

CHAPTER 2

Here the apostle encourages against sins of infirmity (v. 1, 2), shows the true knowledge and love of God (v. 3-6), renews the precept of fraternal love (v. 7-11), addresses the several ages of Christians (v. 12-14), warns against worldly love (v. 15-17), against seducers (v. 18, 19), shows the security of true Christians (v. 20-27), and advises to abide in Christ (v. 28, 29).

1 JOHN 2:1-2

CHRIST THE PROPITIATION

These verses relate to the concluding subject of the foregoing chapter, in which the apostle proceeds upon the supposition of the real Christian's sin. And here he gives them both dissuasion and support.

1. Dissuasion. He would leave no room for sin: “*My little children, these things write I unto you, that you sin not*, v. 1. The design or purport of this letter, the design of what I have just said concerning communion with God and the overthrow of it by an irreligious course, is to dissuade and drive you from sin.” See the familiar affectionate compellation with which he introduces his admonition: *My little children*, children as having perhaps been begotten by his gospel, *little children* as being much beneath him in age and experience, *my little children*, as being dear to him in the bonds of the gospel. Certainly the gospel most prevailed where and when such ministerial love most abounded. Or perhaps the judicious reader will find reason to think that the apostle's meaning in this dissuasion or caution is this, or amounts to this reading: *These things write I unto you, not that you sin*. And so the words will look back to what he had said before concerning the assured pardon of sin: *God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins*, etc., 1 John 1:9. And so the words are a preclusion of all abuse of such favour and indulgence. “Though sins will be forgiven to penitent confessors, yet this I write, not to encourage you in sin, but upon another account.” Or this clause will look forward to what the apostle is going to say about the Advocate for sinners: and so it is a prolepsis, a prevention of like mistake or abuse: “*These things write I unto you, not that you sin*, but

that you may see your remedy for sin.” And so the following particle (as the learned know) may be rendered adversatively: *But, if a man sin*, he may know his help and cure. And so we see,

II. The believer's support and relief in case of sin: *And (or but) if any man sin* (any of us, or of our foresaid communion), *We have we an Advocate with the Father*, etc., v. 1. Believers themselves, those that are advanced to a happy gospel-state, have yet their sins. There is a great distinction therefore between the sinners that are in the world. There are Christianized (such as are instated in the sacred saving privileges of Christ's mystical or spiritual body) and unchristianized, converted and unconverted sinners. There are some who, though they really sin, yet, in comparison with others, are said *not to sin*, as ^{<GRB>}1 John 3:9. Believers, as they have an atonement applied unto them at their entrance into a state of pardon and justification, so they have an Advocate in heaven still to continue to them that state, and procure their continued forgiveness. And this must be the support, satisfaction, and refuge of believers (or real Christians) in or upon their sins: *We have an Advocate*. The original name is sometimes given to the Holy Ghost, and then it is rendered, *the Comforter*. He acts within us; he puts pleas and arguments into our hearts and mouths; and so is our advocate, by teaching us to intercede for ourselves. But here is an advocate without us, in heaven and with the Father. The proper office and business of an advocate is with the judge; with him he pleads the client's cause. The Judge with whom our advocate pleads is the Father, his Father and ours. He who was our Judge in the legal court (the court of the violated law) is our Father in the gospel court, the court of heaven and of grace. His throne or tribunal is the mercy-seat. And he that is our Father is also our Judge, the supreme arbitrator of our state and circumstances, either for life or death, for time or eternity. *You have come — to God, the Judge of all*, ^{<SBZ>}Hebrews 12:23. That believers may be encouraged to hope that their cause will go well, as their Judge is represented to them in the relation of a Father, so their advocate is recommended to them upon these considerations: —

1. By his person and personal names. *It is Jesus Christ the Son of the Father*, one anointed by the Father for the whole office of mediation, the whole work of salvation, and consequently for that of the intercessor or advocate.

2. By his qualification for the office. *It is Jesus Christ the righteous*, the righteous one in the court and sight of the Judge. This is not so necessary in another advocate. Another advocate (or an advocate in another court) may be an unjust person himself, and yet may have a just cause (and the cause of a just person in that case) to plead, and may accordingly carry his cause. But here the clients are guilty; their innocence and legal righteousness cannot be pleaded; their sin must be confessed or supposed. It is the advocate's own righteousness that he must plead for the criminals. He has been righteous to the death, righteous for them; he has brought in everlasting righteousness. This the Judge will not deny. Upon this score he pleads, that the clients' sins may not be imputed to them.

