

1 John 5

by Daniel Steele

In 1 John 5, Daniel Steele emphasizes the inseparable relationship between faith and love, the transformative power of the new birth, and the assurance of eternal life that empowers believers in their walk with God.

Scripture: 1 John 5:1-8, 1 John 5:21

Topics: "Faith And Love", "Eternal Life"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches on the profound truths revealed in the First Epistle of John, emphasizing the essence of true faith as acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah, experiencing new birth, and being aflame with love for God and others. The inseparable connection between faith and love is highlighted, with a strong emphasis on obedience to God's commands as evidence of genuine love. The victory over the world through faith is discussed, along with the importance of having boldness in prayer and the continuous efficacy of the divine change in believers. The sermon concludes with a call to guard against idols and embrace the love and atonement of God through Jesus Christ for eternal life.

Transcript

HALF-HOURS WITH JOHN'S EPISTLES

FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

CHAPTER V.

IN this chapter true faith is described as acknowledging the Messiahship of Jesus, as experiencing the new birth, as aflame with love to God and to all the regenerate, as keeping God's commands, as victorious over the world, as having inward self-attestation and eternal life, and as having boldness and success in prayer. The apostle in iv. 12 details the various evidences on which the Christian faith rests, and declares faith and love to be inseparable, that alike worthless is a faith which does not inspire love, and a love not the offspring of faith. The transition from the former chapter lies in the idea of brotherhood, not human, but Christian, arising from a love flowing from a vital apprehension of Christ as both an almighty Saviour and a supreme Lord. On the plane of love inspired by the Holy Spirit, this brotherhood is not an arbitrary command, but a natural outflow from this diffusive principle.

1. "Whosoever believeth." This is more than assent to the facts in the life of Christ and to the truth of His doctrines and His claims; it is such a reliance upon His person for salvation as causes the abandonment of

every other hope and plea, and the enthronement of Him as the supreme Lawgiver. True faith embraces assent, consent and trust. It requires the hearty assent of the intellect and the cordial movement of the sensibilities and the perfect submission of the will.

"Has been begotten of God." The perfect tense in the Greek implies the continuous efficacy of this divine change.

"Every one that loveth Him that begat." The divine order is faith in Christ, the giver of the Spirit, the Spirit imparting life, and love attending spiritual life as its chief element. Thus faith and love are inseparable. Says Augustine, "Faith with love is the faith of a Christian; without love it is the faith of a demon." The same sentiment is expressed by James respecting those who profess to have faith without its fruitage in works of love. "The devils also believe and tremble," "and are devils still." (Wesley.) "Loveth . . . begotten of him." This is natural. The love of God and the love of the children of God do in fact include each the other. It is equally true if we reverse the order of the subject and predicate and say "he who loves the children of God loves God. Either form of love may be made the ground or the conclusion in the argument." The children are in the image of their father. No one can love his father and hate his photographs, unless they are distortions so monstrous as to dishonor him. True Christians are more or less perfect representations of God's moral character. This verse is called in logic an irregular sorites:

"Every one who believes the Incarnation is a child of God.

Every child of God loves its Father.

Every believer in the Incarnation loves God.

Every one who loves God loves the children of God.

Every believer in the Incarnation loves the children of God."

This verse demonstrates that the love of the Father is the source of love to His children, and not the reverse.

2. "Do His commandments." This phrase occurs nowhere else. Love to God's children is here said to follow from our love to God evinced by obedience. The two loves confirm and prove each other. If either is professed in the absence of the other it is spurious. One may know that his love to his brethren is genuine when he is sure that he loves God. "Whenever we love and obey God we have fresh evidence that our philanthropy is genuine."

3. "His commandments are not grievous" -- or burdensome. Love knows no burdens. Christ's yoke is light because he imparts strength to bear it. "I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me." (Phil. iv. 13, R. V.)

4. "Whatsoever." The neuter emphasizes the victorious power rather than the victorious person. Beware of that exegesis of this text which analyzes the Christian into two personalities, the old man in full strength and the new man dwelling together until death separates them, the old man never crucified (Gal. ii. 20, v. 24; Col. ii. 11) and the body of sin never destroyed. The result is a lifelong sinning personality justified by the doctrine that entire sanctification is impossible in the present life, the doctrine which encourages believers to continue in depravity, and which discrowns the Gospel of Christ by making death the final conqueror of the propensity to sin.

"Is begotten of God." Here and in verses 1 and 18, "in all three cases we have the perfect, not the aorist, participle. It is not the mere fact of having received the Divine birth that is insisted on, but the permanent results of the birth." (Dr. A. Plummer's Cambridge Bible for Colleges.) The same writer notes the fact that in the words, "victory that overcometh," the aorist should be rendered "overcame," the tense denoting "a victory won once for all." Westcott thinks that here "the aorist receives its full force. The victory of Christ was gained upon a narrow field, but it was world-wide in its effects." But we understand from the context that John is describing the victory of regenerate souls. To speak of Jesus Christ as exercising faith is to use a diction foreign to the New Testament. Every Christian may reach a point where faith puts forth its highest possibilities and receives, as a definite second experience of the fullness of the Holy Spirit in his office as the Sanctifier, a victory once for all which will make all future victories easy. Westcott elsewhere concedes that the believer may "pass through the decisive history in which the truth is once for all absolutely realized."

