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Table of Contents

No table of contents entries found.

Preface

An Exposition, With Practical Observations, of The First Epistle General of John

Though the continued tradition of the church attests that this epistle came from John the apostle, yet we may observe some other evidence that will confirm (or with some perhaps even outweigh) the certainty of that tradition. It should seem that the penman was one of the apostolical college by the sensible palpable assurance he had of the truth of the Mediator's person in his human nature: *That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life*, v. 1. Here he takes notice of the evidence the Lord gave to Thomas of his resurrection, by calling him to feel the prints of the nails and of the spear, which is recorded by John. And he must have been one of the disciples present when the Lord came on the same day in which he arose from the dead, and showed them his hands and his side, Jn. 20:20. But, that we may be assured which apostle this was, there is scarcely a critic or competent judge of diction, or style of argument and spirit, but will adjudge this epistle to the writer of that gospel that bears the name of the apostle John. They wonderfully agree in the titles and characters of the Redeemer: *The Word, the Life, the Light; his name was the Word of God*. Compare 1:1 and 5:7 with Jn. 1:1 and Rev. 19:13. They agree in the commendation of God's love to us (3:9; 4:7; and 5:1; Jn. 3:5, 6. Lastly (to add no more instances, which may be easily seen in comparing this epistle with that gospel), they agree in the allusion to, or application of, that passage in that gospel which relates (and which alone relates) the issuing of water and blood out of the Redeemer's opened side: *This is he that came by water and blood*, 5:6. Thus the epistle plainly appears to flow from the same pen as that gospel did. Now I know not that the text, or the intrinsic history of any of the gospels, gives us such assurance of its writer or penman as that ascribed to John plainly does. There (viz. 21:24) the sacred historian thus notifies himself: *This is the disciple that testifieth of these things and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true*. Now who is this disciple, but he concerning whom Peter asked, *What shall this man do?* And concerning whom the Lord answered, *If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?* (v. 22). And who (v. 20) is described by these three characters:— 1. *That he is the disciple whom Jesus loved*, the Lord's peculiar friend. 2. *That he also leaned on his breast at supper*. 3. *That he said unto him, Lord, who is he that betrayeth thee?* As sure then as it is that that disciple was John, so sure may the church be that that gospel and this epistle came from the beloved John.

The epistle is styled *general*, as being not inscribed to any particular church; it is, as a circular letter (or visitation charge), sent to divers churches (some say of Parthia), in order to confirm them in their stedfast adherence to the Lord Christ, and the sacred doctrines concerning his person and office, against seducers; and to instigate them to adorn that doctrine by love to God and man, and particularly to each other, as being descended from God, united by the same head, and travelling towards the same eternal life.

Chapter 1

Evidence given concerning Christ's person and excellency (v. 1, 2). The knowledge thereof gives us communion with God and Christ (v. 3), and joy (v. 4). A description of God (v. 5). How we are thereupon to walk (v. 6). The benefit of such walking (v. 7). The way to forgiveness (v. 9). The evil of denying our sin (v. 8–10).

Verses 1-4

The apostle omits his name and character (as also the author to the Hebrews does) either out of humility, or as being willing that the Christian reader should be swayed by the light and weight of the things written rather than by the name that might recommend them. And so he begins,

I. With an account or character of the Mediator's person. He is the great subject of the gospel, the foundation and object of our faith and hope, the bond and cement that unite us unto God. He should be well known; and he is represented here, 1. *As the Word of life*, v. 1. In the gospel these two are disjoined, and he is called first *the Word*, Jn. 1:1, and afterwards *Life*, intimating, withal, that he is *intellectual life*. *In him was life, and that life was* (efficiently and objectively) *the light of men*, Jn. 1:4. Here both are conjoined: *The Word of life*, the vital Word. In that he is the Word, it is intimated that he is the Word of some person or other; and that is God, even the Father. *He is the Word of God*, and so he is intimated to issue from the Father, as truly (though not in the same manner) as a word (or speech, which is a train of words) from a speaker. But he is not a mere vocal word, a bare *logos prophorikos*, but a vital one: *the Word of life*, the living word; and thereupon, 1. *As eternal life*. His duration shows his excellency. He was from eternity; and so is, in scripture-account, necessary, essential, uncreated life. That the apostle speaks of his eternity, *à parte ante* (as they say) and as *from everlasting*, seems evident in that he speaks of him as he was in and from the beginning; when he was then with the Father, before his manifestation to us, yea, before the making of all things that were made; as Jn. 1:2, 3. So that he is the eternal, vital, intellectual Word of the eternal living Father. 3. *As life manifested* (v. 2), manifested in the flesh, manifested to us. The eternal life would assume mortality, would put on flesh and blood (in the entire human nature), and so dwell among us and converse with us, Jn. 1:14. Here were condescension and kindness indeed, that eternal life (a person of eternal essential life) should come to visit mortals, and to procure eternal life for them, and then confer it on them!

II. With the evidences and convictive assurances that the apostle and his brethren had of the Mediator's presence and converse in this world. There were sufficient demonstrations of the reality of his abode here, and of the excellency and dignity of his person in the way of his manifestation. *The life, the word of life, the eternal life*, as such, could not be seen and felt; but the life manifested might be, and was so. The life was clothed with flesh, put on the state and habit of abased human nature, and as such gave sensible proof of its existence and transactions here. The divine life, or Word incarnate, presented and evinced itself to the very senses of the apostles. As, 1. To their ears: *That which we have heard*, v. 1, 3. The life assumed a mouth and tongue, that he might utter words of life. The apostles not only heard of him, but they heard him himself. Above three years might they attend his ministry, be auditors of his public sermons and private expositions (for he expounded them in his house),

and be charmed with the words of him who spoke as never man spoke before or since. The divine word would employ the ear, and the ear should be devoted to the word of life. And it was meet that those who were to be his representatives and imitators to the world should be personally acquainted with his ministrations. 2. To their eyes: *That which we have seen with our eyes*, v. 1-3. The Word would become visible, would not only be heard, but seen, seen publicly, privately, at a distance and at nearest approach, which may be intimated in the expression, *with our eyes*—with all the use and exercise that we could make of our eyes. We saw him in his life and ministry, saw him in his transfiguration on the mount, hanging, bleeding, dying, and dead, upon the cross, and we saw him after his return from the grave and resurrection from the dead. His apostles must be eye-witnesses as well as ear-witnesses of him. *Wherefore, of these men that have accompanied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection*, Acts 1:21, 22. *And we were eye-witnesses of his majesty*, 2 Pt. 1:16. 3. To their internal sense, to the eyes of their mind; for so (possibly) may the next clause be interpreted: *Which we have looked upon*. This may be distinguished from the foregoing perception, *seeing with the eyes*; and may be the same with what the apostle says in his gospel (ch. 1:14), *And we beheld—**etheasametha**, his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father*. The word is not applied to the immediate object of the eye, but to that which was rationally collected from what they saw. "What we have well discerned, contemplated, and viewed, what we have well known of this Word of life, we report to you." The senses are to be the informers of the mind. 4. To their hands and sense of feeling: *And our hands have handled* (touched and felt) *of the Word of life*. This surely refers to the full conviction our Lord afforded his apostles of the truth, reality, solidity, and organization of his body, after his resurrection from the dead. When he showed them his hands and his side, it is probable that he gave them leave to touch him; at least, he knew of Thomas's unbelief, and his professed resolution too not to believe, till he had found and felt the places and signatures of the wounds by which he died. Accordingly at the next congress he called Thomas, in the presence of the rest, to satisfy the very curiosity of his unbelief. And probably others of them did so too. *Our hands have handled of the Word of life*. The invisible life and Word was no despiser of the testimony of sense. Sense, in its place and sphere, is a means that God has appointed, and the Lord Christ has employed, for our information. Our Lord took care to satisfy (as far as might be) all the senses of his apostles, that they might be the more authentic witnesses of him to the world. Those that apply all this to the hearing of the gospel lose the variety of sensations here mentioned, and the propriety of the expressions, as well as the reason of their inculcation and repetition here: *That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you*, v. 3. The apostles could not be deceived in such long and various exercise of their sense. Sense must minister to reason and judgment; and reason and judgment must minister to the reception of the Lord Jesus Christ and his gospel. The rejection of the Christian revelation is at last resolved into the rejection of sense itself. *He upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not those who had seen him after he had risen*, Mk. 16:14.

III. With a solemn assertion and attestation of these grounds and evidences of the Christian truth and doctrine. The apostles publish these assurances for our satisfaction: *We bear witness, and show unto you*, v. 2. *That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you*, v. 3. It became the apostles to open to the disciples the evidence by which they were led, the reasons by

which they were constrained to proclaim and propagate the Christian doctrine in the world. Wisdom and integrity obliged them to demonstrate that it was not either private fancy or a cunningly-devised fable that they presented to the world. Evident truth would open their mouths, and force a public profession. *We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard*, Acts 4:20. It concerned the disciples to be well assured of the truth of the institution they had embraced. They should see the evidences of their holy religion. It fears not the light, nor the most judicious examination. It is able to afford rational conviction and solid persuasion of mind and conscience. *I would that you knew what great conflict (or concern of mind) I have for you, and for those at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts might be knit together in love, and unto all riches of full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, even of the Father, and of Christ*, Col. 2:1, 2.

IV. With the reason of the apostle's exhibiting and asserting this summary of sacred faith, and this breviate of evidence attending it. This reason is twofold:—

1. That the believers of it may be advanced to the same happiness with them (with the apostles themselves): *That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that you may have fellowship with us*, v. 3. The apostle means not personal fellowship nor consociation in the same church-administrations, but such as is consistent with personal distance from each other. It is communion with heaven, and in blessings that come thence and tend thither. "This we declare and testify, that you may share with us in our privileges and happiness." Gospel spirits (or those that are made happy by gospel grace) would fain have others happy too. We see, also, there is a fellowship or communion that runs through the whole church of God. There may be some personal distinctions and peculiarities, but there is a communion (or common participation of privilege and dignity) belonging to all saints, from the highest apostle to the lowest believer. As there is the same precious faith, there are the same precious promises dignifying and crowning that faith and the same precious blessings and glories enriching and filling those promises. Now that believers may be ambitious of this communion, that they may be instigated to retain and hold fast the faith that is the means of such communion, that the apostles also may manifest their love to the disciples in assisting them to the same communion with themselves, they indicate what it is and where it is: *And truly our fellowship (or communion) is with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ*. We have communion with the Father, and with the Son of the Father (as 2 Jn. 3, he is most emphatically styled) in our happy relation to them, in our receiving heavenly blessings from them, and in our spiritual converse with them. We have now such supernatural conversation with God and the Lord Christ as is an earnest and foretaste of our everlasting abode with them, and enjoyment of them, in the heavenly glory. See to what the gospel revelation tends—to advance us far above sin and earth and to carry us to blessed communion with the Father and the Son. See for what end the eternal life was made flesh—that he might advance us to eternal life in communion with the Father and himself. See how far those live beneath the dignity, use, and end of the Christian faith and institution, who have not spiritual blessed communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ.

2. That believers may be enlarged and advanced in holy joy: *And these things write we unto you that your joy may be full*, v. 4. The gospel dispensation is not properly a dispensation of fear, sorrow, and dread, but of peace and joy. Terror and

astonishment may well attend mount Sinai, but exultation and joy mount Zion, where appears *the eternal Word, the eternal life*, manifested in our flesh. The mystery of the Christian religion is directly calculated for the joy of mortals. It should be joy to us that the eternal Son should come to seek and save us, that he has made a full atonement for our sins, that he has conquered sin and death and hell, that he lives as our Intercessor and Advocate with the Father, and that he will come again to perfect and glorify his persevering believers. And therefore those live beneath the use and end of the Christian revelation who are not filled with spiritual joy. Believers should rejoice in their happy relation to God, as his sons and heirs, his beloved and adopted,—in their happy relation to the Son of the Father, as being members of his beloved body, and coheirs with himself,—in the pardon of their sins, the sanctification of their natures, the adoption of their persons, and the prospect of grace and glory that will be revealed at the return of their Lord and head from heaven. Were they confirmed in their holy faith, how would they rejoice! *The disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost*, Acts 13:52.

Verses 5-7

The apostle, having declared the truth and dignity of the author of the gospel, brings a message or report from him, from which a just conclusion is to be drawn for the consideration and conviction of the professors of religion, or professed entertainers of this glorious gospel.

I. Here is the message or report that the apostle avers to come from the Lord Jesus: *This then is the message which we have heard of him* (v. 5), of his Son Jesus Christ. As he was the immediate sender of the apostles, so he is the principal person spoken of in the preceding context, and the next antecedent also to whom the pronoun *him* can relate. The apostles and apostolical ministers are the messengers of the Lord Jesus; it is their honour, the chief they pretend to, to bring his mind and messages to the world and to the churches. This is the wisdom and present dispensation of the Lord Jesus, to send his messages to us by persons like ourselves. He that put on human nature will honour earthen vessels. It was the ambition of the apostles to be found faithful, and faithfully to deliver the errands and messages they had received. What was communicated to them they were solicitous to impart: *This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you*. A message from the Word of life, from the eternal Word, we should gladly receive: and the present one is this (relating to the nature of God whom we are to serve, and with whom we should covet all indulged communion)—*That God is light, and in him is no darkness at all*, v. 5. This report asserts the excellency of the divine nature. He is all that beauty and perfection that can be represented to us by light. He is a self-active uncompounded spirituality, purity, wisdom, holiness, and glory. And then the absoluteness and fulness of that excellency and perfection. There is no defect or imperfection, no mixture of any thing alien or contrary to absolute excellency, no mutability nor capacity of any decay in him: *In him is no darkness at all*, v. 5. Or this report may more immediately relate to what is usually called the moral perfection of the divine nature, what we are to imitate, or what is more directly to influence us in our gospel work. And so it will comprehend the holiness of God, the absolute purity of his nature and will, his penetrative knowledge (particularly of hearts), his jealousy and injustice, which burn a a most bright and vehement flame. It is meet that to this dark world the great God should be represented as pure and perfect light. It is the Lord Jesus that best of all opens to us the name and nature of the unsearchable God: *The only-begotten, who is in the bosom of the*

Father, the same hath declared him. It is the prerogative of the Christian revelation to bring us the most noble, the most august and agreeable account of the blessed God, such as is most suitable to the light of reason and what is demonstrable thereby, most suitable to the magnificence of his works round about us, and to the nature and office of him that is the supreme administrator, governor, and judge of the world. What more (relating to and comprehensive of all such perfection) could be included in one word than in this, *God is light, and in him is no darkness at all?* Then,

II. There is a just conclusion to be drawn from this message and report, and that for the consideration and conviction of professors of religion, or professed entertainers of this gospel. This conclusion issues into two branches:—1. For the conviction of such professors as have no true fellowship with God: *If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.* It is known that to walk, in scripture account, is to order and frame the course and actions of the moral life, that is, of the life so far as it is capable of subjection to the divine law. *To walk in darkness* is to live and act according to such ignorance, error, and erroneous practice, as are contrary to the fundamental dictates of our holy religion. Now there may be those who may pretend to great attainments and enjoyments in religion; they may profess to have communion with God; and yet their lives may be irreligious, immoral, and impure. To such the apostle would not fear to give the lie: *They lie, and do not the truth.* They belie God; for he holds no heavenly fellowship or intercourse with unholy souls. What communion hath light with darkness? They belie themselves, or lie concerning themselves; for they have no such communications from God nor access to him. There is no truth in their profession nor in their practice, or their practice gives their profession and pretences the lie, and demonstrates the folly and falsehood of them. 2. For the conviction and consequent satisfaction of those that are near to God: *But, if we walk in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.* As the blessed God is the eternal boundless light, and the Mediator is, from him, the light of the world, so the Christian institution is the great luminary that appears in our sphere, and shines here below. A conformity to this in spirit and practice demonstrates fellowship or communion with God. Those that so walk show that they know God, that they have received of the Spirit of God, and that the divine impress or image is stamped upon their souls. *Then we have fellowship one with another,* they with us and we with them, and both with God, in his blessed or beatific communications to us. And this is one of those beatific communications to us—that his Son's blood or death is applied or imputed to us: *The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.* The eternal life, the eternal Son, hath put on flesh and blood, and so became Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ hath shed his blood for us, or died to wash us from our sins in his own blood. His blood applied to us discharges us from the guilt of all sin, both original and actual, inherent and committed: and so far we stand righteous in his sight; and not only so, but his blood procures for us those sacred influences by which sin is to be subdued more and more, till it is quite abolished, Gal. 3:13, 14.