3. By the plea he has to make, the ground and basis of his advocacy: *And he is the propitiation for our sins*, v. 2. He is the expiatory victim, the propitiatory sacrifice that has been offered to the Judge for all our offences against his majesty, and law, and government. In vain do the professors of Rome distinguish between an advocate of redemption and an advocate of intercession, or a mediator of such different service. The Mediator of intercession, the Advocate for us, is the Mediator of redemption, the propitiation for our sins. It is his propitiation that he pleads. And we might be apt to suppose that his blood had lost its value and efficacy if no mention had been made of it in heaven since the time it was shed. But now we see it is of esteem there, since it is continually represented in the intercession of the great advocate (the attorney-general) for the church of God. *He ever lives to make intercession for those that come to God through him.*

4. By the extent of his plea, the latitude of his propitiation. It is not confined to one nation; and not particularly to the ancient Israel of God: *He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only* (not only for the sins of us Jews, us that are Abraham's seed according to the flesh), *but also for those of the whole world* (v. 2); not only for the past, or us present believers, but for the sins of all who shall hereafter believe on him or come to God through him. The extent and intent of the Mediator's death reach to all tribes, nations, and countries. As he is the only, so he is the universal atonement and propitiation for all that are saved and brought home to God, and to his favour and forgiveness.

1 JOHN 2:3-6

CHRIST THE PROPITIATION

These verses may seem to relate to the seventh verse of the former chapter, between which and these verses there occurred an incidental discourse concerning the believer's duty and relief in case of sin, occasioned by the mention of one of the believer's privileges — his being cleansed from sin by the Mediator's blood. In that verse the apostle asserts the beneficial consequence of *walking in the light*: “*We have then fellowship with one another*, such divine fellowship and communion as are the prerogative of the church of Christ.” Here now succeeds the trial or test of our light and of our love.

I. The trial of our light: *And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments*, v. 3. Divine light and knowledge are the beauty and improvement of the mind; it becomes the disciples of the Mediator to be persons of wisdom and understanding. Young Christians are apt to magnify their new light and applaud their own knowledge, especially if they have been suddenly or in a short time communicated; and old ones are apt to suspect the sufficiency and fulness of their knowledge; they lament that they know God, and Christ, and the rich contents of his gospel, no more: but here is the evidence of the soundness of our knowledge, if it constrain us to *keep God's commandments*. Each perfection of his nature enforces his authority; the wisdom of his counsels, the riches of his grace, the grandeur of his works, recommend his law and government. A careful conscientious obedience to his commands shows that the apprehension and knowledge of these things are graciously impressed upon the soul; and therefore it must follow in the reverse that *he that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him*, v. 4. Professors of the truth are often ashamed of their ignorance, or ashamed to own it; they frequently pretend to great attainments in the knowledge of divine mysteries: *Thou makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will, and approvest* (in thy rational judgment) *the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law and art confident that thou thyself art* (or art fit to be) *a guide to the blind*, etc., ✠Romans 2:17, etc. But what knowledge of God can that be which sees not that he is most worthy of the most entire and intense obedience? And, if that be seen and known, how vain and superficial is even this knowledge when it sways not the heart

unto obedience! A disobedient life is the confutation and shame of pretended religious knowledge; it gives the lie to such boasts and pretences, and shows that there is neither religion nor honesty in them.

II. The trial of our love: *But whoso keepeth his word in him verily is the love of God perfected; hereby know we that we are in him*, v. 5. To keep the word of God, or of Christ, is sacredly to attend thereto in all the conduct and motion of life; in him that does so is the love of God perfected. Possibly, some may here understand God's love to us; and doubtless his love to us cannot be perfected (or obtain its perfect design and fruit) without our practical observance of his word. We are chosen, to be holy and blameless before him in love; we are *redeemed, to be a peculiar people, zealous of good works*; we are pardoned and justified, that we may be partakers of larger measures of the divine Spirit for sanctification; we are sanctified, that we may walk in ways of holiness and obedience: no act of divine love that here terminates upon us obtains its proper tendency, issue, and effect, without our holy attendance to God's word. But the phrase rather denotes here our love to God; so v. 15, *The love of (to) the Father is not in him*; so ^{<687>}1 John 3:17, *How dwelleth the love of (to) God in him?* Now light is to kindle love; and love must and will keep the word of God; it enquires wherein the beloved may be pleased and served, and, finding he will be so by observance of his declared will, there it employs and exerts itself; there love is demonstrated; there it has its perfect (or complete) exercise, operation, and delight; and hereby (by this dutiful attendance to the will of God, or Christ) *we know that we are in him* (v. 5), we know that we belong to him, and that we are united to him by that Spirit which elevates and assists us to this obedience; and if we acknowledge our relation to him, and our union with him, it must have this continued enforcement upon us: *He that saith he abideth in him ought himself to walk even as he walked*, v. 6. The Lord Christ was an inhabitant of this world, and walked here below; here he gave a shining example of absolute obedience to God. Those who profess to be on his side, and to abide with him, must walk with him, walk after his pattern and example. The partisans of the several sects of philosophers of old paid great regard to the dictates and practice of their respective teachers and sect-masters; much more should the Christian, he who professes to abide in and with Christ, aim to resemble his infallible Master and head, and conform to his course and prescriptions: *Then are you my friends if you do whatsoever I command you*, ^{<684>}John 15:14.