"Overcometh the world." Here is an additional reason why the commands are not burdensome; it is because the new birth gives a new point of view. Christian faith gives a power to grasp spiritual realities by imparting a new unworldly nature and a strength which overcomes the world. Faith makes the invisible world so real and brings the future and eternal life so near as to make them more influential in the formation of character than the influences of the present evil world. (See Chalmers's great sermon on "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection.")

"The world." All the limited transitory powers opposed to God. It is an empire whose dominion we cannot escape till through faith in Christ the spiritual and eternal become real and infinitely more valuable than things earthly, sensual and evanescent. Faith gives us the true standard for the estimate of things.

"Even our faith." In the Greek the word "faith" in John's Epistles occurs here only. It is not found in his Gospel. It here signifies the system of Gospel truth summed up in the confession that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, both Saviour and Lord, is so trusted in and enthroned as to constitute that saving faith which works by love, purifies the heart and overcomes the world. He who possesses this faith and perseveringly exhibits its effects in his transformed character will share the victory over the world in which Christ exulted. (John xvi. 33.)

5. "Who is he that overcometh?" Here the abstract "whatsoever" is concentered in the single believer whose victory represents what may actually be realized in every Christian. "Belief in Christ is at once belief in God and in man. It lays a foundation for love and trust toward our fellow-men. Thus the instinctive distrust and selfishness, which reign supreme in the world, are overcome."

6. "This is he that came." The identity of the man of Nazareth with the eternal Son of God is again emphasized as the central truth of Christian theology, the reception of which is necessary to the attainment of victory over the world and of translation out of darkness into the marvellous light of His kingdom. Then follow the witnesses to this truth which are "the water and the blood." Many are the explanations of these words. The ritualists understand them to signify the sacraments of baptism and of the Lord's Supper. Others see only symbols of purification and redemption. But it seems to the writer that John uses these words as a summary of Christ's earthly life and mission, baptism in the water of Jordan and His sacrificial death by the shedding of His blood for the redemption of the world. The cardinal truths of His gospel are here briefly stated; for at His baptism with water was His baptism with the Holy Spirit attended by the Divine announcement of His Sonship to God in words implying that He is the Son in a sense unique and peculiar. This was a sufficient opening and explanation of the whole of His ministry. His

public and tragic death is at once the close and the explanation of His life of self-sacrifice. "The Gnostic teachers, against whom the apostle is writing, admitted that the Christ came 'through' and 'in' water; it was precisely at the baptism, they said, that the Divine Word united Himself with the man Jesus. But they denied that the Divine Person had any share in what was effected 'through' and 'in' blood; for, according to them, the Word departed from Jesus at Gethsemane. John emphatically assures us that there was no such separation. It was the Son of God who was baptized; it was the Son of God who was crucified; and it is faith in this vital truth that produces brotherly love, that overcomes the world, and is eternal life." (The Cambridge Bible for Colleges.)

7. "It is the Spirit that beareth witness." Besides the Spirit's testimony to the Divinity of Christ and the absolute truth of His Gospel (John xv. 26) there are six other witnesses cited in John's Gospel: The Old Testament Scriptures (v. 39-47), the Baptist (i. 7), the Disciples (xv. 27, xvi. 30), Christ's works (v. 36, x. 25, 38), His words (viii. 14, 18, xviii. 37), and the Father (v. 37, viii. 18). In this Epistle John adds two more witnesses, the water and the blood, thus making eight witnesses in all. That John is not a favorite with the so-called liberal religious teachers is not wonderful.

"The Spirit is truth." Hence his testimony is absolutely infallible in glorifying the Christ (John xvi. 14) identifying him with Jesus.

"Just as Christ is the Truth (John xiv. 6), the Spirit sent in Christ's name is the Truth."

The Vulgate reads thus: "The Spirit is he who testifies that Christ is the Truth." On this unsubstantial version Bede comments in a very vigorous style, denouncing those who deny the reality of our Saviour's body: "Since therefore the Spirit testifies that Christ is the Truth, and since He surnames Himself the Truth, and the Baptist proclaims Him to be the Truth, and the Son of thunder in his evangel heralds Him as the Truth, let the blasphemers who dogmatically declare that He is a phantom hold their tongues; let their memory perish from the earth who deny either that He is God or that He is a real man." The whole truth revealed by Christ must be believed, however unpleasant. It is morally impossible to be an eclectic believer, receiving only the pleasant parts of Christianity. This is putting depraved taste above the infallible Teacher, to whom the human intellect as well as the human will must bow when we exercise saving faith. What is here said of Christ is said also of His representative, the Holy Spirit.

7. ("Three that bear record in heaven.") These words are not in the R. V. In the opinion of all experts this passage is not genuine, not being found in a single Greek manuscript earlier than the fifteenth century; nor was it quoted by any one of the Greek or Latin fathers in the third, fourth and first half of the fifth centuries, when the doctrine of the Trinity was most intensely discussed. This verse is first found near the close of the fifth century in the Latin version, and it occurs in no other language until the fifteenth century. It is supposed to have been at first a marginal comment on a part of the seventh and eighth verses. "For there are three that bear record, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood; and the three agree in one." Into these genuine words this marginal comment was probably copied innocently by some scribe, who supposed that they belonged to the text. This is called a gloss. The doctrine of the Trinity does not need any questionable proof-texts, being abundantly proved by those accepted Scriptures which ascribe Divine titles, attributes and works to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in whose names every Christian is baptized and every Christian assembly is with benediction dismissed.

