

1 John 4

by Daniel Steele

The sermon emphasizes the importance of discernment, the danger of false prophets, and the revelation of God's love through redemption.

Scripture: 1 John 4:2

Topics: "Discerning Spirits", "Gods Love"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches on the importance of discerning between true and false spirits, emphasizing the need to test religious teachers to ensure they are in alignment with God's truth. He highlights the significance of confessing Jesus Christ as the incarnate Savior, stressing that true faith must declare itself through a genuine, penitent heart trusting in Christ for salvation. Steele delves into the concept of God's love being perfected in believers, leading to boldness in the day of judgment and the mutual indwelling of God and the believer as a sign of intimate fellowship.

Transcript

HALF-HOURS WITH JOHN'S EPISTLES

FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

CHAPTER IV.

THE mention of the Spirit, the pentecostal gift, as decisive of the question whether God abides in believers, suggests that a safeguard should be set up against false spirits who would lead them astray. These are not all of them disembodied, and invisible like Satan. Some of them walk the earth as living religious teachers. These must be tested to prove that they are in sympathy with God and are trustworthy expounders of His truth. Other evil spirits are unseen assuming "specious forms of ambition, power, honor, knowledge, as distinguished from earthly and sensual enjoyments. All such spirits are partial revelations of the one spirit of evil which become (so to speak) embodied in men." (Westcott.)

d. iv. 1-v. 12. The Sources of Sonship: Possession of the Spirit as shown by Confession of the Incarnation.

The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error (iv. 1-6)

Love is the Mark of the Children of Him who is Love (iv. 7-21).

Faith Is the Source of Love, the Victory over the World, and the Possession of Life (v. 1-12).

1. "Prove the spirits." One element of our probation consists in the exercise of our powers of discernment, in discriminating between the influences which are brought to bear upon us. The devil wears many different masks. He conquers by deceit. It is our duty to cultivate the ability to detect the actor behind the mask. This ability is one element of Christian perfection, according to Heb. v. 14, "But solid food is for the perfect, even those who by reason of use (habit) have their (internal) senses exercised to discern good and evil." (R. V. margin.)

The mental inertia which refuses to form this habit of spiritual insight is next in culpability to total indifference in the presence of moral good and moral evil, holiness and sin, soliciting our choice and determining our character. There is no evading responsibility at this point. The fact that "discerning of spirits" is one of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit excuses no one from the constant exercise of his intellectual discrimination between good and evil.

"Many false prophets." Or preachers of religious errors. The false prophets in the Old Testament come to us modern readers branded as false, but in their day they were not thus branded, but came to the people as true and inspired. It is so in our times. Many discredit the true prophets and cleave to the false. Paul encountered rival apostles who publicly questioned the genuineness of his apostleship and turned his converts away from the truth and from Christ its incarnation. In no age has this class of teachers been extinct. They are to-day fulfilling Christ's prediction showing "great signs and wonders" (Matt. xxiv. 24), especially in the line of so-called miraculous healing of the sick and making the dead to appear in material form. Bishop Westcott suggests that John had in mind "the great outbreak of the Gentile pseudo-Christianity which is vaguely spoken of as Gnosticism, the endeavor to separate the 'ideas' of the faith from the facts of the historic redemption." This miscalled "philosophy of religion," which is a series of imaginative speculations respecting the origin of the universe, and the independent and eternal principles of existence, holiness existing in spirit and sin inherent in matter and never touching spirit, is the real key to this Epistle.

2. "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh." Here both the A. V. and R. V. have failed to give the exact Greek, "confesseth Jesus Christ, come in the flesh." Christ is the object confessed, and not some fact relating to Him. The confession required is a person and not, an abstract doctrine. "The gospel centres in a person and not in any truth, even the greatest, about the Person." It is not the confession of the incarnation, but of the Saviour incarnate, the pledge and pattern of man completely redeemed, soul and body bearing the image of the glorified God-man. The believer who thus savingly apprehends and publicly confesses the historic Christ, not as a phantom man, as the Gnostics taught, but a real man, the incarnation of the uncreated Logos who in the beginning was with God and was God, is of God, born from above. "Faith if it is real must declare itself." This text does not teach that an orthodox creed is saving, unless it has produced a truly penitent heart trusting in the divine and human Christ confessed, and relying on Him alone for salvation. Throughout the Epistle the emphasis laid upon "in the flesh," as denoting Christ's real humanity, is manifestly directed against those docetic Gnostics who denied that He was a real man. This they did to avoid the objection to the inherence of sin in all matter; because this would make Jesus Christ sinful, for He had a real body. To meet this objection these philosophers resorted to the denial of His real body.