1 JOHN 2:7-11

THE LAW OF LOVE

The seventh verse may be supposed either to look backward to what immediately preceded (and then it is *walking as Christ walked* that is here represented as *no new, but an old commandment*; it is that which the apostles would certainly inculcate wherever they brought Christ's gospel), or to look forward to what the apostle is now going to recommend, and that is the law of fraternal love; this is the message *heard from the beginning* (1 John 3:11), and *the old commandment*, 2 John 1:5. Now, while the apostle addresses himself to the recommendation of such a practice, he is ready to give an instance thereof in his affectionate appellation: “*Brethren, you who are dear to me in the bond of that love to which I would solicit you;*” and so the precept of fraternal love is recommended,

I. As an old one: *I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment, which you had from the beginning*, v. 7. The precept of love must be as old as human nature; but it might admit divers enactments, enforcements, and motives. In the state of innocence, had human nature then been propagated, men must have loved one another as being of one blood, made to dwell on the earth, as being God's offspring, and bearing his image. In the state of sin and promised recovery, they must love one another as related to God their Maker, as related to each other by blood, and as partners in the same hope. When the Hebrews were peculiarly incorporated, they must accordingly love each other, as being the privileged people, whose were the covenants and the adoption, and of whose race the Messiah and head of the church must spring; and the law of love must be conveyed with new obligations to the new Israel of God, to the gospel church, and so it is the *old commandment*, or the word which the children of the gospel Israel have heard from the beginning, v. 7.

II. As a new one: “*Again, to constrain you to this duty the more, a new commandment I write unto you, the law of the new society, the Christian corporation, which thing is true in him, the matter of which was first true in and concerning the head of it; the truth of it was first and was abundantly in him; he loved the church, and gave himself for it: and it is true in you; this law is in some measure written upon your hearts; hearts;*

you are taught of God to love one another, and that *because*” (or since, or forasmuch as) “*the darkness is past*, the darkness of your prejudiced unconverted (whether Jewish or Gentile) minds, your deplorable ignorance of God and of Christ is now past, *and the true light now shineth* (v. 8); *the light* of evangelical revelation hath shone with life and efficacy into your hearts; hence you have seen the excellency of Christian love, and the fundamental obligation thereto.” Hence we see that the fundamentals (and particularly the fundamental precepts) of the Christian religion may be represented either as new or old; the reformed doctrine, or doctrine of religion in the reformed churches, is new and old — new, as taught after long darkness, by the lights of the reformation, new as purged from the adulterations of Rome; but old as having been taught and *heard from the beginning*. We should see that that grace or virtue which was true in Christ be true also in us; we should be conformable to our head. The more our darkness is past, and gospel light shines unto us, the deeper should our subjection be to the commandments of our Lord, whether considered as old or new. Light should produce a suitable heat. Accordingly, here is another trial of our Christian light; before, it was to be approved by obedience to God; here by Christian love.

1. He who wants such love in vain pretends his light: *He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even unto now*, v. 9. It is proper for sincere Christians to acknowledge what God has done for their souls; but in the visible church there are often those who assume to themselves more than is true, there are those who say they are in the light, the divine revelation has made its impression upon their minds and spirits, and yet they walk in hatred and enmity towards their Christian brethren; these cannot be swayed by the sense of the love of Christ to their brethren, and therefore remain in their dark state, notwithstanding their pretended conversion to the Christian religion.

2. He who is governed by such love approves his light to be good and genuine: *He that loveth his brother* (as his brother in Christ) *abideth in the light*, v. 10. He sees the foundation and reason of Christian love; he discerns the weight and value of the Christian redemption; he sees how meet it is that we should love those whom Christ hath loved; and then the consequence will be that *there is no occasion of stumbling in him* (v. 10); he will be no scandal, *no stumbling-block, to his brother*; he will conscientiously beware that he neither induce his brother to sin nor turn him out of the way of religion, Christian love teaches us highly to value

our brother's soul, and to dread every thing that will be injurious to his innocence and peace.

3. Hatred is a sign of spiritual darkness: *But he that hateth his brother is in darkness*, v. 11. Spiritual light is instilled by the Spirit of grace, and one of *the first-fruits of that Spirit is love*; he then who is possessed with malignity towards a Christian brother must needs be destitute of spiritual light; consequently *he walks in darkness* (v. 11); his life is agreeable to a dark mind and conscience, *and he knows not whither he goes*; he sees not whither this dark spirit carries him, and particularly that it will carry him to the world of utter darkness, *because darkness hath blinded his eyes*, v. 11. The darkness of regeneracy, evidenced by a malignant spirit, is contrary to the light of life; where that darkness dwells, the mind, the judgment, and the conscience will be darkened, and so will mistake the way to heavenly endless life. Here we may observe how effectually our apostle is now cured of his once hot and flaming spirit. Time was when he was for *calling for fire from heaven* upon poor ignorant Samaritans who received them not, ~~and~~ Luke 9:54. But his Lord had shown him that he knew not his own spirit, nor whither it led him. Having now imbibed more of the Spirit of Christ, he breathes out good-will to man, and love to all the brethren. It is the Lord Jesus that is the great Master of love: it is his school (his own church) that is the school of love. His disciples are the disciples of love, and his family must be the family of love.