8. "Agree in one." The Spirit, the water, and the blood are for the one object of establishing the Godhead of Christ. "The Trinity of witnesses furnish one testimony."

9. "If we receive the witness of men." An echo of Christ's word in John viii. 17, "the witness of two men is true." How credible, therefore, must the two witnesses be when they are the Father and the Son. The next clause should be reversed and connected with the following verse, thus: "The witness of God is this: He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself, " after the analogy of chap. i. 5. "To believe on," a phrase occurring nearly forty times in John's Gospel and elsewhere in the New Testament only about ten times, expresses the strongest reliance and trust. We may believe a person's word without trusting to him our property or our lives.

10. "Witness in him." Here we prefer "himself" (Westcott and Hort) instead of "him" (R. V.). The external witness accepted as valid becomes internal certitude when the will bows in accordance with the truth believed. Absolute and irreversible self-surrender to Him who is the Truth brings a direct consciousness of His Divine nature and work. The witness of the Spirit, and of the water, and of the blood leads successively to an inner conviction and realization of pardon, newness of life and entire cleansing. Thus John's doctrine of assurance agrees with Paul's in Rom viii. 16; Gal. iv. 6. This blessed effect does not follow a mere speculative assent to a fact, but it follows trust in the person of Christ and sole reliance on Him. This statement supplements the conditions of the new birth partly stated in the first verse of this chapter. Speculative or historical faith is not decisive of salvation, but it is the first step toward a saving trust.

"He that believeth not God." The fact that this clause is a direct antithesis to "believing on the Son," implies the Godhead or supreme Divinity of Jesus Christ. It also implies that a man cannot be a true believer in God while refusing to rely on His Son for salvation.

"Hath made Him a liar." This declaration John applies to two classes, to those who say that they have no sins (i. 10) which need a Divine Saviour; and, secondly, to those who deny that such a Saviour is the Son of God, our Lord Jesus. The Gnostics belong to both of these classes whose teachings impeach God's testimony that "all have sinned," and that there is salvation in no other name than that of Jesus Christ. The two errors are twins. To lie is a dreadful sin, but to be a liar is much worse. The one is a bad act, the other is an evil character. Hence the heinousness of failing to believe God, to say nothing about an avowed distrust and disobedience.

"Hath not believed." The perfect tense indicates a permanent state in the past continuing to the present hour.

11. "That he gave." As a historic fact in the mission of His Son 'He gave to us' who evangelically appropriate Christ, "eternal life." He who experimentally knows the truth of the Gospel has life eternal, which is present as well as future, or rather "eternal life" exists, and so is above all time. It is eminently a New Testament phrase occurring forty-four times. It is found only once in the Old Testament, Dan. xii. 2. It was manifested unto us (apostles). See i. 2.

"This life is in His Son." Its source and seat, its Prince or Author. See i. 4; Acts iii. 15.

12. "Hath the Son hath the life." If the Son is the fountain of life, then whoever has the Son has the life, and no man can have the latter without the former. What is it to have the Son? It must not be weakened to mean to hold as an article of faith that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God. To have Him we must appropriate Him by receiving Him as both Saviour and Lord in a manner so definite as to become the children of God (John i. 12), so consciously as to have the testimony of the Holy Spirit crying in the heart Abba, Father. (Rom. viii. 14-17; Gal. iv. 6.) If any one is in doubt in respect to this momentous question on

which eternal destiny hinges, let him by penitent, all-surrendering faith in Christ ask for the witness of the Spirit of adoption. This life Paul calls "the life indeed" (I Tim. vi. 19, R. V.), and Ignatius styles it "the inseparable life" and "our true life."

"He that hath not the Son of God." The words "of God" added to the last antithetic clause emphasize the greatness of the treasure which persistent unbelief through probation has forever removed, even the unsearchable riches of Christ. They also accentuate the certainty of failure in such a case, for to His Son God has given to have life in Himself and to impart life to evangelical believers, and to such only.

v. 13-21. CONCLUSION.

Intercessory Love the Fruit of Faith (v. 13-17).

The Sum of the Christian's Knowledge (v. 18-20).

Final Injunction (v. 21).

13. "That ye may know." The Gospel of John was written "that ye may have life" (xx. 31), but this Epistle was written "that ye may know that ye have eternal life." The one leads to the obtaining of the boon of life. The other to the joy of knowing that it is not only obtained, but that it is eternal. Thus from the Gospel to the Epistle there is progress. True faith always leads to knowledge. (Eph. iv. 13.)

14. "This is the boldness." Better, "And the boldness that we have towards Him is this, that if," etc. Thrice before this has John spoken of the Christian boldness (ii. 28, iii. 21, 22, iv. 17). Here it is in reference to intercessory prayer, prompted by love of the brethren. The conscious possession of eternal life enables the believer to come directly before God and to speak every thought with perfect freedom. This boldness is more than simple belief, it is a sure inward experience.

"According to his will." This only limit to acceptable prayer is equivalent to "in my name," John xiv. 13. It comprises all spiritual perfection and all temporal things that are contributory to this perfection.