3. "Confesseth not Jesus!" Overwhelming evidence, including the R. V., requires the omission of the words "Christ is come in the flesh," as an obvious interpolation to complete the antithesis. However

orthodox one's theological creed may be, he does not really and savingly confess Christ till he enthrones Him in his heart as both Saviour and Lord, his reason bowing to His authority as an infallible teacher, and his will submitting to Him as his supreme sovereign, the God-man. The marginal reading, "annulleth Jesus," supported by some ancient authorities, is regarded by most modern experts to be a mistake arising from some traditional saying of John. The same may be said of another reading, "the Spirit which separates Jesus," i. e., sunders Him into two persons, one divine and the other human. It has little or no support in the Greek manuscripts, and rests chiefly, if not solely, on the Vulgate version, the Roman Catholic standard. "The denial of the Incarnation is in fact the denial of that which is characteristic of the Christian faith, the true union of God and man." (Bishop Westcott.) Since it was love that prompted the Divine Logos to become flesh, the denial of this fact, as Augustine suggests, is a sign of the absence of love in him who denies.

"Is not of God." There are apparently two classes, those who deny the Incarnation and (iii. 10) those who do not practise righteousness, but they exhibit two negative signs of one class. He who denies the Incarnation, having thrust from himself the strongest motive to holy living, will fail to practise that genuine, evangelical righteousness which Christ exemplifies and requires.

"Spirit of antichrist." There being no middle class between the just and the unjust, the friends of Christ and his foes, it must follow that all who are not His friends are actuated by the spirit antagonistic to Christ, the spirit of antichrist. See ii. 18, note.

"Whereof ye have heard." As a part of the Gospel message (Matt. xxiv. 5, 24) and of apostolic prediction. (Acts xx. 30; 1 Tim. iv. 1.) These general warnings respecting false Christs and heretical teachers are by John vividly condensed in a typical adversary, called by Paul "that man of sin." (2 Thess. ii. 3.) This antagonism represents not merely unbelievers, but also wilful and conscious perverters of the gospel. Those who have extreme abhorrence of popery render the preposition "anti" instead of. Thus they find in antichrist a forewarning of one who will profess to stand in Christ's place clothed with His authority to forgive sin and to rule the church as "the vicegerent of God." It is certain that John was divinely inspired to describe the seed out of which the papacy has budded, blossomed and borne its baneful fruit. This is implied in the words "even now already is it in the world." In seed form the fulfilment of the prophecy had come before Christians were looking for it.

4. "Ye are of God." "Ye," as contrasted with the world and with professed believers who were not endowed with spiritual discernment because they had not received and retained "the anointing of the Holy One" (ii. 20, 24, 27). There are in John's writings three phrases to express the relation of believers to God: to be begotten of God, to be of God, and to be a child of God. They occur scores of times, implying a new life in the earth.

"Have overcome them." The false prophets who would seduce you from your loyalty to Christ are permanently conquered by John's hearers, as the perfect tense implies. See ii. 14, v. 4; Rev. ii. 7, 11, 17, 26; iii. 5, 12, 21; xii. 11, to all of which John xvi. 32, is the key. "The ground and assurance of the victory of Christians lie in the Power by which they are inspired." (Westcott.) This power is applied by the mutual indwelling of God and the believer (iii. 24, iv. 16; John xv. 4).

"Greater is He that is in you." The Holy Spirit whose indwelling is maintained by an uninterrupted, unwavering trust in the living glorified Christ.

"Than he that is in the world." The devil, whose children the wicked are (iii. 10; Matt. xiii. 38, xxiii. 15; Acts xiii. 10). In their case there is also a mutual indwelling, for the world lieth in the wicked one (v. 19), and the unbelieving and impenitent are "in the world" as a baneful and dominating power.

5. "They are of the world." The false prophets, the organs of the devil, are not merely of the earth, as all men are, but they are of the world -- a phrase expressing the characteristics of all who are separated from God (ii. 16; John viii. 23, xv. 19, xvii. 14, 16, xviii. 36).