Verses 8-10

Here, I. The apostle, having supposed that even those of this heavenly communion have yet their sin, proceeds here to justify that supposition, and this he does by showing the dreadful consequences of denying it, and that in two particulars:—1. *If we say, We have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us,* v. 8. We must beware of deceiving ourselves in denying

or excusing our sins. The more we see them the more we shall esteem and value the remedy. *If we deny them, the truth is not in us*, either the truth that is contrary to such denial (we lie in denying our sin), or the truth of religion, is not in us. The Christian religion is the religion of sinners, of such as have sinned, and in whom sin in some measure still dwells. The Christian life is a life of continued repentance, humiliation for and mortification of sin, of continual faith in, thankfulness for, and love to the Redeemer, and hopeful joyful expectation of a day of glorious redemption, in which the believer shall be fully and finally acquitted, and sin abolished for ever. 2. *If we say, We have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us*, v. 10. The denial of our sin not only deceives ourselves, but reflects dishonour upon God. It challenges his veracity. He has abundantly testified of, and testified against, the sin of the world. *And the Lord said in his heart* (determined thus with himself), *I will not again curse the ground* (as he had then lately done) *for man's sake; for* (or, with the learned bishop Patrick, *though*) *the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth*, Gen. 8:21. But God has given his testimony to the continued sin and sinfulness of the world, by providing a sufficient effectual sacrifice for sin, that will be needed in all ages, and to the continued sinfulness of believers themselves by requiring them continually to confess their sins, and apply themselves by faith to the blood of that sacrifice. And therefore, if we say either that we have not sinned or do not yet sin, *the word of God is not in us*, neither in our minds, as to the acquaintance we should have with it, nor in our hearts, as to the practical influence it should have upon us.

II. The apostle then instructs the believer in the way to the continued pardon of his sin. Here we have, 1. His duty in order thereto: *If we confess our sins*, v. 9. Penitent confession and acknowledgment of sin are the believer's business, and the means of his deliverance from his guilt. And, 2. His encouragement thereto, and assurance of the happy issue. This is the veracity, righteousness, and clemency of God, to whom he makes such confession: *He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*, v. 9. God is faithful to his covenant and word, wherein he has promised forgiveness to penitent believing confessors. He is just to himself and his glory who has provided such a sacrifice, by which his righteousness is declared in the justification of sinners. He is just to his Son who has not only sent him for such service, but promised to him that those who come through him shall be forgiven on his account. *By his knowledge* (by the believing apprehension of him) *shall my righteous servant justify many*, Isa. 53:11. He is clement and gracious also, and so will forgive, to the contrite confessor, all his sins, cleanse him from the guilt of all unrighteousness, and in due time deliver him from the power and practice of it.

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).

Verses 1-2

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.

I. 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., ch. 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 ch. 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*, Heb. 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.

Verses 3-6

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., Rom. 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 ch. 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*, Jn. 15:14.

Verses 7-11

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* (ch. 3:11), and *the old commandment*, 2 Jn. 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; 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, Lu. 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.

Verses 12-17

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 dehortation 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. 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*, 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 ch. 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*, Phil. 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, Eccl. 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.

Verses 18-19

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,*" Dan. 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, 2 Th. 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*, Mt. 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 Acts 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., 2 Pt. 3:17, 18.

Verses 20-27

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 Rev. 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," Jn. 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*, Jn. 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, Jn. 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, ch. 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*, Hos. 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*, 2 Co. 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?" 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, Jn. 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."* 2 Co. 1:21, 22.

Verses 28-29

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 *μεν αισχυνθημεν απο αυτου*—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, Mk. 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*, Eph. 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 1 Co. 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*, Jn. 1:12. And this introduces the context of the following chapter.

Chapter 3

The apostle here magnifies the love of God in our adoption (v. 1, 2). He thereupon argues for holiness (v. 3), and against sin (v. 4–19). He presses brotherly love (v. 11–18). How to assure our hearts before God (v. 19–22). The precept of faith (v. 23). And the good of obedience (v. 24).

Verses 1-3

The apostle, having shown the dignity of Christ's faithful followers, that they are born of him and thereby nearly allied to God, now here,

I. Breaks forth into the admiration of that grace that is the spring of such a wonderful vouchsafement: *Behold* (see you, observe) *what manner of love*, or how great love, *the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called*, effectually called (he who calls things that are not makes them to be what they were not) *the sons of God!* The Father adopts all the children of the Son. The Son indeed calls them, and makes them his brethren; and thereby he confers upon them the power and dignity of the sons of God. It is wonderful condescending love of the eternal Father, that such as we should be made and called his sons—we who by nature are heirs of sin, and guilt, and the curse of God—we who by practice are children of corruption, disobedience, and ingratitude! Strange, that the holy God is not ashamed to be called our Father, and to call us his sons!

Thence the apostle,

II. Infers the honour of believers above the cognizance of the world. Unbelievers know little of them. *Therefore* (or wherefore, upon this score) *the world knoweth us not*, v. 1. Little does the world perceive the advancement and happiness of the genuine followers of Christ. They are here exposed to the common calamities of earth and time; all things fall alike to them as to others, or rather they are subject to the greater sorrow, for they have often reason to say, *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable*, 1 Co. 15:19. The unchristian world, therefore, that walks by sight, knows not their dignity, their privileges, the enjoyments they have in hand, nor what they are entitled to. Little does the world think that these poor, humble, contemned ones are the favourites of heaven, and will be inhabitants there ere long. And they may bear their case the better since their Lord was here unknown as well as they: *Because it knew him not*, v. 1. Little did the world think how great a person was once sojourning here, that the Maker of it was once an inhabitant of it. Little did the Jewish world think that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, was one of their blood, and dwelt in their land; he came to his own, and his own received him not. He came to his own, and his own crucified him; but surely, *had they known him, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory*, 1 Co. 2:8. Let the followers of Christ be content with hard fare here, since they are in a land of strangers, among those who little know them, and their Lord was so treated before them. Then the apostle,

III. Exalts these persevering disciples in the prospect of the certain revelation of their state and dignity. Here, 1. Their present honourable relation is asserted: *Beloved* (you may well be our beloved, for you are beloved of God), *now are we the sons of God*, v. 2. We have the nature of sons by regeneration: we have the title, and spirit, and right to the inheritance of sons by adoption. *This honour have all the saints*. 2. The discovery of the bliss belonging and suitable to this relation is denied: *And it*

doth not yet appear what we shall be, v. 2. The glory pertaining to the sonship and adoption is adjourned and reserved for another world. The discovery of it here would put a stop to the current of affairs that must now proceed. The sons of God must walk by faith, and live by hope. 3. The time of the revelation of the sons of God in their proper state and glory is determined; and that is when their elder brother comes to call and collect them all together: *But we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him*. The particle, *ean*, usually translated *if*, is here well rendered *when*; for the Hebrew particle *am* (to which this is thought to correspond) is observed so to signify, as Dr. Whitby has here noted; and not only is *ean* sometimes used for *hotan*, but some copies even here read *hotan*, *when*. And accordingly it seems proper so to render it in Jn. 14:3, where we read it, *And if I go, and prepare a place*; but more naturally and properly, *When I shall have gone, and shall have prepared the place, I will come again, and receive you unto myself*, or *paraleupsomai*—*I will take you along with myself, that where I am there you may be also*. When the head of the church, the only-begotten of the Father, shall appear, his members, the adopted of God, shall appear and be manifested together with him. They may then well wait in faith, hope, and earnest desire, for the revelation of the Lord Jesus; as even the creation itself waiteth for their perfection, *and the public manifestation of the sons of God*, Rom. 8:19. The sons of God will be known and be made manifest by their likeness to their head: *They shall be like him*—like him in honour, and power, and glory. Their vile bodies shall be made like his glorious body; they shall be filled with life, light, and bliss from him. *When he, who is their life, shall appear, they also shall appear with him in glory*, Col. 3:4. Then, 4. Their likeness to him is argued from the sight they shall have of him: *We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is*. Their likeness will be the cause of that sight which they shall have of him. Indeed, all shall see him, but not as they do; not as *he is*, namely, to those in heaven. The wicked shall see him in his frowns, in the terror of his majesty, and the splendour of his avenging perfections; but these shall see him in the smiles and beauty of his face, in the correspondence and amiableness of his glory, in the harmony and agreeableness of his beatific perfections. Their likeness shall enable them to see him as the blessed do in heaven. Or the sight of him shall be the cause of their likeness; it shall be a transformative sight: they shall be transformed into the same image by the beatific view that they shall have of him. Then the apostle,

IV. Urges the engagement of these sons of God to the prosecution of holiness: *And every man that hath this hope in him purifies himself even as he is pure*, v. 3. The sons of God know that their Lord is holy and pure; he is of purer heart and eyes than to admit any pollution or impurity to dwell with him. Those then who hope to live with him must study the utmost purity from the world, and flesh, and sin; they must grow in grace and holiness. Not only does their Lord command them to do so, but their new nature inclines them so to do; yea, their hope of heaven will dictate and constrain them so to do. They know that their high priest is holy, harmless, and undefiled. They know that their God and Father is the high and holy one, that all the society is pure and holy, that their inheritance is an inheritance of saints in light. It is a contradiction to such hope to indulge sin and impurity. And therefore, as we are sanctified by faith, we must be sanctified by hope. That we may be saved by hope we must be purified by hope. It is the hope of hypocrites, and not of the sons of God, that makes an allowance for the gratification of impure desires and lusts.

Verses 4-10

The apostle, having alleged the believer's obligation to purity from his hope of heaven, and of communion with Christ in glory at the day of his appearance, now proceeds to fill his own mouth and the believer's mind with multiplied arguments against sin, and all communion with the impure unfruitful works of darkness. And so he reasons and argues,

I. From the nature of sin and the intrinsic evil of it. It is a contrariety to the divine law: *Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also (or even) the law* (or, whosoever committeth sin even committeth enormity, or aberration from law, or from the law); *for sin is the transgression of the law*, or is lawlessness, v. 4. Sin is the destitution or privation of correspondence and agreement with the divine law, that law which is the transcript of the divine nature and purity, which contains his will for the government of the world, which is suitable to the rational nature, and enacted for the good of the world, which shows man the way of felicity and peace, and conducts him to the author of his nature and of the law. The current commission of sin now is the rejection of the divine law, and this is the rejection of the divine authority, and consequently of God himself.

II. From the design and errand of the Lord Jesus in and to this world, which was to remove sin: *And you know that he was manifested to take away our sins, and in him is no sin*, v. 5. The Son of God appeared, and was known, in our nature; and he came to vindicate and exalt the divine law, and that by obedience to the precept, and by subjection and suffering under the penal sanction, under the curse of it. *He came therefore to take away our sins*, to take away the guilt of them by the sacrifice of himself, to take away the commission of them by implanting a new nature in us (for we are sanctified by virtue of his death), and to dissuade and save from it by his own example, *and (or for) in him was no sin*; or, he takes sin away, that he may conform us to himself, *and in him is no sin*. Those that expect communion with Christ above should study communion with him here in the utmost purity. And the Christian world should know and consider the great end of the Son of God's coming hither: it was to take away our sin: *And you know* (and this knowledge should be deep and effectual) *that he was manifested to take away our sins*.

III. From the opposition between sin and a real union with or adhesion to the Lord Christ: *Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not*, v. 6. To sin here is the same as to commit sin (v. 8, 9), and to commit sin is to practise sin. He that abideth in Christ continues not in the practice of sin. As vital union with the Lord Jesus broke the power of sin in the heart and nature, so continuance therein prevents the regency and prevalence thereof in the life and conduct. Or the negative expression here is put for the positive: *He sinneth not*, that is, he is obedient, *he keeps the commandments* (in sincerity, and in the ordinary course of life) *and does those things that are pleasing in his sight*, as is said v. 22. Those that abide in Christ abide in their covenant with him, and consequently watch against the sin that is contrary thereto. They abide in the potent light and knowledge of him; and therefore it may be concluded *that he that sinneth* (abideth in the predominant practice of sin) *hath not seen him* (hath not his mind impressed with a sound evangelical discerning of him), *neither known him*, hath no experimental acquaintance with him. Practical renunciation of sin is the great evidence of spiritual union with, continuance in, and saving knowledge of, the Lord Christ.

IV. From the connection between the practice of righteousness and a state of righteousness, intimating withal that the practice of sin and a justified state are inconsistent; and this is introduced with a supposition that a surmise to the contrary is a gross

deceit: "*Little children, dear children, and as much children as you are, herein let no man deceive you. There will be those who will magnify your new light and entertainment of Christianity, who will make you believe that your knowledge, profession, and baptism, will excuse you from the care and accuracy of the Christian life. But beware of such self-deceit. He that doeth righteousness in righteous.*" It may appear that righteousness may in several places of scripture be justly rendered *religion*, as Mt. 5:10, *Blessed are those that are persecuted for righteousness' sake*, that is, for religion's sake; 1 Pt. 3:14, *But if you suffer for righteousness' sake (religion's sake) happy are you*; and 2 Tim. 3:16, *All scripture, or the whole scripture, is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine—and for instruction in righteousness*, that is, in the nature and branches of religion. To do righteousness then, especially being set in opposition to the doing, committing, or practising, of sin, is to practise religion. Now he who practiseth religion is righteous; he is the righteous person on all accounts; he is sincere and upright before God. The practice of religion cannot subsist without a principle of integrity and conscience. He has that righteousness which consists in pardon of sin and right to life, founded upon the imputation of the Mediator's righteousness. He has a title *to the crown of righteousness, which the righteous Judge will give*, according to his covenant and promise, *to those that love his appearing*, 2 Tim. 4:8. He has communion with Christ, in conformity to the divine law, being in some measure practically righteous as he; and he has communion with him in the justified state, being now relatively righteous together with him.

