

THE FIRST GENERAL EPISTLE OF

JOHN

Commentary by **A. R. FAUSSETT**

INTRODUCTION

AUTHORSHIP. — POLYCARP, the disciple of John [*Epistle to the Philippians*, 7], quotes 1 John 4:3. EUSEBIUS [*Ecclesiastical History*, 3.39] says of PAPIAS, a hearer of John, and a friend of POLYCARP, “He used testimonies from the First Epistle of John.” IRENAEUS, according to EUSEBIUS [*Ecclesiastical History*, 5.8], often quoted this Epistle. So in his work *Against Heresies* [3.15; 5, 8] he quotes from John by name, ^{α185}1 John 2:18, etc.; and in [3.16,7], he quotes 1 John 4:1-3 5:1, and 2 John 1:7:8. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA [*Miscellanies*, 2.66, p. 464] refers to ^{α186}1 John 5:16, as in John’s *larger Epistle*. See other quotations [*Miscellanies*, 3.32,42; 4.102]. TERTULLIAN [*Against Marcion*, 5.16] refers to 1 John 4:1, etc.; [*Against Praxeas*, 15], to 1 John 1:1. See his other quotations [*Against Praxeas*, 28; *Against the Gnostics*, 12]. CYPRIAN [*Epistles*, 28 (24)], quotes as John’s, 1 John 2:3,4; and [*On the Lord’s Prayer*, 5] quotes ^{α185}1 John 2:15-17; and [*On Works and Alms*, 3], 1 John 1:8; and [*On the Advantage of Patience*, 2] quotes 1 John 2:6. MURATORI’S *Fragment on the Canon of Scripture* states, “There are two of John (the Gospel and Epistle?) esteemed Catholic,” and quotes 1 John 1:3. The *Peschito Syriac* contains it. ORIGEN (in EUSEBIUS [*Ecclesiastical History*, 6.25]) speaks of the First Epistle as genuine, and “probably the second and third, though all do not recognize the latter two”; on the Gospel of John, [*Commentary on John*, 13.2], he quotes 1 John 1:5. DIONYSIUS OF ALEXANDRIA, ORIGEN’S scholar, cites the words of this Epistle as those of the Evangelist John. EUSEBIUS [*Ecclesiastical History*, 3.24], says, John’s first Epistle and Gospel are *acknowledged without question* by those of the present day, as well as by the ancients. So also JEROME [*On Illustrious Men*]. The

opposition of COSMAS INDICOPLEUSTES, in the sixth century, and that of MARCION because our Epistle was inconsistent with his views, are of no weight against such irrefragable testimony.

The internal evidence is equally strong. Neither the Gospel, nor this Epistle, can be pronounced an imitation; yet both, in style and modes of thought, are evidently of the same mind. The *individual* notices are not so numerous or obvious as in Paul's writings, as was to be expected in a *Catholic* Epistle; but such as there are accord with John's position. He implies his apostleship, and perhaps alludes to his Gospel, and the affectionate tie which bound him as an *aged* pastor to his spiritual "children"; and in ^{<A1B2>}1 John 2:18,19 4:1-3, he alludes to the false teachers as known to his readers; and in ^{<A1B2>}1 John 5:21 he warns them against the idols of the surrounding world. It is no objection against its authenticity that the doctrine of the *Word*, or divine second Person, existing from everlasting, and in due time made flesh, appears in it, as also in the Gospel, as opposed to the heresy of the Docetae *in the second century*, who denied that our Lord *is come in the flesh*, and maintained He came only in outward *semblance*; for the same doctrine appears in ^{<S115>}Colossians 1:15-18 ^{<S1B6>}1 Timothy 3:16 Hebrews 1:1-3; and the germs of Docetism, though not fully developed till the second century, were in existence in the first. The Spirit, presciently through John, puts the Church beforehand on its guard against the coming heresy.

TO WHOM ADDRESSED. — AUGUSTINE [*The Question of the Gospels*, 2.39], says this Epistle was written to the *Parthians*. BEDE, in a prologue to the seven Catholic Epistles, says that ATHANASIUS attests the same. By the *Parthians* may be meant the Christians living beyond the Euphrates in the Parthian territory, outside the Roman empire, "the Church at Babylon elected together with (you)," the churches in the Ephesian region, the quarter to which Peter addressed his Epistles (^{<A1B2>}1 Peter 5:12). As Peter addressed the flock which John subsequently tended (and in which Paul had formerly ministered), so John, Peter's close companion after the ascension, addresses the flock among whom Peter had been when he wrote. Thus "the elect lady" (2 John 1:1) answers "to the Church elected together" (^{<A1B3>}1 Peter 5:13). See further confirmation of this view in *Introduction* to Second John. It is not necessarily an objection to this view that John never is known to have personally ministered in the Parthian

territory. For neither did Peter personally minister to the churches in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia, though he wrote his Epistles to them. Moreover, in John's prolonged life, we cannot dogmatically assert that he did not visit the Parthian Christians, after Peter had ceased to minister to them, on the mere ground of absence of extant testimony to that effect. This is as probable a view as ALFORD's, that in the passage of AUGUSTINE, "to the Parthians," is to be altered by conjectural emendation; and that the Epistle is addressed to the churches at and around Ephesus, on the ground of the fatherly tone of affectionate address in it, implying his personal ministry among his readers. But his position, as probably the only surviving apostle, accords very well with his addressing, in a Catholic Epistle, a cycle of churches which he may not have specially ministered to in person, with affectionate fatherly counsel, by virtue of his general apostolic superintendence of all the churches.

TIME AND PLACE OF WRITING. — This Epistle seems to have been written subsequently to his Gospel as it assumes the reader's acquaintance with the Gospel facts and Christ's speeches, and also with the special aspect of the incarnate Word, as God *manifest in the flesh* (^{◊186}1 Timothy 3:16), set forth more fully in his Gospel. The tone of address, as a father addressing his "*little children*" (the continually recurring term, 1 John 2:1,12,13,18,28 3:7,18 4:4 5:21), accords with the view that this Epistle was written in John's old age, perhaps about A.D. 90. In ^{◊188}1 John 2:18, "it is the last time," probably does not refer to any particular event (as the destruction of Jerusalem, which was now many years past) but refers to the nearness of the Lord's coming as proved by the rise of *Antichristian teachers*, the mark of *the last time*. It was the Spirit's purpose to keep the Church always expecting Christ as ready to come at any moment. The whole Christian age is *the last time* in the sense that no other dispensation is to arise till Christ comes. Compare "these last days," Hebrews 1:2. Ephesus may be conjectured to be the *place* whence it was written. The controversial allusion to the germs of Gnostic heresy accord with Asia Minor being the place, and the last part of the apostolic age the *time*, of writing this Epistle.

CONTENTS. — The leading subject of the whole is, *fellowship with the Father and the Son* (1 John 1:3). Two principal divisions may be noted:

(1) 1 John 1:5-2:28: the theme of this portion is stated at the outset, “*God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all*”; consequently, in order to have fellowship with Him, we must *walk in light* (1 John 1:7); connected with which in the *confession* and subsequent *forgiveness of our sins* through *Christ’s propitiation and advocacy*, without which forgiveness there could be no light or fellowship with God: a farther step in thus walking in the light is, positively *keeping God’s commandments*, the sum of which is *love*, as opposed to *hatred*, the acme of disobedience to God’s word: negatively, he exhorts them according to their several stages of spiritual growth, *children, fathers, young men*, in consonance with their privileges as *forgiven, knowing the Father*, and *having overcome the wicked one, not to love the world*, which is incompatible with the indwelling of *the love of the Father*, and to be on their guard against the *Antichristian* teachers already in the world, who were not of the Church, but of the world, against whom the true defense is, that his believing readers who have the *anointing of God*, should *continue to abide in the Son and in the Father*.

(2) The second division (1 John 2:29-5:5) discusses the theme with which it opens, *He is righteous*; consequently (as in the first division), “*every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him*.” *Sonship* in us involves our purifying ourselves as He is pure, even as we *hope to see, and therefore to be made like our Lord when He shall appear*; in this second, as in the first division, both a positive and a negative side are presented of “*doing righteousness as He is righteous*,” involving a contrast between the children of God and the children of the devil. *Hatred* marks the latter; *love*, the former: this love gives assurance of acceptance with God for ourselves and our prayers, accompanied as they are (1 John 3:23) with obedience to His great commandment, to “*believe on Jesus, and love one another*”; the seal (1 John 3:24) of His dwelling in us and assuring our hearts, is the Spirit which He hath given us. In contrast to this (as in the first division), he warns against false spirits, the notes of which are, *denial of Christ*, and *adherence to the world*. *Sonship*, or birth of God, is then more fully described: its essential feature is unslavish, free *love to God*, because *God first loved us*, and *gave His Son to die for us*, and consequent *love to the brethren*, grounded on their being sons of God also like ourselves, and so *victory*

over the world; this victory being gained only by the man who believes in Jesus as the Son of God.

(3) *The conclusion* establishes this last central truth, on which rests our fellowship with God, *Christ's having come by the water* of baptism, *the blood* of atonement, and *the witnessing Spirit*, which is *truth*. As in the opening he rested this cardinal truth on the apostles' witness of the eye, the ear, and the touch, so now at the close he rests it on *God's witness*, which is accepted by the believer, in contrast with the unbeliever, who *makes God a liar*. Then follows his closing statement of his *reason for writing* (^{¶13}1 John 5:13; compare the corresponding 1 John 1:4, at the beginning), namely, that *believers in Christ the Son of God may know that they have* (now already) *eternal life* (the source of "joy," 1 John 1:4; compare similarly his object in writing the Gospel, ^{¶14}John 20:31), and so have confidence as to their prayers being answered (corresponding to ^{¶15}1 John 3:22 in the second part); for instance, their intercessions for a *sinning brother* (unless his sin be a *sin unto death*). He closes with a brief summing up of the instruction of the Epistle, the high dignity, sanctity, and safety from evil of the children of God in contrast to the sinful world, and a warning against *idolatry*, literal and spiritual: "Keep yourselves from idols."

Though the Epistle is not directly polemical, the *occasion* which suggested his writing was probably the rise of Antichristian teachers; and, *because* he knew the spiritual character of the several classes whom he addresses, *children, youths, fathers*, he feels it necessary to write to confirm them in the faith and joyful fellowship of the Father and Son, and to assure them of the reality of the things they believe, that so they may have the full privileges of believing.

STYLE. — His peculiarity is fondness for aphorism and repetition. His tendency to repeat his own phrase, arises partly from the affectionate, hortatory character of the Epistle; partly, also, from its Hebraistic forms abounding in parallel clauses, as distinguished from the Grecian and more logical style of Paul; also, from his childlike simplicity of spirit, which, full of his one grand theme, repeats, and dwells on it with fond delight and enthusiasm. Moreover as ALFORD well says, the appearance of uniformity is often produced by want of deep enough exegesis to discover the real

differences in passages which seem to express the same. Contemplative, rather than argumentative, he dwells more on the general, than on the particular, on the inner, than on the outer, Christian life. Certain fundamental truths he recurs to again and again, at one time enlarging on, and applying them, at another time repeating them in their condensed simplicity. The thoughts do not march onward by successive steps, as in the logical style of Paul, but rather in circle drawn round one central thought which he reiterates, ever reverting to it, and viewing it, now under its positive, now under its negative, aspect. Many terms which in the Gospel are given as Christ's, in the Epistle appear as the favorite expressions of John, naturally adopted from the Lord. Thus the contrasted terms, "flesh" and "spirit," "light" and "darkness," "life" and "death," "abide in Him": fellowship with the Father and Son, and with one another," is a favorite phrase also, not found in the Gospel, but in Acts and Paul's Epistles. In him appears the harmonious union of opposites, adapting him for his high functions in the kingdom of God, contemplative repose of character, and at the same time ardent zeal, combined with burning, all-absorbing love: less adapted for active outward work, such as Paul's, than for spiritual service. He handles Christian verities not as abstract dogmas, but as living realities, personally enjoyed in fellowship with God in Christ, and with the brethren. Simple, and at the same time profound, his writing is in consonance with his spirit, unrheterical and undialectic, gentle, consolatory, and loving: the reflection of the Spirit of Him on whose breast he lay at the last supper, and whose beloved disciple he was. EWALD in ALFORD, speaking of the "unruffled and heavenly repose" which characterizes this Epistle, says, "It appears to be the tone, not so much of a father talking with his beloved children, as of a glorified saint addressing mankind from a higher world. Never in any writing has the doctrine of heavenly love — a love working in stillness, ever unwearied, never exhausted — so thoroughly approved itself as in this Epistle."

JOHN'S PLACE IN THE BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH. — As Peter founded and Paul propagated, so John completed the spiritual building. As the Old Testament puts prominently forward the *fear of God*, so John, the last writer of the New Testament, gives prominence to the *love of God*. Yet, as the Old Testament is not all limited to presenting the fear of God, but sets forth also His *love*, so John, as a representative of the New Testament,

while breathing so continually the spirit of love, gives also the plainest and most awful warnings against sin, in accordance with his original character as Boanerges, “son of thunder.” His mother was Salome, mother of the sons of Zebedee, probably sister to Jesus’ mother (compare ^{<3825>}John 19:25, “His mother’s sister,” with ^{<4125>}Matthew 27:56 ^{<4150>}Mark 15:40), so that he was cousin to our Lord; to his mother, under God, he may have owed his first serious impressions. Expecting as she did the Messianic kingdom in glory, as appears from her petition (^{<4111>}Matthew 20:20-23), she doubtless tried to fill his young and ardent mind with the same hope. NEANDER distinguishes three leading tendencies in the development of the Christian doctrine, the Pauline, the Jacobean (between which the Petrine forms an intermediate link), and the Johannean. John, in common with James, was less disposed to the intellectual and dialectic cast of thought which distinguishes Paul. He had not, like the apostle of the Gentiles, been brought to faith and peace through severe conflict; but, like James, had reached his Christian individuality through a quiet development: James, however, had passed through a moulding in Judaism previously, which, under the Spirit, caused him to present Christian truth in connection with the law, in so far as the latter in its spirit, though not letter, is permanent, and not abolished, but established under the Gospel. But John, from the first, had drawn his whole spiritual development from the personal view of Christ, the model man, and from intercourse with Him. Hence, in his writings, everything turns on one simple contrast: divine *life* in communion with Christ; death in separation from Him, as appears from his characteristic phrases, “*life, light, truth; death, darkness, lie.*” “As James and Peter mark the gradual transition from spiritualized Judaism to the independent development of Christianity, and as Paul represents the independent development of Christianity in opposition to the Jewish standpoint, so the contemplative element of John reconciles the two, and forms the closing point in the training of the apostolic Church” [NEANDER].