15. "And if we know." There may be uncertainty respecting the fact of the presence of the knowledge, but not in the knowledge itself. He who is prompted by the Holy Spirit will ask for those things only which accord with God's will, and he will have them in the assured promise, if not in conscious realization. (Mark xi. 24.) This may be delayed.

"We have the petitions." Their equivalent, if not necessarily the actual things asked for. A saint in need may pray for gold and receive that which is better than gold, the trial of his faith; confidence in God may be tested and strengthened. This finds its most characteristic expression in intercessory prayer, as in the next verse. Fellowship with God implies deep interest in our fellow-men, especially professed disciples of Christ. But there is one great barrier to the success of such prayer, "sin unto death."

16. "Sin not unto death." Death spiritual is separation from Christ "the life." All sin tends to this separation, but not in equal degrees. A hasty or thoughtless sin flowing from human imperfection and infirmity does not carry the same momentum of volition as a deliberate transgression. A course of sin is more worthy of condemnation than a single act, immediately confessed and repented.

"He will ask." The true believer will naturally offer prayer for his erring and imperilled brother in Christ. He needs no command. "Prayer is the Christian's vital breath."

"And he will give to him life." The pronoun "he" naturally refers to him who prays. "There is nothing unscriptural in the thought that the believer does that which God does through him, as in James v. 20." The life given is not life restored, but rather life invigorated as the life of a sick man on the way to death is strengthened by a skilful physician.

"There is sin unto death." This is the R. V. marginal reading. The A. V., "a sin," is too definite and indicates a single act, or a certain act, which the Greek does not imply.

"I do not say he shall pray for it." We are not forbidden to pray, but excused. In Jer. vii. 16, and xiv. 11, the prophet was forbidden to pray for the Jewish people in their apostasy, because they had exhausted the forbearance of God and He had determined to "consume them." But in the New Testament we are not commanded to refrain from prayer for the very worst people, even those who have committed the irremissible sin, the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. We are told that we may innocently refrain from prayer in such a case.

This sin is not limited to a single act, such as a crime worthy of punishment by death, or a manifestly Divine visitation, or a sin punished by the church with excommunication. It is rather a course of wilful sin in defiance of the known law of God persisted in so obstinately against the influences of the Holy Spirit, that repentance becomes a moral impossibility, just as a man may starve himself so long as to lose the power to appropriate, digest and assimilate food. Just as there is an abstinence from food unto death, there is a career of sin and a refusal of the offers of grace until the power to receive grace perishes. Here arises the question, "How can we know when a sinner has reached this fatal point? How can we know when we are excused from intercessory prayer in his behalf?" So far as our powers of perception are concerned the line between God's mercy and His wrath in this world is imperceptible. But since all true prayer is prompted and helped by the Holy Spirit (Rom. viii. 26), the total absence of such prompting and assistance in the case of attempted prayer for an individual, whether a brother in the church or not, affords to the living Christian, who has the spirit of prayer for other sinners, ground for the inference that this person has sinned unto death, having passed the point in his course of sin which marks the soul for eternal despair. Our exegesis is strongly confirmed by the preceding context, which teaches that when we fulfil the conditions of true prayer we receive "whatsoever we ask." John pauses to note one exception to this promise, namely, when praying for another our prayer will be useless if that person has reached the point in his persistent sinning beyond which there is no possible passing out of death into life. Hence I believe that if the "sin unto death" is in act of sin, however heinous, it is the culmination of a state or habit of sin wilfully chosen and persisted in. It is the deliberate and final preference of darkness to light, of falsehood to truth, of sin to holiness, of the world to God, and of spiritual death to eternal life. It is the choice of Milton's Satan, "Evil, be thou my good."

17. "All unrighteousness is sin." "This statement," says the Cambridge Bible, "serves as a farewell declaration against the Gnostic doctrine that to the enlightened Christian declensions from righteousness involve no sin," because, as they assert, sin inheres in matter only, and hence the human spirit is always sinless. John's wider scope given to the definition of sin includes not only positive transgression of the law, but also all failures to fulfil our duty to God and to one another. These are unrighteousness, although our natural infirmities and birth propensities do not involve us in guilt and entail punishment. John had already declared (i. 9) that there is ample provision in the atonement for both the forgiveness of actual sins and for cleansing from all unrighteousness. Here is a wide field for brotherly intercession.

"There is a sin not unto death." This is added as a safeguard against despair. Bishop Westcott finds an unsolved paradox in this clause and the declaration in chap. iii. 9, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; and he cannot sin because he is born of God." But in this verse John asserts that there is a sin which does not destroy the spiritual life. This has been accounted a plain contradiction. The perplexity disappears, or, rather, is greatly alleviated, by a careful reading of the Greek tenses. The perfect tense "has been born of God" implies that the regenerating efficacy of divine grace continues, and his likeness to God, figuratively expressed by the phrase "son of God," remains undimmed to the present moment. In that case, while love to God rules the conduct, the person cannot be sinning or in a career of rebellion against God, which is spiritual death ending in eternal death. But from chap. ii. 1 it is assumed that there may be a single sin (aorist tense), contrary to the tenor and trend of this regenerate and saintly character, committed under the stress of sudden temptation, and immediately bewailed with true penitence and trust in the great Advocate with the Father. Such a sin finds speedy forgiveness. The spiritual life is not extinguished in eternal death. In this sense there is possible "a sin not unto death." But if instant repentance is not made, and a second and a third sin are committed, the law of habit comes in, and, like the fabled boa constrictor which crushed Laocoon and his sons in his deadly coils, destroys forever the spiritual life. He has ceased to be a child of God, because he has ceased to be like God. The "sin unto death" has been committed.