V. From the relation between the sinner and the devil, and thereupon from the design and office of the Lord Christ against the devil. 1. From the relation between the sinner and the devil. As elsewhere sinners and saints are distinguished (though even saints are sinners largely so called), *so to commit sin* is here so to practise it as sinners do, that are distinguished from saints, to live under the power and dominion of it; and he who does so *is of the devil*; his sinful nature is inspired by, and agreeable and pleasing to, the devil; and he belongs to the party, and interest, and kingdom of the devil. It is he that is the author and patron of sin, and has been a practitioner of it, a tempter and instigator to it, even from the beginning of the world. And thereupon we must see how he argues. 2. From the design and office of the Lord Christ against the devil: *For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil*, v. 8. The devil has designed and endeavoured to ruin the work of God in this world. The Son of God has undertaken the holy war against him. He came into our world, and was manifested in our flesh, that he might conquer him and dissolve his works. Sin will he loosen and dissolve more and more, till he has quite destroyed it. Let not us serve or indulge what the Son of God came to destroy.

VI. From the connection between regeneration and the relinquishment of sin: *Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin*. To be born of God is to be inwardly renewed, and restored to a holy integrity or rectitude of nature by the power of the Spirit of God. *Such a one committeth not sin*, does not work iniquity nor practise disobedience, which is contrary to his new nature and the regenerate complexion of his spirit; for, as the apostle adds, *his seed remaineth in him*, either the word of God in its light and power *remaineth in him* (as 1 Pt. 1:23, *Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever*), or, *that which is born of the Spirit is spirit*; the spiritual seminal principle of holiness remaineth in him. Renewing grace is an abiding principle. Religion, in the spring of it, is not an art, an acquired dexterity and

skill, but a new nature. And thereupon the consequence is the regenerate person *cannot sin*. That he cannot commit an act of sin, I suppose no judicious interpreter understands. This would be contrary to ch. 1:9, where it is made our duty to confess our sins, and supposed that our privilege thereupon is to have our sins forgiven. *He therefore cannot sin*, in the sense in which the apostle says, *he cannot commit sin*. He cannot continue in the course and practice of sin. He cannot so sin as to denominate him a sinner in opposition to a saint or servant of God. Again, he cannot sin comparatively, as he did before he was born of God, and as others do that are not so. And the reason is *because he is born of God*, which will amount to all this inhibition and impediment. 1. There is a light in his mind which shows him the evil and malignity of sin. 2. There is that bias upon his heart which disposes him to loathe and hate sin. 3. There is the spiritual seminal principle or disposition, that breaks the force and fulness of the sinful acts. They proceed not from such plenary power of corruption as they do in others, nor obtain that plenitude of heart, spirit, and consent, which they do in others. *The spirit lusteth against the flesh*. And therefore in respect to such sin it may be said, *It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me*. It is not reckoned the person's sin, in the gospel account, where the bent and frame of the mind and spirit are against it. Then, 4. There is a disposition for humiliation and repentance for sin, when it has been committed. *He that is born of God cannot sin*. Here we may call to mind the usual distinction of natural and moral impotency. The unregenerate person is morally unable for what is religiously good. The regenerate person is happily disabled for sin. There is a restraint, an embargo (as we may say), laid upon his sinning powers. It goes against him sedately and deliberately to sin. We usually say of a person of known integrity, "He cannot lie, he cannot cheat, and commit other enormities." *How can I commit this great wickedness, and sin against God!* Gen. 39:9. And so those who persist in a sinful life sufficiently demonstrate that they are not born of God.

VII. From the discrimination between the children of God and the children of the devil. They have their distinct characters. *In this the children of God are manifest and the children of the devil*, v. 10. In the world (according to the old distinction) there are the seed of God and the seed of the serpent. Now the seed of the serpent is known by these two signatures:—1. By neglect of religion: *Whosoever doeth not righteously* (omits and disregards the rights and dues of God; for religion is but our righteousness towards God, or giving him his due, and whosoever does not conscientiously do this) *is not of God*, but, on the contrary, of the devil. The devil is the father of unrighteous or irreligious souls. And, 2. By hatred of fellow-christians: *Neither he that loveth not his brother*, v. 10. True Christians are to be loved for God's and Christ's sake. Those who so love them not, but despise, and hate, and persecute them, have the serpentine nature still abiding in them.

Verses 11-13

The apostle, having intimated that one mark of the devil's children is hatred of the brethren, takes occasion thence,

I. To recommend fraternal Christian love, and that from the excellence, or antiquity, or primariness of the injunction relating thereto: *And this is the message* (the errand or charge) *which you heard from the beginning* (this came among the principal parts of practical Christianity), *that we should love one another*, v. 11. We should love the Lord Jesus, and value his love, and consequently love all the objects of it, and thereupon all our brethren in Christ.

II. To dissuade from what is contrary thereto, all ill-will towards the brethren, and that by the example of Cain. His envy and

malignity should deter us from harbouring the like passion, and that upon these accounts:—1. It showed that he was as the first-born of the serpent's seed; even he, the eldest son of the first man, was of *the wicked one*. He imitated and resembled the first wicked one, the devil. 2. His ill-will had no restraint; it proceeded so far as to contrive and accomplish murder, and that of a near relation, and that in the beginning of the world, when there were but few to replenish it. *He slew his brother*, v. 12. Sin, indulged, knows no bound. And, 3. It proceeded so far, and had in it so much of the devil, that he murdered his brother for religion's sake. He was vexed with the superiority of Abel's service, and envied him the favour and acceptance he had with God. And for these he martyred his brother. *And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous*, v. 12. Ill-will will teach us to hate and revenge what we should admire and imitate. And then, III. To infer that it is no wonder that good men are so served now: *Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you*, v. 13. The serpentine nature still continues in the world. The great serpent himself reigns as the God of this world. Wonder not then that the serpentine world hates and hisses at you who belong to that seed of the woman that is to bruise the serpent's head.

Verses 14-19

The beloved apostle can scarcely touch upon the mention of sacred love, but he must enlarge upon the enforcement of it, as here he does by divers arguments and incentives thereto; as,

I. That it is a mark of our evangelical justification, of our transition into a state of life: *We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren*, v. 14. We are by nature children of wrath and heirs of death. By the gospel (the gospel-covenant or promise) our state towards another world is altered and changed. We pass from death to life, from the guilt of death to the right of life; and this transition is made upon our believing in the Lord Jesus: *He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life*, and he that believeth not *hath the wrath of God abiding on him*, Jn. 3:36. Now this happy change of state we may come to be assured of: *We know that we have passed from death to life*; we may know it by the evidences of our faith in Christ, of which this love to our brethren is one, which leads us to characterize this love that is such a mark of our justified state. It is not a zeal for a party in the common religion, or an affection for, or an affectation of, those who are of the same denomination and subordinate sentiments with ourselves. But this love,

1. Supposes a general love to mankind: the law of Christian love, in the Christian community, is founded on the catholic law, in the society of mankind, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. Mankind are to be loved principally on these two accounts:—(1.) As the excellent work of God, made by him, and made in wonderful resemblance of him. The reason that God assigns for the certain punishment of a murderer is a reason against our hatred of any of the brethren of mankind, and consequently a reason for our love to them: *for in the image of God made he man*, Gen. 9:6. (2.) As being, in some measure, beloved in Christ. The whole *race of mankind—the gens humana*, should be considered as being, in distinction from fallen angels, a redeemed nation; as having a divine Redeemer designed, prepared, and given for them. *So God loved the world*, even this world, *that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life*, Jn. 3:16. A world so beloved of God should accordingly be loved by us. And this love will exert itself in earnest desires, and prayers, and attempts, for the conversion and salvation of the yet uncalled blinded world. *My heart's desire and prayer for*

Israel are that they may be saved. And then this love will include all due love to enemies themselves.

2. It includes a peculiar love to the Christian society, to the catholic church, and that for the sake of her head, as being his body, as being redeemed, justified, and sanctified in and by him; and this love particularly acts and operates towards those of the catholic church that we have opportunity of being personally acquainted with or credibly informed of. They are not so much loved for their own sakes as for the sake of God and Christ, who have loved them. And it is God and Christ, or, if you will, the love of God and grace of Christ, that are beloved and valued in them and towards them. And so this is the issue of faith in Christ, and is thereupon a note of our passage from death to life.

II. The hatred of our brethren is, on the contrary, a sign of our deadly state, of our continuance under the legal sentence of death: *He that loveth not his brother (his brother in Christ) abideth in death*, v. 14. He yet stands under the curse and condemnation of the law. This the apostle argues by a clear syllogism: "You know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him; but he who hates his brother is a murderer; and therefore you cannot but know that he who hates his brother hath not eternal life abiding in him," v. 15. Or, *he abideth in death*, as it is expressed, v. 14, *Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer*; for hatred of the person is, so far as it prevails, a hatred of life and welfare, and naturally tends to desire the extinction of it. Cain hated, and then slew, his brother. Hatred will shut up the bowels of compassion from the poor brethren, and will thereby expose them to the sorrows of death. And it has appeared that hatred of the brethren has in all ages dressed them up in ill names, odious characters, and calumnies, and exposed them to persecution and the sword. No wonder, then, that he who has a considerable acquaintance with the heart of man, or is taught by him who fully knows it, who knows the natural tendency and issue of vile and violent passions, and knows withal the fulness of the divine law, declares him who hates his brother to be *a murderer*. Now he who by the frame and disposition of his heart is a murderer *cannot have eternal life abiding in him*; for he who is such must needs be carnally-minded, *and to be carnally-minded is death*, Rom. 8:6. The apostle, by the expression of *having eternal life abiding in us*, may seem to mean the possession of an internal principle of endless life, according to that of the Saviour, *Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst*, shall never be totally destitute thereof; *but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life*, Jn. 4:14. And thereupon some may be apt to surmise that the passing from death to life (v. 14) does not signify the relative change made in our justification of life, but the real change made in the regeneration to life; and accordingly that the abiding in death mentioned v. 14 is continuance in spiritual death, as it is usually called, or abiding in the corrupt deadly temper of nature. But as these passages more naturally denote the state of the person, whether adjudged to life or death, so the relative transition from death to life may well be proved or disproved by the possession or non-possession of the inward principle of eternal life, since washing from the guilt of sin is inseparably united with washing from the filth and power of sin. *But you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God*, 1. Cor. 6:11.

III. The example of God and Christ should inflame our hearts with this holy love: *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*, v. 16. The great God has given his Son to the death for us. But since this apostle has declared that the *Word was God*, and that *he became flesh for us*, I see not why we may

not interpret this of God the Word. Here is the love of God himself, of him who in his own person is God, though not the Father, that he assumed a life, that he might lay it down for us! Here is the condescension, the miracle, the mystery of divine love, that God would redeem the church with his own blood! Surely we should love those whom God hath loved, and so loved; and we shall certainly do so if we have any love for God.

IV. The apostle, having proposed this flaming constraining example of love, and motive to it, proceeds to show us what should be the temper and effect of this our Christian love. And, 1. It must be, in the highest degree, so fervent as to make us willing to suffer even to death for the good of the church, for the safety and salvation of the dear brethren: *And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren* (v. 16), either in our ministrations and services to them (*yea, and if I be offered upon the service and sacrifice of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all—I shall congratulate your felicity, Phil. 2:17*), or in exposing ourselves to hazards, when called thereto, for the safety and preservation of those that are more serviceable to the glory of God and the edification of the church than we can be. *Who have for my life laid down their own necks; unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles, Rom. 16:4*. How mortified should the Christian be to this life! How prepared to part with it! And how well assured of a better! 2. It must be, in the next degree, compassionate, liberal, and communicative to the necessities of the brethren: *For whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?* v. 17. It pleases God that some of the Christian brethren should be poor, for the exercise of the charity and love of those that are rich. And it pleases the same God to give to some of the Christian brethren this world's good, that they may exercise their grace in communicating to the poor saints. And those who have this world's good must love a good God more, and their good brethren more, and be ready to distribute it for their sakes. It appears here that this love to the brethren is founded upon love to God, in that it is here called so by the apostle: *How dwelleth the love of God in him?* This love to the brethren is love to God in them; and where there is none of this love to them there is no true love to God at all. 3. I was going to intimate the third and lowest degree in the next verse; but the apostle has prevented me, by intimating that this last charitable communicative love, in persons of ability, is the lowest that can consist with the love of God. But there may be other fruits of this love; and therefore the apostle desires that in all it should be unfeigned and operative, as circumstances will allow: *My little children* (my dear children in Christ), *let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth*, v. 18. Compliments and flatteries become not Christians; but the sincere expressions of sacred affection, and the services or labours of love, do. Then,

V. This love will evince our sincerity in religion, and give us hope towards God: *And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him*, v. 19. It is a great happiness to be assured of our integrity in religion. Those that are so assured may have holy boldness or confidence towards God; they may appeal to him from the censures and condemnation of the world. The way to arrive at the knowledge of our own truth and uprightness in Christianity, and to secure our inward peace, is to abound in love and in the works of love towards the Christian brethren.