~~and~~ 1 JOHN 2:12-17

AGAINST THE LOVE OF THE WORLD

This new command of holy love, with the incentives thereto, may possibly be directed to the several ranks of disciples that are here accosted. The several graduates in the Christian university, the catholic church, must be sure to preserve the bond of sacred love. Or, there being an important dehoration and dissuasion to follow, without the observance of which vital religion in the love of God and love of the brethren cannot subsist, the apostle may justly seem to preface it with a solemn address to the several forms or orders in the school of Christ: let the infants or minors, the adults, the seniors (or the *adepti*, the *teleioi*, the most *perfect*), in the Christian institution, know that they must *not love this world*; and so,

I. We have the address itself made to the various forms and ranks in the church of Christ. All Christians are not of the same standing and stature; there are babes in Christ, there are grown men, and old disciples. As these have their peculiar states, so they have their peculiar duties; but there are precepts and a correspondent obedience common to them all, as particularly mutual love and contempt of the world. We see also that wise pastors will judiciously distribute the word of life, and give to the several members of Christ's family their several suitable portions: *I write unto you children, fathers, and young men.* In this distribution the apostle addresses,

1. The lowest in the Christian school: *I write unto you, little children,* v. 12. There are novices in religion, babes in Christ, those who are learning the rudiments of Christian godliness. The apostle may seem to encourage them by applying to them first; and it may be useful to the greater proficients to hear what is said to their juniors; elements are to be repeated; first principles are the foundation of all. He addresses *the children* in Christianity upon two accounts: —

(1.) *Because their sins were forgiven them for his name's sake,* v. 12. The youngest sincere disciple is pardoned; *the communion of saints* is attended with *the forgiveness of sins.* Sins are forgiven either for God's name's sake, for the praise of his glory (his glorious perfections displayed in forgiveness), or *for Christ's name's sake,* upon his score, and upon the account of the redemption that is in him; and those that are forgiven of God are strongly obliged to relinquish this world, which so interferes with *the love of God.*

(2.) *Because of their knowledge of God: I write unto you, little children, because you have known the Father,* v. 13. Children are wont to know none so soon as their father. Children in Christianity must and do know God. *They shall all know me, from the least to the greatest,* ~~Heb~~ Hebrews 8:11. Children in Christ should know that God is their Father; it is their wisdom. We say, It is a wise child that knows his father. These children cannot but know theirs; they can well be assured by whose power they are regenerated and by whose grace they are adopted. Those that know the Father may well be withdrawn from the love of this world. Then the apostle, proceeds,

2. To those of the highest station and stature, to the seniors in Christianity, to whom he gives an honourable appellation: *I write unto you, fathers* (v. 13, 14), *unto you, Mnasons, you old disciples*, ^{<4216>}Acts 21:16. The apostle immediately passes from the bottom to the top of the school, from the lowest form to the highest, that those in the middle may hear both lessons, may remember what they have learned and perceive what they must come to: *I write unto you, fathers*. Those that are of longest standing in Christ's school have need of further advice and instruction; the oldest disciple must go to heaven (the university above) with his book, his Bible, in his hand; fathers must be written to, and preached to; none are too old to learn. He writes to them upon the account of their knowledge: *I write unto you, fathers, because you have known him that is from the beginning*, v. 13, 14. Old men have knowledge and experience, and expect deference. The apostle is ready to own the knowledge of old Christians, and to congratulate them thereupon. They know the Lord Christ, particularly *him that was from the beginning*; as ^{<6111>}1 John 1:1. As Christ is *Alpha* and *Omega*, so he must be the beginning and end of our Christian knowledge. *I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord*, ^{<3088>}Philippians 3:8. Those who know him that was from the beginning, before this world was made, may well be induced thereby to relinquish this world. Then,

3. To the middle age of Christians, to those who are in their bloom and flower: *I write unto you, young men*, v. 13, 14. There are the adult in Christ Jesus, those that have arrived at the strength of spirit and sound sense and can discern between good and evil. The apostle applies to them upon these accounts: —

(1.) Upon the account of their martial exploits. Dexterous soldiers they are in the camp of Christ: *Because you have overcome the wicked one*, v. 13. There is a wicked one that is continually warring against souls, and particularly against the disciples: but those that are well taught in Christ's school can handle their arms and vanquish the evil one; and those that can vanquish him may be called to vanquish the world too, which is so great an instrument for the devil.

(2.) Upon the account of their strength, discovered in this their achievement: *Because you are strong, and you have overcome the wicked one*, v. 14. Young men are wont to glory in their strength; it will be the glory of youthful persons to be strong in Christ and in his grace; it will be

their glory, and it will try their strength, to overcome the devil; if they be not too hard for the devil, he will be too hard for them. Let vigorous Christians show their strength in conquering the world; and the same strength must be exerted in overcoming the world as is employed in overcoming the devil.

(3.) Because of their acquaintance with the word of God: *And the word of God abideth in you*, v. 14. The word of God must abide in the adult disciples; it is the nutriment and supply of strength to them; it is the weapon by which they overcome the wicked one; the sword of the Spirit, whereby they quench his fiery darts: and those in whom the word of God dwells are well furnished for the conquest of the world.