18. "But he that was begotten of God." Rather "the begotten of God," otherwise called "the Only Begotten Son." The exegetes quite generally agree that the Son of God is expressed by the aorist participle "begotten." If John had in mind a regenerated man he would have used the perfect tense, as in the first clause of this verse, also in iii. 9. The A. V., in accordance with an uncritical manuscript, leaves every newborn Christian to "keep himself," but the best critical manuscripts, as in Westcott and Hort's text, supply him with a keeper and protector -- not a guardian angel, but the only begotten Son of God. Hence he does not depend on his own resources in his warfare against the active and wily "evil one."

"Keepeth him." The (only) begotten (Son) of God keepeth him, not within a prison, but from watchful regard from without; not in custody, but in freedom.

"Toucheth him not." To a soul perfectly trusting in the power of the Son of God, there is no inward point of contact for the evil one to touch. "The ground of safety," says Westcott, "is revealed in John xiv. 30, for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me." The perfectly trusting soul becomes the entirely sanctified soul. The principle of evil is not within, but without. The doctrine of final perseverance cannot be grounded on this passage. Faith may lapse and the person may wander from his divine keeper. "We cannot be protected against ourselves in spite of ourselves," while we are free agents in probation. If a man falls at any stage in his spiritual life, it is not the fault of divine grace, nor does it come from the irresistible power of adversaries, but from relaxed hold on the omnipotent guardian to whom he might have clung. "The sense of the divine protection is at any moment sufficient to inspire confidence, but not to render effort unnecessary." Says Bengel in his note on John iv. 14, "Shall never thirst." "Truly that water, as far as it depends on itself, has in it an everlasting virtue; and when thirst returns the defect is on the part of the man, not of the water." Says Alford, on John v. 24, "hath eternal life." "Where faith is, the possession of eternal life is, and when the one remits, the other is forfeited." All of God's promises have a condition expressed or implied. Whoever is in Christ is safe so long as he abides in Him, for he "is kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." (1 Pet. i. 5.)

19. "We know that we are of God." This is the most satisfactory knowledge, because it is experimental, intuitive and absolutely certain. The Spirit cries within the heart, "Abba, Father." The first "we know" in verse 18 is theoretical announcing a theological truth respecting the regenerate. It is not a testimony, but a

tenet. The first clause of verse 19 is a testimony.

"The whole world." All men who are not in Christ. Human society, as alien from God and opposed to Him, is wholly, in all its organizations, principles and practices, in the embrace of the evil one. Christians know that there is a kingdom of darkness, out of which they have been translated, and in which all unregenerate still abide. "It is clear, therefore, that the severance between the church and the world ought to be, and tends to be, as total as that between God and the evil one."

"Lieth in the evil one." A malignant personality has usurped the dominion of the whole world as just defined. (John xiv. 30, xvi. 11.) Hence a personal deliverer is required, in order to emancipate the captives of a personal oppressor and destroyer.

20. "And we know." "Even in the intellectual sphere, in which the Gnostics (knowing ones) claim to have such advantages, the Christian is, by Christ's bounty, superior." (Cambridge Bible.) In the Greek this reiterated "we know" is in this case introduced by the adversative particle "but," making a startling antithesis with the preceding clause. Bad as the world is under the tyranny of Satan, there is no ground for pessimistic despair. "That which is as yet dark will he made light. There is given to us the power of ever-advancing knowledge and of present divine fellowship. We can wait, even as God waits."

"The Son of God hath come," implying His permanent presence, inspiring life, hope and strength in every believer.

"And hath given to us an understanding." The permanency of this gift is elsewhere expressed in the gift of the Paraclete who came to stay, whose office it is to reveal Christ to the eye of faith and to give insight into spiritual truth.

"That we may know," be knowing, by a never-ending exercise of our ever-expanding powers, more and more of the depths of the Divine love. This is eternal life.

"Him that is true." The Father revealed in His Son completely the loftiest and purest idea of God possible in the mind of man, in contrast with the imaginary, unreal and imperfect objects of worship which mislead and debase all the pagan nations.

"We are in Him that is true." Not by a literal incorporation into the body of the glorified Christ, but by fellowship real and blissful. "So far as believers are united with Christ, they are united with God. His assumption of humanity explains how the union is possible." (Westcott.)

"This is the true God and eternal life." All the scholars agree that "this" may grammatically refer to the Father, the principal noun in the previous sentence, or to Jesus Christ, the nearest noun. In favor of the first theory are the following arguments: (1.) The Father is the leading subject of discourse. (2.) It is exactly John's style to repeat with some addition what has been already written. (3.) The Father is the primary source of life, the Son is secondary. (John v. 26.) (4.) This view harmonizes with John xvii. 3. (5.) The fact that God is the true God is in reference to the argument against idolatry, a more special point than the Divinity of His Son, as in I Thess. i. 9, "And how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God." The following are reasons for referring "this" to the incarnate Son of God: (1.) His is the noun last mentioned. (2.) The Father having been twice called "the true one" in the previous verse, to call Him so the third time would be a painful tautology. (3.) In this Epistle and in John's Gospel, Christ is styled the life. (4.) Athanasius thus interprets this text in his controversy with the Arians. (5.) The main purpose of this Epistle

is to establish the reality of Christ's humanity, that the Son of God who has come in the flesh is a Being worthy of worship, and because He is the revelation of the true God, He is the true God.