Verses 20-22

The apostle, having intimated that there may be, even among us, such a privilege as an assurance or sound persuasion of heart

towards God, proceeds here,

I. To establish the court of conscience, and to assert the authority of it: *For, if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things*, v. 20. Our heart here is our self-reflecting judicial power, that noble excellent ability whereby we can take cognizance of ourselves, of our spirits, our dispositions, and actions, and accordingly pass a judgment upon our state towards God; and so it is the same with conscience, or the power of moral self-consciousness. This power can act as witness, judge, and executioner of judgment; it either accuses or excuses, condemns or justifies; it is set and placed in this office by God himself: *the spirit of man*, thus capacitated and empowered, *is the candle of the Lord*, a luminary lighted and set up by the Lord, *searching all the inward parts of the belly*, taking into scrutiny and viewing the *penetralia—the private recesses* and secret transactions of the inner man, Prov. 20:27. Conscience is God's vicegerent, calls the court in his name, and acts for him. *The answer of a good conscience towards God*, 1 Pt. 3:21. God is chief Judge of the court: *If our heart condemn us God is greater than our heart*, superior to our heart and conscience in power and judgment; hence the act and judgment of the court are the act and judgment of God; as, 1. If conscience condemn us, God does so too: *For, if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things*, v. 20. God is a greater witness than our conscience, and knoweth more against us than it does: *he knoweth all things*; he is a greater Judge than conscience; for, as he is supreme, so his judgment shall stand, and shall be fully and finally executed. This seems to be the design of another apostle when he says, *For I know nothing by myself*, that is, in the case wherein I am censured by some. "I am not conscious of any guile, or allowed unfaithfulness, in my stewardship and ministry. *Yet I am hereby justified*; it is not by my own conscience that I must ultimately stand or fall; the justification or justifying sentence of my conscience, or self-consciousness, will not determine the controversy between you and me; as you do not appeal to its sentence, so neither will you be determined by its decision; *but he that judgeth me* (supremely and finally judgeth me), and by whose judgment you and I must be determined, *is the Lord*," 1 Co. 4:4. Or, 2. If conscience acquit us, God does so too: *Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God* (v. 21), then have we assurance that he accepts us now, and will acquit us in the great day of account. But, possibly, some presumptuous soul may here say, "I am glad of this; my heart does not condemn me, and therefore I may conclude God does not." As, on the contrary, upon the foregoing verse, some pious trembling soul will be ready to cry out, "God forbid! My heart or conscience condemns me, and must I then infallibly expect the condemnation of God?" But let such know that the errors of the witness are not here reckoned as the acts of the court; ignorance, error, prejudice, partiality, and presumption, may be said to be faults of the officers of the court, or of the attendants of the judge (as the mind, the will, appetite, passion, sensual disposition, or disordered brain), or of the jury, who give a false verdict, not of the judge itself; *conscience—syneidesis*, is properly *self-consciousness*. Acts of ignorance and error are not acts of self-consciousness, but of some mistaken power; and the court of conscience is here described in its process, according to the original constitution of it by God himself, according to which process what is bound in conscience is bound in heaven; let conscience therefore be heard, be well-informed, and diligently attended to.

II. To indicate the privilege of those who have a good conscience towards God. They have interest in heaven and in the court

above; their suits are heard there: *And whatsoever we ask we receive of him*, v. 22. It is supposed that the petitioners do not desire, or do not intend to desire, any thing that is contrary to the honour and glory of the court or to their own intended spiritual good, and then they may depend upon receiving the good things they ask for; and this supposition may well be made concerning the petitioners, or they may well be supposed to receive the good things they ask for, considering their qualification and practice: *Because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight*, v. 22. Obedient souls are prepared for blessings, and they have promise of audience; those who commit things displeasing to God cannot expect that he should please them in hearing and answering their prayers, Ps. 66:18; Prov. 28:9.

Verses 23-24

The apostle, having mentioned keeping the commandments, and pleasing God, as the qualification of effectual petitioners in and with Heaven, here suitably proceeds,

I. To represent to us what those commandments primarily and summarily are; they are comprehended in this double one: *And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment*, v. 23. To believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ is, 1. To discern what he is, according to his name, to have an intellectual view of his person and office, as the Son of God, and the anointed Saviour of the world. *That every one that seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life*, Jn. 6:40. 2. To approve him in judgment and conscience, in conviction and consciousness of our case, as one wisely and wonderfully prepared and adapted for the whole work of eternal salvation. 3. To consent to him, and acquiesce in him, as our Redeemer and recoverer unto God. 4. To trust to him, and rely upon him, for the full and final discharge of his saving office. *Those that know thy name will put their trust in thee*, Ps. 9:10. *I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day*, 2 Tim. 1:12. This faith is a needful requisite to those who would be prevalent petitioners with God, because it is by the Son that we must come to the Father; through his grace and righteousness our persons must be accepted or ingratiated with the Father (Eph. 1:6), through his purchase all our desired blessings must come, and through his intercession our prayers must be heard and answered. This is the first part of the commandment that must be observed by acceptable worshippers; the second is that we *love one another, as he gave us commandment*, v. 23. The command of Christ should be continually before our eyes. Christian love must possess our soul when we go to God in prayer. To this end we must remember that our Lord obliges us, (1.) To forgive those who offend us (Mt. 6:14), and, (2.) To reconcile ourselves to those whom we have offended, Mt. 5:23, 24. As good-will to men was proclaimed from heaven, so good-will to men, and particularly to the brethren, must be carried in the hearts of those who go to God and heaven.

II. To represent to us the blessedness of obedience to these commands. The obedient enjoy communion with God: *And he that keepeth his commandments, and particularly those of faith and love, dwelleth in him, and he in him*, v. 24. We dwell in God by a happy relation to him, and spiritual union with him, through his Son, and by a holy converse with him; and God dwells in us by his word, and our faith fixed on him, and by the operations of his Spirit. Then there occurs the trial of his divine inhabitation: *And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us* (v. 24), by the sacred disposition

and frame of soul that he hath conferred upon us, which being a spirit of faith in God and Christ, and of love to God and man, appears to be of God.

Chapter 4

In this chapter the apostle exhorts to try spirits (v. 1), gives a note to try by (v. 2, 3), shows who are of the world and who of God (v. 4-6), urges Christian love by divers considerations (v. 7-16), describes our love to God, and the effect of it (v. 17-21).

Verses 1-3

The apostle, having said that God's dwelling in and with us may be known by *the Spirit that he hath given us*, intimates that that Spirit may be discerned and distinguished from other spirits that appear in the world; and so here,

I. He calls the disciples, to whom he writes, to caution and scrutiny about the spirits and spiritual professors that had now risen.

1. To caution: "*Beloved, believe not every spirit; regard not, trust not, follow not, every pretender to the Spirit of God, or every professor of vision, or inspiration, or revelation from God.*" Truth is the foundation of simulation and counterfeits; there had been real communications from the divine Spirit, and therefore others pretended thereto. God will take the way of his own wisdom and goodness, though it may be liable to abuse; he has sent inspired teachers to the world, and given us a supernatural revelation, though others may be so evil and so impudent as to pretend the same; every pretender to the divine Spirit, or to inspiration, and extraordinary illumination thereby, is not to be believed. Time was when the spiritual man (the man of the Spirit, who made a great noise about, and boast of, the Spirit) was mad, Hos. 9:7. 2. To scrutiny, to examination of the claims that are laid to the Spirit: *But try the spirits, whether they be of God*, v. 1. God has given of his Spirit in these latter ages of the world, but not to all who profess to come furnished therewith; to the disciples is allowed a judgment of discretion, in reference to the spirits that would be believed and trusted in the affairs of religion. A reason is given for this trial: *Because many false prophets have gone out into the world*, v. 1. There being much about the time of our Saviour's appearance in the world a general expectation among the Jews of a Redeemer to Israel, and the humiliation, spiritual reformation, and sufferings of the Saviour being taken as a prejudice against him, others were induced to set up as prophets and messiahs to Israel, according to the Saviour's prediction, Mt. 24:23, 24. It should not seem strange to us that false teachers set themselves up in the church: it was so in the apostles' times; fatal is the spirit of delusion, sad that men should vaunt themselves for prophets and inspired preachers that are by no means so!

II. He gives a test whereby the disciples may try these pretending spirits. These spirits set up for prophets, doctors, or dictators in religion, and so they were to be tried by their doctrine; and the test whereby in that day, or in that part of the world where the apostle now resided (for in various seasons, and in various churches, tests were different), must be this: *Hereby know you the Spirit of God, Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (or that confesseth Jesus Christ that came in the flesh), is of God*, v. 2. Jesus Christ is to be confessed as the Son of God, the eternal life and Word, that was with the Father from the beginning; as the Son of God that came into, and came in, our human mortal nature, and therein suffered and died at Jerusalem. He who confesses and preaches this, by a mind supernaturally instructed and enlightened therein, does it by the Spirit of God, or God is the author of that illumination. On the contrary, "*Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (or Jesus Christ that came in the flesh) is not of God*", v. 3. God has given so much testimony to Jesus

Christ, who was lately here in the world, and in *the flesh* (or in a fleshly body like ours), though now in heaven, that you may be assured that any impulse or pretended inspiration that contradicts this is far from being from heaven and of God." The sum of revealed religion is comprehended in the doctrine concerning Christ, his person and office. We see then the aggravation of a systematic opposition to him and it. *And this is that spirit of antichrist whereof you have heard that it should come, and even now already is it in the world*, v. 3. It was foreknown by God that antichrists would arise, and antichristian spirits oppose his Spirit and his truth; it was foreknown also that one eminent antichrist would arise, and make a long and fatal war against the Christ of God, and his institution, and honour, and kingdom in the world. This great antichrist would have his way prepared, and his rise facilitated, by other less antichrists, and the spirit of error working and disposing men's minds for him: the antichristian spirit began betimes, even in the apostles' days. Dreadful and unsearchable is the judgment of God, that persons should be given over to an antichristian spirit, and to such darkness and delusion as to set themselves against the Son of God and all the testimony that the Father hath given to the Son! But we have been forewarned that such opposition would arise; we should therefore cease to be offended, and the more we see the word of Christ fulfilled the more confirmed we should be in the truth of it.

Verses 4-6

In these verses the apostle encourages the disciples against the fear and danger of this seducing antichristian spirit, and that by such methods as these:—1. He assures them of a more divine principle in them: "*You are of God, little children*, 5:4. *You are God's little children. We are of God*, v. 6. *We are born of God*, taught of God, anointed of God, and so secured against infectious fatal delusions. God has his chosen, who shall not be mortally seduced." 2. He gives them hope of victory: "*And have overcome them*, v. 4. You have hitherto overcome these deceivers and their temptations, and there is good ground of hope that you will do so still, and that upon these two accounts:"—(1.) "There is a strong preserver within you: *Because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world*, v. 4. The Spirit of God dwells in you, and that Spirit is more mighty than men of devils." It is a great happiness to be under the influence of the Holy Ghost. (2.) "You are not of the same temper with these deceivers. The Spirit of God hath framed your mind for God and heaven; *but they are of the world*. The spirit that prevails in them leads them to this world; their heart is addicted thereto; they study the pomp, the pleasure, and interest of the world: *and therefore speak they of the world*; they profess a worldly messiah and saviour; they project a worldly kingdom and dominion; the possessions and treasures of the world would they engross to themselves, forgetting that the true Redeemer's *kingdom is not of this world*. This worldly design procures them proselytes: *The world heareth them*, v. 5. They are followed by such as themselves: the world will love its own, and its own will love it. But those are in a fair way to conquer pernicious seductions who have conquered the love of this seducing world." Then, 3. He represents to them that though their company might be the smaller, yet it was the better; they had more divine and holy knowledge: "*He that knoweth God heareth us*. He who knows the purity and holiness of God, the love and grace of God, the truth and faithfulness of God, the ancient word and prophecies of God, the signals and testimonials of God, must know that he is with us; and he who knows this will attend to us, and abide with us." He that is well furnished with natural religion will the more faithfully cleave to Christianity. *He that knoweth God* (in his

natural and moral excellences, revelations, and works) *heareth us*, v. 6. As, on the contrary, "*He that is not of God heareth not us*. He who knows not God regards not us. He that is not *born of God* (walking according to his natural disposition) walks not with us. The further any are from God (as appears in all ages) the further they are from Christ and his faithful servants; and the more addicted persons are to this world the more remote they are from the spirit of Christianity. Thus you have a distinction between us and others: *Hereby know we the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error*, v. 6. This doctrine concerning the Saviour's person leading you from the world to God is a signature of *the Spirit of truth*, in opposition to *the spirit of error*. The more pure and holy any doctrine is the more likely is it to be of God."

Verses 7-13

As *the Spirit of truth* is known by doctrine (thus spirits are to be tried), it is known by love likewise; and so here follows a strong fervent exhortation to holy Christian love: *Beloved, let us love one another*, v. 7. The apostle would unite them in his love, that he might unite them in love to each other: "*Beloved, I beseech you, by the love I bear to you, that you put on unfeigned mutual love.*" This exhortation is pressed and urged with variety of argument: as,

I. From the high and heavenly descent of love: *For love is of God*. He is the fountain, author, parent, and commander of love; it is the sum of his law and gospel: *And every one that loveth* (whose spirit is framed to judicious holy love) *is born of God*, v. 7. The Spirit of God is the Spirit of love. The new nature in the children of God is the offspring of his love: and the temper and complexion of it is love. *The fruit of the Spirit is love*, Gal. 5:22. Love comes down from heaven.

II. Love argues a true and just apprehension of the divine nature: *He that loveth knoweth God*, v. 7. *He that loveth not knoweth not God*, v. 8. What attribute of the divine Majesty so clearly shines in all the world as his communicative goodness, which is love. The wisdom, the greatness, the harmony, and usefulness of the vast creation, which so fully demonstrate his being, do at the same time show and prove his love; and natural reason, inferring and collecting the nature and excellence of the most absolute perfect being, must collect and find that he is most highly good: and *he that loveth not* (is not quickened by the knowledge he hath of God to the affection and practice of love) *knoweth not God*; it is a convictive evidence that the sound and due knowledge of God dwells not in such a soul; his love must needs shine among his primary brightest perfections; *for God is love* (v. 8), his nature and essence are love, his will and works are primarily love. Not that this is the only conception we ought to have of him; we have found that he *is light as well as love* (ch. 1:5), and God is principally love to himself, and he has such perfections as arise from the necessary love he must bear to his necessary existence, excellence, and glory; but love is natural and essential to the divine Majesty: *God is love*. This is argued from the display and demonstration that he hath given of it; as, 1. That he hath loved us, such as we are: *In this was manifest the love of God towards us* (v. 9), towards us mortals, us ungrateful rebels. *God commandeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*, Rom. 5:8. Strange that God should love impure, vain, vile, dust and ashes! 2. That he has loved us at such a rate, at such an incomparable value as he has given for us; he has given his own, only-beloved, blessed Son for us: *Because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him*, v. 9. This person is in some peculiar distinguishing way the Son of God; he is the only-begotten. Should we suppose him begotten as a creature or created being, he is not the only-begotten. Should we

suppose him a natural necessary eradication from the Father's glory or glorious essence, or substance, he must be the only-begotten: and then it will be a mystery and miracle of divine love that such a Son should be sent into our world for us! It may well be said, *So* (wonderfully, so amazingly, so incredibly) *God loved the world*. 3. That God loved us first, and in the circumstances in which we lay: *Herein is love* (unusual unprecedented love), *not that we loved God, but that he loved us*, v. 10. He loved us, when we had no love for him, when we lay in our guilt, misery, and blood, when we were undeserving, ill-deserving, polluted, and unclean, and wanted to be washed from our sins in sacred blood. 4. That he gave us his Son for such service and such an end. (1.) For such service, *to be the propitiation for our sins*; consequently to die for us, to die under the law and curse of God, to *bear our sins in his own body*, to be crucified, to be wounded in his soul, and pierced in his side, to be dead and buried for us (v. 10); and then, (2.) For such an end, for such a good and beneficial end to us—*that we might live through him* (v. 9), might live for ever through him, might live in heaven, live with God, and live in eternal glory and blessedness with him and through him: O what love is here! Then,

III. Divine love to the brethren should constrain ours: *Beloved* (I would adjure you by your interest in my love to remember), *if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another*, v. 11. This should be an invincible argument. The example of God should press us. *We should be followers* (or imitators) *of him, as his dear children*. The objects of the divine love should be the objects of ours. Shall we refuse to love those whom the eternal God hath loved? We should be admirers of his love, and lovers of his love (of the benevolence and complacency that are in him), and consequently lovers of those whom he loves. The general love of God to the world should induce a universal love among mankind. *That you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth his rain on the just and on the unjust*, Mt. 5:45. The peculiar love of God to the church and to the saints should be productive of a peculiar love there: *If God so loved us, we ought surely* (in some measure suitably thereto) *to love one another*.