CHAPTER 1

1 JOHN 1:1-10.

THE WRITER'S AUTHORITY AS AN EYEWITNESS TO THE GOSPEL FACTS, HAVING SEEN, HEARD, AND HANDLED HIM WHO WAS FROM THE BEGINNING: HIS OBJECT IN WRITING: HIS MESSAGE. IF WE WOULD HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH HIM, WE MUST WALK IN LIGHT, AS HE IS LIGHT.

1. Instead of a formal, John adopts a virtual address (compare 1 John 1:4). To wish *joy* to the reader was the ancient customary address. The sentence begun in 1 John 1:1 is broken off by the parenthetic 1 John 1:2, and is resumed at 1 John 1:3 with the repetition of some words from 1 John 1:1.

That which was — not “began to be,” but *was* essentially (*Greek*, “*een*,” not “*egeneto*”) before He was *manifested* (1 John 1:2); answering to “Him that is *from the beginning*” (^{αὐτός}1 John 2:13); so John’s Gospel, John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word.” Proverbs 8:23, “I was set up from everlasting, *from the beginning*, or ever the earth was.”

we — apostles.

heard ... seen ... looked upon ... handled — a series rising in gradation. *Seeing* is a more convincing proof than *hearing* of; *handling*, than even *seeing*. “*Have heard ... have seen*” (perfect tenses), as a possession *still abiding* with us; but in *Greek* (not as *English Version* “have,” but simply) “looked upon” (not perfect tense, as of a *continuing* thing, but aorist, *past* time) while Christ the incarnate Word was still with us. “Seen,” namely, His glory, as revealed in the Transfiguration and in His miracles; and His passion and death in a real body of flesh and blood. “Looked upon” as a wondrous spectacle steadfastly, deeply, contemplatively; so the *Greek*. Appropriate to John’s contemplative character.

hands ... handled — Thomas and the other disciples on distinct occasions after the resurrection. John himself had leaned on Jesus’ breast at the last

supper. Contrast the wisest of the heathen *feeling after* (the same *Greek* as here; *groping after* WITH THE HANDS”) *if haply they might find God* (see ~~4172~~ Acts 17:27). This proves against Socinians he is here speaking of the *personal incarnate Word*, not of Christ’s *teaching* from the beginning of His official life.

of — “concerning”; following “heard.” “Heard” is the verb most applying to the purpose of the Epistle, namely the truth which John had *heard concerning the Word of life*, that is, (Christ) *the Word* who is *the life*. “Heard,” namely, from Christ Himself, including all Christ’s teachings about Himself. Therefore he puts “of,” or “concerning,” before “the word of life,” which is inapplicable to any of the verbs except “heard”; also “heard” is the only one of the verbs which he resumes at 1 John 1:5.

2. the life — Jesus, “the Word of life.”

was manifested — who had previously been “with the Father.”

show — Translate as in 1 John 1:3, “declare” (compare 1 John 1:5). *Declare* is the general term; *write* is the particular (1 John 1:4).

that eternal life — *Greek*, “the life which is eternal.” As the Epistle begins, so it ends with “eternal life,” which we shall ever enjoy with, and in, Him who is “the life eternal.”

which — *Greek*, “the which.” the before-mentioned (1 John 1:1) life *which* was with the Father “from the beginning” (compare John 1:1). This proves the distinctness of the First and Second Persons in the one Godhead.

3. That which we have seen and heard — resumed from 1 John 1:1, wherein the sentence, being interrupted by 1 John 1:2, parenthesis, was left incomplete.

declare we unto you — Oldest manuscripts add *also; unto you also* who have not *seen* or *heard* Him.

that ye also may have fellowship with us — that *ye also* who have not seen, *may* have the *fellowship* with us which we who have seen enjoy; what that fellowship consists in he proceeds to state, “Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son.” Faith realizes what we have not seen as

spiritually visible; not till by faith we too have seen, do we know all the excellency of the true Solomon. He Himself is ours; He in us and we in Him. We are “partakers of the divine nature.” We know God only by having fellowship with Him; He may thus be *known*, but not *comprehended*. The repetition of “with” before the “Son,” distinguishes the *persons*, while the *fellowship* or *communion* with both *Father* and *Son*, implies their unity. It is not added “and with the Holy Ghost”; for it is *by* the Holy Ghost or Spirit of the Father and Son in us, that we are enabled to have *fellowship with the Father and Son* (compare ^{<G181>}1 John 3:24). Believers enjoy the fellowship OF, but not WITH, the Holy Ghost. “Through Christ God closes up the chasm that separated Him from the human race, and imparts Himself to them in the communion of the divine life” [NEANDER].

4. these things — and none other, namely, this whole Epistle.

write we unto you — Some oldest manuscripts omit “unto you,” and emphasize “we.” Thus the antithesis is between “we” (apostles and eye-witnesses) and “your.” *We* write thus that *your joy* may be full. Other oldest manuscripts and versions read “OUR joy,” namely, *that our joy may be filled full by bringing you also into fellowship with the Father and Son*. (Compare ^{<G186>}John 4:36, end; Philippians 2:2, “Fulfil ye my joy,” ^{<G176>}Philippians 2:16 4:1 2 John 1:8). It is possible that “your” may be a correction of transcribers to make this verse harmonize with ^{<G181>}John 15:11 16:24; however, as John often repeats favorite phrases, he may do so here, so “your” may be from himself. So ^{<G112>}2 John 1:12, “your” in oldest manuscripts. The authority of manuscripts and versions on both sides here is almost evenly balanced. Christ Himself is the source, object, and center of His people’s joy (compare 1 John 1:3, end); it is in *fellowship with Him* that we have *joy*, the fruit of faith.

5. First division of the body of the Epistle (compare *Introduction*).

declare — *Greek*, “announce”; report in turn; a different *Greek* word from 1 John 1:3. As the Son announced the message heard from the Father as His apostle, so the Son’s apostles announce what they have heard from the Son. John nowhere uses the term “Gospel”; but the *witness* or *testimony*, *the word*, *the truth*, and here the *message*.

God is light — What light is in the natural world, that God, the source of even material light, is in the spiritual, the fountain of wisdom, purity, beauty, joy, and glory. As all material life and growth depends on *light*, so all spiritual life and growth depends on GOD. As God here, so Christ, in 1 John 2:8, is called “the true light.”

no darkness at all — strong negation; *Greek*, “No, not even one speck of darkness”; no ignorance, error, untruthfulness, sin, or death. John heard this from Christ, not only in express words, but in His acted words, namely, His is whole manifestation in the flesh as “the brightness of the Father’s *glory*.” Christ Himself was the embodiment of “the message,” representing fully in all His sayings, doings, and sufferings, Him who is LIGHT.

6. say — profess.

have fellowship with him — (1 John 1:3). The essence of the Christian life.

walk — in inward and outward action, whithersoever we turn ourselves [BENGEL].

in darkness — *Greek*, “in *the* darkness”; opposed to “the light” (compare 1 John 2:8,11).

lie — (1 John 2:4).

do not — in *practice*, whatever we *say*.

the truth — (Ephesians 4:2^{and} 1 John 3:21).

7. Compare Ephesians 5:8,11-14. “WE WALK”; “God is (*essentially* in His very nature as ‘the light,’ 1 John 1:5) in the light.” WALKING *in the light*, the element in which God Himself is, constitutes the test of fellowship with Him. Christ, like us, *walked* in the light (1 John 2:6). ALFORD notices, Walking in the light as He is in the light, is no mere imitation of God, *but an identity in the essential element* of our daily walk with the essential element of God’s eternal being.

we have fellowship one with another — and of course *with God* (to be understood from 1 John 1:6). Without having fellowship with God there

can be no true and Christian fellowship one with another (compare 1 John 1:3).

and — as the result of “walking in the light, as He is in the light.”

the blood of Jesus ... cleanseth us from all sin — daily contracted through the sinful weakness of the flesh. and the power of Satan and the world. He is speaking not of justification through His blood once for all, but of the *present sanctification* (“cleanseth” is *present* tense) which the believer, *walking in the light* and having *fellowship with God and the saints*, enjoys as His privilege. Compare ⁴³⁰John 13:10, *Greek*, “He that has been *bathed*, needeth not save to *wash* his feet, but is clean every whit.” Compare 1 John 1:9, “*cleanse* us from all unrighteousness,” a further step besides “*forgiving* us our sins.” Christ’s blood is the cleansing mean, whereby gradually, being already justified and in fellowship with God, we become *clean* from all sin which would mar our fellowship with God. Faith applies the cleansing, purifying blood. Some oldest manuscripts omit “Christ”; others retain it.

8. The confession of sins is a necessary consequence of “walking in the light” (1 John 1:7). “If thou shalt confess thyself a sinner, the *truth* is in thee; for the *truth* is itself *light*. Not yet has thy life become perfectly light, as sins are still in thee, but yet thou hast already begun to be illuminated, because there is in thee confession of sins” [AUGUSTINE].

that we have no sin — “HAVE,” not “have *had*,” must refer not to the past sinful life while unconverted, but to the *present* state wherein believers *have sin* even still. Observe, “sin” is in the singular; “(confess our) *sins*” (1 John 1:9) in the plural. *Sin* refers to the *corruption of the old man* still present in us, and the *stain* created by the actual *sins* flowing from that old nature in us. To confess our need of cleansing from *present* sin is essential to “walking in the light”; so far is the presence of some sin incompatible with our *in the main* “walking in light.” But the believer hates, confesses, and longs to be delivered from all sin, which is *darkness*. “They who defend their sins, will see in the great day whether their sins can defend them.”

deceive ourselves — We cannot deceive God; we only make ourselves to err from the right path.

the truth — (1 John 2:4). True faith. “The truth respecting God’s holiness and our sinfulness, which is the very first spark of light in us, has no place in us” [ALFORD].

9. confess — with the lips, speaking from a contrite heart; involving also confession to our fellow men of offenses committed against them.

he — God.

faithful — to His own promises; “true” to His word.

just — Not merely the mercy, but the *justice* or *righteousness* of God is set forth in the redemption of the penitent believer in Christ. God’s promises of mercy, to which He is *faithful*, are in accordance with His *justice*.

to — *Greek*, “in order that.” His forgiving *us our sins and cleansing us*, etc. is in furtherance of the *ends* of His eternal *faithfulness* and *justice*.

forgive — remitting the *guilt*.

cleanse — purify from all filthiness, so that henceforth we more and more become free from the presence of sin through the Spirit of sanctification (compare ³⁰⁸Hebrews 9:14; and above, see on 1 John 1:7).

unrighteousness — offensive to Him who “is just” or *righteous*; called “sin,” 1 John 1:7, because “sin is the transgression of the law,” and the law is the expression of God’s *righteousness*, so that *sin* is *unrighteousness*.

10. Parallel to 1 John 1:8.

we have not sinned — referring to the commission of actual *sins*, even after regeneration and conversion; whereas in 1 John 1:8, “we have no sin,” refers to the present GUILT remaining (until cleansed) from the *actual sins* committed, and to the SIN of our corrupt old nature still adhering to us. The perfect “have ... sinned” brings down the commission of sins to the present time, not merely sins committed *before*, but *since, conversion*.

we make him a liar — a gradation; 1 John 1:6, “we lie”; 1 John 1:8, “we deceive ourselves”; worst of all, “we make Him a liar,” by denying His word that all men are sinners (compare ³¹⁰1 John 5:10).

his word is not in us — “His word,” which is “the truth” (1 John 1:8), accuses us truly; by denying it we drive it from our hearts (compare ~~John~~ John 5:38). Our rejection of “His word” in respect to our being sinners, implies as the consequence our rejection of His word and will revealed in the .law and Gospel *as a whole*; for these throughout rest on the fact that *we have sinned, and have sin.*

CHAPTER 2

1 JOHN 2:1-29.

THE ADVOCACY OF CHRIST IS OUR ANTIDOTE TO SIN WHILE WALKING IN THE LIGHT; FOR TO KNOW GOD, WE MUST KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS AND LOVE THE BRETHREN, AND NOT LOVE THE WORLD, NOR GIVE HEED TO ANTICHRISTS, AGAINST WHOM OUR SAFETY IS THROUGH THE INWARD ANOINTING OF GOD TO ABIDE IN GOD: SO AT CHRIST'S COMING WE SHALL NOT BE ASHAMED.

1. (^{<G188>}1 John 5:18.)

My little children — The diminutive expresses the tender affection of an aged pastor and spiritual father. *My own dear children*, that is, sons and daughters (see on ^{<G122>}1 John 2:12).

these things — (1 John 1:6-10). My purpose in writing what I have just written is not that you should abuse them as giving a license to sin but, on the contrary, “in order that ye may not sin at all” (the *Greek* aorist, implying the absence not only of the habit, but of *single acts* of sin [ALFORD]). In order to “walk in the light” (1 John 1:5,7), the first step is *confession of sin* (1 John 1:9), the next (1 John 2:1) is that we should *forsake all sin*. The divine purpose has for its aim, either to prevent the commission of, or to destroy sin [BENGEL].

And, etc. — connected with the former; *Furthermore*, “if any man sin,” let him, while loathing and condemning it, not fear to go at once to God, the Judge, confessing it, for “we have an Advocate with Him.” He is speaking of a BELIEVER’S *occasional* sins of infirmity through Satan’s fraud and malice. The use of “we” immediately afterwards implies that *we all* are *liable* to this, though not necessarily constrained to sin.

we have an advocate — Advocacy is God’s family blessing; other blessings He grants to good and bad alike, but justification, sanctification, continued intercession, and peace, He grants to His children alone.

advocate — *Greek*, “*paraclete*,” the same term as is applied to the Holy Ghost, as the “other Comforter”; showing the unity of the Second and Third Persons of the Trinity. Christ is the Intercessor *for us* above; and, in His absence, here below the Holy Ghost is the other Intercessor *in us*. Christ’s *advocacy* is inseparable from the Holy Spirit’s *comfort* and working in us, as the spirit of intercessory prayer.

righteous — As our “advocate,” Christ is not a mere suppliant petitioner. He pleads for us on the ground of *justice*, or *righteousness*, as well as mercy. Though He can say nothing good *of us*, He can say much *for us*. It is His *righteousness*, or obedience to the law, and endurance of its full penalty for us, on which He grounds His claim for our acquittal. The sense therefore is, “in that He is *righteous*”; in contrast to our *sin* (“if any man *sin*”). The Father, by raising Him from the dead, and setting Him at His own right, has once for all accepted Christ’s claim for us. Therefore the accuser’s charges against God’s children are vain. “The righteousness of Christ stands on our side; for God’s righteousness is, in Jesus Christ, ours” [LUTHER].