21. "Little children." This is a term of endearment addressed to all readers, irrespective of age.

"Guard yourself from idols." Contrast is one of the laws of the suggestion of thought. In this Epistle we have had light and darkness, truth and falsehood, love and hate, Christ and antichrist, life and death, righteousness and sin, the children of God and the children of the devil, the spirit of truth and the spirit of error, the believer protected against sin by the Only Begotten Son, and the world in the coils of the old serpent, the devil; and now we come to a fitting, practical, climacteric conclusion, Worship the true God and eschew idols." We must bear in mind the environment of idolatry in which Christians in John's day lived, when every street and every house literally swarmed with idols, and magnificent temples and groves and seductive idolatrous rites constituted the chief attraction of Ephesus, the city of great Diana. Some of the Gnostic teachers were giving occasion for this warning against idols, by their sophistry that idolatry was harmless, or that there was no need to suffer martyrdom in order to avoid it. If it were sinful, it had no power to defile the spirit with the body, but the material envelope only. Says Bishop Westcott, "This comprehensive warning is probably the latest voice of Scripture."

The eminent appropriateness of this prohibition of idolatry, rendered emphatic by the fact that it is the final charge of the beloved apostle, is seen when we consider the pagan environment of the Christian church in Ephesus. "If there was one thing for which the metropolis of Asia was more celebrated than another in the apostolic age, it was for the magnificence of its idolatrous worship. The temple of Artemis (Diana) its tutelary deity, which crowned the head of its harbor, was one of the seven wonders of the world.

Its one hundred and twenty-seven columns, sixty feet high, were each a gift of a people or a prince. In area it was nearly as large as St. Paul's Cathedral in London; and its magnificence had become a proverb. 'The gods had one house on earth, and that was at Ephesus.' The architectural imagery of St. Paul in 1 Cor. iii. 9-17, which was written at Ephesus, and in the Epistles to the Ephesians (ii. 19- 22), and to Timothy (1 Tim. iii. 15, vi. 19; 2 Tim. ii. 19, 20), may well have been suggested by it.

The city was proud of the title, 'Temple-keeper of the great Artemis' (Acts xix. 35), and the wealthy vied with one another in lavishing gifts upon the shrine. The temple thus became a vast treasure house of gold and silver vessels and works of art. It was served by a college of priestesses and of priests. 'Besides these there was a vast throng of dependants, who lived by the temple and its services -- theologi, who may have expounded sacred legends; hymnodi, who composed hymns in honor of the deity and others, together with a great crowd of hieroduler, who performed more menial offices.

The making of shrines and images of the goddess occupied many hands. But perhaps the most important of all the privileges possessed by the goddess and her priests was that of asylum. Fugitives from justice or vengeance who reached her precincts were perfectly safe from all pursuit and arrest. The boundaries of the space possessing such virtue were from time to time enlarged. Mark Antony imprudently allowed them to take in part of the city, which part thus became free of all law, and a haunt of thieves and villains.

Besides being a place of worship, a museum and a sanctuary, the Ephesian temple was a great bank. Nowhere in Asia could money be more safely deposited than here." (Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges.) Well did Tacitus remark, "No authority was strong enough to keep in check the turbulence of a people which protected the crimes of men in honor and worship of the gods." We have only to read the first chapter of Romans, or Gal. v. 19-21, and Col. iii. 5-8, to know enough of the kind of morality which

commonly accompanied Greek and Roman idolatry in the first century of the Christian era, especially in Ephesus, where architecture and art and poetry appealed to the sense of the beautiful, where the mechanical arts devoted to paganism promoted thrift, where the vaults of Diana's temple afforded avarice a safe-deposit, where a host of priestesses ministered to lust, and the right of asylum shielded crime.

Where pagan religion is thus linked with art and business and pleasure, we do not wonder that John, the venerated Christian teacher, utters his final exhortation, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." Nor are we surprised to learn that Heraclitus of Ephesus was called "the weeping philosopher," in view of the monstrous idiocy and protected criminality of the people among whom "there was not a man who did not deserve hanging." But the bottom of the depravity of this idol-worshipping city is not reached till we have passed down through the successive strata of magic, astrology, sorcery, incantations, amulets, exorcism, and every form of rascally imposture, all engendered by its heathen mythology.

"Facts such as these, " says Dr. A. Plummer, "place in a very vivid light St. John's stern insistence upon the necessity of holding steadfastly the true faith in the Father and the incarnate Son, of keeping one's self pure, of avoiding the world and the things of the world, of being on one's guard against lying spirits, and especially the sharp final admonition, 'Guard yourselves from idols.'"

CONCLUDING NOTE.

The last seven scriptural attestations to the atonement are found in this Epistle. It is the opinion of the most scholarly experts that the so-called First Epistle of John is the final document of Divine Revelation. This fact enhances the value of the seven clear and emphatic testimonies to the atonement, the central doctrine of the Gospel and the keystone of the arch of Christian theology. Three of these are found in the third chapter and one in each of the other four, making seven in all.