"They speak of the world." The character of their speech and the character of their hearers are determined by their own character." (Westcott.) This is according to the adage, "like priest like people." An unspiritual pulpit will make unspiritual pews.

6. "We are of God." Having spoken of Christian hearers in verse 4, John now speaks of Christian teachers whose anointed vision discerns the true message which they bring to men from the lips of God. This is received in its true character by him who has the experimental knowledge of God and by all who sincerely desire such knowledge. "The world listens to those who express its own thoughts; the Christian listens to those who teach him more of God. The readiness to hear springs from a living, growing knowledge, which welcomes and appropriates the truth." The phrase, "He who is not of God," does not exclude true moral responsibility. He has determined his own character by the perverse attitude of his own will, by which he has shut out "the Spirit of truth," who reveals the truth and enables the seeking soul to see it. In the absence of the Spirit of truth, the evil spirit, the father of lies, fills the empty and darkened soul with various forms of religious error. Hence the culpability of unbelief.

"By this we know." "This power of recognition belongs to all believers. It is not limited to teachers by an emphatic pronoun as before." That the apostles have the "Spirit of truth" is proved by the fact that they who have been born of the Spirit hear and obey them, while the false prophets show that they have the spirit of error because the world hears them with sympathy and satisfaction.

7. "Every one that loveth" with evangelical, pure, unselfish affection "is begotten of God." This excludes sexual love and the merely natural love of kindred. Some who have never heard of Christ, such as Socrates and Marcus Aurelius, have exhibited Christian philanthropy, which evinces that they were born of God. They had the spirit of faith, i. e., the disposition to embrace the object of saving faith, Christ, were He presented to them; and they had the purpose of righteousness, the disposition to conform to Christian ethics when revealed to them. "Such are saved through the historic Christ, though they know him not." (Wesley.) They have the essential Christ, i. e., the outlines of His moral character.

8. "Knoweth not God." Literally "knew Him not" when they professed to know Him by receiving baptism or by testimony of the lips.

"God is love." This is more than to say God is amiable. Only if He is love in His essential being, is the statement true, that to have no personal, experimental knowledge of love is to have no real knowledge of God. The Gnostics were doubtless in John's mind, who knew much about God, but they did not by a heart experience know God, for instead of loving those humble brethren who were not their equals in intellectual attainments they treated them with an arrogant and heartless contempt. "They had recognized that 'God is spirit,' and to some extent that 'God is light;' for they knew Him to be an immaterial Being and the highest Intelligence; but they had wholly failed to appreciate that God is love." (Dr. A. Plummer.) The heathen regard God as terrible, whose fierce anger needs to be averted with offerings. The Jews believed that He was just and jealous, and, possibly, merciful, whose inmost being was to them a mystery beyond what

was revealed in His name Jehovah, "I am that I am." To the regenerate alone is He known as Love.

Says Augustine, "If nothing whatever throughout the other pages of the Scriptures were said in praise of love, and this one thing only were all we, were told by the voice of the Spirit of God, 'For God is love,' nothing more ought we to require."

9. "Herein was the love of God manifested," and in John iii. 16, "For God so loved the world." Bishop Westcott says, "The revelation of the divine love is referred to an absolute (eternal) moment, both in relation to the Son and also to the world and to men." God's love is made known chiefly through redemption, which is a definite act. The gift of the Son was absolutely free and spontaneous. If it had been of necessity it would not be a proof of love.

"In us." It was love towards us, but the form of this phrase shows that God's love is revealed not only in His Son, but also in us as a transparent medium. "The Christian shares the life of Christ and so becomes himself a secondary sign of God's love." (Westcott.) The new creation is a more clear and expressive revelation of love than the first creation: "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ."

"His only begotten Son." Shallow and weak indeed is the Unitarian exegesis -- "best beloved son." It is in vain that extreme liberalism teaches that all men are incarnations of God in a lower degree than Jesus. "Only begotten" denotes unique sonship, an existence unshared which is grounded in God's nature, while the existence of all men and of all things is grounded in God's will. This is the difference between the generation of the Son outside of time limits, "before the world was," and the creation of the universe by His own volition. "Christ is the One only Son, the One to whom the title belongs in a sense completely unique and singular, as distinguished from that in which there are many children of God. (John i. 12-14.)"

"That we might live." Activity, not safety, is accentuated.