II. We have the dehortation or dissuasion thus prefaced and introduced, a caution fundamental to vital practical religion: “*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world*, v. 15. Be crucified to the world, be mortified to the things, to the affairs and enticements, of it.” The several degrees of Christians should unite in this, in being dead to the world. Were they thus united, they would soon unite upon other accounts: their love should be reserved for God; throw it not away upon the world. Now here we see the reasons of this dissuasion and caution. They are several, and had need to be so; it is hard to dispute or dissuade disciples themselves from the love of the world. These reasons are taken,

1. From the inconsistency of this love with the love of God: *If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him*, v. 15. The heart of man is narrow, and cannot contain both loves. The world draws down the heart from God; and so the more the love of the world prevails the more the love of God dwindles and decays.

2. From the prohibition of worldly love or lust; it is not ordained of God: *It is not of the Father, but is of the world*, v. 16. This love or lust is not appointed of God (he calls us from it), but it intrudes itself from the world; the world is a usurper of our affection. Now here we have the due consideration and notion of the world, according to which it is to be crucified and renounced. *The world*, physically considered, is good, and is to be admired as the work of God and a glass in which his perfections shine; but it is to be considered in its relation to us now in our corrupted state, and as it works upon our weakness and instigates and inflames our vile affections. There is great affinity and alliance between this world and

the flesh, and this world intrudes and encroaches upon the flesh, and thereby makes a party against God. The things of the world therefore are distinguished into three classes, according to the three predominant inclinations of depraved nature; as,

(1.) There is *the lust of the flesh*. *The flesh* here, being distinguished from *the eyes* and *the life*, imports the body. The lust of the flesh is, subjectively, the humour and appetite of indulging fleshly pleasures; and, objectively, all those things that excite and inflame the pleasures of the flesh. This lust is usually called *luxury*.

(2.) There is *the lust of the eyes*. The eyes are delighted with treasures; riches and rich possessions are craved by an extravagant eye; this is the lust of covetousness.

3. There is *the pride of life*. A vain mind craves all the grandeur, equipage, and pomp of a vain-glorious life; this is ambition, and thirst after honour and applause. This is, in part, the disease of the ear; it must be flattered with admiration and praise. The objects of these appetites must be abandoned and renounced; as they engage and engross the affection and desire, *they are not of the Father, but of the world*, v. 16. The Father disallows them, and the world should keep them to itself. The lust or appetite to these things must be mortified and subdued; and so the indulging of it is not appointed by the Father, but is insinuated by the ensnaring world.

3. From the vain and vanishing state of earthly things and the enjoyment of them. *And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof*, v. 17. The things of the world are fading and dying apace. The lust itself and the pleasure of it wither and decay; desire itself will ere long fail and cease, ²¹¹⁵ Ecclesiastes 12:5. And what has become of all the pomp and pleasure of all those who now lie mouldering in the grave?

4. From the immortality of the divine lover, the lover of God: *But he that doeth the will of God*, which must be the character of the lover of God, in opposition to this lover of the world, *abideth for ever*, v. 17. The object of his love in opposition to *the world that passeth away*, abideth for ever; his sacred passion or affection, in opposition to the lust that passeth away, abideth for ever; love shall never fail; and he himself is an heir of immortality and endless life, and shall in time be translated thither.

From the whole of these verses we should observe the purity and spirituality of the apostolical doctrine. The animal life must be subjected to the divine; the body with its affections should be swayed by religion, or the victorious love of God.

~~GDS~~ 1 JOHN 2:18-19

CONCERNING ANTICHRIST

Here is,

I. A moral prognostication of the time; the end is coming: *Little children, it is the last time*, v. 18. Some may suppose that the apostle here addresses the first rank of Christians again; the juniors are most apt to be seduced, and therefore, “*Little children, you that are young in religion, take heed to yourselves that you be not corrupted.*” But it may be, as elsewhere, a universal appellation, introductive of an alarm to all Christians: “*Little children, it is the last time; our Jewish polity in church and state is hastening to an end; the Mosaic institution and discipline are just upon vanishing away; Daniel's weeks are now expiring; the destruction of the Hebrew city and sanctuary is approaching, the end whereof must be with a flood, and to the end of the war desolations are determined,*” ~~ZOB~~ Daniel 9:26. It is meet that the disciples should be warned of the haste and end of time, and apprised as much as may be of the prophetic periods of time.

II. The sign of this last time: *Even now there are many antichrists* (v. 18), many that oppose the person, doctrine, and kingdom of Christ. It is a mysterious portion of providence that antichrists should be permitted; but, when they have come, it is good and safe that the disciples should be informed of them; ministers should be *watchmen to the house of Israel*. Now it should be no great offence nor prejudice to the disciples that there are such antichrists:

1. One great one has been foretold: *As you have heard that antichrist shall come*, v. 18. The generality of the church have been informed by divine revelation that there must be a long and fatal adversary to Christ and his church, ~~SIB~~ 2 Thessalonians 2:8-10. No wonder then that there are many harbingers and forerunners of the great one: *Even now there are many antichrists*, the mystery of iniquity already worketh.

