and ascended Christ; and thus we know that eternal life is given us in the Son of God.

[\* Even the orderly reception of the Holy Ghost was so (see Acts 2:38).]

The testimony of these three witnesses meets together in this same truth, namely, that grace — that God Himself — has given us eternal life; and that this life is in the Son. Man had nothing to do in it, except by his sins. It is the gift of God, and the life that He gives is in the Son. The testimony is the testimony of God. How blessed to have such a testimony, and that from God Himself, and in perfect grace!

We have then the three things: the cleansing, the expiation, and the presence of the Holy Ghost as the witness that eternal life is given us in the Son, who was slain for man when in relationship with man here below. He could but die for man as he is. Life is elsewhere, namely, in Himself.

Here the doctrine of the epistle ends. The apostle wrote these things in order that they who believed in the Son might know that they had eternal life. He does not give means of examination to make the faithful doubt whether they had eternal life; but — seeing that there were seducers who endeavored to turn them aside as deficient in something important, and who presented themselves as possessing some superior light — he points out to them the marks of life, in order to re-assure them; developing the excellence of that life, and of their position as enjoying it; and in order that they might understand that God had given it to them, and that they might be in no wise shaken in mind.



He then speaks of the practical confidence in God which flows from all this — confidence exercised with a view to all our wants here below, all that our hearts desire to ask of God.

We know that He always listens to everything that we ask in accordance with His will. Precious privilege! The Christian himself would not desire anything to be granted him that was contrary to the will of God. But for everything that is according to His will, His ear is ever open to us, ever attentive. He always hearkens; He is not like man, often occupied so that he cannot listen, or careless so that he will not. God always hears us, and assuredly He does not fail in power: the attention He pays us is a proof of His goodwill. We receive therefore the things that we ask of Him. He grants our requests. What a sweet relationship! What a high privilege! And it is one also of which we may avail ourselves in charity for others.

If a brother sins and God chastises him, we may petition for that brother, and life shall be restored him. Chastisement tends to the death of the body (compare Job 33 and 34; James 5:14, 15); we pray for the offender and he is healed. Otherwise the sickness takes its course. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is such sin as is unto death. This does not seem to me to be some particular sin, but all sin which has such a character that, instead of awakening christian charity, it awakens christian indignation. Thus Ananias and Sapphira committed a sin unto death. It was a lie, but a lie under such circumstances that it excited horror rather than compassion. We can easily understand this in other cases.

Thus far as to sin and its chastisement. But the positive side is also brought before us. As born of God, we do not commit sin at all, we keep ourselves, and “the wicked one toucheth us not.” He has nothing wherewith to entice the new man. The enemy has no objects of attraction to the divine nature in us, which is occupied, by the action of the Holy Ghost, with divine and heavenly things, or with the will of God. Our part therefore is so to live — the new man occupied with the things of God and of the Spirit.

The apostle ends his epistle by specifying these two things: our nature, our mode of being, as Christians; and the object that has been communicated to us in order to produce and nourish faith.

We know that we are of God; and that not in a vague way, but in contrast with all that is not us — a principle of immense importance, which makes christian position exclusive by its very nature. It is not merely good, or bad, or better; but it is of God. And nothing which is not of God (that is to say, which has not its origin in Him) could have this character and this place. The whole world lies in the wicked one.

The Christian has the certainty of these two things by virtue of his nature, which discerns and knows that which is of God, and thereby judges all that is opposed to it. The two are not merely good and bad, but of God and of the enemy. This as to the nature.

With regard to the object of this nature, we know that the Son of God is come — a truth of immense importance also. It is not merely that there is good and that there is evil; but the Son of God has Himself come into this scene of misery, to present an object to our hearts. But there is more than this. He has given us an understanding that in the midst of all the falsehood of this world, of which Satan is the prince, we may know Him that is true — the true One. Immense privilege which alters our whole position! The power of the world by which Satan blinded us is completely broken, and we are brought into the true light; and in that light we see and know Him who is true, who is in Himself perfection; that by which all things can be perfectly discerned and judged according to truth. But this is not all. We are in this true One, partakers of His nature, and abiding in Him, and in order that we may enjoy the source of truth.\* Now it is in Jesus that we are. It is thus, it is in Him, that we are in connection with the perfections of God.

[\* I have already noticed this passage as being a kind of key to the way we really know God, and dwell in Him. It speaks of God as Him we know, in whom we are, explaining it by saying, that it is in His Son Jesus Christ our Lord; only here, as follows in the text, it is truth and not love.]

We may again remark here — that which gives a character to the whole epistle — the manner in which God and Christ are united in the apostle's mind. It is on account of this that he so frequently says, "He," when we must understand "Christ," although he had previously spoken of God: for instance, chapter 4:20. And here, "We are in him that is true that is to say], in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life."

Behold then the divine links of our position! We are in Him who is true; this is the nature of Him in whom we are. Now, in reality as to the nature, it is God Himself; as to the Person, and as to the manner of being in Him, it is His Son Jesus Christ. It is in the Son, in the Son as man, that we are in fact as to His Person; but He is the true God, the veritable God.

Nor is this all; but we have life in Him. He is also the eternal life, so that we possess it in Him. We know the true God, we have eternal life.

All that is outside this is an idol. May God preserve us from it, and teach us by His grace to preserve ourselves from it! This gives occasion to the Spirit of God to speak of “the truth” in the two short epistles that follow.