IV. The Christian love is an assurance of the divine inhabitation: *If we love one another, God dwelleth in us*, v. 12. Now God dwelleth in us, not by any visible presence, or immediate appearance to the eye (*no man hath seen God at any time*, v. 12), but by his Spirit (v. 13); or, *"No man hath seen God at any time"*; he does not here present himself to our eye or to our immediate intuition, and so he does not in this way demand and exact our love; but he demands and expects it in that way in which he has thought meet to deserve and claim it, and that is in the illustration that he has given of himself and of his love (and thereupon of his loveliness too) in the catholic church, and particularly in the brethren, the members of that church. In them, and in his appearance for them and with them, is God to be loved; and thus, *if we love one another, God dwelleth in us*. The sacred lovers of the brethren are the temples of God; the divine Majesty has a peculiar residence there."

V. Herein the divine love attains a considerable end and accomplishment in us: *"And his love is perfected in us*, v. 12. It has obtained its completion in and upon us. God's love is not perfected in him, but in and with us. His love could not be designed to be ineffectual and fruitless upon us; when its proper genuine end and issue are attained and produced thereby, it may be said to be perfected; so faith is perfected by its works, and love perfected by its operations. When the divine love has wrought us to the same image, to the love of God, and thereupon to the love of the brethren, the children of God, for his sake, it is therein and

so far perfected and completed, though this love of ours is not at present perfect, nor the ultimate end of the divine love to us." How ambitious should we be of this fraternal Christian love, when God reckons his own love to us perfected thereby! To this the apostle, having mentioned the high favour of God's dwelling in us, subjoins the note and character thereof: *Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit*, v. 13. Certainly this mutual inhabitation is something more noble and great than we are well acquainted with or can declare. One would think that to speak of God dwelling in us, and we in him, were to use words too high for mortals, had not God gone before us therein. What this indwelling imports has been briefly explained on ch. 3:24. What it fully is must be left to the revelation of the blessed world. But this mutual inhabitation we know, says the apostle, *because he hath given us of his spirit*; he has lodged the image and fruit of his Spirit in our hearts (v. 13), and *the Spirit that he hath given us* appears to be his, or of him, since it is *the Spirit of power*, of zeal and magnanimity for God, *of love* to God and man, *and of a sound mind*, of an understanding well instructed in the affairs of God and religion, and his kingdom among men, 2 Tim. 1:7.

Verses 14-16

Since faith in Christ works love to God, and love to God must kindle love to the brethren, the apostle here confirms the prime article of the Christian faith as the foundation of such love. Here,

I. He proclaims the fundamental article of the Christian religion, which is so representative of the love of God: *And we have seen, and do testify, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world*, v. 14. We here see, 1. The Lord Jesus's relation to God; he is Son to the Father, such a Son as no one else is, and so as to be God with the Father. 2. His relation and office towards us—*the Saviour of the world*; he saves us by his death, example, intercession, Spirit, and power against the enemies of our salvation. 3. The ground on which he became so—by the mission of him: *The Father sent the Son*, he decreed and willed his coming hither, in and with the consent of the Son. 4. The apostle's assurance of this—he and his brethren had seen it; they had seen the Son of God in his human nature, in his holy converse and works, in his transfiguration on the mount, and in his death, resurrection from the dead, and royal ascent to heaven; they had so seen him as to be satisfied that he was the *only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*. 5. The apostle's attestation of this, in pursuance of such evidence: *"We have seen and do testify*. The weight of this truth obliges us to testify it; the salvation of the world lies upon it. The evidence of the truth warrants us to testify it; our eyes, and ears, and hands, have been witnesses of it." Thereupon,

II. The apostle states the excellency, or the excellent privilege attending the due acknowledgment of this truth: *Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God*, v. 15. This confession seems to include faith in the heart as the foundation of it, acknowledgment with the mouth to the glory of God and Christ, and profession in the life and conduct, in opposition to the flatteries or frowns of the world. Thus *no man says that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost*, by the external attestation and internal operation of the Holy Ghost, 1 Co. 12:3. And so he who thus confesses Christ, and God in him, is enriched with or possessed by the Spirit of God, and has a complacential knowledge of God and much holy enjoyment of him. Then,

III. The apostle applies this in order to the excitation of holy love. God's love is thus seen and exerted in Christ Jesus; *and thus*

have we known and believed the love that God hath to us, v. 16. The Christian revelation is, what should endear it to us, the revelation of the divine love; the articles of our revealed faith are but so many articles relating to the divine love. The history of the Lord Christ is the history of God's love to us; all his transactions in and with his Son were but testifications of his love to us, and means to advance us to the love of God: *God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself*, 2 Co. 5:19. Hence we may learn,

1. That *God is love* (v. 16); he is essential boundless love; he has incomparable incomprehensible love for us of this world, which he has demonstrated in the mission and mediation of his beloved Son. It is the great objection and prejudice against the Christian revelation that the love of God should be so strange and unaccountable as to give his own eternal Son for us; it is the prejudice of many against the eternity and the deity of the Son that so great a person should be given for us. It is, I confess, mysterious and unsearchable; but there are *unsearchable riches in Christ*. It is a pity that the vastness of the divine love should be made a prejudice against the revelation and the belief of it. But what will not God do when he designs to demonstrate the height of any perfection of his? When he would show somewhat of his power and wisdom, he makes such a world as this; when he would show more of his grandeur and glory, he makes heaven for the ministering spirits that are before the throne. What will he not do then when he designs to demonstrate his love, and to demonstrate his highest love, or that he himself is love, or that love is one of the most bright, dear, transcendent, operative excellencies of his unbounded nature; and to demonstrate this not only to us, but to the angelic world, and to the principalities and powers above, and this not for our surprise for a while, but for the admiration, and praise, and adoration, and felicity, of our most exalted powers to all eternity? What will not God then do? Surely then it will look more agreeable to the design, and grandeur, and pregnancy of his love (if I may so call it) to give an eternal Son for us, than to make a Son on purpose for our relief. In such a dispensation as that of giving a natural, essential, eternal Son for us and to us, he will commend his love to us indeed; and what will not the God of love do when he designs to commend his love, and to commend it in the view of heaven, and earth, and hell, and when he will commend himself and recommend himself to us, and to our highest conviction, and also affection, as love itself? And what if it should appear at last (which I shall only offer to the consideration of the judicious) that the divine love, and particularly God's love in Christ, should be the foundation of the glories of heaven, in the present enjoyment of those ministering spirits that comported with it, and of the salvation of this world, and of the torments of hell? This last will seem most strange. But what if therein it should appear not only that God is love to himself, in vindicating his own law, and government, and love, and glory, but that the damned ones are made so, or are so punished, (1.) Because they despised the love of God already manifested and exhibited. (2.) Because they refused to be beloved in what was further proposed and promised. (3.) Because they made themselves unmeet to be the objects of divine complacency and delight? If the conscience of the damned should accuse them of these things, and especially of rejecting the highest instance of divine love, and if the far greatest part of the intelligent creation should be everlastingly blessed through the highest instance of the divine love, then may it well be inscribed upon the whole creation of God, *God is love*.

2. That hereupon *he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him*, v. 16. There is great communion between the God

of love and the loving soul; that is, him who loves the creation of God, according to its different relation to God, and reception from him and interest in him. He that dwells in sacred love has *the love God shed abroad upon his heart*, has the impress of God upon his spirit, the Spirit of God sanctifying and sealing him, lives in the meditation, views, and tastes of the divine love, and will ere long go to dwell with God for ever.

Verses 17-21

The apostle, having thus excited and enforced sacred love from the great pattern and motive of it, the love that is and dwells in God himself, proceeds to recommend it further by other considerations; and he recommends it in both the branches of it, both as love to God, and love to our brother or Christian neighbour.

I. As love to God, to the *primum amabile*—*the first and chief of all amiable beings and objects*, who has the confluence of all beauty, excellence, and loveliness, in himself, and confers on all other beings whatever renders them good and amiable. Love to God seems here to be recommended on these accounts:—1. It will give us peace and satisfaction of spirit in the day when it will be most needed, or when it will be the greatest pleasure and blessing imaginable: *Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment*, v. 17. There must be a day of universal judgment. Happy they who shall have holy fiducial boldness before the Judge at that day, who shall be able to lift up their heads, and to look him in the face, as knowing he is their friend and advocate! Happy they who have holy boldness and assurance in the prospect of that day, who look and wait for it, and for the Judge's appearance! So do, and so may do, the lovers of God. Their love to God assures them of God's love to them, and consequently of the friendship of the Son of God; the more we love our friend, especially when we are sure that he knows it, the more we can trust his love. As God is good and loving, and faithful to his promise, so we can easily be persuaded of his love, and the happy fruits of his love, when we can say, *Thou that knowest all things knowest that we love thee. And hope maketh not ashamed*; our hope, conceived by the consideration of God's love, will not disappoint us, *because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost that is given to us*, Rom. 5:5. Possibly here by the love of God may be meant our *love to God*, which is *shed abroad upon our hearts by the Holy Ghost*; this is the foundation of our hope, or of our assurance that our hope will hold good at last. Or, if by the love of God be meant the sense and apprehension of his love to us, yet this must suppose or include us as lovers of him in this case; and indeed the sense and evidence of his love to us do shed abroad upon our hearts love to him; and thereupon we have confidence towards him and peace and joy in him. He will give the crown of righteousness to all that love his appearing. And we have this boldness towards Christ because of our conformity to him: *Because as he is so are we in this world*, v. 17. Love hath conformed us to him; as he was the great lover of God and man, he has taught us in our measure to be so too, and he will not deny his own image. Love teaches us to conform in sufferings too; we suffer for him and with him, and therefore cannot but hope and trust that we shall also be glorified together with him, 2 Tim. 2:12. 2. It prevents or removes the uncomfortable result and fruit of servile fear: *There is no fear in love* (v. 18); so far as love prevails, fear ceases. We must here distinguish, I judge, between fear and being afraid; or, in this case, between the fear of God and being afraid of him. The fear of God is often mentioned and commanded as the substance of religion (1 Pt. 2:17; Rev. 14:7); and so it imports the high regard and veneration we have for God and his authority and

government. Such fear is constant with love, yea, with perfect love, as being in the angels themselves. But then there is a being afraid of God, which arises from a sense of guilt, and a view of his vindictive perfections; in the view of them, God is represented as a consuming fire; and so fear here may be rendered *dread*; *There is no dread in love*. Love considers its object as good and excellent, and therefore amiable, and worthy to be beloved. Love considers God as most eminently good, and most eminently loving us in Christ, and so puts off dread, and puts on joy in him; and, as love grows, joy grows too; so that *perfect love casteth out fear* or dread. Those who perfectly love God are, from his nature, and counsel, and covenant, perfectly assured of his love, and consequently are perfectly free from any dismal dreadful suspicions of his punitive power and justice, as armed against them; they well know that God loves them, and they thereupon triumph in his love. That *perfect love casteth out fear* the apostle thus sensibly argues: that which casteth out torment casteth out fear or dread: *Because fear hath torment* (v. 18)—fear is known to be a disquieting torturing passion, especially such a fear as is the dread of an almighty avenging God; but perfect love casteth out torment, for it teaches the mind a perfect acquiescence and complacency in the beloved, and therefore *perfect love casteth out fear*. Or, which is here equivalent, *he that feareth is not made perfect in love* (v. 18); it is a sign that our love is far from being perfect, since our doubts, and fears, and dismal apprehensions of God, are so many. Let us long for, and hasten to, the world of perfect love, where our serenity and joy in God will be as perfect as our love! 3. From the source and rise of it, which is the antecedent love of God: *We love him, because he first loved us*, v. 19. His love is the incentive, the motive, and moral cause of ours. We cannot but love so good a God, who was first in the act and work of love, who loved us when we were both unloving and unlovely, who loved us at so great a rate, who has been seeking and soliciting our love at the expense of his Son's blood; and has condescended to beseech us to be reconciled unto him. Let heaven and earth stand amazed at such love! His love is the productive cause of ours: *Of his own will* (of his own free loving will) *begat he us. To those that love him all things work together for good, to those who are the called according to his purpose*. Those that love God are the called thereto *according to his purpose* (Rom. 8:28); according to whose purpose they are called is sufficiently intimated in the following clauses: *whom he did predestinate* (or antecedently purpose, to the image of his Son) *those he also called*, effectually recovered thereto. The divine love stamped love upon our souls; may the Lord still and further direct our hearts into the love of God! 2 Th. 3:5.

II. As love to our brother and neighbour in Christ; such love is argued and urged on these accounts:—1. As suitable and consonant to our Christian profession. In the profession of Christianity we profess to love God as the root of religion: *"If then a man say, or profess as much as thereby to say, I love God, I am a lover of his name, and house, and worship, and yet hate his brother, whom he should love for God's sake, he is a liar* (v. 20), he therein gives his profession the lie." That such a one loves not God the apostle proves by the usual facility of loving what is seen rather than what is unseen: *For he that loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen?* v. 20. The eye is wont to affect the heart; things unseen less catch the mind, and thereby the heart. The incomprehensibility of God very much arises from his invisibility; the member of Christ has much of God visible in him. How then shall the hater of a visible image of God pretend to love the unseen original, the invisible God himself? 2. As suitable to the express law of God, and the just reason of it: *And this*

commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also, v. 21. As God has communicated his image in nature and in grace, so he would have our love to be suitably diffused. We must love God originally and supremely, and others in him, on the account of their derivation and reception from him, and of his interest in them. Now, our Christian brethren having a new nature and excellent privileges derived from God, and God having his interest in them as well as in us, it cannot but be a natural suitable obligation *that he who loves God should love his brother also*.

Chapter 5

In this chapter the apostle asserts, I. The dignity of believers (v. 1). II. Their obligation to love, and the trial of it (v. 1-3). III. Their victory (v. 4, 5). IV. The credibility and confirmation of their faith (v. 6–10). V. The advantage of their faith in eternal life (v. 11–13). VI. The audience of their prayers, unless for those who have sinned unto death (v. 14–17). VII. The preservation from sin and Satan (v. 18). VIII. Their happy distinction from the world (v. 19). IX. Their true knowledge of God (v. 20), upon which they must depart from idols (v. 21).