2. They were foretold also as the sign of this last time. *For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect,* ⁴²⁰⁴Matthew 24:24. And these were the forerunners of the dissolution of the Jewish state, nation, and religion: *Whereby we know it is the last time,* v. 18. Let the prediction that we see there has been of seducers arising in the Christian world fortify us against their seduction.

III. Some account of these seducers or antichrists.

1. More positively. They were once entertainers or professors of apostolical doctrine: *“They went out from us* (v. 19), *from our company and communion;”* possibly from the church of Jerusalem, or some of the churches of Judea, as ⁴⁴⁸¹Acts 15:1, *Certain men came down from Judea, and taught the brethren,* etc. The purest churches may have their apostates and revolters; the apostolic doctrine did not convert all whom it convinced of its truth.

2. More privately. *“They were not inwardly such as we are: But they were not of us; they had not from the heart obeyed the form of sound doctrine delivered to them; they were not of our union with Christ the head.”* Then here is,

(1.) The reason upon which it is concluded that they were not of us, were not what they pretended, or what we are, and that is their actual defection: *“For, if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us* (v. 19); had the sacred truth been rooted in their hearts it would have held them with us; had they had the anointing from above, by which they had been made true and real Christians, they would not have turned antichrists.” Those that apostatize from religion sufficiently indicate that, before, they were hypocrites in religion: those who have imbibed the spirit of gospel truth have a good preservative against destructive error.

(2.) The reason why they are permitted thus to depart from apostolical doctrine and communion — that their insincerity may be detected: *But this was done (or they went out) that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us,* v. 19. The church knows not well who are its vital members and who are not; and therefore the church, considered as internally sanctified, may well be styled *invisible*. Some of the hypocritical must be manifested here, and that for their own shame and benefit too, in their reduction to the truth, if they have not sinned unto death, and for the

terror and caution of others. *You therefore, beloved, seeing you know these things before, beware lest you also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, etc.,* ^{<GNT>}2 Peter 3:17, 18.

^{<GNT>}1 JOHN 2:20-27

CONCERNING ANTICHRIST

Here,

I. The apostle encourages the disciples (to whom he writes) in these dangerous times, in this hour of seducers; he encourages them in the assurance of their stability in this day of apostasy: *But you have an unction from the Holy One, and you know all things.* We see,

1. The blessing wherewith they were enriched — an unguent from heaven: *You have an unction.* True Christians are anointed ones, their name intimates as much. They are anointed with the oil of grace, with gifts and spiritual endowments, by the Spirit of grace. They are anointed into a similitude of their Lord's offices, as subordinate prophets, priests, and kings, unto God. The Holy Spirit is compared to oil, as well as to fire and water; and the communication of his salvific grace is our anointing.

2. From whom this blessing comes — *from the Holy One*, either from the Holy Ghost or from the Lord Christ, as ^{<GNT>}Revelation 3:7, *These things saith he that is holy — the Holy One.* The Lord Christ is glorious in his holiness. The Lord Christ disposes of the graces of the divine Spirit, and he anoints the disciples to make them like himself, and to secure them in his interest.

3. The effect of this unction — it is a spiritual eye-salve; it enlightens and strengthens the eyes of the understanding: *“And thereby you know all things (v. 20), all these things concerning Christ and his religion; it was promised and given you for that end,”* ^{<GNT>}John 14:26. The Lord Christ does not deal alike by all his professed disciples; some are more anointed than others. There is great danger lest those that are not thus anointed should be so far from being true to Christ that they should, on the contrary,

turn antichrists, and prove adversaries to Christ's person, and kingdom, and glory.

II. The apostle indicates to them the mind and meaning with which he wrote to them.

1. By way of negation; not as suspecting their knowledge, or supposing their ignorance in the grand truths of the gospel: "*I have not written unto you because you know not the truth*, v. 21. I could not then be so well assured of your stability therein, nor congratulate you on your unction from above." It is good to surmise well concerning our Christian brethren; we ought to do so till evidence overthrows our surmise: a just confidence in religious persons may both encourage and contribute to their fidelity.

2. By way of assertion and acknowledgment, as relying upon their judgment in these things: *But because you know it (you know the truth in Jesus), and that no lie is of the truth*. Those who know the truth in any respect are thereby prepared to discern what is contrary thereto and inconsistent therewith. *Rectum est index sui et obliqui — The line which shows itself to be straight shows also what line is crooked*. Truth and falsehood do not well mix and suit together. Those that are well acquainted with Christian truth are thereby well fortified against antichristian error and delusion. No lie belongs to religion, either natural or revealed. The apostles most of all condemned lies, and showed the inconsistency of lies with their doctrine: they would have been the most self-condemned persons had they propagated the truth by lies. It is a commendation of the Christian religion that it so well accords with natural religion, which is the foundation of it, that it so well accords with the Jewish religion, which contained the elements or rudiments of it. *No lie is of the truth*; frauds and impostures then are very unfit means to support and propagate the truth. I suppose it had been better with the state of religion if they had never been used. The result of them appears in the infidelity of our age; the detection of ancient pious frauds and wiles has almost run our age into atheism and irreligion; but the greatest actors and sufferers for the Christian revelation would assure us that *no lie is of the truth*.