2. And he — *Greek*, “*And Himself*.” He is our all-prevailing Advocate, because He is *Himself* “the propitiation”; *abstract*, as in ^{◄103}1 Corinthians 1:30: He is to us *all that is needed for propitiation* “in behalf of our sins”; *the propitiatory sacrifice*, provided by the Father’s love, removing the estrangement, and appeasing the righteous wrath, on God’s part, against the sinner. “There is no incongruity that a father should be *offended* with that son whom he loveth, and at that time offended with him when he *loveth* him” [BISHOP PEARSON]. The only other place in the New Testament where *Greek* “propitiation” occurs, is ^{◄104}1 John 4:10; it answers in the *Septuagint* to *Hebrew*, “*caphar*,” to *effect an atonement* or *reconciliation* with God; and in Ezekiel 44:29, to the *sin offering*. In ^{◄105}Romans 3:25, *Greek*, it is “propitiatory,” that is, the mercy seat, or lid of the ark whereon God, represented by the Shekinah glory above it, met His people, represented by the high priest who sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice on it.

and — *Greek*, “yet.”

ours — believers: not *Jews*, in contrast to Gentiles; for he is not writing to Jews (ⲉⲓⲛⲓ 1 John 5:21).

also for the sins of the whole world — Christ’s “advocacy” is limited to *believers* (1 John 2:1 1 John 1:7): His *propitiation* extends as widely as *sin* extends: see on 2 Peter 2:1, “denying the Lord that *bought them*.” “The whole world” cannot be restricted to the *believing* portion of the world (compare ⲉⲓⲛⲓ 1 John 4:14; and “the whole world,” ⲉⲓⲛⲓ 1 John 5:19). “Thou, too, art part of the world, so that thine heart cannot deceive itself and think, The Lord died for Peter and Paul, but not for me” [LUTHER].

3. hereby — *Greek*, “in this.” “It is *herein*,” and herein only, that we know (present tense) that we have knowledge of (perfect tense, once-for-all obtained and continuing *knowledge of Him*)” (1 John 2:4,13,14). Tokens whereby to discern grace are frequently given in this Epistle. The Gnostics, by the Spirit’s prescient forewarning, are refuted, who boasted of *knowledge*, but set aside *obedience*. “Know Him,” namely, as “the righteous” (1 John 2:1,29); our “Advocate and Intercessor.”

keep — John’s favorite word, instead of “do,” literally, “watch,” “guard,” and “keep safe” as a precious thing; observing so as to keep. So Christ Himself. Not faultless conformity, but hearty acceptance of, and willing subjection to, God’s whole revealed will, is meant.

commandments — *injunctions* of faith, love, and obedience. John never uses “the law” to express the rule of Christian obedience: he uses it as the Mosaic law.

4. I know — *Greek*, “I have knowledge of (perfect) Him.” Compare with this verse 1 John 1:8.

5. Not merely repeating the proposition, 1 John 2:3, or asserting the merely opposite alternative to 1 John 2:4, but expanding the “know Him” of 1 John 2:3, into “in Him, verily (not as a matter of vain boasting) is the love of (that is towards) God perfected,” and “we are in Him.” *Love* here answers to *knowledge* in 1 John 2:3. In proportion as we love God, in that same proportion we *know* Him, and vice versa, until our *love and knowledge* shall attain their full maturity of perfection.

his word — *His word* is one (see on 1 John 1:5), and comprises His “*commandments*,” which are many (1 John 2:3).

hereby — in our progressing towards this ideal of perfected love and obedience. There is a gradation: 1 John 2:3, “*know Him*”; 1 John 2:5, “*we are in Him*”; 1 John 2:6, “*abideth in Him*”; respectively, *knowledge, fellowship, abiding constancy*. [BENGEL].

6. abideth — implying a condition lasting, without intermission, and without end.

He that saith ... ought — so that his deeds may be consistent with his words.

even as he — Believers readily supply the name, their hearts being full of Him (compare ⁴¹¹⁵John 20:15). “Even as He walked” when on earth, especially in respect to *love*. John delights in referring to Christ as the model man, with the words, “Even as He,” etc. “It is not Christ’s walking on the sea, but His ordinary walk, that we are called on to imitate” [LUTHER].

7. Brethren — The oldest manuscripts and versions read instead, “Beloved,” appropriate to the subject here, *love*.

no new commandment — namely, *love*, the main principle of walking *as Christ walked* (1 John 2:6), and that commandment, of which one exemplification is presently given, 1 John 2:9,10, *the love of brethren*.

ye had from the beginning — from the time that ye first heard the Gospel word preached.

8. a new commandment — It was “old,” in that *Christians* as such had heard it *from the first*; but “new” (*Greek*, “*kaine*,” not “*nea*”: *new and different* from the *old* legal precept) in that it was first *clearly* promulgated with Christianity; though the inner *spirit* of the law was *love* even to enemies, yet it was enveloped in some bitter precepts which caused it to be temporarily almost unrecognized, till the Gospel came. Christianity first put *love to brethren* on the *new* and highest MOTIVE, instinctive love to Him who first loved us, constraining us to love all, even enemies, thereby walking in the steps of Him who loved us when enemies. So Jesus

calls it “new,” ^{<B3>}John 13:34,35, “Love one another *as I have loved you*” (the new motive); ^{<B52>}John 15:12.

which thing is true in him and in you — “*In Christ* all things are always true, and were so from the beginning; but *in Christ and in us* conjointly *the commandment* [the love of brethren] *is then true* when we acknowledge the truth which is *in Him*, and have the same flourishing *in us*” [BENGEL]. ALFORD explains, “Which thing (*the fact that the commandment is a new one*) is true in Him and in you because the darkness is *passing away*, and the true light is now shining; that is, the commandment *is a new one*, and this is true both in the case of Christ and in the case of you; because *in you* the darkness is passing away, and *in Him* the true light is shining; therefore, on both accounts, the command is a *new one*: new as regards you, because you are newly come from darkness into light; new as regards Him, because He uttered it when He came into the world to lighten every man, and began that shining which even now continues.” I prefer, as BENGEL, to explain, The *new commandment* finds its *truth* in its practical *realization* in the walk of Christians in union with Christ. Compare the use of “verily,” 1 John 2:5. ^{<B42>}John 4:42, “indeed”; ^{<B5>}John 6:55. The repetition of “in” before “you,” “in Him and in you,” not “in Him and you” implies that the love commandment finds its realization *separately*: first it did so “*in Him*,” and then it does so “in us,” in so far as we now “also walk even as He walked”; and yet it finds its realization also *conjointly*, by the two being united in one sentence, even as it is by virtue of the love commandment having been first fulfilled *in Him*, that it is also now fulfilled *in us*, through His Spirit in us: compare a similar case, ^{<B17>}John 20:17, “*My Father and your Father*”; by virtue of His being “*My Father*,” He is also *your Father*.

darkness is past — rather, as in ^{<B17>}1 John 2:17, “is passing away.” It shall not be wholly “past” until “the Sun of righteousness” shall arise *visibly*; “the light is now shining” *already*, though but partially until the day bursts forth.

9-11. There is no mean between *light and darkness, love and hatred, life and death, God and the world*: wherever spiritual *life* is, however weak, there *darkness* and *death* no longer reign, and *love* supplants *hatred*; and ^{<B18>}Luke 9:50 holds good: wherever *life* is not, *there death, darkness, the*

flesh, the world, and hatred, however glossed over and hidden from man's observation, prevail; and ^{<012>}Luke 11:23 holds good. "Where love is not, there hatred is; for the heart cannot remain a void" [BENGE].

in the light — as his proper element.

his brother — his neighbor, and especially those of the Christian brotherhood. The very title "brother" is a reason why love should be exercised.

even until now — notwithstanding that "the true light already has begun to shine" (1 John 2:8).

10. Abiding in *love* is *abiding in the light*; for the Gospel light not only illumines the understanding, but warms the heart into love.

none occasion of stumbling — In contrast to, "He that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes." "In him who loves there is neither blindness nor *occasion of stumbling* [to himself]: in him who does not love, there is both *blindness* and occasion of stumbling. He who hates his brother, is both a stumbling-block to himself, and stumbles against himself and everything within and without; he who loves has an unimpeded path" [BENGE]. John has in mind Jesus' words, John 11:9,10. ALFORD well says, "The light and the darkness are within ourselves; admitted into us by the eye, whose singleness fills the whole body with light."

11. is in darkness ... walketh — "is" marks his continuing STATE: he has never come out of "the darkness" (so *Greek*); "walketh" marks his OUTWARD WALK and acts.

whither — *Greek*, "where"; including not only the destination *to which*, but the way *whereby*.

hath blinded — rather, as *Greek* aorist, "blinded" of old. Darkness not only surrounds, but blinds him, and that a blindness of long standing.

12. little children — *Greek*, "little sons," or "dear sons and daughters"; not the same *Greek* as in ^{<013>}1 John 2:13, "little *children*," "infants" (in age and standing). He calls ALL to whom he writes, "little *sons*" (1 John 2:1,

Greek; ^{<G128>}1 John 2:28 3:18 4:4 5:21); but only in ^{<G128>}1 John 2:13,18 he uses the term “little children,” or “infants.” Our Lord, whose Spirit John so deeply drank into, used to His disciples (^{<G128>}John 13:33) the term “little sons,” or *dear sons and daughters*; but in John 21:5, “little children.” It is an undesigned coincidence with the Epistle here, that in John’s Gospel somewhat similarly the classification, “lambs, sheep, sheep,” occurs.

are forgiven — “have been, and are forgiven you”: ALL God’s *sons and daughters* alike enjoy this privilege.

13, 14. All three classes are first addressed in the present. “I write”; then in the past (aorist) tense, “I wrote” (not “I have written”; moreover, in the oldest manuscripts and versions, in the end of ^{<G128>}1 John 2:13, it is past, “I wrote,” not as *English Version*, “I write”). Two classes, “fathers” and “young men,” are addressed with the same words each time (except that the address to the *young men* has an addition expressing the source and means of their victory); but the “little sons” and “little children” are differently addressed.

have known — and do know: so the *Greek* perfect means. The “I wrote” refers not to a former Epistle, but to this Epistle. It was an idiom to put the *past* tense, regarding the time from the *reader’s* point of view; when he should receive the Epistle the writing would be *past*. When he uses “I write,” he speaks from *his own* point of view.

him *that is* from the beginning — Christ: “that which was from the beginning.”

overcome — The *fathers*, appropriately to their age, are characterized by *knowledge*. The *young men*, appropriately to theirs, by *activity in conflict*. The *fathers*, too, have *conquered*; but now their active service is past, and they and *the children* alike are characterized by *knowing* (the *fathers* know *Christ*, “Him that was from the beginning”; *the children* know the Father). The first thing that the *little children* realize is that God is their *Father*; answering in the parallel clause to “little sons ... your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake,” the universal first privilege of *all* those really-dear *sons* of God. Thus this latter clause includes *all*, whereas the former clause refers to those more especially who are in the *first* stage of spiritual life, “little children.” Of course, these can only know *the Father* as theirs

through *the Son* (⁴¹¹⁷Matthew 11:27). It is beautiful to see how the *fathers* are characterized as reverting back to the first great truths of spiritual childhood, and the sum and ripest fruit of advanced experience, the *knowledge of Him that was from the beginning* (twice repeated, ⁴¹²³1 John 2:13,14). Many of them had probably known *Jesus* in person, as well as by faith.

14. young men ... strong — *made so out of natural weakness*, hence enabled to *overcome* “the strong man armed” through Him that is “stronger.” Faith is the victory that overcomes the world. This term “overcome” is peculiarly John’s, adopted from his loved Lord. It occurs sixteen times in the Apocalypse, six times in the First Epistle, only thrice in the rest of the New Testament. In order to overcome the world on the ground, and in the strength, of the blood of the Savior, we must be willing, like Christ, to part with whatever of the world belongs to us: whence immediately after “ye have overcome the wicked one (the prince of the world),” it is added, “Love not the world, neither the things ... in the world.”

and, etc. — the secret of the young men’s *strength*: the Gospel *word*, clothed with living power by the Spirit who *abideth* permanently in them; this is “the sword of the Spirit” wielded in prayerful waiting on God. Contrast the mere physical strength of young men, Isaiah 40:30,31. *Oral teaching* prepared these youths for the profitable use of *the word* when *written*. “Antichrist cannot endanger you (⁴¹²⁸1 John 2:18), nor Satan tear from you *the word of God*.”

the wicked one — who, as “prince of this world,” enthralled “the world” (⁴¹²⁵1 John 2:15-17 5:19, *Greek*, “the wicked one”), especially the young. Christ came to destroy this “prince of the world.” Believers achieve the first grand conquest over him when they pass from darkness to light, but afterwards they need to maintain a continual *keeping* of themselves from his assaults, looking to God by whom alone they are *kept* safe. BENGEL thinks John refers specially to the remarkable constancy exhibited by youths in Domitian’s persecution. Also to the young man whom John, after his return from Patmos, led with gentle, loving persuasion to repentance. This youth had been commended to the overseers of the Church by John, in one of his tours of superintendency, as a promising

disciple; he had been, therefore, carefully watched up to baptism. But afterwards relying too much on baptismal grace, he joined evil associates, and fell from step to step down, till he became a captain of robbers. When John, some years after, revisited that Church and heard of the youth's sad fall, he hastened to the retreat of the robbers, suffered himself to be seized and taken into the captain's presence. The youth, stung by conscience and the remembrance of former years, fled away from the venerable apostle. Full of love the aged father ran after him, called on him to take courage, and announced to him forgiveness of his sins in the name of Christ. The youth was recovered to the paths of Christianity, and was the means of inducing many of his bad associates to repent and believe [CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *Who Is the Rich Man Who Shall Be Saved?* 4.2; EUSEBIUS, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.20; CHRYSOSTOM, *First Exhortation to Theodore*, 11].

15. Love not the world — that *lieth in the wicked one* (^{GEN}1 John 5:19), whom ye young men *have overcome*. Having once for all, through *faith, overcome the world* (1 John 4:4 5:4), carry forward the conquest by not loving it. “The world” here means “man, and man’s world” [ALFORD], in his and its state as *fallen from God*. “God loved [with the love of *compassion*] the world,” and we should feel the same kind of love for the fallen world; but we are *not* to *love* the world with *congeniality* and *sympathy* in its alienation from God; we cannot have this latter kind of love for the God-estranged world, and yet have also “the love of the Father in” us.

neither — *Greek*, “nor yet.” A man might deny in general that he *loved the world*, while keenly following some one of THE THINGS IN IT: its riches, honors, or pleasures; this clause prevents him escaping from conviction.

any man — therefore the warning, though primarily addressed to the young, applies to *all*.

love of — that is, *towards* “the Father.” The two, God and the (sinful) world, are so opposed, that both cannot be congenially loved at once.

16. all that is in the world — can be classed under one or other of the three; the world contains these and no more.

lust of the flesh — that is, the lust which has its seat and source in our lower animal nature. Satan tried this temptation the first on Christ: Luke 4:3, “Command this stone that it be made *bread*.” Youth is especially liable to fleshly lusts.

lust of the eyes — the avenue through which outward things of the world, riches, pomp, and beauty, inflame us. Satan tried this temptation on Christ when he showed Him the kingdoms of the world in a moment. By the lust of the eyes David (2 Samuel 11:2) and Achan fell (^{<1672>}Joshua 7:21).