Verses 1-5

I. The apostle having, in the conclusion of the last chapter, as was there observed, urged Christian love upon those two accounts, as suitable to Christian profession and as suitable to the divine command, here adds a third: Such love is suitable, and indeed demanded, by their eminent relation; our Christian brethren or fellow-believers are nearly related to God; they are his children: *Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God*, v. 1. Here the Christian brother is, 1. Described by his faith; he that *believeth that Jesus is the Christ*—that he is Messiah the prince, that he is the Son of God by nature and office, that he is the chief of all the anointed world, chief of all the priests, prophets, or kings, who were ever anointed by God or for him, that he is perfectly prepared and furnished for the whole work of the eternal salvation—accordingly yields himself up to his care and direction; and then he is, 2. Dignified by his descent: *He is born of God*, v. 1. This principle of faith, and the new nature that attends it or from which it springs, are ingenerated by the Spirit of God; and so sonship and adoption are not now appropriated *to the seed of Abraham according to the flesh*, not to the ancient Israel of God; all believers, though by nature sinners of the Gentiles, are spiritually descended from God, and accordingly are to be beloved; as it is added: *Every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him*, v. 1. It seems but natural that he who loves the Father should love the children also, and that in some proportion to their resemblance to their Father and to the Father's love to them; and so we must first and principally love *the Son of the Father*, as he is most emphatically styled, 2 Jn. 3, *the only* (necessarily) *begotten*, and *the Son of his love*, and then those that are voluntarily begotten, and *renewed by the Spirit of grace*.

II. The apostle shows, 1. How we may discern the truth, or the true evangelical nature of our love to the regenerate. The ground of it must be our love to God, whose they are: *By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God*, v. 2. Our love to them appears to be sound and genuine when we love them not merely upon any secular account, as because they are rich, or learned, or kind to us, or of our denomination among religious parties; but because they are God's children, his regenerating grace appears in them, his image and superscription are upon them, and so in them God himself is loved. Thus we see what that love to the brethren is that is so pressed in this epistle; it is love to them as the children of God and the adopted brethren of the Lord Jesus. 2. How we may learn the truth of our love to God—it appears in our holy obedience: *When we love God, and keep his commandments*, v. 2. Then we truly, and in gospel account, love God, when we keep his commandments: *For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments*; and the keeping of his commandments requires a spirit inclined thereto and delighting herein; *and so his commandments are not grievous*, v. 3. Or, *This is the love of God, that*, as thereby we

are determined to obedience, and to keep the commandments of God, so his commandments are thereby made easy and pleasant to us. The lover of God says, "*O how I love thy law! I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart* (Ps. 119:32), when thou shalt enlarge it either with love or with thy Spirit, the spring of love." 3. What is and ought to be the result and effect of regeneration—an intellectual spiritual conquest of this world: *For whatsoever is born of God*, or, as in some copies, *whosoever is born of God, overcometh the world*, v. 4. He that is born of God is born *for* God, and consequently for another world. He has a temper and disposition that tend to a higher and better world; and he is furnished with such arms, or such a weapon, whereby he can repel and conquer this; as it is added, *And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith*, v. 4. Faith is the cause of victory, the means, the instrument, the spiritual armour and artillery by which we overcome; for, (1.) In and by faith we cleave to Christ, in contempt of, and opposition to, the world. (2.) Faith works in and by love to God and Christ, and so withdraws us from the love of the world. (3.) Faith sanctifies the heart, and purifies it from those sensual lusts by which the world obtains such sway and dominion over souls. (4.) It receives and derives strength from the object of it, the Son of God, for conquering the frowns and flatteries of the world. (5.) It obtains by gospel promise a right to the indwelling Spirit of grace, that is greater than he who dwells in the world. (6.) It sees an invisible world at hand, with which this world is not worthy to be compared, and into which it tells the soul in which it resides it must be continually prepared to enter; and thereupon,

III. The apostle concludes that it is the real Christian that is the true conqueror of the world: *Who is he then that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?* v. 5. It is the world that lies in our way to heaven, and is the great impediment to our entrance there. But he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God believes therein that Jesus Came from God to be the Saviour of the world, and powerfully to conduct us from the world to heaven, and to God, who is fully to be enjoyed there. And he who so believes must needs by this faith overcome the world. For, 1. He must be well satisfied that this world is a vehement enemy to his soul, to his holiness, his salvation, and his blessedness. *For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world*, ch. 2:16. 2. He sees it must be a great part of the Saviour's work, and of his own salvation, to be redeemed and rescued from this malignant world. *Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world*, Gal. 1:4. 3. He sees in and by the life and conduct of the Lord Jesus on earth that this world is to be renounced and overcome. 4. He perceives that the Lord Jesus conquered the world, not for himself only, but for his followers; and they must study to be partakers of his victory. *Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world*. 5. He is taught and influenced by the Lord Jesus's death to be mortified and crucified to the world. *God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world*, Gal. 6:14. 6. He is begotten by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to the lively hope of a blessed world above, 1 Pt. 1:3. 7. He knows that the Saviour has gone to heaven, and is there preparing a place for his serious believers, Jn. 14:2. 8. He knows that his Saviour will come again thence, and will put an end to this world, and judge the inhabitants of it, and receive his believers to his presence and glory, Jn. 14:3. 9. He is possessed with a spirit and disposition that cannot be satisfied with this world, that look beyond it, and are still tending, striving, and pressing, towards the world in heaven. *In this*

we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven, 2 Co. 5:2. So that it is the Christian religion that affords its proselytes a universal empire. It is the Christian revelation that is the great means of conquering the world, and gaining another that is most pure and peaceful, blessed and eternal. It is there, in that revelation, that we see what are the occasion and ground of the quarrel and contest between the holy God and this rebellious world. It is there that we meet with sacred doctrine (both speculative and practical), quite contrary to the tenour, temper, and tendency of this world. It is by that doctrine that a spirit is communicated and diffused which is superior and adverse to the spirit of the world. It is there we see that the Saviour himself was not of this world that his kingdom was not and is not so, that it must be separated from the world and gathered out of it for heaven and for God. There we see that the Saviour designs not this world for the inheritance and portion of his saved company. As he has gone to heaven himself, so he assures them he goes to prepare for their residence there, as designing they should always dwell with him, and allowing them to believe that if in this life, and this world only, they had hope in him, they should at last be but miserable. It is there that the eternal blessed world is most clearly revealed and proposed to our affection and pursuit. It is there that we are furnished with the best arms and artillery against the assaults and attempts of the world. It is there that we are taught how the world may be out-shot in its own bow, or its artillery turned against itself; and its oppositions, encounters, and persecutions, be made serviceable to our conquest of the world, and to our motion and ascent to the higher heavenly world: and there we are encouraged by a whole army and cloud of holy soldiers, who have in their several ages, posts, and stations, overcome the world, and won the crown. It is the real Christian that is the proper hero, who vanquishes the world and rejoices in a universal victory. Nor does he (for he is far superior to the Grecian monarch) mourn that there is not another world to be subdued, but lays hold on the eternal world of life, and in a sacred sense takes the kingdom of heaven by violence too. Who in all the world but the believer on Jesus Christ can thus overcome the world?

Verses 6-9

The faith of the Christian believer (or the believer in Christ) being thus mighty and victorious, it had need to be well founded, to be furnished with unquestionable celestial evidence concerning the divine mission, authority, and office of the Lord Jesus; and it is so; he brings his credentials along with him, and he brings them in a way by which he came and in the witness that attends him.

I. In the way and manner by which he came; not barely by which he came into the world, but by and with which he came, and appeared, and acted, as a Saviour in the world: *This is he that came by water and blood.* He came to save us from our sins, to give us eternal life, and bring us to God; and, that he might the more assuredly do this, *he came by, or with, water and blood.* *Even Jesus Christ;* Jesus Christ, I say, did so; and none but he. And I say it again, not by or with *water only, but by and with water and blood, v. 6. Jesus Christ came with water and blood,* as the notes and signatures of the true effectual Saviour of the world; and he came by water and blood as the means by which he would heal and save us. That he must and did thus come in his saving office may appear by our remembering these things:—

1. We are inwardly and outwardly defiled. (1.) Inwardly, by the power and pollution of sin and in our nature. For our cleansing from this we need spiritual water; such as can reach the soul and the powers of it. Accordingly, there is in and by

Christ Jesus *the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost*. And this was intimated to the apostles by our Lord, when he washed their feet, and said to Peter, who refused to be washed, *Except I wash thee, thou hast no part in me.* (2.) We are defiled outwardly, by the guilt and condemning power of sin upon our persons. By this we are separated from God, and banished from his favourable, gracious, beatific presence for ever. From this we must be purged by atoning blood. It is the law or determination in the court of heaven *that without shedding of blood there shall be no remission*, Heb. 9:22. The Saviour from sin therefore must come with blood.

2. Both these ways of cleansing were represented in the old ceremonial institutions of God. Persons and things must be purified by water and blood. *There were divers washings and carnal ordinances imposed till the time of reformation*, Heb. 9:10. *The ashes of a heifer, mixed with water, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh*, Heb. 9:13; Num. 19:9. *And likewise almost all things are, by the law, purged with blood*, Heb. 9:22. As those show us our double defilement, so they indicate the Saviour's two-fold purgation.

3. At and upon the death of Jesus Christ, his side being pierced with a soldier's spear, out of the wound there immediately issued water and blood. This the beloved apostle saw, and he seems to have been affected with the sight; he alone records it, and seems to reckon himself obliged to record it, and seems to reckon himself obliged to record it, as containing something mysterious in it: *And he that saw it bore record, and his record is true. And he knoweth*, being an eye-witness, *that he saith true, that you might believe*, and that you might believe this particularly, that out of his pierced side *forthwith there came water and blood*, Jn. 19:34, 35. Now this water and blood are comprehensive of all that is necessary and effectual to our salvation. By the water our souls are washed and purified for heaven and the region of saints in light. By the blood God is glorified, his law is honoured, and his vindictive excellences are illustrated and displayed. *Whom God hath set forth*, or purposed, or proposed, *a propitiation through faith in his blood*, or a propitiation in or by his blood through faith, *to declare his righteousness, that he may be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus*, Rom. 3:25, 26. By the blood we are justified, reconciled, and presented righteous to God. By the blood, the curse of the law being satisfied, and purifying Spirit is obtained for the internal ablution of our natures. *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit*, the promised Spirit, *through faith*, Gal. 3:13, etc. The water, as well as the blood, issued out of the side of the sacrificed Redeemer. The water and the blood then comprehend all things that can be requisite to our salvation. They will consecrate and sanctify to that purpose all that God shall appoint or make use of in order to that great end. *He loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church*, Eph. 5:25–27. He who comes by water and blood is an accurate perfect Saviour. And this is he who comes by water and blood, even Jesus Christ! Thus we see in what way and manner, or, if you please, with what utensils, he comes. But we see his credentials also,

II. In the witness that attends him, and that is, the divine Spirit, that Spirit to whom the perfecting of the works of God is usually attributed: *And it is the Spirit that beareth witness*, v. 6. It was meet that the commissioned Saviour of the world should have a constant agent to support his work, and testify of him to the world. It was meet that a divine power should attend him,

his gospel, and servants; and notify to the world upon what errand and office they came, and by what authority they were sent: this was done in and by the Spirit of God, according to the Saviour's own prediction, "*He shall glorify me*, even when I shall be rejected and crucified by men, *for he shall receive of mine*. He shall not receive my immediate office; he shall not die and rise again for you; *but he shall receive of mine*, shall proceed on the foundation I have laid, shall take up my institution, and truth, and cause, *and shall further show it unto you*, and by you to the world," Jn. 16:14. And then the apostle adds the commendation or the acceptableness of this witness: *Because the Spirit is truth*, v. 6. He is the Spirit of God, and cannot lie. There is a copy that would afford us a very suitable reading thus: *because*, or that, *Christ is the truth*. And so it indicates the matter of the Spirit's testimony, the thing which he attests, and that is, the truth of Christ: *And it is the Spirit that beareth witness that Christ is the truth*; and consequently that Christianity, or the Christian religion, is the truth of the day, the truth of God. But it is meet that one or two copies should alter the text; and our present reading is very agreeable, and so we retain it. *The Spirit is truth*. He is indeed the Spirit of truth, Jn. 14:17. And that the Spirit is truth, and a witness worthy of all acceptation, appears in that he is a heavenly witness, or one of the witnesses that in and from heaven bore testimony concerning the truth and authority of Christ. *Because* (or for) *there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one*. And so v. 7 most appositely occurs, as a proof of the authenticity of the Spirit's testimony; he must needs be true, or even truth itself, if he be not only a witness in heaven, but *even one* (not in testimony only, for so an angel may be, but in being and essence) *with the Father and the Word*. But here,

1. We are stopped in our course by the contest there is about the genuineness of v. 7. It is alleged that many old Greek manuscripts have it not. We shall not here enter into the controversy. It should seem that the critics are not agreed what manuscripts have it and what not; nor do they sufficiently inform us of the integrity and value of the manuscripts they peruse. Some may be so faulty, as I have an old printed Greek Testament so full of *errata*, that one would think no critic would establish a various lection thereupon. But let the judicious collators of copies manage that business. There are some rational surmises that seem to support the present text and reading. As,

(1.) If we admit v. 8, in the room of v. 7, it looks too like a tautology and repetition of what was included in v. 6, *This is he that came by water and blood, not by water only, but by water and blood; and it is the Spirit that beareth witness. For there are three that bear witness, the Spirit, the water, and the blood*. This does not assign near so noble an introduction of these three witnesses as our present reading does.

(2.) It is observed that many copies read that distinctive clause, *upon the earth: There are three that bear record upon the earth*. Now this bears a visible opposition to some witness or witnesses elsewhere, and therefore we are told, by the adversaries of the text, that this clause must be supposed to be omitted in most books that want v. 7. But it should for the same reason be so in all. Take we v. 6, *This is he that came by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth*. It would not now naturally and properly be added, *For there are three that bear record on earth*, unless we should suppose that the apostle would tell us that all the witnesses are such as are on earth, when yet he would assure us that one is infallibly true, or even truth itself.

(3.) It is observed that there is a variety of reading even in the Greek text, as in v. 7. Some copies read *hen eisi*—*are one*; others (at least the *Complutensian*) *eis to hen eisin*—*are to one, or agree in one*; and in v. 8 (in that part that it is supposed should be admitted), instead of the common *en teυ γευ*—*in earth, the Complutensian* reads *epi teυς γευς*—*upon earth*, which seems to show that that edition depended upon some Greek authority, and not merely, as some would have us believe, upon the authority either of the vulgar Latin or of *Thomas Aquinas*, though his testimony may be added thereto.