It has been beautifully said that this Epistle is a prism which gives all the seven colors that make up the one white light of redemptive truth. Each of these testimonies is really distinct from every other, and from all others in the Holy Scriptures. These unique presentations of this fundamental doctrine have a polemic value, since they are of the nature of apologetic protests against erroneous views of the atonement already commencing to disturb the church and certain to appear more distinctly in future centuries.

Let us present a conspectus of these testimonies. The first is "the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin." This is the negative side of the Christian's high privilege, of which the positive is to have fellowship in the light of God. The sin which is cleansed away by the virtue of the Redeemer's blood is not viewed as transgression to be forgiven, but as defilement to be removed, because it disqualifies for the presence of God in his temple. Here we have a definition of the atonement, as that quality in the blood of Jesus the Son of God which annuls or cleanses conditionally the pollution of sin.

Its uniqueness lies in the divine-human value of the sacrifice for sin nowhere else stated, although it is implied in Paul's word, "the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood." (Acts xx. 28.) Hitherto the value of Christ's blood has been expressed in such words as "incorruptible" and "precious," but now John's final testimony reaches an absolute climax. It is "the blood of Jesus His Son." This suggests how widely modern philosophers depart from the truth when they deny the theological and practical reality of the blood of our Incarnate Sacrifice, arguing that the sacrificial language of the Levitical altar-service comes into the New Testament only as a figure.

Were this true we should find in the progress of doctrine in this volume a gradual transition from the figurative to the real. On the contrary, Levitical language is more distinct and real at the end of the gospels than at the beginning, at the conclusion of the Acts than at the commencement, and in the final epistle of Paul than in the first of the series. John, the last survivor of the apostles, opens and finishes his last writing with a most realistic allusion to the blood of the atonement.

He gives no sanction to an interpretation of the Gospel so refined and so "spiritual" as to need no veritable oblation of blood, the medium of physical life. In his day the evangelical system had not been so sublimated as to clear itself of the wrath of God and its propitiation in "the blood of Jesus His Son." The modern theory is as false as it is fascinating. The second testimony to the atonement is still more emphatic: "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world." The uniqueness of this declaration is seen first in the word "hilasmos., " "propitiation," used in no other book in the New Testament, and, secondly, in the fact that the Son of God himself is the propitiation, and not as in Rom. iii. 25, a propitiatory offering made by Christ. That which gives heavenly virtue to the sacrifice in this testimony goes beyond the preaching, which emphasizes the blood and the life, and announces the astonishing fact that the very self of the offerer is the propitiation, as the Son.

His Person interposes between the divine displeasure and the world which "lieth in the wicked one." He is the standing propitiation. Hence the possibility of a Christian's receiving forgiveness if he should commit a single sin, as the aorist tense, "If any man sin," implies. The Advocate makes no special intercession for the professed Christian who, by persisting in a course of sin without repentance, ceases to be a child of God because he has lost his likeness to God. In the Septuagint there is this remarkable sentence, "There is propitiation (hilasmos) with Thee."

This is not for the encouragement of the saint who has yielded to one temptation to sin, but for his warning to turn immediately in penitent faith in Christ. The Spirit of Inspiration adds these words, "that Thou mayest be feared."

The third testimony is in some respects the most striking of all the seven, though it is introduced quite incidentally and with the least formality. In stating the necessity that all who would see the Son of God as He is, when He shall be manifested, should be found like Him, "pure even as He is pure," it was very natural that His first manifestation should be suggested to the mind of John as making provision for all that the second manifestation would require. This requirement is purity of heart, for which the atonement is an ample conditional provision. In addition we have in this Scripture two distinct and peculiar points, the "taking away of sins," and "in Him is no sin." The words "take away" have a very special force in the New Testament statement of the atonement. In the sentence, "Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world," the meaning is that Jesus is the conditional substitute, not in punishment, but for punishment. But in 1 John iii. 5 the dominant thought is not that of the sacrificial purgation of sin, but of our complete separation from sin through Christ's hostility to sin and His removal of all sin from believers even as He is Himself sinless. This He does by the indwelling fullness of the Spirit entirely sanctifying spirit, soul and body. (1 Thess. v. 23.) Hence the atonement exhibits its highest efficiency in the entire removal of the hereditary bent to sinning.

The seal of perfection is put upon the atonement when its Author is thus described: "In Him is no sin." He who takes away our sins by forgiveness and our sinfulness by His mission of the Holy Spirit for our entire

purification, makes Himself the standard of our perfection and makes us partakers of His own sinlessness. John displays our Pattern negatively as pure, and positively as righteous, not merely to magnify Christ's dignity, but to reveal our privilege and duty to be exactly like Him in purity and righteousness.