Compare David’s prayer, Psalm 119:37; Job’s resolve, Psalm 31:1

^{<163>}Matthew 5:28. The only good of worldly riches to the possessor is the beholding them with the *eyes*. Compare ^{<1448>}Luke 14:18, “I must go and SEE it.”

pride of life — literally, “arrogant assumption”: vainglorious display.

Pride was Satan’s sin whereby he fell and forms the link between the two foes of man, the *world* (answering to “the lust of the eyes”) and the *devil* (as “the lust of the flesh” is the third foe). Satan tried this temptation on Christ in setting Him on the temple pinnacle that, in spiritual *pride* and *presumption*, on the ground of His Father’s care, He should cast Himself down. The same three foes appear in the three classes of soil on which the divine seed falls: the wayside hearers, the *devil*; the thorns, *the world*; the rocky undersoil, *the flesh* (^{<133>}Matthew 13:18-23 Mark 4:3-8). The world’s awful *antitrinity*, the “lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life,” similarly is presented in Satan’s temptation of Eve: “When she saw that the tree was good for *food*, pleasant to the *eyes*, and a tree to be desired to make one *wise*,” Genesis 3:6 (one manifestation of “the pride of life,” the desire to know above what God has revealed, Colossians 2:8, the pride of unsanctified knowledge).

of — does not spring *from* “the Father” (used in relation to the preceding “little children,” ^{<102>}1 John 2:12, or “little sons”). He who is born *of* God alone turns *to* God; he who is of the world turns to the world; the sources of love to God and love to the world, are irreconcilably distinct.

17. the world — with all who are of the world worldly.

passeth away — *Greek*, “is passing away” even now.

the lust thereof — in its threefold manifestation (⁶¹²⁶1 John 2:16).

he that doeth the will of God — not his own *fleshy* will, or the will of the *world*, but that of God (1 John 2:3,6), especially in respect to *love*.

abideth for ever — “even as God also abideth for ever” (with whom the godly is one; compare Psalm 55:19, “God, even He that abideth of old): a true *comment*, which CYPRIAN and LUCIFER have added to the *text* without support of *Greek* manuscripts. In contrast to the three *passing* lusts of the world, the doer of God’s will has three *abiding* goods, “riches, honor, and life” (Proverbs 22:4).

18. Little children — same *Greek* as ⁶¹²³1 John 2:13; children *in age*. After the *fathers* and *young men* were gone, “the last time” with its “many Antichrists” was about to come suddenly on *the children*. “In this *last hour* we all even still live” [BENGEL]. Each successive age has had in it some of the signs of “the last time” which precedes Christ’s coming, in order to keep the Church in continual waiting for the Lord. The connection with ⁶¹²⁵1 John 2:15-17 is: There are coming those seducers who are of the world (1 John 4:5), and would tempt you to go out from us (⁶¹²⁹1 John 2:19) and deny Christ (⁶¹²²1 John 2:22).

as ye have heard — from the apostles, preachers of the Gospel (for example, 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10; and in the region of Ephesus, ⁴⁰¹⁹Acts 20:29,30).

shall come — *Greek*, “cometh,” namely, out of his own place. *Antichrist* is interpreted in two ways: a false Christ (Matthew 24:5,24), literally, “*instead of Christ*”; or an *adversary of Christ*, literally, “*against Christ*.” As John never uses *pseudo-Christ*, or “false Christ,” for *Antichrist*, it is plain he means an *adversary of Christ*, claiming to himself what belongs to Christ, and wishing to substitute himself for Christ as the supreme object of worship. He *denies the Son*, not merely, like the pope, acts in the name of the Son, 2 Thessalonians 2:4, “Who *opposeth* himself (*Greek*, “ANTI-*keimenos*”) [to] all that is called God,” decides this. For God’s great truth, “God is man,” he would substitute his own lie, “man is God” [TRENCH].

are there — *Greek*, “there have begun to be”; there have arisen. These “many Antichrists” answer to “the spirit of lawlessness (*Greek*) doth

already work.” The Antichristian principle appeared then, as now, in evil men and evil teachings and writings; but still “THE Antichrist” means a hostile *person*, even as “THE Christ” is a personal Savior. As “cometh” is used of Christ, *so* here of Antichrist, the embodiment in his own person of all the Antichristian features and spirit of those “many Antichrists” which have been, and are, his forerunners. John uses the singular of him. No other New Testament writer uses the term. He probably answers to “the little horn having the eyes of a man, and speaking great things” (Daniel 7:8,20); “the man of sin, son of perdition” (2 Thessalonians 2:3); “the beast ascending out of the bottomless pit” (Revelation 11:7 17:8), or rather, “the false prophet,” the same as “the second beast coming up out of the earth” (Revelation 13:11-18 16:13).

19. out from us — from our Christian communion. Not necessarily a formal secession or *going out*: thus Rome has spiritually *gone out*, though formally still of the Christian Church.

not of us — by spiritual fellowship (1 John 1:3). “They are like bad humors in the body of Christ, the Church: when they are vomited out, then the body is relieved; the body of Christ is now still under treatment, and has not yet attained the perfect soundness which it shall have only at the resurrection” [AUGUSTINE, *Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, Homily 3.4].

they would ... have continued — implying the indefectibility of grace in the elect. “Where God’s call is effectual, there will be sure perseverance” [CALVIN]. Still, it is no fatal necessity, but a “voluntary necessity” [DIDYMUS], which causes men to remain, or else go from the body of Christ. “We are either among the members, or else among the bad humors. It is of his own will that each is either an Antichrist, or in Christ” [AUGUSTINE]. Still God’s actings in eternal election harmonize in a way *inexplicable to us*, with man’s free agency and responsibility. It is men’s own evil will that chooses the way to hell; it is God’s free and sovereign grace that draws any to Himself and to heaven. To God the latter shall ascribe wholly their salvation from first to last: the former shall reproach themselves alone, and not God’s decree, with their condemnation (1 John 3:9 5:18).

that they were not all of us — This translation would imply *that some of the Antichrists are of us!* Translate, therefore, “that all (who are for a time among us) are not of us.” Compare ^{<G1B>}1 Corinthians 11:19, “There must be heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.” For “were” some of the oldest manuscripts read “are.” Such occasions test who are, and who are not, the Lord’s people.

20. But — *Greek*, “And.” He here states the means which they as believers have wherewith to withstand. *Antichrists* (^{<G1B>}1 John 2:18), namely, the *chrism* (so the *Greek*: a play upon similar sounds), or “anointing unguent,” namely, the Holy Spirit (more plainly mentioned further on, as in John’s style, ^{<G1B>}1 John 3:24 4:13 5:6), which *they* (“ye” is emphatical in contrast to those apostates, ^{<G1B>}1 John 2:19) have “from the Holy One, *Christ*” (^{<G1B>}John 1:33 3:34 15:26 16:14): “the righteous” (1 John 2:1), “pure” (1 John 3:3), “the Holy One” (^{<G1B>}Acts 3:14) “of God”; ^{<G1B>}Mark 1:24. Those anointed of God in *Christ* alone can resist those anointed with the spirit of Satan, *Antichrists*, who would sever them from the Father and from the Son. Believers have the anointing Spirit from *the Father* also, as well as from the Son; even as the Son is anointed therewith by the Father. Hence the Spirit is the token that we are in the Father and in the Son; without it a man is none of Christ. The material unguent of costliest ingredients, poured on the head of priests and kings, typified this spiritual unguent, derived from Christ, the Head, to us, His members. We can have no share in Him as *Jesus*, except we become truly *Christians*, and so be in Him as *Christ*, anointed with that unction from the Holy One. The Spirit poured on Christ, the Head, is by Him diffused through all the members. “It appears that we all are the body of *Christ*, because we all are anointed: and we all in Him are both *Christ’s* and *Christ*, because in some measure the whole *Christ* is Head and body.”

and — therefore.

ye know all things — needful for acting aright against Antichrist’s seductions, and for Christian life and godliness. In the same measure as one hath *the Spirit*, in that measure (no more and no less) he knows all these things.

21. but because ye know it, and that, etc. — Ye not *only know* what is the truth (concerning the Son and the Father, ^{<G1B>}1 John 2:13), but also are

able to detect a lie as a thing opposed to the truth. For right (a straight line) is the index of itself and of what is crooked [ESTIUS]. The *Greek* is susceptible of ALFORD'S translation, "Because ye know it, and *because* no lie is of the truth" (literally, "every lie is excluded from being of the truth"). I therefore wrote (in this Epistle) to point out what the lie is, and who the liars are.

22. a liar — *Greek*, "Who is the liar?" namely, guilty of *the* lie just mentioned (⁴¹²¹1 John 2:21).

that Jesus is the Christ — the grand central truth.

He is Antichrist — *Greek*, "*the* Antichrist"; not however here *personal*, but in the abstract; the ideal of Antichrist is "he that denieth the Father and the Son." To deny the latter is virtually to deny the former. Again, the truth as to the Son must be held in its integrity; to deny that Jesus is the Christ, or that He is the Son of God, or that He came in the flesh, invalidates the whole (⁴¹¹⁷Matthew 11:27).

23. *Greek*, "Every one who denieth the Son, hath not the Father either" (1 John 4:2,3): "inasmuch as God hath given Himself to us wholly to be enjoyed in Christ" [CALVIN].

he — *that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also*. These words ought not to be in italics, as though they were not in the original: for the oldest *Greek* manuscripts have them.

hath — namely, in his abiding possession as his "portion"; by living personal "fellowship."

acknowledgeth — by open confession of Christ.

24. Let that — truth respecting the Father and the Son, regarded as a seed not merely dropped in, but having taken root (1 John 3:9).

ye — in the *Greek* standing emphatically at the beginning of the sentence. YE, therefore, *acknowledge the Son, and so shall ye have the Father also* (⁴¹²³1 John 2:23).

from the beginning — from the time of your first hearing the Gospel.

remain — Translate as before, "abide."

ye also — in your turn, as distinguished from “that which ye have heard,” the seed *abiding in you*. Compare ^{ⲁⲓⲃⲟ}1 John 2:27, “the anointing *abideth in you* ... ye shall *abide in Him*.” Having taken into us the living seed of the truth concerning the Father and the Son, we become transformed into the likeness of Him whose seed we have taken into us.

25. this is the promise — *Eternal life* shall be the permanent consummation of thus *abiding in the Son and in the Father* (^{ⲁⲓⲃⲟ}1 John 2:24).

he — *Greek*, “Himself,” Christ, “the Son” (compare 1 John 1:1).

promised — (^{ⲁⲓⲃⲟ}John 3:15,36 6:40,47,57 17:2,3).

26. These things — (^{ⲁⲓⲃⲟ}1 John 2:18-25).

have I written — resumed from ^{ⲁⲓⲃⲟ}1 John 2:21 and ^{ⲁⲓⲃⲟ}1 John 2:14.

seduce you — that is, are trying to seduce or lead you into error.

27. But — *Greek*, “And you (contrasting the believing readers with the *seducers*; the words ‘and you’ stand prominent, the construction of the sentence following being altered, and no verb agreeing with ‘and you’ until ‘need not’) ... the anointing,” etc. (resumed from ^{ⲁⲓⲃⲟ}1 John 2:20).

received of him — (^{ⲁⲓⲃⲟ}John 1:16). So we “are unto God a sweet savor of Christ.”

abideth in you — He tacitly thus admonishes them to say, when tempted by seducers, “The anointing abideth in us; we do not need a teacher [for we have the Holy Spirit as our teacher, Jeremiah 31:34 ^{ⲁⲓⲃⲟ}John 6:45 16:13]; it teaches us the truth; in that teaching we will abide” [BENGEL].

and — and therefore. God is sufficient for them who are taught of Him; they are independent of all others, though, of course, not declining the Christian counsel of faithful ministers. “Mutual communication is not set aside, but approved of, in the case of those who are partakers of the anointing in one body” [BENGEL].

the same anointing — which ye once for all received, and which now still abides in you.

of — “concerning.”

all things — essential to salvation; the point under discussion. Not that the believer is made infallible, for no believer here receives the Spirit in all its fullness, but only the measure needful for keeping him from soul-destroying error. So the Church, though having the Spirit in her, is not infallible (for many fallible members can never make an infallible whole), but is kept from ever wholly losing the saving truth.

no lie — as Antichristian teaching.

ye shall abide in him — (Ⲙⲓⲛⲁ 1 John 2:24, end); even as “the anointing abideth in you.” The oldest manuscripts read the imperative, “*abide* in Him.”

28. little children — *Greek*, “little sons,” as in Ⲙⲓⲛⲁ 1 John 2:12; believers of every stage and age.

abide in him — Christ. John repeats his monition with a loving appellation, as a father addressing dear children.

when — literally, “if”; the uncertainty is not as to the fact, but *the time*.

appear — *Greek*, “be manifested.”

we — both writer and readers.

ashamed before him — literally, “*from Him*”; shrink back *from Him* ashamed. Contrast “boldness in the day of judgment,” Ⲙⲓⲛⲁ 1 John 4:17; compare Ⲙⲓⲛⲁ 1 John 3:21 5:14. In the Apocalypse (written, therefore, BENGEL thinks, subsequently), Christ’s coming is represented as put off to a greater distance.

29. The heading of the second division of the Epistle: “God is righteous; therefore, every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him.” Love is the grand feature and principle of “righteousness” selected for discussion, Ⲙⲓⲛⲁ 1 John 2:29-3:3.

If ye know ... ye know — distinct *Greek* verbs: “if ye *are aware* (are in possession of the knowledge) ... ye *discern* or apprehend also that,” etc. Ye are already aware that *God* (“He” includes both “the Father,” *of whom* the believer *is born* (end of this verse, and 1 John 3:1), and “the Son,” 1

John 2:1,23) *is righteous*, ye must necessarily, thereby, perceive also the consequence of that truth, namely, “that everyone that doeth righteousness (and he alone; literally, *the* righteousness such as the righteous God approves) is born of Him.” The righteous produceth the righteous. We are never said to be *born again of Christ*, but of *God*, with whom Christ is one. HOLLAZ in ALFORD defines *the righteousness of God*, “It is the divine energy by whose power God wills and does all things which are conformable to His eternal law, prescribes suitable laws to His creatures, fulfils His promises to men, rewards the good, and punishes the ungodly.”

doeth — “For the graces (virtues) are practical, and have their being in being produced (in being exercised); for when they have ceased to act, or are only about to act, they have not even being” [AECUMENIUS]. “God is righteous, and therefore the *source* of righteousness; when then a man doeth righteousness, we know that the source of his righteousness is God, that consequently he has acquired by new birth from God that righteousness which he had not by nature. We argue from his *doing righteousness*, to his being *born of God*. The error of Pelagians is to conclude that *doing righteousness* is a condition of *becoming* a child of God” [ALFORD most truly]. Compare ~~Q114~~ Luke 7:47,50: Her much love *evinced* that her sins *were already* forgiven; not, were the *condition* of her sins being forgiven.