(4.) The seventh verse is very agreeable to the style and the theology of our apostle; as, [1.] He delights in the title *the Father*, whether he indicates thereby God only, or a divine person distinguished from the Son. *I and the Father are one. And Yet I am not alone; because the Father is with me. I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. Grace be with you, and peace from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father*, 2 Jn. 3. Then, [2.] The name *the Word* is known to be almost (if not quite) peculiar to this apostle. Had the text been devised by another, it had been more easy and obvious, from the form of baptism, and the common language of the church, to have used the name *Son* instead of that of the *Word*. As it is observed that Tertullian and Cyprian use that name, even when they refer to this verse; or it is made an objection against their referring to this verse, because they speak of the Son, not the Word; and yet Cyprian's expression seems to be very clear by the citation of Facundus himself. *Quod Johannis apostoli testimonium beatus Cyprianus, Carthaginensis antistes et martyr, in epistolâ sive libro, quem de Trinitate scripsit, de Patre, Filio, et Spiritu sancto dictum intelligit; ait enim, Dicit Dominus, Ego et Pater unum sumus; et iterum de Patre, Filio, et Spiritu sancto scriptum est, Et hi tres unum sunt.*—*Blessed Cyprian, the Carthaginian bishop and martyr, in the epistle or book he wrote concerning the Trinity, considered the testimony of the apostle John as relating to the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit; for he says, the Lord says, I and the Father are one; and again, of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit it is written, And these three are one.* Now it is nowhere written that these are one, but in v. 7. It is probable than that St. Cyprian, either depending on his memory, or rather intending things more than words, persons more than names, or calling persons by their names more usual in the church (both in popular and polemic discourses), called the second by the name of the *Son* rather than of the *Word*. If any man can admit Facundus's fancy, that Cyprian meant that the Spirit, the water, and the blood, were indeed the Father, Word, and Spirit, that John said were one, he may enjoy his opinion to himself. For, *First*, He must suppose that Cyprian not only changed all the names, but the apostle's order too. For the blood (the Son), which Cyprian puts second, the apostle puts last. And, *Secondly*, He must suppose that Cyprian thought that by the blood which issued out of the side of the Son the apostle intended the Son himself, who might as well have been denoted by the water,—that by the water, which also issued from the side of the Son, the apostle intended the person of the Holy Ghost,—that by the Spirit, which in v. 6 is said to be truth, and in the gospel is called the Spirit of truth, the apostle meant the person of the Father, though he is nowhere else so called when joined with the Son and the Holy Ghost. We require good proof that the *Carthaginian* father could so understand the apostle. He who so understands him must believe too that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are said to be three witnesses on earth. *Thirdly*, *Facundus* acknowledges that Cyprian says that of his three it is written, *Et hi tres unum sunt—and these three are one.* Now these are the words, not of v. 8, but of v. 7. They are not used concerning the three on earth, the Spirit, the water,

and the blood; but the three in heaven, the Father, and the Word, and the Holy Ghost. So we are told that the author of the book *De baptismo haereticorum*, allowed to be contemporary with Cyprian, cites John's words, agreeably to the Greek manuscripts and the ancient versions, thus: *Ait enim Johannes de Domino nostro in epistolâ nos docens, Hic es qui venit per aquam et sanguinem, Jesus Christus, non in aquâ tantum, sed in aquâ et sanguine; et Spiritus est qui testimonium perhibet, quia Spiritus est veritas; quia tres testimonium perhibent, Spiritus et aqua et sanguis, et isti tres in unum sunt*—For John, in his epistle, says concerning our Lord, *This is he, Jesus Christ, who came by water and blood, not in water only, but in water and blood; and it is the Spirit that bears witness, because the Spirit is truth; for there are three that bear witness, the Spirit, the water, and the blood, and these three agree in one.* If all the Greek manuscripts and ancient versions say concerning the Spirit, the water, and the blood, that *in unum sunt*—they agree in one, then it was not of them that Cyprian spoke, whatever variety there might be in the copies in his time, when he said it is written, *unum sunt*—they are one. And therefore Cyprian's words seem still to be a firm testimony to v. 7, and an intimation likewise that a forger of the text would have scarcely so exactly hit upon the apostolical name for the second witness in heaven, *the Word*. Them, [3.] As only this apostle records the history of the water and blood flowing out of the Saviour's side, so it is he only, or he principally, who registers to us the Saviour's promise and prediction of the Holy spirit's coming to glorify him, and to testify of him, and to convince the world of its own unbelief and of his righteousness, as in his gospel, ch. 14:16, 17, 26; 15:26; 16:7–15. It is most suitable then to the diction and to the gospel of this apostle thus to mention the Holy Ghost as a witness for Jesus Christ. Then,

(5.) It was far more easy for a transcriber, by turning away his eye, or by the obscurity of the copy, it being obliterated or defaced on the top or bottom of a page, or worn away in such materials as the ancients had to write upon, to lose and omit the passage, than for an interpolator to devise and insert it. He must be very bold and impudent who could hope to escape detection and shame; and profane too, who durst venture to make an addition to a supposed sacred book. And,

(6.) It can scarcely be supposed that, when the apostle is representing the Christian's faith in overcoming the world, and the foundation it relies upon in adhering to Jesus Christ, and the various testimony that was attended him, especially when we consider that he meant to infer, as he does (v. 9), *If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this* (which he had rehearsed before) *is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son.* Now in the three witnesses on earth there is neither all the witness of God, nor indeed any witness who is truly and immediately God. The antitrinitarian opposers of the text will deny that either the Spirit, or the water, or the blood, is God himself; but, upon our present reading, here is a noble enumeration of the several witnesses and testimonies supporting the truth of the Lord Jesus and the divinity of his institution. Here is the most excellent abridgment or breviary of the motives to faith in Christ, of the credentials the Saviour brings with him, and of the evidences of our Christianity, that is to be found, I think, in the book of God, upon which single account, even waiving the doctrine of the divine Trinity, the text is worthy of all acceptance.

2. Having these rational grounds on our side, we proceed. The apostle, having told us that the Spirit that bears witness to Christ is truth, shows us that he is so, by assuring us that he is in heaven, and that there are others also who cannot but be true, or truth itself, concurring in testimony with him: *For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy*

Ghost, and these three are one, v. 7.

(1.) Here is a trinity of heavenly witnesses, such as have testified and vouched to the world the veracity and authority of the Lord Jesus in his office and claims, where, [1.] The first that occurs in order is *the Father*; he set his seal to the commission of the Lord Christ all the while he was here; more especially, *First*, In proclaiming him at his baptism, Mt. 3:17. *Secondly*, In confirming his character at the transfiguration, Mt. 17:5. *Thirdly*, In accompanying him with miraculous power and works: *If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not; but if I do, though you believe not me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him*, Jn. 10:37, 38. *Fourthly*, In avouching at his death, Mt. 27:54. *Fifthly*, In raising him from the dead, and receiving him up to his glory: *He shall convince the world-of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and you see me no more*, Jn. 16:10, and Rom. 1:4. [2.] The second witness in the Word, a mysterious name, importing the highest nature that belongs to the Saviour of Jesus Christ, wherein he existed before the world was, whereby he made the world, and whereby he was truly God with the Father. He must bear witness to the human nature, or to the man Christ Jesus, in and by whom he redeemed and saved us; and he bore witness, *First*, By the mighty works that he wrought. Jn. 5:17, *My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Secondly*, In conferring a glory upon him at his transfiguration. *And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father*, Jn. 1:14. *Thirdly*, In raising him from the dead. Jn. 2:19, *Destroy this temple, and in three days will I raise it up*. [3.] The third witness is the Holy Ghost, or the Holy Spirit, and august, venerable name, the possessor, proprietor, and author of holiness. True and faithful must he be to whom the Spirit of holiness sets his seal and solemn testimony. So he did to the Lord Jesus, the head of the Christian world; and that in such instances as these:—*First*, In the miraculous production of his immaculate human nature in the virgin's womb. *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee*, Lu. 1:35, etc. *Secondly*, In the visible descent upon him at his baptism. *The Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape*, Lu. 3:22, etc. *Thirdly*, In an effectual conquest of the spirits of hell and darkness. *If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come unto you*, Mt. 12:28. *Fourthly*, In the visible potent descent upon the apostles, to furnish them with gifts and powers to preach him and his gospel to the world after he himself had gone to heaven, Acts 1:4, 5; 2:2-4, etc. *Fifthly*, In supporting the name, gospel, and interest of Christ, by miraculous gifts and operations by and upon the disciples, and in the churches, for two hundred years (1 Co. 12:7), concerning which see Dr. Whitby's excellent discourse in the preface to the second volume of his *Commentary on the New Testament*. These are witnesses in heaven; and they bear record from heaven; and they are one, it should seem, not only in testimony (for that is implied in their being three witnesses to one and the same thing), but upon a higher account, as they are in heaven; they are one in their heavenly being and essence; and, if one with the Father, they must be one God.

(2.) To these there is opposed, though with them joined, a trinity of witnesses on earth, such as continue here below: *And there are three that bear witness on earth, the spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree in one, v. 8*. [1.] Of these witnesses the first is the *spirit*. This must be distinguished from the person of the Holy Ghost, who is in heaven. We must say then, with the Saviour (according to what is reported by this apostle), *that which is born of the Spirit is spirit*, Jn. 3:6. The disciples of the Saviour are, as well as others, born after the flesh. They come into the world endued with a corrupt carnal

disposition, which is enmity to God. This disposition must be mortified and abolished. A new nature must be communicated. Old lusts and corruptions must be eradicated, and the true disciple become a new creature. The regeneration or renovation of souls is a testimony to the Saviour. It is his actual though initial salvation. It is a testimony on earth, because it continues with the church here, and is not performed in that conspicuous astonishing manner in which signs from heaven are accomplished. To this Spirit belong not only the regeneration and conversion of the church, but its progressive sanctification, victory over the world, her peace, and love, and joy, and all that grace by which she is made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. [2.] The second is the *water*. This was before considered as a means of salvation, now as a testimony to the Saviour himself, and intimates his purity and purifying power. And so it seems to comprehend, *First*, The purity of his own nature and conduct in the world. *He was holy, harmless, and undefiled*. *Secondly*, The testimony of John's baptism, who bore witness of him, prepared a people for him, and referred them to him, Mk. 1:4, 7, 8. *Thirdly*, The purity of his own doctrine, by which souls are purified and washed. *Now you are clean through the word that I have spoken unto you*, Jn. 15:3. *Fourthly*, The actual and active purity and holiness of his disciples. His body is the holy catholic church. *Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit*, 1 Pt. 1:22. And this signed and sealed by, *Fifthly*, The baptism that he has appointed for the initiation or introduction of his disciples, in which he signally (or by that sign) says, *Except I wash thee, thou hast no part in me. Not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God*, 1 Pt. 3:21. [3.] The third witness is the blood; this he shed, and this was our ransom. This testifies for Jesus Christ, *First*, In that it sealed up and finished the sacrifices of the Old Testament, *Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us*. *Secondly*, In that it confirmed his own predictions, and the truth of all his ministry and doctrine, Jn. 18:37. *Thirdly*, In that it showed unparalleled love to God, in that he would die a sacrifice to his honour and glory, in making atonement for the sins of the world, Jn. 14:30, 31. *Fourthly*, In that it demonstrated unspeakable love to us; and none will deceive those whom they entirely love, Jn. 14:13–15. *Fifthly*, In that it demonstrated the disinterestedness of the Lord Jesus as to any secular interest and advantage. No impostor and deceiver ever proposes to himself contempt and a violent cruel death, Jn. 18:36. *Sixthly*, In that it lays obligation on his disciple to suffer and die for him. No deceiver would invite proselytes to his side and interest at the rate that the Lord Jesus did. *You shall be hated of all men for my sake. They shall put you out of their synagogues; and the time comes that whosoever kills you will think that he doeth God service*, Jn. 16:2. He frequently calls his servants to a conformity with him in sufferings: *Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach*, Heb. 13:13. This shows that neither he nor his kingdom is of this world. *Seventhly*, The benefits accruing and procured by his blood (well understood) must immediately demonstrate that he is indeed the Saviour of the world. And then, *Eighthly*, These are signified and sealed in the institution of his own supper: *This is my blood of the New Testament* (which ratifies the New Testament), *which is shed for many, for the remission of sins*, Mt. 26:28. Such are the witnesses on earth. Such is the various testimony given to the author of our religion. No wonder if the rejector of all this evidence he judged as a blasphemer of the Spirit of God, and be left to perish without remedy in his sins. These three witnesses (being more different than the three former) are not so properly said to be *one* as to be *for one*, to be for one and the same purpose and cause, *or to agree in one*, in one and the same thing among themselves, and in the same

testimony with those who bear record from heaven.

III. The apostle justly concludes, *If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God, that he hath testified of his Son*, v. 9. Here we have, 1. A supposition well founded upon the premises. *Here is the witness of God*, the witness whereby God hath testified of his Son, which surely must intimate some immediate irrefragable testimony, and that of the Father concerning his Son; he has by himself proclaimed and avouched him to the world. 2. The authority and acceptableness of his testimony; and that argued from the less to the greater: *If we receive the witness of men* (and such testimony is and must be admitted in all judicatories and in all nations), *the witness of God is greater*. It is truth itself, of highest authority and most unquestionable infallibility. And then there is, 3. The application of the rule to the present case: *For this is the witness*, and here is the witness of God even of the Father, as well as of the Word and Spirit, *which he hath testified of*, and wherein he hath attested, *his Son. God, that cannot lie*, hath given sufficient assurance to the world that Jesus Christ is his Son, the Son of his love, and Son by office, to reconcile and recover the world unto himself; he testified therefore the truth and divine origin of the Christian religion, and that it is the sure appointed way and means of bringing us to God.

Verses 10-13

In those words we may observe,

I. The privilege and stability of the real Christian: *He that believeth on the Son of God*, hath been prevailed with unfeignedly to cleave to him for salvation, *hath the witness in himself*, v. 10. He hath not only the outward evidence that others have, but he hath in his own heart a testimony for Jesus Christ. He can allege what Christ and the truth of Christ have done for his soul and what he has seen and found in him. As, 1. He has deeply seen his sin, and guilt, and misery, and his abundant need of such a Saviour. 2. He has seen the excellency, beauty, and office of the Son of God, and the incomparable suitableness of such a Saviour to all his spiritual wants and sorrowful circumstances. 3. He sees and admires the wisdom and love of God in preparing and sending such a Saviour to deliver him from sin and hell, and to raise him to pardon, peace, and communion with God. 4. He has found and felt the power of the word and doctrine of Christ, wounding, humbling, healing, quickening, and comforting his soul. 5. He finds that the revelation of Christ, as it is the greatest discovery and demonstration of the love of God, so it is the most apt and powerful means of kindling, fomenting, and inflaming love to the holy blessed God. 6. He is born of God by the truth of Christ, as v. 1. He has a new heart and nature, a new love, disposition, and delight, and is not the man that formerly he was. 7. He finds yet such a conflict with himself, with sin, with the flesh, the world, and invisible wicked powers, as is described and provided for in the doctrine of Christ. 8. He finds such prospects and such strength afforded him by the faith of Christ, that he can despise and overcome the world, and travel on towards a better. 9. He finds what interest the Mediator has in heaven, by the audiency and prevalency of those prayers that are sent thither in his name, according to his will, and through his intercession. 10. He is begotten again to a lively hope, to a holy confidence in God, in his good-will and love, to a pleasant victory over terrors of conscience, dread of death and hell, to a comfortable prospect of life and immortality, being enriched with the earnest of the Spirit and sealed to the day of redemption. Such assurance has the gospel believer; he has a witness in himself. Christ is formed in him, and he is growing up to the fulness and perfection, or perfect image of Christ,

in heaven.

