

# Maclaren on 1 John-Pt2

## SERMONS & EXPOSITION ON 1JOHN

by

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### 1 John 4:10 Christ's Mission The Revelation Of God's Love

**Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.'—1 John 4:10.**

THIS is the second of a pair of twin verses which deal with substantially the same subject under two slightly different aspects. The thought common to both is that Christ's mission is the great revelation of God's love. But in the preceding verse the point on which stress is laid is the manifestation of that love, and in our text the point mainly brought out is its essential nature. In the former we read, 'In this was manifested the love of God,' and in the present verse we read, 'Herein is love.' In the former verse John fixes on three things as setting forth the greatness of that manifestation—viz., that the Christ is the only begotten Son, that the manifestation is for the world, and that its end is the bestowment of everlasting love. In my text the points which are fixed on are that that Love in its nature is self-kindled—'not that we loved God, but that He loved us'—and that it lays hold of, and casts out of the way that which, unremoved, would be a barrier between God and us—viz., our sin: 'He hath sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.'

Now it is interesting to notice that these twin verses, like a double star which reflects the light of a central sun, draw their brightness from the great word of the Master, 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' Do you not hear the echo of His voice in the three expressions in the verse before the text—'only begotten,' 'world,' 'live'? Here is one more of the innumerable links which bind together in indissoluble union the Gospel and the Epistle. So, then, the great thought suggested by the words before us is just this, that in the Incarnation and Sacrifice of Jesus Christ we have the great revelation of the love of God.

#### **I. Now There Are Three Questions That Suggest Themselves To Me, And The First Is This, What, Then, Does Christ's Mission Say About God's Love?**

I do not need to dwell on the previous question whether, apart from that mission, there is any solid revelation of the fact that there is love in Heaven, or whether we are left, apart from it, to gropings and probabilities. I need not refer you to the ambiguous oracles of nature or to the equally ambiguous oracles of life. I need not, I suppose, do more than just remind you that even the men whose faith grasps the thought of the love of God most intensely, know what it is to be brought to a stand before some of the dreadful problems which the facts of humanity and the facts of nature press upon us, nor need I remind you how, as we see around us to-day, in the drift of our English literature and that of other nations, when men turn their backs upon the Cross, they look upon a landscape all swathed in mists, and on which darkness is steadily settling. The reason why the men of this generation, some of them very superficially, and for the sake of being 'in the swim,' and some of them despairingly and with bleeding hearts, are turning themselves to a reasoned pessimism, is because they will not see what shines out from the Cross, that God is love.

Nor need I do more than remind you, in a word, of the fact that, go where we will through this world, and consult all the conceptions that men have made to themselves of gods many and lords many, whilst we find the deification of power, and of vice, and of fragmentary good-nesses, of hopes and fears, of longings, of regrets, we find nowhere a god of whom the characteristic is love. And amidst that Pantheon of deities, some of them savage, some of them lustful, some of them embodiments of all vices, some of them indifferent and neutral, some of them radiant and fair, none reveals this secret, that the centre of the universe is a heart. So we have to turn away from hopes, from probability dashed with many a doubt, and find something that has more solid substance in it, if it is to be enough to bear up the man that grasps it and to yield before no tempests. For all that Bishop Butler says, probabilities are not, the guide of life, in its deepest and noblest aspects. They may be the guide of practice, but for the anchorage of the soul we want no shifting sand-bank, but that to which we may make fast and be sure that, whatever shifts, it remains immovable. You can no more clothe the soul in 'perhappes' than a man can make garments out of a spider's web. Religion consists of the things of which we are sure, and not of the things which are probable. 'Peradventure' is not the word on which a man can rest the weight of a crushed, or an agonising, or a sinking soul; he must have 'Verily! verily!' and then he is at rest.

How do we know what a man is? By seeing what a man does. How do we know what God is? By knowing what God does. So John does not argue with logic, either frosty or fiery, but he simply opens his mouth, and in calm, pellucid utterances sets forth the truths and leaves them to work. He says to us, 'I do not relegate you to your intuitions; I do not argue with you; I simply say, Look at Him;

look, and see that God is love.'

What, then, does the mission of Christ say to us about the love of God? It says, first, that it is a love independent of, and earlier than, ours. We love, as a rule, because we recognise in the object to which our heart goes out something that draws it, something that is loveable. But He whose name is 'I am that I am' has all the reasons of His actions within Himself, and just as He,

**'Sits on no precarious throne,  
Nor borrows leave to be,'**

nor is dependent on any creature for existence, so He is His own motive, He is His own reason. Within that sacred circle of the Infinite Nature lie all the energies which bring that Infinite Nature into action; and like some clear fountain, more sparkling than crystal, there wells up for ever, from the depths of the Divine Nature, the love which is Himself. He loves, not because we love Him, but because He is God. The very sun itself, as some astronomers believe, owes its radiant brightness and ever-communicated warmth to the impact on, and reception into, it of myriads of meteors and of matter drawn from the surrounding system. So when the fuel fails, that fire will go out, and the sun will shrivel into a black ball. But this central Sun of the universe has all His light within Himself, and the rays that pour out from Him owe their being and their motion to nothing but the force of that central fire, from which they rush with healing on their wings.