CHAPTER 3

1 JOHN 3:1-24.

DISTINGUISHING MARKS OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD AND THE CHILDREN OF THE DEVIL. BROTHERLY LOVE THE ESSENCE OF TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS.

1. Behold — calling attention, as to some wonderful exhibition, little as the world sees to admire. This verse is connected with the previous ^{<3129>}1 John 2:29, thus: All our *doing of righteousness* is a mere sign that God, of His matchless love, has adopted us as children; it does not save us, but is a proof that we are saved of His grace.

what manner of — of what surpassing excellence, how gracious on His part, how precious to us.

love ... bestowed — He does not say that God hath given us some gift, but *love itself* and the fountain of all honors, the heart itself, and that not for our works or efforts, but of His grace [LUTHER].

that — “what manner of love”; resulting in, proved by, our being, etc. The immediate *effect aimed at* in the bestowal of this love is, “*that* we should be called children of God.”

should be called — should have received the privilege of such a glorious *title* (though seeming so imaginary to the world), along with the glorious *reality*. With God *to call* is to *make really to be*. Who so great as God? What nearer relationship than that of *sons*? The oldest manuscripts add, “And we ARE SO” really.

therefore — “on this account,” because “we are (really) so.”

us — the children, like the Father.

it knew him not — namely, the Father. “If they who regard not God, hold thee in any account, feel alarmed about thy state” [BENGEL]. Contrast

1 John 5:1. The world's whole course is one great act of non-recognition of God.

2. Beloved — by the Father, and therefore by me.

now — in contrast to “not yet.” We *now* already are really sons, though not recognized as such by the world, and (as the consequence) we look for the visible manifestation of our sonship, which *not yet* has taken place.

doth not yet appear — *Greek*, “it hath not yet (‘at any time,’ *Greek* aorist) been visibly manifested what we shall be” — what further glory we shall attain by virtue of this our sonship. The “what” suggests a something inconceivably glorious.

but — omitted in the oldest manuscripts. Its insertion in *English Version* gives a wrong antithesis. It is not, “*We do not yet know manifestly* what ... but we know,” etc. *Believers have* some degree of the manifestation already, though the *world has not*. The connection is, The manifestation *to the world* of what we shall be, has not yet taken place; *we know* (in general; as a matter of *well-assured knowledge*; so the *Greek*) that when (literally, “if”; expressing no doubt as to the fact, but only as to the time; also implying the coming preliminary fact, on which the consequence follows, Malachi 1:6 John 14:3) He (not “it,” namely, that which is not yet manifested [ALFORD]) shall be manifested (1 John 3:5 2:28), we shall be like Him (Christ; all sons have a substantial resemblance to their father, and Christ, whom we shall be like, is “the express image of the Father’s person,” so that in resembling Christ, we shall resemble the Father). We *wait for the manifestation* (literally, the “apocalypse”; the same term as is applied to Christ’s own manifestation) *of the sons of God*. After our natural birth, the new birth into the life of grace is needed, which is to be followed by the new birth into the life of glory; the two latter alike are termed “the regeneration” (~~ALFORD~~ Matthew 19:28). The resurrection of our bodies is a kind of coming out of the womb of the earth, and being born into another life. Our first temptation was that we should be like God in knowledge, and by that we fell; but being raised by Christ, we become truly like Him, by knowing Him as we are known, and by seeing Him as He is [PEARSON, *Exposition of the Creed*]. As the first immortality which Adam lost was to be able not to die, so the last shall be not to be able to die. As man’s first free choice or will was to be able not to sin, so our last

shall be not to be able to sin [AUGUSTINE, *The City of God*, 22.30]. The devil fell by aspiring to God's *power*; man, by aspiring to his *knowledge*; but aspiring after God's *goodness*, we shall ever grow in His likeness. The transition from *God* the Father to "He," "Him," referring to Christ (who alone is ever said in Scripture to be *manifested*; not the Father, ^{<A18>}John 1:18), implies the entire unity of the Father and the Son.

for, etc. — Continual beholding generates likeness (^{<A18>}2 Corinthians 3:18); as the face of the moon being always turned towards the sun, reflects its light and glory.

see him — not in His innermost Godhead, but as manifested in Christ. None but the pure can see the infinitely Pure One. In all these passages the *Greek* is the same verb *opsomai*; not denoting the action of seeing, but the state of him to whose eye or mind the object is presented; hence the *Greek* verb is always in the middle or reflexive voice, to *perceive* and *inwardly appreciate* [TITTMANN]. Our spiritual bodies will appreciate and recognize spiritual beings hereafter, as our natural bodies now do natural objects.

3. this hope — of being hereafter "like Him." *Faith* and *love*, as well as *hope*, occur in ^{<A18>}1 John 3:11,23.

in — rather, "(resting) upon Him"; grounded on His promises.

purifieth himself — by Christ's Spirit in him (John 15:5, end). "Thou purifiest thyself, not of thyself, but of Him who comes that He may dwell in thee" [AUGUSTINE]. One's justification through faith is presupposed.

as he is pure — unsullied with any uncleanness. The Second Person, by whom both the Law and Gospel were given.

4. Sin is incompatible with birth from God (1 John 3:1-3). John often sets forth the same truth *negatively*, which he had before set forth *positively*. He had shown, birth from God involves self-purification; he now shows where sin, that is, the want of self-purification, is, there is no birth from God.

Whosoever — *Greek*, "Every one who."

committeth sin — in contrast to 1 John 3:3, “Every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself”; and 1 John 3:7, “He that doeth righteousness.”

transgresseth ... the law — *Greek*, “committeth transgression of law.” God’s law of purity; and so shows he has no such hope of being hereafter pure as God is pure, and, therefore, that he is not born of God.

for — *Greek*, “and.”

sin is ... transgression of ... law — definition of *sin* in general. The *Greek* having the article to both, implies that they are convertible terms. The *Greek* “sin” (*hamartia*) is literally, “a missing of the mark.” God’s will being that mark to be ever aimed at. “By the law is the knowledge of sin.” The crookedness of a line is shown by being brought into juxtaposition with a straight ruler.

5. Additional proof of the incompatibility of sin and sonship; the very object of Christ’s manifestation in the flesh was *to take away* (by one act, and entirely, aorist) all sins, as the scapegoat did typically.

and — another proof of the same.

in him is no sin — not “was,” but “is,” as in 1 John 3:7, “He *is* righteous,” and 1 John 3:3, “He *is* pure.” Therefore we are to be so.

6. He reasons from Christ’s own entire separation from sin, that those in him must also be separate from it.

abideth in him — as the branch in the vine, by vital union living by His life.

sinneth not — In so far as he abides in Christ, so far is he free from all sin. The ideal of the Christian. The life of sin and the life of God mutually exclude one another, just as darkness and light. In matter of fact, believers do fall into sins (1 John 1:8-10 2:1,2); but all such sins are alien from the life of God, and need Christ’s cleansing blood, without application to which the life of God could not be maintained. He sinneth not so long as he abideth in Christ.

whosoever sinneth hath not seen him — *Greek* perfect, “has not seen, and does not see Him.” Again the *ideal* of Christian intuition and knowledge is presented (^{<402>}Matthew 7:23). All sin as such is at variance with the notion of one regenerated. Not that “whosoever is betrayed into sins has never seen nor known God”; but *in so far* as sin exists, *in that degree* the spiritual intuition and knowledge of God do not exist in him.

neither — “not even.” To *see* spiritually is a further step than *to know*; for by *knowing* we come to *seeing* by vivid realization and experimentally.

7, 8. The same truth stated, with the addition that he who sins is, so far as he sins, “of the devil.”

let no man deceive you — as Antinomians try to mislead men.

righteousness — *Greek*, “the righteousness,” namely, of Christ or God.

he that doeth ... is righteous — Not his *doing* makes him *righteous*, but his *being righteous* (justified by the righteousness of God in Christ, Romans 10:3-10) makes him to do *righteousness*: an inversion common in familiar language, logical in reality, though not in form, as in ^{<404>}Luke 7:47 ^{<484>}John 8:47. Works do not justify, but the justified man works. We infer from his *doing righteousness* that he is already *righteous* (that is, has the true and only principle of *doing righteousness*, namely, *faith*), and is therefore *born of God* (1 John 3:9); just as we might say, The tree that bears good fruit is a good tree, and has a living root; not that the fruit *makes* the tree and its root to be good, but it *shows* that they are so.

he — Christ.

8. **He that committeth sin is of the devil** — in contrast to “He that doeth righteousness,” 1 John 3:7. He is *a son of the devil* (^{<480>}1 John 3:10 ^{<484>}John 8:44). John does not, however, say, “born of the devil.” as he does “born of God,” for “the devil begets none, nor does he create any; but whoever imitates the devil becomes a child of the devil by imitating him, not by proper birth” [AUGUSTINE, *Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, Homily 4.10]. From the devil there is not generation, but corruption [BENGE].

sinneth from the beginning — from the time that any began to sin [ALFORD]: from the time that he became what he is, the devil. He seems to have kept his first estate only a very short time after his creation [BENGEL]. *Since the fall of man* [at the beginning of our world] *the devil is (ever) sinning* (this is the force of “sinneth”; he has sinned from the beginning, is the cause of all sins, and still goes on sinning; present). As the author of sin, and prince of this world, he has never ceased to seduce man to sin [LUECKE].

destroy — break up and do away with; bruising and crushing the serpent’s head.

works of the devil — sin, and all its awful consequences. John argues, Christians cannot do that which Christ came to destroy.

9. Whosoever is born of God — literally, “Everyone that is begotten of God.”

doth not commit sin — His higher nature, as one born or begotten of God, doth not sin. *To be begotten of God* and *to sin*, are states mutually excluding one another. In so far as one sins, he makes it doubtful whether he be *born of God*.

his seed — the living word of God, made by the Holy Spirit the seed in us of a new life and the continual mean of sanctification.

remaineth — abideth in him (compare *Note*, see on 1 John 3:6; ^{REB}John 5:38). This does not contradict 1 John 1:8,9; the regenerate show the utter incompatibility of *sin* with *regeneration*, by cleansing away every sin into which they may be betrayed by the old nature, at once in the blood of Christ.

cannot sin, because he is born of God — “because it is *of God* that *he is born*” (so the *Greek* order, as compared with the order of the same words in the beginning of the verse); not “because he *was* born of God” (the *Greek* is perfect tense, which is *present* in meaning, not aorist); it is not said, Because a man was once for all born of God he never afterwards can sin; but, Because he is born of God, the seed abiding now in Him, he cannot sin; so long as it energetically abides, sin can have no place. Compare Genesis 39:9, Joseph, “How CAN I do this great wickedness

and sin against God?" The principle within me is at utter variance with it. The regenerate life is incompatible with sin, and gives the believer a hatred for sin in every shape, and an unceasing desire to resist it. "The child of God in this conflict receives indeed wounds daily, but never throws away his arms or makes peace with his deadly foe" [LUTHER]. The exceptional sins into which the regenerate are surprised, are owing to the new life principle being for a time suffered to lie dormant, and to the sword of the Spirit not being drawn instantly. Sin is ever active, but no longer reigns. The *normal* direction of the believer's energies is against sin; the law of God after the inward man is the *ruling* principle of his true self though the old nature, not yet *fully* deadened, rebels and sins. Contrast ^{<618>}1 John 5:18 with ^{<618>}John 8:34; compare Psalm 18:22,23 32:2,3 119:113,176. The magnetic needle, the nature of which is always to point to the pole, is easily turned aside, but always reseeks the pole.

10. children of the devil — (See on 1 John 3:8; ^{<618>}Acts 13:10). There is no middle class between the children of God and the children of the devil.

doeth not righteousness — Contrast ^{<618>}1 John 2:29.

he that loveth not his brother — (1 John 4:8); a particular instance of that *love* which is the sum and fulfillment of all righteousness, and the token (not loud professions, or even seemingly good works) that distinguishes God's children from the devil's.

11. the message — "announcement," as of something good; not a mere *command*, as the law. The Gospel *message* of Him who loved us, announced by His servants, is, that we *love the brethren*; not here all mankind, but those who are our brethren in Christ, children of the same family of God, of whom we have been born anew.

12. *who* — not in the *Greek*.

of that wicked one — Translate, "*evil one*," to accord with "Because his own works were *evil*." Compare 1 John 3:8, "of the devil," in contrast to "of God," ^{<618>}1 John 3:10.

slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous — through envy and hatred of his brother's piety, owing to

which God accepted Abel's, but rejected Cain's offering. Enmity from the first existed between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent.

13. Marvel not — The marvel would be if the world loved you.

the world — of whom Cain is the representative (^{<GIRD>}1 John 3:12).

hate you — as Cain hated even his own brother, and that to the extent of murdering him. The world feels its bad works tacitly reproved by your good works.

14. We — emphatical; hated though we be by the world, *we* know what the world knows not.

know — as an assured fact.

passed — *changed our state.* ^{<SIB>}Colossians 1:13, “from the power of darkness ... translated into the kingdom of His dear Son.”

from death unto life — literally, “*out of the* death (which enthralled the unregenerate) *into the* life (of the regenerate).” A palpable coincidence of language and thought, the beloved disciple adopting his Lord's words.

because we love the brethren — the ground, not of our *passing over out of death into life*, but of our *knowing* that we have so. *Love*, on our part, is the *evidence* of our justification and regeneration, not the *cause* of them. “Let each go to his own heart; if he find there love to the brethren, let him feel assured that he has passed from death unto life. Let him not mind that his glory is only hidden; when the Lord shall come, then shall he appear in glory. For he has vital energy, but it is still wintertime; the root has vigor, but the branches are as it were dry; within there is marrow which is vigorous, within are leaves, within fruits, but they must wait for summer” [AUGUSTINE].

He that loveth not — Most of the oldest manuscripts omit “his brother,” which makes the statement more general.

abideth — still.

in death — “in *the* (spiritual) death” (ending in eternal death) which is the state of all by nature. His want of *love* evidences that no saving change has passed over him.

15. hateth — equivalent to “loveth not” (^{GRH}1 John 3:14); there is no medium between the two. “Love and hatred, like light and darkness, life and death, necessarily replace, as well as necessarily exclude, one another” [ALFORD].

is a murderer — because indulging in that passion, which, if followed out to its natural consequences, would make him one. “Whereas, ^{GRH}1 John 3:16 desires us to lay down our lives for the brethren; *duels* require one (awful to say!) to risk *his own* life, rather than not deprive *another* of life” [BENGEL]. God regards the inward disposition as tantamount to the outward act which would flow from it. Whomsoever one hates, one wishes to be dead.

hath — Such a one still “abideth in death.” It is not his *future* state, but his *present*, which is referred to. He who hates (that is, loveth not) his brother (^{GRH}1 John 3:14), cannot in this his present state have eternal life abiding in him.