"Through Him." Christ is the efficient cause of spiritual life. He lives in the true believer. (Chap. v. 12, 20; Gal. ii. 20; 2 Cor. iv. 10-12; Col. iii. 4.) He is the substance of the Christian's life. (Phil. i. 21.) Also the aim of his life. (Rom. vi. 10, 11, xiv. 8; Gal. ii. 19.)

10. "In this is love." Real love in its origin is not human, but divine. Its source is not a blind impulse, but an intelligent movement of God's free will pitying a sinful race and approving those who trust in His Son, whom He sent into a fallen world. In this act God's love reached its climax. Human love at best is only responsive; it is never original and spontaneous. It is never strictly distinterested, as the love of God is. The theology that requires of mankind such love is too high for the holiest men and angels to reach.

The great secret of God's method with men is that He loves them into loving. There is no other force so mighty as love, and nothing else so contagious. It is the royal law of the Christian life, because it has been the regal force in God's dealing with His children. Having been won to the Father by the Father's love, the child is bound by the very nature of the new life to show the same love to others.

"And this is just as practical a law for the conduct of home. The love of a mother for her child is the great example and sanction of the love of the children one for another. Here in the home it is an indisputable fact that we are loved into loving. And business, which is supposed to be the sphere least subject to the sway of altruistic law, is no less subject to the general principle. Every employer can do more by love, which is always just, than he can by the rigorous enforcement of definite rules. Workmen are loved into

loving the work they do and into placing the interests of their employers first. In fact, there is no department of our complex life which is not subject to this spiritual and natural law we love because He first loved us."

"The propitiation for our sins." See on chap. ii. 1. The Greek word (*hilasmos*) occurs in the New Testament only in these two passages, and without reference to the person to whom it is offered. The same is true of the corresponding verb found only twice in the Now Testament. The Scriptural conception is not that of appeasing one who is personally angry, but rather that of altering the conditions which prevent pardon and raise up an inevitable obstacle to fellowship. These are two: God's relation as moral governor and protector of His law, and the natural inclination of fallen man to commit sin. God as the executive of law cannot by mere prerogative pardon the sinner, nor is a sinful being fit for fellowship with his holy Creator. The propitiation offered by Christ declares God's righteousness while pardoning the ungodly that repent and trust in the Son of God, receiving Him as both Saviour and Lord. Such are at the same time forgiven and regenerated, or made new creatures. Thus both the obstacles to acceptance are removed.

Such phrases as "propitiating God" and "God being reconciled" are foreign to New Testament diction.

11. "If God so loved us." Here "if" does not intimate a doubt. It is nearly equivalent to "since." Compare John xiii. 14, "If I then have washed your feet."

"We also ought." As spiritual children of God we must honor Him by representing His moral attributes and by following His example in loving those whom He loves. See iii. 16, note. The obligation which God's love here lays upon us is not that we should love Him in return, as we would naturally expect, but that we should "love one another." It was when Jesus was "knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands and that He was come from God, and was going to God," that He put on the livery of a servant and washed His disciples' feet. His followers should learn that the spiritual nobility implied by adoption into the family of God imposes corresponding obligation. The higher the rank the more service to humanity is rightly expected.

12. "God hath no man ever yet beheld." In all the history of the saints from Enoch to John the Baptist, however close their fellowship with God, no one had beheld His essential Being. The various theophanies of the Old Testament were not His real Person, but only fringes of His robe. But faith is a good substitute for sight. Says Bede, "Where we are not yet permitted to enjoy the Divine vision what comfort we experience!" For the invisible God is not only near to us, but to the full believer in Christ, "He is in us, the Life of our lives."

"God abideth in us." He is in the genuine believer not as a stranger in an inn lodging for a night, but He is a permanent inhabitant. This fact should banish fear, begird with strength, afford unbroken peace and unfailing joy, and tireless activity in promoting His glory on the earth. We may not always be conscious of the Holy Spirit abiding within, but there will be periods of wonderful spiritual illumination and crises of indescribable joy. Professor Phelps calls it "almost intolerable joy."