Our fourth allusion to the atonement is found in John's sudden transition from sin to Satan's agency in its origin: "The Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil." The past tense, "was manifested," renders it certain that John is not speaking of the destruction of sin at and after his second coming, as some erroneously teach. Here in our earthly sphere, and now in our probation, while contending against these three battalions of enemies to holiness, the world, the flesh and the devil, the usurping prince of this world, is the scene of the most glorious victory of the Son of God over His antagonist taking place on the very ground of Satan's first apparent triumph in the fall of Adam, the progenitor of a race bearing his image marred and scarred by sin through his evil agency. The works of the devil in this world are found only in the human heart. His works do not consist in our actual sins. These are the works of men. His work is that bent to sinning which the sin of Adam, at the solicitation of Satan, the father of lies, entailed upon our race. It is the overthrow of this power of Satan enthroned in human souls. The Son of God came for this purpose that He might, not by physical omnipotence, but by the power of His cross, expel the forces of Satan and regain for Himself and His Father His rightful possession. There is nowhere outside of the Apocalypse so full and explicit a statement of the relation of the death of Christ to the dissolution of the empire of the evil one. If the sins are actual and personal they are taken away into the land of forgetfulness through faith in Christ's redemption. If they are the works of Satan, then are they to be cast out by the entrance of a stronger than he. John does not go into the detail. He leaves the matter in its broad generality. He does not use the Pauline phrase, "sanctify wholly," and "our old man is crucified," but he certainly purposes to accentuate the inspiring truth that those who are born of God may 'be delivered from every trace of the work of Satan within them as a downward propelling force. With this idea in his mind let any candid person read the whole passage: "He was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is no sin." What is this but a positive assurance that those who fully rely on the atonement may, and must, share their Saviour's freedom from sin? What is this but a declaration that all which is "of the devil" may in this life be removed from our regenerate souls, which have now become the temple of the indwelling Christ?

The fifth testimony to the atonement regards it as the example and pattern of self-sacrificing devotion to the good of others: "Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

In the presence of a passage like this we must admit that the atonement was a perfect surrender and oblation of the human and divine self to His Father; a perfect example of the opposite of the sin and selfishness of mankind and a sublime reproof of man's separation from God. But the idea of example does not explain the atonement. There is some purpose infinitely deeper than example. On the Godward side there must have been some barrier to the salvation of a sinful race which the atonement removed. Whether the difficulty was in God's essential justice, as some assert, or in His governmental rectitude, as we believe, we cannot here demonstrate. There is a very wide interval between the kenosis, or self-emptying of the Son of God, and the self-devotion of his imitating servants. But this is true that the love which devised the atonement in the wisdom of the Father, and prompted the self-sacrificing of the Son, is that perfect love in purified human hearts which inspires self-abnegation even unto death in the spiritual interest of our fellow-men.

As we advance in this wonderful Epistle we come to the sixth testimony to the atonement, which is the largest and most comprehensive of the seven. "God is love. Herein was the love of God manifested in us, that God hath sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him." That here, for the first time in the Bible, God is said to be love, must awaken our keen attention. Love has the preeminence here as everywhere, and rules the whole passage. It is the fountain out of which the atonement flows. It presides over the mission of the Redeemer, providing for believers a divine life which itself presupposes and requires a propitiation. It is the melody of all God's Revelation, and it strikes its highest note in the gift of His only begotten Son to the manger and the cross, that the believer might not perish, but have eternal life. In no other sense is love the essence of God's nature than in the intercommunication of the Persons of the Trinity. Upon the fact that the Son was the object of the Father's love from eternity is grounded the manifestation of His love to us in the gift of His Son, that believers "might live through Him." John does not use any of Paul's terms, "reconciliation," "ransom" and "redemption," but their full meaning is contained in the twice used word "hilasmos," "propitiation" required by holiness and provided by love. This great word in chap. iv. 10, stands between the positive purpose of the atonement in verse 9, "that we might live through him," and the negative in verse 14, "to be the Saviour of the world." The latter teaches the universal extent of the atonement as an objective provision, and the former the free, subjective appropriation which limits its ultimate benefits to those who comply with its conditions.

The seventh and last of John's testimonies and the last in all Revelation relates to the virtue of the atonement as the source of life, eternal life, conditionally inspired in a fallen race. This is the supreme benefit of God in the death and resurrection of His Incarnate Son. If there is one sentence worthy of being God's final word respecting this whole subject, it is this: "And this is the record (testimony) that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life;" or, in the emphatic order of the Greek, "the life he hath not." Searching the "record" just written we find the Spirit, the author and giver of life; the water, the indispensable supporter of life, "the well of water" within the believer "springing up into everlasting life," and the blood flowing from His pierced side. We may not explain the great miracle of living streams, "water and blood," out of a dead Saviour's side. In the sacrifice of our redemption they flow together, the water signifying the new life imparted in the new birth. This with John is the supreme if not the only meaning of water as a symbol, as all purifying by washing is with blood. "He has washed us from our sins in His blood." The two streams signify the unity of spiritual life in the purgation of sin and the removal of death by the impartation of life, the beginning of life everlasting. He who receives the one receives the other. The blood avails for the whole world as a provision placing all men on salvable ground. But it is not so with the water. It must be drunk before life can be experienced. For eternal life is in His Son. "He," and he only, who hath the Son hath life. To have the Son in this vital sense is to be united with Him as the branch is united with the vine.

There is no book of the New Testament which makes the propitiation of Christ so absolutely all-prevailing; it is the beginning and ending and the interval between them. It is something unspeakably solemn in the appeal of the last page of the Bible to the significance of the atonement, as if the Holy Spirit who inspired it would end His work at the cross and leave ringing in the ears of every reader the words, "we have life in the Son" through His propitiation. Much of the current theology rejecting propitiation seeks in vain for life, not in the blood, but in human philosophy. Our Lord's final testimony is, "I am the Propitiation and the Life."

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