16. What true *love to the brethren* is, illustrated by the love of Christ to us.

Hereby — *Greek*, “Herein.”

the love of *God* — The words “of God” are not in the original. Translate, “We arrive at the knowledge of love”; we apprehend what true love is.

he — Christ.

and we — on our part, if absolutely needed for the glory of God, the good of the Church, or the salvation of a brother.

lives — Christ alone laid down His one *life* for us all; we ought to lay down our *lives* severally for the lives of the brethren; if not actually, at least virtually, by giving our time, care, labors, prayers, substance: *Non nobis, sed omnibus*. Our life ought not to be dearer to us than God’s own Son was to Him. The apostles and martyrs acted on this principle.

17. this world’s good — literally, “livelihood” or substance. If we ought to lay down our *lives* for the brethren (^{GRH}1 John 3:16), how much more ought we not to withhold our *substance*?

seeth — not merely *casually*, but deliberately *contemplates* as a spectator; *Greek*, “beholds.”

shutteth up his bowels of compassion — which had been momentarily opened by the *spectacle* of his brother’s need. The “bowels” mean the *heart*, the seat of compassion.

how — *How* is it possible that “the love of (that is, ‘to’) God dwelleth (*Greek*, ‘abideth’) in him?” Our superfluities should yield to the necessities; our comforts, and even our necessities in some measure, should yield to the extreme wants of our brethren. “Faith gives Christ to me; love flowing from faith gives me to my neighbor.”

18. When the venerable John could no longer walk to the meetings of the Church but was borne thither by his disciples, he always uttered the same address to the Church; he reminded them of that one commandment which he had received from Christ Himself, as comprising all the rest, and forming the distinction of the new covenant, “My little children, love one another.” When the brethren present, wearied of hearing the same thing so often, asked why he always repeated the same thing, he replied, “Because it is the commandment of the Lord, and if this one thing be attained, it is enough” [JEROME].

in word — *Greek*, “with word ... with tongue, but in deed and truth.”

19. hereby — *Greek*, “herein”; in our *loving in deed and in truth* (^{GRS}1 John 3:18).

we know — The oldest manuscripts have “we shall know,” namely, if we fulfill the command (^{GRS}1 John 3:18).

of the truth — that we are real disciples of, and belonging to, *the truth*, as it is in Jesus: begotten of God with the word of truth. Having herein *the truth* radically, we shall be sure not to love merely *in word and tongue*. (^{GRS}1 John 3:18).

assure — literally, “persuade,” namely, so as to cease to condemn us; satisfy the questionings and doubts of our consciences as to whether we be accepted *before* God or not (compare ^{GRS}Matthew 28:14 ^{GRS}Acts 12:20, “*having made* Blastus their friend,” literally, “persuaded”). The “heart,” as

the seat of the feelings, is our inward *judge*; the *conscience*, as the witness, acts either as our justifying advocate, or our condemning accuser, before God even now. John 8:9, has “conscience,” but the passage is omitted in most old manuscripts. John nowhere else uses the term “conscience.” Peter and Paul alone use it.

before him — as in the sight of Him, the omniscient Searcher of *hearts*. *Assurance* is designed to be the ordinary experience and privilege of the believer.

20. LUTHER and BENGEL take this verse as consoling the believer whom his *heart condemns*; and who, therefore, like Peter, appeals from conscience to Him who is *greater than conscience*. “Lord, Thou *knowest all things*: thou knowest that I love Thee.” Peter’s conscience, though condemning him of his sin in denying the Lord, assured him of his *love*; but fearing the possibility, owing to his past fall, of deceiving himself, he appeals to the all-knowing God: so Paul, 1 Corinthians 4:3,4. So if we be believers, even if *our heart condemns us of sin in general*, yet having the one sign of sonship, love, we may still *assure our hearts* (some oldest manuscripts read *heart*, ^{GRB}1 John 3:19, as well as ^{GRB}1 John 3:20), as knowing *that God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things*. But thus the same *Greek* is translated “because” in the beginning, and “(we know) *that*” in the middle of the verse, and if the verse were consolatory, it probably would have been, “Because EVEN if our heart condemn us,” etc. Therefore translate, “*Because* (rendering the reason why it has been stated in ^{GRB}1 John 3:19 to be so important to ‘assure our hearts before Him’) if our heart condemn (*Greek*, ‘*know* [aught] *against* us’; answering by contrast to ‘we shall *know* that we are of the truth’) us (it is) *because* God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things.” If our heart judges us unfavorably, we may be sure that He, knowing more than our heart knows, judges us more unfavorably still [ALFORD]. A similar ellipsis (“it is”) occurs in ^{GRB}1 Corinthians 14:27 2 Corinthians 1:6 8:23. The condemning testimony of our conscience is not alone, but is the echo of the voice of Him who is greater and knoweth all things. Our hypocrisy in *loving by word and tongue*, not in *deed and truth*, does not escape even our conscience, though weak and knowing but little, how much less God who knows all things! Still the consolatory view may be the right one. For the *Greek* for “we shall *assure* our hearts” (see on ^{GRB}1 John 3:19), is *gain*

over, persuade so as to be stilled, implying that there was a previous state of *self-condemnation by the heart* (^{GR1}1 John 3:20), which, however, is *got over* by the consolatory thought, “God is greater than my heart” which condemns me, and “knows all things” (Greek “*ginoskei*,” “*knows*,” not “*kataginoskei*,” “*condemns*”), and therefore knows my *love* and desire to serve Him, and knows my *frame* so as to pity my weakness of faith. This *gaining over* the heart to peace is not so advanced a stage as the *having CONFIDENCE towards God* which flows from a *heart condemning us not*. The first “because” thus applies to the two alternate cases, ^{GR1}1 John 3:20,21 (giving the ground of saying, that *having love we shall gain over, or assure our minds before Him*, ^{GR9}1 John 3:19); the second “because” applies to the first alternate alone, namely, “if our heart condemn us.” When he reaches the second alternate, ^{GR1}1 John 3:21, he states it independently of the former “because” which had connected it with ^{GR9}1 John 3:19, inasmuch as *CONFIDENCE toward God* is a farther stage than *persuading our hearts*, though always preceded by it.

21. Beloved — There is no “But” contrasting the two cases, ^{GR1}1 John 3:20,21, because “Beloved” sufficiently marks the transition to the case of the brethren walking in the full confidence of *love* (^{GR8}1 John 3:18). The two results of our being able to “assure our hearts before Him” (^{GR9}1 John 3:19), and of “our heart condemning us not” (of insincerity as to *the truth* in general, and as to *LOVE* in particular) are,

(1) confidence toward God;

(2) a sure answer to our prayers. John does not mean that all whose hearts do not condemn them, are therefore safe before God; for some have their conscience seared, others are ignorant of the truth, and it is not only *sincerity*, but *sincerity in the truth* which can save men.

Christians are those meant here: knowing Christ’s precepts and testing themselves by them.

22. we receive — as a matter of fact, according to His promise. Believers, as such, ask only what is in accordance with God’s will; or if they ask what God wills not, they bow their will to God’s will, and so God grants them either their request, or something better than it.

because we keep his commandments — Compare Psalm 66:18 34:15 145:18,19. Not as though our merits earned a hearing for our prayers, but when we are believers in Christ, all our works of faith being the fruit of *His* Spirit in us, are “pleasing in God’s sight”; and our prayers being the voice of the same Spirit of God in us, naturally and necessarily are answered by Him.

23. Summing up of God’s commandments under the Gospel dispensation in one commandment.

this is his commandment — singular: for *faith* and *love* are not *separate* commandments, but are indissolubly united. We cannot truly *love* one another without *faith* in Christ, nor can we truly believe in Him without love.

believe — *once for all; Greek aorist.*

on the name of his Son — on all that is revealed in the Gospel concerning Him, and on Himself in respect to His person, offices, and atoning work.

as he — as *Jesus* gave us commandment.

24. dwelleth in him — The believer dwelleth in Christ.

and he in him — Christ in the believer. Reciprocity. “Thus he returns to the great keynote of the Epistle, *abide in Him*, with which the former part concluded” (¹²³1 John 2:28).

hereby — herein we (believers) know that he abideth in us, namely, from (the presence in us of) the Spirit “which He hath given us.” Thus he prepares, by the mention of the true Spirit, for the transition to the false “spirit,” 1 John 4:1-6; after which he returns again to the subject of *love*.

CHAPTER 4

1 JOHN 4:1-21.

TESTS OF FALSE PROPHETS. LOVE, THE TEST OF BIRTH FROM GOD, AND THE NECESSARY FRUIT OF KNOWING HIS GREAT LOVE IN CHRIST TO US.

1. Beloved — the affectionate address wherewith he calls their attention, as to an important subject.

every spirit — which presents itself in the person of a prophet. The Spirit of truth, and the spirit of error, speak by men's spirits as their organs. There is but one Spirit of truth, and one spirit of Antichrist.

try — by the tests (1 John 4:2,3). All believers are to do so: not merely ecclesiastics. Even an angel's message should be tested by the word of God: much more men's teachings, however holy the teachers may seem.

because, etc. — the reason why we must “try,” or *test* the spirits.

many false prophets — not “prophets” in the sense “foretellers,” but organs of the spirit that inspires them, *teaching* accordingly either truth or error: “many Antichrists.”

are gone out — as if from God.

into the world — said alike of good and bad prophets (2 John 1:7). The world is easily seduced (1 John 4:4,5).

2. Hereby — “Herein.”

know ... the Spirit of God — whether he be, or not, in those teachers professing to be moved by Him.

Every spirit — that is, *Every teacher* claiming inspiration by the HOLY SPIRIT.

confesseth — The truth is taken for granted as established. Man is required to *confess* it, that is, in his teaching to profess it openly.

Jesus Christ is come in the flesh — a twofold truth confessed, that *Jesus* is the *Christ*, and that *He is come* (the *Greek* perfect tense implies not a mere past historical fact, as the aorist would, but also the *present continuance* of the fact and its blessed effects) *in the flesh* (“clothed with flesh”: not with a mere *seeming* humanity, as the Docetae afterwards taught: He therefore was, previously, something far above flesh). His *flesh* implies His *death* for us, for only by assuming flesh could He die (for as God He could not), Hebrews 2:9,10,14,16; and His death implies His LOVE for us (⁴⁶¹³John 15:13). To deny the reality of *His flesh* is to deny His love, and so cast away the root which produces all true love on the believer’s part (1 John 4:9-11,19). Rome, by the doctrine of the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary, denies Christ’s proper humanity.

3. confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh — IRENAEUS [3.8], LUCIFER, ORIGEN, on ⁴¹⁵⁴Matthew 25:14, and *Vulgate* read, “Every spirit which *destroys* (*sets aside, or does away with*) Jesus (Christ).” CYPRIAN and POLYCARP support *English Version* text. The oldest extant manuscripts, which are, however, centuries after POLYCARP, read, “Every spirit that confesseth not (that is, refuses to confess) Jesus” (in His person, and all His offices and divinity), omitting “is come in the flesh.”

ye have heard — from your Christian teachers.

already is it in the world — in the person of *the false prophets* (1 John 4:1).

4. Ye — emphatical: YE who confess Jesus: in contrast to “them,” the false teachers.

overcome them — (1 John 5:4,5); instead of being “overcome and brought into (spiritual) bondage” by them (⁴¹²⁹2 Peter 2:19). John 10:8,5, “the sheep did *not hear them*”: “a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.”

he that is in you — *God*, of whom ye are.

he that is in the word — the spirit of Antichrist, the devil, “the prince of this world.”

5. of the world — They derive their spirit and teaching from the world, “unregenerate human nature, ruled over and possessed by Satan, the prince of this world” [ALFORD].

speak they of the word — They draw the matter of their conversation from the life, opinions, and feelings of the world.

the world heareth them — (^{<6158>}John 15:18,19). *The world loves its own.*

6. We — *true teachers* of Christ: in contrast to *them*.

are of God — and therefore *speak of God*: in contrast to “speak they of the world,” 1 John 4:5.

knoweth God — as his Father, being a child “*of God*” (^{<6123>}1 John 2:13,14).

heareth us — Compare ^{<6157>}John 18:37, “Every one that is of the truth, heareth My voice.”

Hereby — (1 John 4:2-6); by their confessing, or not confessing, Jesus; by the kind of reception given them respectively by those who know God, and by those who are of the world and not of God.

spirit of truth — *the Spirit* which comes from God and teaches *truth*.

spirit of error — *the spirit* which comes from Satan and seduces into *error*.

7. Resumption of the main theme (^{<6129>}1 John 2:29). *Love*, the sum of *righteousness*, is the test of our being *born of God*. Love flows from a sense of God’s love to us: compare 1 John 4:9 with ^{<6136>}1 John 3:16, which 1 John 4:9 resumes; and ^{<6143>}1 John 4:13 with ^{<6124>}1 John 3:24, which similarly ^{<6143>}1 John 4:13 resumes. At the same time, 1 John 4:7-21 is connected with the immediately preceding context, 1 John 4:2 setting forth *Christ’s incarnation, the great proof of God’s love* (^{<6140>}1 John 4:10).

Beloved — an address appropriate to his subject, “love.”

love — *All love is from God* as its fountain: especially that embodiment of love, God manifest in the flesh. The *Father* also is *love* (1 John 4:8). The *Holy Ghost* sheds *love* as its first *fruit* abroad in the heart.

knoweth God — spiritually, experimentally, and habitually.

8. knoweth not — *Greek* aorist: not only *knoweth* not now, but never *knew*, *has not once for all known* God.

God is love — There is no *Greek* article to *love*, but to *God*; therefore we cannot translate, *Love is God*. God is fundamentally and essentially LOVE: not merely *is loving*, for then John's argument would not stand; for the conclusion from the premises then would be this, *This man is not loving: God is loving; therefore he knoweth not God IN SO FAR AS GOD IS LOVING*; still he might know Him in His *other* attributes. But when we take love as God's essence, the argument is sound: *This man doth not love, and therefore knows not love: God is essentially love, therefore he knows not God*.

9. toward us — *Greek*, "in our case."

sent — *Greek*, "*hath sent*."

into the world — a proof against Socinians, that the Son existed before He was "sent into the world." Otherwise, too, He could not have been our *life* (1 John 4:9), our "*propitiation*" (1 John 4:10), or our "*Savior*" (1 John 4:14). It is the grand *proof* of God's love, His having sent "*His only-begotten Son, that we might live through Him*," who is *the Life*, and who has redeemed our forfeited life; and it is also the grand *motive* to our mutual love.

10. Herein is love — *love* in the abstract: *love*, in its highest ideal, is herein. The love was all on God's side, none on ours.

not that we loved God — though so altogether worthy of love.

he loved us — though so altogether unworthy of love. The *Greek* aorist expresses, Not that we *did* any act of love *at any time* to God, but that He *did* the act of love to us in sending Christ.

11. God's love to us is the grand motive for our love to one another (^{<G1861}1 John 3:16).

if — as we all admit as a fact.

we ... also — as being *born of God*, and therefore resembling our Father who is love. In proportion as we appreciate God's love to us, we love Him and also *the brethren*, the children (by regeneration) of the same God, the representatives of the unseen God.