"His love is perfected in us." It is our love toward God which is here spoken of as perfected. God's love is always perfect. To say that God's love for us is perfected is to imply that His love may be imperfect, and that His love is not perfected until Christians "love one another." This would make a Divine perfection depend on a human volition. We have perfect love when the Spirit sheds abroad the love of God to such a degree as to exclude everything antagonistic thereto. The claim that we have perfect love to God is manifestly erroneous if love toward our fellow Christians is absent. Love is the only particular in which

perfection can be predicated of man marred and dwarfed by sin, and that love is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit (Rom. v. 5), the author of that circumcision of heart requisite for loving God with all the heart and all the soul. (Deut. xx x. 6.) In chap. ii. 5 the sign of the perfect love of God in the believer is his estimate of His revelation and his vigilance in obeying its commandments. Here it is love to one another. Evangelical perfection may consist with many intellectual infirmities.

13. "Hereby know we." Love to man is a proof that God abides within us, just as the stream argues the existence of the fountain. This Epistle of John is as full of tests of character as a complete chemical laboratory is amply furnished with tests of substances. Hence the constant occurrence of the phrases "we know" and "hereby we know." See iii. 24, iv. 13, 15, 16, v. 20, 15; John vi. 56, xiv. 20, xv. 5.

"That we abide in Him and He in us." Says Basil, "The Spirit is the place for the saints; and the saint is a place appropriate to the Spirit." Prof. Austin Phelps declares that next to the mystery of Three Persons in One Nature is the mystery of the Divine Spirit abiding in the human spirit. This mutual abiding, a favorite doctrine with John, is an expression of the most intimate and delightful fellowship. It is a strong incidental proof of the supreme divinity of Christ that he is frequently spoken of as one of the parties to this mutual abiding (John vi. 56, xiv. 20, xv. 5, xvii. 26); for no created personality can enter into and abide in another.

"He hath given us of His Spirit." The gift of the Spirit is the proof that God abides in believers. His testimony is direct and immediate when he cries in the heart, "Abba, Father" (Gal. iv. 6), or teaches us to utter the same joyful cry. (Rom. viii. 15.) His testimony is indirect and mediate when from the observed fruit of the Spirit (Gal. v. 22, 23) we infer the abiding presence of the Father and the Son. (John xiv. 23.) The direct witness of the Spirit being the ground of the inferential witness must precede it. Christians are sometimes said to receive of the Spirit and sometimes they are said to receive the Spirit. (Gal. iii. 2, 3, 5, iv. 6.) Only the latter is true of Christ. He has a capacity commensurate with the Spirit's infinitude.

14. "We have seen." "We" is emphasis as in i. 1-5 and designates those who had been eyewitnesses of the Incarnate Son of God working miracles, uttering matchless parables, interpreting the law of God with an authority equal to its Divine Giver on Mt. Sinai, and exhibiting a sinless character amid contradictions, insults, and persecutions, thus proving his claim to be the only begotten Son of God. While no man has beheld the Father, some did see in Jesus Christ the revelation of God.

"The Saviour of the world." He is provisionally the Saviour of all men. But he is really the Saviour of only those that accept Him by faith. (John iii. 16.) All who hear His gospel and do not obey it will be punished with an everlasting sentence. (Matt. xxv. 46; 2 Thess. i. 8, 9.) The Jews were not expecting a Saviour of the world, but a Deliverer of their nation only.

15. "Confess that Jesus is the Son of God." See verse 2 for the key to the meaning. It does not express the declaration of a fact, but the public recognition of the Person of Christ as the Divine Saviour, and submission to Him as Lord, and trust in Him for salvation. He who with the heart thus acknowledges Him, and with tongue confesses Him, is said to have Him and to have eternal life. "He that confesseth the Son hath the Father also."

"Abideth in Him and he in God." This reciprocal indwelling in God (iii. 24, iv. 13, 15, 16), and in Christ (John vi. 56, xiv. 20, xv. 5), implies the most intimate fellowship of the believer with the Father, and with the Son, in whom He is revealed. The conditions of this fellowship are love, confession and obedience. The effects are fruitfulness, assurance and guilelessness. The sign is the possession of the Holy Spirit who sheds abroad love in the heart and inspires the filial feeling, crying Abba, Father.

16. "And we." This pronoun is emphatic and denotes all "who can speak from the fullness of Christian experience as confessors of Christ." (Bishop Westcott.) Young converts who cannot say with confidence "we know," should be encouraged by the promise, "Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord."