III. The apostle further impleads and arraigns these seducers who had newly arisen.

1. They are *liars*, egregious opposers of sacred truth: *Who is a liar*, or the liar, the notorious liar of the time and age in which we live, *but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?* The great and pernicious lies that the father of lies, or of liars, spreads in the world, were of old, and usually are, falsehoods and errors relating to the person of Christ. There is no truth so sacred and fully attested but some or other will contradict or deny it. That Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God had been attested by heaven, and earth, and hell. It should seem that some, in the tremendous judgment of God, are given up to strong delusions.

2. They are direst enemies to God as well as to the Lord Christ: *He is antichrist who denieth the Father and the Son*, v. 22. He that opposes Christ denies the witness and testimony of the Father, and the seal that he hath given to his Son; *for him hath God the Father sealed*, ~~Rev~~ John 6:27. And he that denies the witness and testimony of the Father, concerning Jesus Christ denies that God is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, and consequently abandons the knowledge of God in Christ, and thereupon the whole revelation of God in Christ, and particularly of God in Christ *reconciling the world unto himself*; and therefore the apostle may well infer, *Whosoever denies the Son the same has not the Father* (v. 23); he has not the true knowledge of the Father, for the Son has most and best revealed him; he has no interest in the Father, in his favour, and grace, and salvation, *for none cometh to the Father but by the Son*. *But*, as some copies add, *he that acknowledgeth the Son has the Father also*, v. 23. As there is an intimate relation between the Father and the Son, so there is an inviolable union in the doctrine, knowledge, and interests of both; so that he who has the knowledge of, and right to, the Son, has the knowledge of, and right to, the Father also. Those that adhere to the Christian revelation hold the light and benefit of natural religion withal.

IV. Hereupon the apostle advises and persuades the disciples to continue in the old doctrine at first communicated to them: *Let that therefore abide in you which you have heard from the beginning*, v. 24. Truth is older than error. The truth concerning Christ, that was at first delivered to the saints, is not to be exchanged for novelties. So sure were the apostles of the truth of what they had delivered concerning Christ, and from him, that after all their toils and sufferings they were not willing to relinquish it. The Christian truth may plead antiquity, and be recommended thereby. This exhortation is enforced by these considerations: —

1. From the sacred advantage they will receive by adhering to the primitive truth and faith.

(1.) They will continue thereby in holy union with God and Christ: *If that which you have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, you also shall continue in the Son and in the Father*, v. 24. It is the truth of Christ abiding in us that is the means of severing us from sin and uniting us to the Son of God, ^{<68B>}John 15:3, 4. The Son is the medium or the Mediator by whom we are united to the Father. What value then should we put upon gospel truth!

(2.) They will thereby secure the promise of eternal life: *And this is the promise that he* (even God the Father, ^{<68B>}1 John 5:11) *hath promised us, even eternal life*, v. 25. Great is the promise that God makes to his faithful adherents. It is suitable to his own greatness, power, and goodness. It is *eternal life*, which none but God can give. The blessed God puts great value upon his Son, and the truth relating to him, when he is pleased to promise to those who continue in that truth (under the light, and power, and influence of it) *eternal life*. Then the exhortation aforesaid is enforced,

2. From the design of the apostle's writing to them. This letter is to fortify them against the deceivers of the age: *“These things have I written to you concerning those that seduce you* (v. 26), and therefore, if you continue not in what *you have heard from the beginning*, my writing and service will be in vain.” We should beware lest the apostolical letters, yea, lest the whole scripture of God, should be to us insignificant and fruitless. *I have written to him the great things of my law* (and my gospel too), *but they were counted as a strange thing*, ^{<38B>}Hosea 8:12.

3. From the instructive blessing they had received from heaven: *But the anointing which you have received from him abideth in you*, v. 27. True Christians have an inward confirmation of the divine truth they have imbibed: the Holy Spirit has imprinted it on their minds and hearts. It is meet that the Lord Jesus should have a constant witness in the hearts of his disciples. The unction, the pouring out of the gifts of grace upon sincere disciples, is a seal to the truth and doctrine of Christ, since none giveth that seal but God. *Now he who establisheth us with you* (and you with us) *in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God*, ^{<40B>}2 Corinthians 1:21. This sacred chrism, or divine unction, is commended on these accounts: —

(1.) It is durable and lasting; oil or unguent is not so soon dried up as water: *it abideth in you*, v. 27. Divine illumination, in order to confirmation, must be something continued or constant. Temptations, snares, and seductions, arise. The anointing must abide.

(2.) It is better than human instruction: “*And you need not that any man teach you*, v. 27. Not that this anointing will teach you without the appointed ministry. It could, if God so pleased; but it will not, though it will teach you better than we can: *And you need not that any man teach you*, v. 27. You were instructed by us before you were anointed; but now our teaching is nothing in comparison to that. *Who teacheth like him?*” ~~8872~~ Job 36:22. The divine unction does not supersede ministerial teaching, but surmount it.