12. *God, whom no man hath seen at any time, hath appointed His children as the visible recipients of our outward kindness which flows from love to Himself, "whom not having seen, we love," compare Notes, ^{<G1861}1 John 4:11, ^{<G1869}1 John 4:19,20. Thus ^{<G1862}1 John 4:12 explains why, instead (in ^{<G1861}1 John 4:11) of saying, "If God so loved us, we ought also to love *God*," he said, "We ought also to love *one another*."*

If we love one another, God dwelleth in us — for God is love; and it must have been from Him dwelling in us that we drew the real love we bear to the brethren (1 John 4:8,16). John discusses this in ^{<G1863}1 John 4:13-16.

his love — rather, "the love of Him," that is, "to Him" (1 John 2:5), evinced by our love to His representatives, our brethren.

is perfected in us — John discusses this in ^{<G1867}1 John 4:17-19. Compare 1 John 2:5, "is perfected," that is, attains its proper maturity.

13. Hereby — "Herein." The token vouchsafed to us of God's dwelling (*Greek*, "abide") in us, though we see Him not, is this, that He hath given us "of His Spirit" (^{<G1868}1 John 3:24). Where the Spirit of God is, there God is. ONE Spirit dwells in the Church: each believer receives a measure "of" that Spirit in the proportion God thinks fit. *Love* is His first-fruit (^{<G1862}Galatians 5:22). In Jesus alone the Spirit dwelt without measure (^{<G1868}John 3:34).

14. And we — primarily, *we apostles*, Christ's appointed eye-witnesses to testify to the facts concerning Him. The internal evidence of the indwelling Spirit (^{<G1863}1 John 4:13) is corroborated by the external evidence of the eye-witnesses to the fact of the Father having "sent His Son to be the Savior of the world."

seen — *Greek*, “contemplated,” “attentively beheld” (see on 1 John 1:1).

sent — *Greek*, “*hath sent*”: not an entirely past fact (aorist), but one of which the effects continue (perfect tense).

15. shall confess — once for all: so the *Greek* aorist means.

that Jesus is the Son of God — and therefore “the Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14).

16. And we — *John and his readers* (not as 1 John 4:14, *the apostles* only).

known and believed — True *faith*, according to John, is a faith of *knowledge* and experience: true *knowledge* is a knowledge of *faith* [LUECKE].

to us — *Greek*, “in our case” (see on 1 John 4:9).

dwelleth — *Greek*, “abideth.” Compare with this verse, 1 John 4:7.

17, 18. (Compare 1 John 3:19-21.)

our love — rather as the *Greek*, “LOVE (in the abstract, the principle of love [ALFORD]) is made perfect (in its relations) *with us*.” Love dwelling in us advances to its consummation “*with us*” that is, as it is concerned *with us*: so *Greek*. Luke 1:58, “showed mercy upon (literally, ‘with’) her”: 2 John 1:2, the truth “shall be *with us* for ever.”

boldness — “confidence”: the same *Greek* as 1 John 3:21, to which this passage is parallel. The opposite of “fear,” 1 John 4:18. *Herein* is our love perfected, namely, *in God dwelling in us, and our dwelling in God* (1 John 4:16), involving as its *result* “that we can have confidence (or *boldness*) in the day of judgment” (so terrible to all other men, Acts 24:25 Romans 2:16).

because, etc. — The ground of our “confidence” is, “*because* even as He (Christ) is, we also are in this world” (and He will not, in that day, condemn those who are *like Himself*), that is, we are *righteous* as He is righteous, especially in respect to that which is the sum of righteousness, *love* (1 John 3:14). Christ IS righteous, and *love* itself, in heaven: so are we, His members, who are still “in this world.” Our oneness with Him

even *now* in His exalted position above (Ephesians 2:6), so that all that belongs to Him of righteousness, etc., belongs to us also by perfect imputation and progressive impartation, is the ground of our *love* being *perfected so that we can have confidence in the day of judgment*. We are *in*, not *of*, this world.

18. *Fear* has no place in *love*. *Bold confidence* (^{<G117>}1 John 4:17), based on *love*, cannot coexist with *fear*. *Love*, which, when *perfected*, gives *bold confidence*, *casts out fear* (compare ^{<S121>}Hebrews 2:14,15). The design of Christ's propitiatory death was to *deliver* from this *bondage of fear*.

but — “nay” [ALFORD].

fear hath torment — *Greek*, “punishment.” Fear is always revolving in the mind the punishment deserved [ESTIUS]. Fear, by anticipating punishment (through consciousness of deserving it), has it even now, that is, the foretaste of it. *Perfect love* is incompatible with such a self-punishing *fear*. *Godly fear* of offending God is quite distinct from slavish fear of consciously deserved punishment. The latter *fear* is natural to us all until *love casts it out*. “Men's states vary: one is without fear and love; another, with fear without love; another, with fear and love; another, without fear with love” [BENGEL].

19. him — omitted in the oldest manuscripts. Translate, *We* (emphatical: WE on our part) *love* (in general: love alike *Him*, and *the brethren*, and *our fellow men*), because He (emphatical: answering to “we”; *because it was He who*) first loved us in sending His Son (*Greek* aorist of a definite act at a point of time). He was the first to love us: this thought ought to create in us *love casting out fear* (^{<G118>}1 John 4:18).

20. loveth not ... brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen — It is easier for us, influenced as we are here by sense, to direct love towards one within the range of our senses than towards One unseen, appreciable only by faith. “Nature is prior to grace; and we by nature love things seen, before we love things unseen” [ESTIUS]. *The eyes are our leaders in love*. “Seeing is an incentive to love” [AECUMENIUS]. If we do not love *the brethren*, the visible representatives of *God*, how can we love God, the invisible One, *whose children they are*? The true ideal of man, lost in Adam, is realized in Christ, in whom God is

revealed as He is, and man as he ought to be. Thus, by faith in Christ, we learn to love both the true God, and the true man, and so to love the brethren as bearing His image.

hath seen — and continually sees.

21. Besides the argument (^{<404>}1 John 4:20) from the common feeling of men, he here adds a stronger one from God's express *commandment* (^{<423>}Matthew 22:39). He who loves, will do what the object of his love wishes.

he who loveth God — he who wishes to be regarded by God as loving Him.

CHAPTER 5

1 JOHN 5:1-21.

WHO ARE THE BRETHERN ESPECIALLY TO BE LOVED (1 JOHN 4:21); OBEDIENCE, THE TEST OF LOVE, EASY THROUGH FAITH, WHICH OVERCOMES THE WORLD. LAST PORTION OF THE EPISTLE. THE SPIRIT'S WITNESS TO THE BELIEVER'S SPIRITUAL LIFE. TRUTHS REPEATED AT THE CLOSE: FAREWELL WARNING.

1. Reason why our “brother” (1 John 4:21) is entitled to such *love*, namely, because he is “born (begotten) of God”: so that if we want to show our love to *God*, we must show it to God’s visible representative.

Whosoever — *Greek*, “Everyone that.” He could not be our “Jesus” (God-Savior) unless He were “the Christ”; for He could not reveal the way of salvation, except He were a *prophet*: He could not work out that salvation, except He were a *priest*: He could not confer that salvation upon us, except He were a *king*: He could not be *prophet*, *priest*, and *king*, except He were the Christ [PEARSON, *Exposition of the Creed*].

born — Translate, “begotten,” as in the latter part of the verse, the *Greek* being the same. Christ is the “only-begotten Son” by *generation*; we become begotten sons of God by *regeneration* and adoption.

every one that loveth him that begat — sincerely, not in mere profession (1 John 4:20).

loveth him also that is begotten of him — namely, “his brethren” (1 John 4:21).

2. **By** — *Greek*, “In.” As our *love to the brethren* is the sign and test of our *love to God*, so (John here says) our *love to God* (tested by our “keeping his commandments”) is, conversely, the ground and only true basis of *love to our brother*.

we know — John means here, not the *outward* criteria of genuine brotherly love, but the *inward spiritual* criteria of it, *consciousness of love to God* manifested in a hearty keeping of His commandments. When we have this inwardly and outwardly confirmed *love to God*, we can *know* assuredly that we truly *love the children of God*. “*Love to one’s brother* is prior, according to the order of nature (see on ¹1 John 4:20); *love to God* is so, according to the order of grace (1 John 5:2). At one time the former is more immediately known, at another time the latter, according as the mind is more engaged in human relations or in what concerns the divine honor” [ESTIUS]. John shows what true *love* is, namely, that which is referred to God as its first object. As previously John urged the effect, so now he urges the cause. For he wishes mutual love to be so cultivated among us, as that *God* should always be placed first [CALVIN].

3. this is — the *love* of God consists in this.

not grievous — as so many think them. It is “the way of the transgressor” that “is hard.” What makes them to the regenerate “not grievous,” is *faith* which “overcometh the world” (1 John 5:4); in proportion as faith is strong, the grievousness of God’s commandments to the rebellious flesh is overcome. The reason why believers feel any degree of irksomeness in God’s commandments is, they do not realize fully by faith the privileges of their spiritual life.

4. For — (See on 1 John 5:3). The reason why “His commandments are not grievous.” Though there is a conflict in keeping them, the sue for the whole body of the regenerate is victory over every opposing influence; meanwhile there is a present *joy* to each believer in keeping them which makes them “not grievous.”

whatsoever — *Greek*, “all that is begotten of God.” The neuter expresses *the universal whole*, or *aggregate of the regenerate*, regarded as one collective body John 3:6 6:37,39, “where BENGEL remarks, that in Jesus’ discourses, what the Father has given Him is called, in the singular number and neuter gender, *all whatsoever*; those who come to the *Son* are described in the masculine gender and plural number, *they all*, or singular, *every one*. The Father has given, as it were, the whole mass to the Son, that all whom He gave may be *one whole*: that *universal whole* the Son singly evolves, in the execution of the divine plan.”

overcometh — habitually.

the world — all that is opposed to keeping the commandments of God, or draws us off from God, in this world, including our corrupt *flesh*, on which the world's blandishments or threats act, as also including Satan, *the prince of this world* (^{<B23>}John 12:31 14:30 16:11).

this is the victory that overcometh — Greek aorist, "... that hath (already) overcome the world": the *victory* (where *faith* is) hereby is implied as having been *already obtained* (^{<B23>}1 John 2:13 4:4).

5. Who — "Who" *else* "but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God:" "the Christ" (1 John 5:1)? Confirming, by a triumphant question defying all contradiction, as an undeniable fact, 1 John 5:4, that *the victory* which overcomes the world is *faith*. For it is by *believing*: that we are made one with *Jesus the Son of God*, so that we partake of *His victory over the world*, and have dwelling in us One greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4). "Survey the whole world, and show me even one of whom it can be affirmed with truth that he overcomes the world, who is not a Christian, and endowed with this faith" [EPISCOPIUS in ALFORD].

6. This — the Person mentioned in 1 John 5:5. This *Jesus*.

he that came by water and blood — "by water," when His ministry was inaugurated by baptism in the Jordan, and He received the Father's testimony to His Messiahship and divine *Sonship*. Compare 1 John 5:5, "believeth that Jesus is the *Son of God*," with ^{<B13>}John 1:33,34, "The Spirit ... remaining on Him ... I saw and bare record that this is *the Son of God*"; and 1 John 5:8, below, "there are three that bear *witness* in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood." Corresponding to this is *the baptism of water and the Spirit* which He has instituted as a standing seal and mean of initiatory incorporation with Him.

and blood — He came by "the blood of His cross" (so "by" is used, ^{<B22>}Hebrews 9:12: "by," that is, *with*, "His own blood He entered in once into the holy place"): a fact *seen* and so solemnly *witnessed* to by John. "These two past facts in the Lord's life are this abiding *testimony* to us, by virtue of the permanent application to us of their cleansing and atoning power."

Jesus Christ — not a mere appellation, but a solemn assertion of the Lord's Person and Messiahship.

not by, etc. — *Greek*, “not IN *the* water only, but IN *the* water and IN (so oldest manuscripts add) *the* blood.” As “*by*” implies the mean *through*, or *with*, which He came: so “*in*,” the element *in* which He came. “The” implies that *the water* and *the blood* were sacred and well-known symbols. John Baptist came only baptizing with water, and therefore was not the *Messiah*. Jesus came first to undergo Himself the double baptism of water and blood, and then to baptize us with the Spirit-cleansing, of which *water* is the sacramental seal, and with His atoning *blood*, the efficacy of which, once for all shed, is perpetual in the Church; and therefore is *the Messiah*. It was His shed *blood* which first gave *water baptism* its spiritual significancy. We are baptized *into His death*: the grand point of union between us and Him, and, through Him, between us and God.

it is the Spirit, etc. — *The Holy Spirit* is an additional witness (compare 1 John 5:7), besides the *water* and the *blood*, to Jesus' *Sonship* and *Messiahship*. The Spirit attested these truths at Jesus' baptism by descending on Him, and throughout His ministry by enabling Him to speak and do what man never before or since has spoken or, done; and “it is the Spirit that beareth witness” of Christ, now permanently in the Church: both in the inspired New Testament Scriptures, and in the hearts of believers, and in the spiritual reception of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

because the Spirit is truth — It is His essential *truth* which gives His witness such infallible authority.

7. three — Two or three witnesses were required by law to constitute adequate testimony. The only *Greek* manuscripts *in any form* which support the words, “in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one; and there are three that bear witness in earth,” are the *Montfortianus* of Dublin, copied evidently from the *modern Latin Vulgate*; the *Ravianus*, copied from the *Complutensian Polyglot*; a manuscript at Naples, with the words added in the *Margin* by a recent hand; *Ottobonianus*, 298, of the fifteenth century, the *Greek* of which is a mere translation of the accompanying *Latin*. All the old versions omit the words. The oldest manuscripts of the *Vulgate* omit them: the earliest *Vulgate* manuscript which has them being *Wizanburgensis*, 99, of the

eighth century. A scholium quoted in *Matthaei*, shows that the words did not arise from fraud; for in the words, in all *Greek* manuscripts “there are *three* that bear record,” as the Scholiast notices, the word “three” is *masculine*, because the three things (*the Spirit, the water, and the blood*) are SYMBOLS OF THE TRINITY. To this CYPRIAN, 196, also refers, “Of the *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, it is written, ‘*And these three are one*’ (a unity).” There must be some mystical truth implied in using “*three*” (*Greek*) in the *masculine*, though the antecedents, “Spirit, water, and blood,” are *neuter*. That THE TRINITY was the truth meant is a natural inference: the triad specified pointing to a still Higher Trinity; as is plain also from 1 John 5:9, “the witness of GOD,” referring to the *Trinity* alluded to in the Spirit, water, and blood. It was therefore first written as a *marginal* comment to complete the sense of the *text*, and then, as early at least as the eighth century, was introduced into the text of the *Latin Vulgate*. The testimony, however, could only be borne *on earth* to men, not in *heaven*. The marginal comment, therefore, that inserted “in heaven,” was inappropriate. It is *on earth* that the context evidently requires the witness of the three, *the Spirit, the water, and the blood*, to be borne: mystically setting forth the divine *triune* witnesses, the Father, the Spirit, and the Son. LUECKE notices as internal evidence against the words, John never uses “the Father” and “the Word” as correlates, but, like other New Testament writers, associates “the Son” with “the Father,” and always refers “the Word” to “God” as its correlate, not “the Father.” Vigilius, at the end of the fifth century, is the first who quotes the disputed words as in the text; but no *Greek* manuscript earlier than the fifteenth is extant with them. The *term* “Trinity” occurs first in the third century in TERTULLIAN [*Against Praxeas*, 3].