"Know and have believed." Sometimes knowledge is the ground of faith, as the banker's acquaintance with the good character of the borrower is his reason for trusting him; and sometimes faith is the path to knowledge, as when the child believing the teacher comes to know the alphabet. Paul speaks of the unity of faith and knowledge, i. e., faith ends in knowledge. (Eph. iv. 13.) This is the genesis of all spiritual knowledge. A general acquaintance with Christ and self-surrender to him prepares us for that appropriating faith in his promise of the Paraclete whose office it is to glorify the living Christ revealing Him in the heart. As a practical truth in the spiritual realm, believing precedes knowing. Then in turn knowledge lays the foundation for a higher act of faith, as Paul knew whom he had believed, and on this ground he was fully persuaded or had a perfect faith that he could safely trust the deposit of himself in His hands until the day of judgment. Thus, by first believing and then knowing, and on this new basis believing again, the Christian climbs Jacob's ladder from earth to heaven.

"The love that God hath in us." Believers are the sphere in which God's love manifests itself to all who know them. "God is love." In verse 8 these wonderful words are associated with the initial knowledge of God in the soul's new birth. Here they are repeated in connection with the believer's activity, growth and Christian perfection. God in Christ is set as the type for human action and the model to which the believer must be conformed, not only in the future world, but in the present life, for "As he is so are we in this world."

"Dwelleth in God and God in him." See verse 15, note. This mutual abiding enables the adult believer to rise to the heavenly order described in Col. iii. 3, "For ye died and your life is hid with Christ in God." Death to sin is requisite to perfect fellowship with God.

17. "Herein has love been made perfect with us." Some exegetes say that it is God's love to us which is here described, but we agree with Alford that "this is forbidden by the whole context." God's love is always perfect, but man's love to God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit (Rom. v. 5), meeting various obstacles, limitations and antagonisms (Gal. v. 17; 1 Cor. iii. 1-3), is at first feeble and imperfect. But when the flesh is crucified, love filling the soul's whole capacity is said by the Spirit of inspiration to be perfected. Again, "the love of God" in this Epistle commonly means our love to Him, and not His to us (ii. 5, iii. 17, v. 3). If it means the love which He has implanted in us, He is the direct object of that love and we are the responsible subjects. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." It is best to interpret "herein" as referring to what precedes; to our abiding in God and God in us. "That we may have boldness." Rather in order that we may have boldness in the day of judgment. The Greek thus strongly expresses the purpose for which our love is made perfect by the mutual indwelling.

"Boldness." This strong Saxon word is the best translation of the Greek. In the A. V. it is rendered by the weak word "confidence," as in ii. 28. It is a compound word meaning "say everything," and signifies the utmost intrepidity and freedom in speaking. The R. V. uniformly renders it "boldness" everywhere in this Epistle and in Heb. iv. 16, where it means the fearless trust with which perfect love regards "the judge of the quick and the dead." This boldness attends the present contemplation of the day of judgment by those who love God with all the heart, mind and strength.

"Day of judgment." This future day is demonstrated by the human conscience, and by divine revelation. It is authenticated by the resurrection from the dead of the appointed Judge (Acts xvii. 31) who declared that he would judge the whole human family, and confirmed this solemn prediction by his greatest miracle, his victory over the grave.

"Because as He is, so are we in this world." John's statement is what in logic is called an "enthymeme." One of the premises not being expressed is carried along in the mind. This premise is the thought that the Judge will not condemn those who are facsimiles of Himself. This is the syllogism:

The final Judge will acquit facsimiles of Himself.

We are in this world facsimiles of the final Judge.

Therefore the final Judge will acquit us.

Says Bishop Westcott, "The ground of boldness is present likeness to Christ." Says Alford, "In these words, the sense must be gained by keeping strictly to the tenses and grammatical construction, not by changing the tenses, nor by referring the words in this world to Christ, as Christ was in this world we are." This is true, but it is not the truth declared in this verse. Our essential likeness to Christ is "not in our trials and persecutions; nor by our not being of the world as He is not of the world; nor in that we, as sons by adoption through Him, are beloved of God, nor in that we live in love as He lives in love; but in that we are righteous as He is righteous (chap. 1 29, iii. 3-6, 10, 22); this love being evinced by our abiding in love." Alford furthermore asserts that the ground of our boldness is "because we are absolutely like Christ Himself, because He lives in us, for without this there can be no likeness to Him." Westcott concurs with Alford. He says, "The likeness of Christians to Christ is to His character as it is at present and eternally, not to any one attribute, as love or righteousness, but to the whole character of Christ as it is made known; and His high-priestly prayer serves as a commentary on the view which St. John suggests of the position of Christians in this world."