II. The aggravation of the unbeliever's sin, the sin of unbelief: *He that believeth not God hath made him a liar*. He does, in effect, give God the lie, *because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son*, v. 10. He must believe that God did not send his Son into the world, when he has given us such manifold evidence that he did, or that Jesus Christ was not the Son of God, when all that evidence relates to and terminates upon him, or that he sent his Son to deceive the world and to lead it into error and misery, or that he permits men to devise a religion which, in all the parts of it, is a pure, holy, heavenly, undefiled institution, and so worthy to be embraced by the reason of mankind, and yet is but a delusion and a lie, and then lends them his Spirit and power to recommend and obtrude it upon the world, which is to make God the Father, the author and abettor, of the lie.

III. The matter, the substance, or contents of all this divine testimony concerning Jesus Christ: *And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son*, v. 11. This is the sum of the gospel. This is the sum and epitome of the whole record given us by all the aforesaid six witnesses. 1. That *God hath given to us eternal life*. He has designed it for us in his eternal purpose. He has prepared all the means that are necessary to bring us to it. He has made it over to us by his covenant and promise. And he actually confers a right and title thereto on all who believe on and actually embrace the Son of God. Then, 2. *This life is in the Son*. The Son is life; eternal life in his own essence and person, Jn. 1:4; 1 Jn. 1:2. He is eternal life to us, the spring of our spiritual and glorious life, Col. 3:4. From him life is communicated to us, both here in heaven. And thereupon it must follow, (1.) *He that hath the Son hath life*, v. 12. He that is united to the Son is united to life. He who hath a title to the Son hath a title to life, to eternal life. Such honour hath the Father put upon the Son: such honour must we put upon him too. We must come and kiss the Son, and we shall have life. (2.) *He that hath not the Son of God hath not life*, v. 12. He continues under the condemnation of the law (Jn. 3:36); he refuses the Son, who is life itself, who is the procurer of life, and the way to it; he provokes God to deliver him over to endless death for making him a liar, since he believes not this record that God hath given concerning his Son.

IV. The end and reason of the apostle's preaching this to believers. 1. For their satisfaction and comfort: *These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life*, v. 13. Upon all this evidence, and these witnesses, it is but just and meet that there should be those who believe on the name of the Son of God. God increase their number! How much testimony from heaven has the world to answer for! And to three witnesses in heaven must the world be accountable. These believers have eternal life. They have it in the covenant of the gospel, in the beginning and first-fruits of it within them, and in their Lord and head in heaven. These believers may come to know that they have eternal life, and should be quickened, encouraged, and comforted, in the prospect of it: and they should value the scriptures, which are so much written for their consolation and salvation. 2. For their confirmation and progress in their holy faith: *And that you may believe on the name of the Son of God* (v. 13), may go on believing. Believers must persevere, or they do nothing. To withdraw from believing on the name of the Son of God is to renounce eternal life, and draw back unto perdition. Therefore the evidences of religion and the advantage of faith are to be presented to believers, in order to hearten and encourage them to

persevere to the end.

Verses 14-17

Here we have,

I. A privilege belonging to faith in Christ, namely, audience in prayer: *This is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us*, v. 14. The Lord Christ emboldens us to come to God in all circumstances, with all our supplications and requests. Through him our petitions are admitted and accepted of God. The matter of our prayer must be agreeable to the declared will of God. It is not fit that we should ask what is contrary either to his majesty and glory or to our own good, who are his and dependent on him. And then we may have confidence that the prayer of faith shall be heard in heaven.

II. The advantage accruing to us by such privilege: *If we know that he heareth us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him*, v. 15. Great are the deliverances, mercies, and blessings, which the holy petitioner needs. To know that his petitions are heard or accepted is as good as to know that they are answered; and therefore that he is so pitied, pardoned, or counselled, sanctified, assisted, and saved (or shall be so) as he is allowed to ask of God.

III. Direction in prayer in reference to the sins of others: *If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for those that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it*, v. 16. Here we may observe, 1. We ought to pray for others as well as for ourselves; for our brethren of mankind, that they may be enlightened, converted, and saved; for our brethren in the Christian profession, that they may be sincere, that their sins may be pardoned, and that they may be delivered from evils and the chastisements of God, and preserved in Christ Jesus. 2. There is a great distinction in the heinousness and guilt of sin: *There is a sin unto death* (v. 16), *and there is a sin not unto death*, v. 17. (1.) *There is a sin unto death*. All sin, as to the merit and legal sentence of it, is unto death. *The wages of sin is death; and cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them*, Gal. 3:10. But there is a sin unto death in opposition to such sin as is here said *not to be unto death*. There is therefore, (2.) *A sin not unto death*. This surely must include all such sin as by divine or human constitution may consist with life; in the human constitution with temporal or corporal life, in the divine constitution with corporal or with spiritual evangelical life. [1.] There are sins which, by human righteous constitution, are not unto death; as divers pieces of injustice, which may be compensated without the death of the delinquent. In opposition to this there are sins which, by righteous constitution, are to death, or to a legal forfeiture of life; such as we call *capital crimes*. [2.] Then there are sins which, by divine constitution, are unto death; and that either death corporal or spiritual and evangelical. *First*, Such as are, or may be, to death corporal. Such may the sins be either of gross hypocrites, as Ananias and Sapphira, or, for aught we know, of sincere Christian brethren, as when the apostle says of the offending members of the church of Corinth, *For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep*, 1 Co. 11:30. There may be sin unto corporal death among those who may not be condemned with the world. Such sin, I said, is, or may be, to corporal death. The divine penal constitution in the gospel does not positively and peremptorily threaten death to the more visible sins of the members of Christ, but only some gospel-chastisement; *for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth*,

and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth, Heb. 12:6. There is room left for divine wisdom or goodness, or even gospel severity, to determine how far the chastisement or the scourge shall proceed. And we cannot say but that sometimes it may (*in terrorem—for warning to others*) proceed even to death. Then, *Secondly*, There are sins which, by divine constitution, are unto death spiritual and evangelical, that is, are inconsistent with spiritual and evangelical life, with spiritual life in the soul and with an evangelical right to life above. Such are total impenitence and unbelief for the present. Final impenitence and unbelief are infallibly to death eternal, as also a blaspheming of the Spirit of God in the testimony that he has given to Christ and his gospel, and a total apostasy from the light and convictive evidence of the truth of the Christian religion. These are sins involving the guilt of everlasting death. Then comes,

IV. The application of the direction for prayer according to the different sorts of sin thus distinguished. The prayer is supposed to be for life: *He shall ask, and he (God) shall give them life*. Life is to be asked of God. He is the God of life; he gives it when and to whom he pleases, and takes it away either by his constitution or providence, or both, as he thinks meet. In the case of a brother's sin, which is not (in the manner already mentioned) unto death, we may in faith and hope pray for him; and particularly for the life of soul and body. But, in case of the sin unto death in the forementioned ways, we have no allowance to pray. Perhaps the apostle's expression, *I do not say, He shall pray for it*, may intend no more than, "I have no promise for you in that case; no foundation for the prayer of faith." 1. The laws of punitive justice must be executed, for the common safety and benefit of mankind: and even an offending brother in such a case must be resigned to public justice (which in the foundation of it is divine), and at the same time also to the mercy of God. 2. The removal of evangelical penalties (as they may be called), or the prevention of death (which may seem to be so consequential upon, or inflicted for, some particular sin), can be prayed for only conditionally or provisionally, that is, with proviso that it consist with the wisdom, will, and glory of God that they should be removed, and particularly such death prevented. 3. We cannot pray that the sins of the impenitent and unbelieving should, while they are such, be forgiven them, or that any mercy of life or soul, that suppose the forgiveness of sin, should be granted to them, while they continue such. But we may pray for their repentance (supposing them but in the common case of the impenitent world), for their being enriched with faith in Christ, and thereupon for all other saving mercies. 4. In case it should appear that any have committed the irremissible blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, and the total apostasy from the illuminating convictive powers of the Christian religion, it should seem that they are not to be prayed for at all. For *what remains but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, to consume such adversaries?* Heb. 10:27. And these last seem to be the sins chiefly intended by the apostle by the name of *sins unto death*. Then, 5. The apostle seems to argue that there is sin that is not unto death; thus, *All unrighteousness is sin* (v. 17); but, were all unrighteousness unto death (since we have all some unrighteousness towards God or man, or both, in omitting and neglecting something that is their due), then we were all peremptorily bound over to death, and, since it is not so (the Christian brethren, generally speaking, having right to life), there must be sin that is not to death. Though there is no venial sin (in the common acceptation), there is pardoned sin, sin that does not involve a plenary obligation to eternal death. If it were not so, there could be no justification nor continuance of the justified state. The gospel constitution or covenant abbreviates, abridges, or rescinds the guilt of sin.

Verses 18-21

Here we have,

I. A recapitulation of the privileges and advantages of sound Christian believers. 1. They are secured against sin, against the fulness of its dominion or the fulness of its guilt: *We know that whosoever is born of God* (and the believer in Christ is born of God, v. 1) *sinneth not* (v. 18), *sinneth not* with that fulness of heart and spirit that the unregenerate do (as was said ch. 3:6, 9), and consequently not with that fulness of guilt that attends the sins of others; and so he is secured against that sin which is unavoidably unto death, or which infallibly binds the sinner over unto the wages of eternal death; the new nature, and the inhabitation of the divine Spirit thereby, prevent the admission of such unpardonable sin. 2. They are fortified against the devil's destructive attempts: *He that is begotten of God keepeth himself*, that is, is enabled to guard himself, *and the wicked one toucheth him not* (v. 18), that is, that the wicked one may not touch him, namely, to death. It seems not to be barely a narration of the duty or the practice of the regenerate; but an indication of their power by virtue of their regeneration. They are thereby prepared and principled against the fatal touches, the sting, of the wicked one; he touches not their souls, to infuse his venom there as he does in others, or to expel that regenerative principle which is an antidote to his poison, or to induce them to that sin which by the gospel constitution conveys an indissoluble obligation to eternal death. He may prevail too far with them, to draw them to some acts of sin; but it seems to be the design of the apostle to assert that their regeneration secures them from such assaults of the devil as will bring them into the same case and actual condemnation with the devil. 3. they are on God's side and interest, in opposition to the state of the world: *And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness*, v. 19. Mankind are divided into two great parties of dominions, that which belongs to God and that which belongs to wickedness or to the wicked one. The Christian believers belong to God. They are of God, and from him, and to him, and for him. They succeed into the right and room of the ancient Israel of God, of whom it is said, *The Lord's people is his portion*, his estate in this world; *Jacob is the lot of his inheritance*, the dividend that has fallen to him by the lot of his own determination (Deu. 32:9); while, on the contrary, *the whole world*, the rest, being by far the major part, *lieth in wickedness*, in the jaws in the bowels of the wicked one. There are, indeed, were we to consider the individuals, many wicked ones, many wicked spirits, in the heavenly or the ethereal places; but they are united in wicked nature, policy, and principle, and they are united also in one head. there is the prince of the devils and of the diabolical kingdom. There is a head of the malignity and of the malignant world; and he has such sway here that he is called *the god of this world*. Strange that such a knowing spirit should be so implacably incensed against the Almighty and all his interests, when he cannot but know that it must end in his own overthrow and everlasting damnation! How tremendous is the judgment of God upon that wicked one! May the God of the Christian world continually demolish his dominion in this world, and translate souls into *the kingdom of his dear Son!* 4. They are enlightened in the knowledge of the true eternal God: *"And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true*, v. 20. The Son of God has come into our world, and we have seen him, and know him by all the evidence that has already been asserted; he has revealed unto us the true God (as Jn. 1:18), and he has opened our minds too to understand that revelation, given us an internal light in our understandings, whereby we may discern

the glories of the true God; and we are assured that it is the true God that he hath discovered to us. He is infinitely superior in purity, power, and perfection, to all the gods of the Gentiles. He has all the excellences, beauties, and riches, of the living and true God. It is the same God that, according to Moses's account, made the heavens and the earth, the same who took our fathers and patriarchs into peculiar covenant with himself, the same who brought our ancestors out of Egypt, who gave us the fiery law upon mount Sinai, who gave us his holy oracles, promised the call and conversion of the Gentiles. By his counsels and works, by his love and grace, by his terrors and judgments, we know that he, and he alone, in the fulness of his being, is the living and true God." It is a great happiness to know the true God, to know him in Christ; it is eternal life, Jn. 17:3. It is the glory of the Christian revelation that it gives the best account of the true God, and administers the best eye-salve for our discerning the living and true God. 5. They have a happy union with God and his Son: "*And we are in him that is true, even (or and) in his Son Jesus Christ, v. 20.* The Son leads us to the Father, and we are in both, in the love and favour of both, in covenant and federal alliance with both, in spiritual conjunction with both by the inhabitation and operation of their Spirit: and, that you may know how great a dignity and felicity this is, you must remember that this true one is *the true God and eternal life*" or rather (as it should seem a more natural construction), "This same Son of God is himself also *the true God and eternal life*" (Jn. 1:1, and here, ch. 1:2), "so that in union with either, much more with both, we are united to *the true God and eternal life.*" Then we have,

II. The apostle's concluding monition: "*Little children*" (dear children, as it has been interpreted), "*keep yourselves from idols, v. 21.* Since you know the true God, and are in him, let your light and love guard you against all that is advanced in opposition to him, or competition with him. Flee from the false gods of the heathen world. They are not comparable to the God whose you are and whom you serve. Adore not your God by statues and images, which share in his worship. Your God is an incomprehensible Spirit, and is disgraced by such sordid representations. Hold no communion with your heathen neighbours in their idolatrous worship. Your God is jealous, and would have you come out, and be separated from among them; mortify the flesh, and be crucified to the world, that they may not usurp the throne of dominion in the heart, which is due only to God. The God whom you have known is he who made you, who redeemed you by his Son, who has sent his gospel to you, who has pardoned your sins, begotten you unto himself by his Spirit, and given you eternal life. Cleave to him in faith, and love, and constant obedience, in opposition to all things that would alienate your mind and heart from God. To this living and true God be glory and dominion for ever and ever. *Amen.*"