8. agree in one — “tend unto one result”; their agreeing testimony to Jesus’ Sonship and Messiahship they give by the sacramental grace in the *water* of baptism, received by the penitent believer, by the atoning efficacy of His *blood*, and by the internal witness of His *Spirit* (^{GEN}1 John 5:10): answering to the testimony given to *Jesus’ Sonship and Messiahship* by His baptism, His crucifixion, and the Spirit’s manifestations in Him (see on 1 John 5:6). It was by His *coming by water* (that is, His baptism in Jordan) that Jesus was solemnly inaugurated in office, and revealed Himself as Messiah; this must have been peculiarly important in John’s

estimation, who was first led to Christ by the testimony of the Baptist. By the baptism then received by Christ, and by His redeeming *blood*-shedding, and by that which the Spirit of God, whose witness is infallible, has effected, and still effects, by Him, the *Spirit*, the *water*, and the *blood*, unite, as the threefold witness, to verify His divine Messiahship [NEANDER].

9. If, etc. — We do *accept* (and rightly so) the witness of veracious men, fallible though they be; much more ought we to accept *the* infallible witness of God (the Father). “The testimony of the Father is, as it were, the basis of the testimony of the Word and of the Holy Spirit; just as the testimony of *the Spirit* is, as it were, the basis of the testimony of *the water* and the *blood*” [BENGEL].

for — This principle applies in the present case, FOR

which — in the oldest manuscripts, “*because* He hath given testimony concerning His Son.” What that testimony is we find above in 1 John 5:1,5, “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God”; and below in ^{and}1 John 5:10,11.

10. hath the witness — of God, by His *Spirit* (1 John 5:8).

in himself — God’s Spirit dwelling in him and *witnessing* that “Jesus is the Lord,” “the Christ,” and “the Son of God” (1 John 5:1,5). The witness of the Spirit *in* the believer *himself* to his own sonship is not here expressed, but follows as a consequence of believing the witness of God to Jesus’ divine Sonship.

believeth not God — credits not His *witness*.

made him a liar — a consequence which many who virtually, or even avowedly, do not believe, may well startle back from as fearful blasphemy and presumption (^{and}1 John 1:10).

believeth not the record — *Greek*, “believeth not IN the record, or *witness*.” Refusal to *credit* God’s testimony (“believeth not God”) is involved in refusal *to believe* IN (to rest one’s trust in) Jesus Christ, the object of God’s *record* or *testimony*. “Divine “faith” is an assent unto something as credible upon the testimony of God. This is the highest kind

of *faith*; because the object hath the highest credibility, because grounded upon the testimony of God, which is infallible” [PEARSON, *Exposition of the Creed*]. “The authority on which we believe is divine; the doctrine which we follow is divine” [LEO].

gave — *Greek*, “hath testified, and now testifies.”

of — concerning.

11. hath given — *Greek*, aorist: “gave” once for all. Not only “*promised*” it.

life is in his Son — essentially (John 1:4 11:25 14:6); bodily (Colossians 2:9); operatively (⁵¹⁰² Timothy 1:10) [LANGE in ALFORD]. It is in the second Adam, the Son of God, that this *life* is secured to us, which, if left to depend on us, we should lose, like the first Adam.

12. the Son ... life — *Greek*, “THE life.” BENGEL remarks, The verse has two clauses: in the former the Son is mentioned without the addition “of God,” for believers know *the Son*: in the second clause the addition “of God” is made, that unbelievers may know thereby what a serious thing it is not to have Him. In the former clause “has” bears the emphasis; in the second, *life*. To *have the Son* is to be able to say as the bride, “I am my Beloved’s, and *my Beloved is mine*” [So 6:3]. *Faith* is the mean whereby the regenerate HAVE Christ as a *present* possession, and in having Him *have life* in its germ and reality now, and shall have life in its fully developed manifestation hereafter. *Eternal life* here is:

(1) *initial*, and is an earnest of that which is to follow; in the intermediate state

(2) *partial*, belonging but to a part of a man, though that is his nobler part, the soul separated from the body; at and after the resurrection

(3) *perfectional*. This life is not only natural, consisting of the union of the soul and the body (as that of the reprobate in eternal pain, which ought to be termed *death* eternal, not *life*), but also spiritual, the union of the soul to God, and supremely blessed for ever (for *life* is another term for *happiness*) [PEARSON, *Exposition of the Creed*].

13. The oldest manuscripts and versions read, “These things have I written unto you [omitting ‘*that believe on the name of the Son of God*’] that ye may know that ye have eternal life (compare ^{<G1B1>}1 John 5:11), THOSE (of you I mean) WHO believe (not as *English Version* reads, ‘*and that ye may believe*’) on the name of the Son of God.” *English Version*, in the latter clause, will mean, “that ye may *continue* to believe,” etc. (compare ^{<G1B2>}1 John 5:12).

These things — This Epistle. He, towards the close of his Gospel (^{<G1B3>}John 20:30,31), wrote similarly, stating his purpose in having written. In 1 John 1:4 he states the object of his writing this Epistle to be, “that your joy may be full.” To “*know that we have eternal life*” is the sure way to “joy in God.”

14. the confidence — *boldness* (^{<G1H7>}1 John 4:17) in prayer, which results from *knowing that we have eternal life* (^{<G1B3>}1 John 5:13 ^{<G1B9>}1 John 3:19,22).

according to his will — which is the believer’s will, and which is therefore no restraint to his prayers. In so far as God’s will is not our will, we are not abiding in faith, and our prayers are not accepted. ALFORD well says, If we *knew* God’s will thoroughly, and *submitted* to it heartily, it would be impossible for us to ask anything for the spirit or for the body which He should not perform; it is this ideal state which the apostle has in view. It is the *Spirit* who teaches us inwardly, and Himself in us asks according to the will of God.

15. hear — *Greek*, “that He *heareth* us.”

we have the petitions that we desired of him — *We have*, as present possessions, everything *whatsoever we desired (asked) from Him*. Not one of our *past* prayers offered in faith, *according to His will*, is lost. Like Hannah, we can rejoice over them as granted even before the event; and can recognize the event when it comes to pass, as not from chance, but obtained by our past prayers. Compare also Jehoshaphat’s believing confidence in the issue of his prayers, so much so that he appointed singers to praise the Lord beforehand.

16. If any ... see — on any particular occasion; *Greek* aorist.

his brother — a fellow Christian.

sin a sin — in the act of sinning, and continuing in the sin: present.

not unto death — provided that it is *not unto death*.

he shall give — The *asker* shall be the means, by his intercessory prayer, of *God giving* life to the sinning brother. Kindly reproof ought to accompany his intercessions. *Life* was in process of being forfeited by the sinning brother when the believer's intercession obtained its restoration.

for them — resuming the proviso put forth in the beginning of the verse. "Provided that the sin is not unto death." "Shall give life," I say, *to*, that is, obtain life "*for* (in the case of) them that sin not unto death."

I do not say that he shall pray for it — The *Greek* for "pray" means a REQUEST as of one on an equality, or at least on terms of familiarity, with him from whom the favor is sought. "The Christian intercessor for his brethren, John declares, shall not assume the authority which would be implied in making request for a sinner who has sinned the sin unto death (⁴⁰⁵⁵1 Samuel 15:35 16:1 ⁴⁰²⁹Mark 3:29), that it might be forgiven him" [TRENCH, *Greek Synonyms of the New Testament*]. Compare ⁴⁰³⁹Deuteronomy 3:26. *Greek* "ask" implies the humble petition of an inferior; so that our Lord never uses it, but always uses (*Greek*) "request." Martha, from ignorance, once uses "ask" in His case (⁴⁰¹²John 11:22). "Asking" for a brother sinning not unto death, is a humble petition in consonance with God's will. To "request" for a sin unto death [*intercede, as it were, authoritatively for it*, as though we were more merciful than God] would savor of presumption; prescribing to God in a matter which lies out of the bounds of our brotherly yearning (because one sinning unto death would thereby be demonstrated not to be, nor ever to have been, truly a brother, ⁴⁰¹⁹1 John 2:19), how He shall inflict and withhold His righteous judgments. Jesus Himself intercedes, not for the world which hardens itself in unbelief, but for those given to Him out of the world.

17. "Every unrighteousness (even that of believers, compare 1 John 1:9 3:4. Every coming short of *right*) is sin"; (but) not every sin is the sin unto death.

and there is a sin not unto death — in the case of which, therefore, believers may intercede. *Death* and *life* stand in correlative opposition (⁴⁰¹¹1

John 5:11-13). *The sin unto death* must be one tending “towards” (so the *Greek*), and so resulting in, *death*. ALFORD makes it to be an appreciable ACT of sin, namely, *the denying Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God* (in contrast to confess this truth, 1 John 5:1,5), ^{<G156>}1 John 2:19,22 4:2,3 5:10. Such wilful deniers of Christ are not to be received into one’s house, or wished “God speed.” Still, I think with BENGEL, not merely the *act*, but also the *state* of apostasy accompanying the *act*, is included — a “state of soul in which faith, love, and hope, in short, the new life, is extinguished. The chief commandment is *faith* and *love*. Therefore, the chief sin is that by which faith and love are destroyed. In the former case is *life*; in the latter, *death*. As long as it is not evident (see on ^{<G156>}1 John 5:16, on ‘see’) that it is a sin unto death, it is lawful to pray. But when it is deliberate rejection of grace, and the man puts from him life thereby, how can others procure for him life?” Contrast ^{<G154>}James 5:14-18. Compare ^{<G123>}Matthew 12:31,32 as to the wilful rejection of Christ, and resistance to the Holy Ghost’s plain testimony to Him as the divine Messiah. Jesus, on the cross, pleaded only for those who KNEW NOT *what they were doing* in crucifying Him, not for those wilfully resisting grace and knowledge. If we *pray* for the impenitent, it must be with humble reference of the matter to God’s will, not with the intercessory *request* which we should offer for a *brother* when erring.

18. (1 John 3:9.)

We know — Thrice repeated emphatically, to enforce the three truths which the words preface, as matters of the brethren’s joint experimental knowledge. This ^{<G158>}1 John 5:18 warns against abusing ^{<G156>}1 John 5:16,17, as warranting carnal security.

whosoever — *Greek*, “every one who.” Not only advanced believers, but *every one* who is born again, “sinneth not.”

he that is begotten — *Greek* aorist, “has been (once for all in *past* time) begotten of God”; in the beginning of the verse it is perfect. “Is begotten,” or “born,” as a *continuing* state.

keepeth himself — The *Vulgate* translates, “The having been begotten of God keepeth HIM” (so one of the oldest manuscripts reads): so ALFORD. Literally, “He having been begotten of God (nominative pendent), *it* (the

divine generation implied in the nominative) keepeth him.” So 1 John 3:9, “His seed remaineth in him.” Still, in *English Version* reading, God’s working by His Spirit inwardly, and man’s working under the power of that Spirit as a responsible agent, is what often occurs elsewhere. That *God* must *keep* us, if we are to *keep ourselves* from evil, is certain. Compare ^{<675>}John 17:15 especially with this verse.

that wicked one toucheth him not — so as to hurt him. In so far as he realizes his regeneration-life, the prince of this world *hath nothing in him* to fasten his deadly temptations on, as in Christ’s own case. His divine regeneration has severed once for all his connection with the prince of this world.

19. world lieth in wickedness — rather, “lieth in *the wicked one*,” as the *Greek* is translated in ^{<675>}1 John 5:18 ^{<673>}1 John 2:13,14; compare 1 John 4:4 ^{<674>}John 17:14,15. The world *lieth* in the power of, and abiding in, the wicked one, as the resting-place and lord of his slaves; compare “abideth in death,” ^{<674>}1 John 3:14; contrast ^{<673>}1 John 5:20, “we are in Him that is true.” While the believer has been delivered out of his power, the whole world *lieth* helpless and motionless still in it, just as it was; including the wise, great, respectable, and all who are not by vital union in Christ.

20. Summary of our Christian privileges.

is come — *is present, having come*. “HE IS HERE — all is full of Him — His incarnation, work, and abiding presence, is to us a living fact” [ALFORD].

given us an understanding — Christ’s, office is to give the inner spiritual understanding to discern the things of God.

that we may know — Some oldest manuscripts read, “(so) that *we know*.”

him that is true — God, as opposed to every kind of *idol* or false god (^{<673>}1 John 5:21). Jesus, by virtue of His oneness with God, is also “He that is true” (Revelation 3:7).

even — “we are in the true” God, *by virtue of being* “in His Son Jesus Christ.”

This is the true God — “*This* Jesus Christ (the last-named Person) is the true God” (identifying Him thus with the Father in His attribute, “the only true God,” John 17:3, primarily attributed to the Father).

and eternal life — predicated of the Son of God; ALFORD wrongly says, He was *the life*, but not *eternal life*. The Father is indeed *eternal life* as its source, but the Son also is that *eternal life manifested*, as the very passage (1 John 1:2) which ALFORD quotes, proves against him. Compare also ^{ALF1}1 John 5:11,13. Plainly it is as the *Mediator of ETERNAL LIFE to us* that Christ is here contemplated. The *Greek* is, “The true God and eternal life is this” Jesus Christ, that is, In believing in Him we believe in the true God, and have eternal life. The Son is called “He that is TRUE,” Revelation 3:7, as here. This naturally prepares the way for warning against *false* gods (^{ALF1}1 John 5:21). Jesus Christ is the only “express image of God’s person” which is sanctioned, the only true visible manifestation of God. All other representations of God are forbidden as *idols*. Thus the Epistle closes as it began (1 John 1:1,2).

21. Affectionate parting caution.

from idols — Christians were then everywhere surrounded by *idolaters*, with whom it was impossible to avoid intercourse. Hence the need of being on their guard against any even indirect compromise or act of communion with idolatry. Some at Pergamos, in the region whence John wrote, fell into the snare of eating things sacrificed to idols. The moment we cease to abide “in Him that is true (by abiding) in Jesus Christ,” we become part of “the world that lieth in the wicked one,” given up to *spiritual*, if not in all places *literal*, *idolatry* (Ephesians 5:5 Colossians 3:5).