18. "There is no fear in love." The thought of boldness, by a mental law of suggestion, calls up the theme of fear in contrast as naturally existing in sinful men. Fear and love are mutually exclusive according to the intensity of love. "Fear cannot co-exist with perfect love which occupies the whole heart. The fear of which St. John speaks is, of course, not the reverence of a son (Heb. v. 7, 8), but the dread of the criminal or of the slave." (Westcott.) Says Augustine, "It is one thing to fear God lest He may send thee into Gehenna with the devil; and quite a different feeling to fear God lest He depart from thee." With a theological insight, and an epigrammatic expression unparalleled, Bengel groups all mankind in four classes:

1st. Those who are without fear and without love;

2d. Those who are with fear and without love;

3d. Those who are with fear and with love;

4th. Those who are without fear and with love.

This unmatched epigram also gives the history of the individual soul from the blindness and hardness of impenitence through conviction of sin, and the mixed condition of early Christian experience, "the flesh lusting against the Spirit and the Spirit opposing the flesh" in His endeavor to lead the persevering believer into the experience of love not mingled with fear, pure, or perfect, love, the spiritual Canaan

"Where dwells the Lord our Righteousness,

And keeps his own in perfect peace

And everlasting rest."

"Fear hath punishment." In anticipation of divinely inflicted suffering. Such punishment is not future only but present. See John iii. 18.

19. "We love." In the critical manuscript there is no expressed object, because Christian love of every kind is meant.

"Because He first loved us." This is more than gratitude. Evangelical love originates in God's love. This enkindles love in us as a fruit of the Spirit. (Rom. v. 5; Gal. v. 22.)

20. "If a man say." Here appears again the Gnostic objector with whom we became acquainted in chap. i. 6, 8, 10. By his baneful doctrine of dualism, ascribing all evil to matter, and declaring his spirit by its nature free from sin, he vainly imagines that he can combine in his own person love toward God and hatred of his brother in Christ or his fellow-man made in the image of God. Says Dr. Plummer in the Cambridge Bible for Schools, "The case here contemplated is one form of the man that feareth not. His freedom from fear is caused, however, not by the perfection of love but by presumption. He is either morally blind or a conscious hypocrite." Compare 14, 9. He neither fears nor loves. His fearlessness may result from, indifference, or ignorance, or inveterate wickedness veneered with a pretentious philosophy.

"He cannot love God." John's argument is that if a man fails in the duty of love to one with whom he is in daily intercourse, he cannot perform the far more difficult duty of loving one whom he has never seen and of whose form he cannot conceive, and whose invisible existence is kept in mind by the strenuous effort of faith.

21. "Commandment . . . from him." Exegetes find it difficult to determine in this verse, as also in several other passages, whether John is speaking of the Son or of the Father. Both are authors of this command. (Lev. xix. 18; John xiii. 34.) But this difficulty is not without doctrinal significance. It argues that the apostle thoroughly believed in the supreme Godhead of the Incarnate Son of God who Shared his Father's glory before the world was. If John had believed that the Son of God was a creature he would not have so confused the Personal Son with his Father's personality.

John's reasoning, in a nutshell, is this, no man can do so contradictory an act as to love God and hate his image in his brother man, and, especially, in his Christian brother.

CONCLUDING NOTES.

1. In verse 3 an important variant reading is found in the Vulgate and in many Latin fathers. Instead of "confesseth not Jesus" they have "separates Jesus," i. e., separates the divine from the human, or divides the one divine-human person. Some of the Latin manuscripts read "annulleth" for "confesseth not." See R. V. margin. For the following reasons we reject these two variant readings:

(1.) The name Jesus emphasizes the humanity of our Lord and it would not be used by John in a sense so comprehensive. He would have said "the Christ."

(2.) All the earliest Greek manuscripts read "confesseth not," and all the versions except the Latin, although one important Old Latin follows the earliest Greek manuscripts. Nearly all the Greek fathers who quote this text have the words "confesseth not." In view of these facts there can be no question as to the overwhelming weight of evidence in favor of the traditional reading, as found in both the A. V. and R. V.