(3.) It is a sure evidence of truth, and all that it teaches is infallible truth: *But as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie*, v. 27. The Holy Spirit must needs be *the Spirit of truth*, as he is called, ~~8847~~ John 14:17. The instruction and illumination that he affords must needs be in and of the truth. The Spirit of truth will not lie; and he teacheth all things, that is, all things in the present dispensation, all things necessary to our knowledge of God in Christ, and their glory in the gospel. And,

(4.) It is of a conservative influence; it will preserve those in whom it abides against seducers and their seduction: “*And even as it hath taught you you shall abide in him*, v. 27. It teaches you to abide in Christ; and, as it teaches you, it secures you; it lays a restraint upon your minds and hearts, that you may not revolt from him. *And he that hath anointed us is God, who also hath sealed us for himself, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.*” ~~4021~~ 2 Corinthians 1:21, 22.

~~6128~~ 1 JOHN 2:28-29

CHRIST'S SECOND APPEARANCE

From the blessing of the sacred unction the apostle proceeds in his advice and exhortation to constancy in and with Christ: *And now, little children, abide in him*, v. 28. The apostle repeats his kind appellation, *little children*, which I suppose does not so much denote their diminitiveness as

his affection, and therefore, I judge, may be rendered *dear children*. He would persuade by love, and prevail by endearment as well as by reason. “Not only the love of Christ, but the love of you, constrains us to inculcate your perseverance, and that *you would abide in him*, in the truth relating to his person, and in your union with him and allegiance to him.” Evangelical privileges are obligatory to evangelical duties; and those that are anointed by the Lord Jesus are highly obliged to abide with him in opposition to all adversaries whatever. This duty of perseverance and constancy in trying times is strongly urged by the two following considerations: —

1. From the consideration of his return at the great day of account: *That when he shall appear we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming*, v. 28. It is here taken for granted that the Lord Jesus will come again. This was part of that truth they had heard from the beginning. And, when he shall come again, he will publicly appear, be manifested to all. When he was here before, he came privately, in comparison. He proceeded from a womb, and was introduced into a stable: but, when he shall come again, he will come from the opened heavens, and every eye shall see him; and then those who have continued with him throughout all their temptations shall have confidence, assurance, and joy, in the sight of him. They shall lift up their heads with unspeakable triumph, as knowing that their complete redemption comes along with him. On the contrary, those that have deserted him *shall be ashamed before him*; they shall be ashamed of themselves, ashamed of their unbelief, their cowardice, ingratitude, temerity, and folly, in forsaking so glorious a Redeemer. They shall be ashamed of their hopes, expectations, and pretences, and ashamed of all the wages of unrighteousness, by which they were induced to desert him: *That we may have confidence, and may not be ashamed*. The apostle includes himself in the number. “Let not us be ashamed of you,” as well as, “you will not be ashamed of yourselves.” Or *me aischynthomen ap' autou* — *that we be not ashamed* (made ashamed, or put to shame) *by him at his coming*. At his public appearance he will shame all those who have abandoned him, he will disclaim all acquaintance with them, will cover them with shame and confusion, will abandon them to darkness, devils, and endless despair, by professing before men and angels that he is ashamed of them, ~~4188~~ Mark 8:38. To the same advice and exhortation he proceeds,

2. From the consideration of the dignity of those who still adhere to Christ and his religion: *If you know that he is righteous, you know that every one*

that doeth righteousness is born of him, v. 29. The particle here rendered *if* seems not to be *vox dubitantis*, but *concedentis*; not so much a conditional particle, as a suppositional one, if I may call it so, a note of allowance or concession, and so seems to be of the same import with our English *inasmuch*, or *whereas*, or *since*. So the sense runs more clearly: *Since you know that he is righteous, you know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him*. He that doeth righteousness may here be justly enough assumed as another name for him that abideth in Christ. For he that abideth in Christ abideth in the law and love of Christ, and consequently in his allegiance and obedience to him; and so must do, or work, or practise, righteousness, or the parts of gospel holiness. Now such a one must needs *be born of him*. He is renewed by the Spirit of Christ, after the image of Christ, *created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath fore-ordained that he should walk in them*, ^{<410>}Ephesians 2:10. “*Since then you know that the Lord Christ is righteous* (righteous in his quality and capacity, the Lord our righteousness, and the Lord our sanctifier or our sanctification, as ^{<411>}1 Corinthians 1:30), you cannot but know thereupon” (or know you, it is for your consideration and regard) “that he who by the continued practice of Christianity abideth in him is born of him.” The new spiritual nature is derived from the Lord Christ. He that is constant to the practice of religion in trying times gives good evidence that he is born from above, from the Lord Christ. The Lord Christ is an everlasting Father. It is a great privilege and dignity to be born of him. Those that are so are the children of God. *To as many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God*, ^{<412>}John 1:12. And this introduces the context of the following chapter.