2. Verse 8. For the most part St. John, like the other writers of the Bible, leaves the reader to form his conception of God from what is recorded of His action; but in three phrases he has laid down once for all the great outlines within which our thoughts on the Divine Nature must be confined, "God is Spirit," "God is light," and "God is love." "The first is metaphysical and describes God in Himself, in His being. The second is moral, and describes God in His character towards all created things. He is light. The third is personal, and describes God in His action towards self-conscious creatures. He is love. In this order they offer a progress of thought." (Westcott.)

3. Augustine declares that the name "Love" belongs very appropriately in the Holy Trinity to the Holy Spirit who communicates to us that common love which binds the Father and the Son together. Hence this epigrammatic sentence contains the quintessence of orthodox theology: "Ubi caritas, ibi Trinitas," where love is there is the Trinity. Love existing from eternity, before a creature existed, must have had the only begotten Son for its eternal object, while the messenger between them was the Personal Holy Spirit, equal in power and glory because he fathoms or searches the depths of both the Father and the Son. The unity of the Three is one substance, Love. Augustine insists that the divine "substance is not one thing and love another, but that the substance itself is love, and love itself is the substance, whether in the Father or in the Son." "Love," says Westcott, "involves a subject and an object, and that which unites both. We are taught, then, to conceive of God as having in Himself the perfect object of love and the perfect response of love, completely self-sufficing and self-complete. We thus gain, however imperfect language may be, the idea of a tri-personality in an Infinite Being as correlative to a sole-personality in a finite. In the unity of Him who is One we acknowledge the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, in the interaction of Whom we can see love fulfilled." To have no personal experience of love in its evangelical sense is to have no personal knowledge of God. The Gnostics knew much about God, but they had no real knowledge of God, because, instead of loving their illiterate brethren, they, in their intellectual pride, looked down upon them with an arrogant contempt.

4. Until the sunrise of the Incarnation no religion had grasped the truth that God in His very essence is love. The name which He set for Himself in the Old Testament was Jehovah, "I am that I am," but the name revealed in the New Testament is Love. In no book in the New Testament does "love," either as a noun or a verb, occur so often as in this Epistle and the gospel written by "the Apostle of Love." The love of God usually in this Epistle means our love to God, but in verse 9 and in iii. 16 it means His love to us.

5. Only begotten Son, verse 9.

"The point which is emphasized by 'only begotten Son' here is evidently the absolute uniqueness of the Being of the Son. He stands to the Father in a relation wholly singular. He is the one only Son, the one to whom the title belongs in a sense completely unique and peculiar. The thought is centred in the Personal existence of the Son, and not in the generation of the Son. The true reading in John i. 18 is in all probability 'only begotten God' (R. V. margin and text of Westcott and Hort). This phrase occurs in some of the confessions of the fourth century. Christ is the only begotten Son in distinction from the many who have become sons by adoption. We must avoid the error of Dr. Adam Clarke and Prof. Moses Stuart that the Logos was not the Son until he was born of Mary. He was Son from eternity. See Watson's Institutes

on "the eternal generation of the Son."

6. Perfect Love, verse 18.

We cannot agree with the Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges: "Though as certain as any physical law, the principle, that perfect love excludes all fear, is an ideal that has never been verified in fact. No believer's love has ever been so perfect as entirely to banish fear; but every believer experiences that as his love increases his fear diminishes." Our objection to this denial is, first, that it assumes that the writer has known the state of feeling of every martyr who has joyfully marched to the stake, and of every other Christian in all the past generations, which assumption is but little short of omniscience; and, secondly, it is a covert denial of the possibility of perfect love in the human soul under the dispensation of the Holy Spirit. The most that any man is competent to assert is that he has not himself reached that experience of love which banishes all fear that has torment. Our third objection is that it impeaches and discredits the testimonies of eminent saints in all the Christian ages. In the fourth place idealism, when employed to neutralize a divine precept, is a weapon which can be wielded against every commandment of God. He who interprets as ideal and impracticable the mandate, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect," opens the way for the negation of all the other precepts in the Sermon on the Mount, a way in which many modern professors of the Christian faith are carelessly walking.

"To put the standard of Christian perfection too high," says Wesley "is to drive it out of the world." There is no doubt that what "the beloved disciple" says about perfect love and deliverance from all fear he says out of the experience of his own heart as a fact. St. Paul reasoned, but St. John uttered the intuitions of his own consciousness.

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