If, then, God's love is not evoked by anything in His creatures, then it is universal, and we do not need anxiously to question ourselves whether we deserve that it shall fall upon us, and no conscious unworthiness need ever make us falter in the least in the firmness with which we grasp that great central thought. The sun, inferior emblem as it is of that Light of all that is, pours down its beams indiscriminately on dunghill and on jewel, though it be true that in the one its rays breed corruption and in the other draw out beauty. That great love wraps us all, is older than our sins, and is not deflected by them. So that is the first thing that Christ's mission tells us about God's love.

## **II. It Speaks To Us Of A Love Which Gives Its Best.**

John says, 'God sent His Son,' and that word reposes, like the rest of the passage, on many words of Christ's—such as, for instance, when He speaks of Himself as 'sanctified and sent into the world,' and many another saying. But remember how, in the foundation passage to which I have already referred, and of which we have some reflection in the words before us, there is a tenderer expression—not merely 'sent,' but 'gave.' Paul strengthens the word when he says, 'gave up for us all.' It is not for us to speculate about these deep things, but I would remind you of what I dare say I have had occasion often to point out, that Paul seems to intend to suggest to us a mysterious parallel, when he further says, 'He that spared not His own Son, but freely gave Him up to death for us all.' For that emphatic word 'spared' is a distinct allusion to, and quotation of, the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac: 'Seeing thou hast not withheld from Me thine only son.' And so, mysterious as it is, we may venture to say that He not only sent, but He gave, and not only gave, but gave up. His love, like ours, delights to lavish its most precious gifts on its objects.

Now there arises from this consideration a thought which I only mention, and it is this. Christian teaching about Christ's work has often, both by its friends and its foes, been so presented as to lead to the conception that it was the work of Christ which made God love men. The enemies of evangelical truth are never tired of talking in that sense; and some of its unwise friends have given reason for the caricature. But the true Christian teaching is, 'God so loved, that He gave.' The love is the cause of the mission, and not the mission that which evokes the love. So let us be sure that, not because Christ died does God love us sinful creatures, but that, because God loves us, Christ died for us.

The third thing which the mission of Christ teaches us about the love of God is that it is a love which takes note of and overcomes man's sin. I have said, as plainly as I can, that I reject the travesty of Christianity which implies that it was Christ's mission which originated God's love to men. But a love that does not in the slightest degree care whether its object is good or bad—what sort of a love do you call that? What do you name it when a father shows it to his children? Moral indifference; culpable and weak and fatal. And is it anything nobler, if you transfer it to God, and say that it is all the same to Him whether a man is living the life of a hog, and forgetting all that is high and noble, or whether he is pressing with all his strength towards light and truth and goodness? Surely, surely they who, in the name of their reverence for the supreme love of God, cover over the fact of His righteousness, are mutilating and killing the very attribute that they are trying to exalt. A love that cares nothing for the moral character of its object is not love, but hate; it is not kindness, but cruelty. Take away the background because it is so black, and you lower the brilliancy of whiteness of that which stands in front of it. There is such a property in God as is fittingly described by that tremendous word 'wrath.' God cannot, being what He is, treat sin as if it were no sin; and therefore we read, 'He sent His son to be the propitiation for our sins.' The black dam, which we build up between ourselves and the river of the water of life, is to be swept away; and it is the death of Jesus Christ which makes it possible for the highest gift of God's love to pour over the ruined and partially removed barrier and to flood a man's soul. Brethren, no God that is worthy the name can give Himself to a sinful soul. No sinful soul that has not the habit, the guilt, the penalty of its sins swept away, is capable of receiving the life, which is the highest gift of the love. So our twin

texts divide what I may call the process of redemption between them; and whilst the one says, 'He sent His Son that we should have life through Him,' the other tells us of how the sins which bar the entrance of that life into our hearts, as our own consciences tell us they do, can be removed. There must first be the propitiation for our sins, and then that mighty love reaches its purpose and attains its end, and can give us the life of God to be the life of our souls. So much for my first and principle question, If. Now I have to ask, secondly, how comes it that Christ's mission says anything about God's love?

That question is a very plain one, and I should like to press the answer to it very emphatically. Take any other of the great names of the world's history of poet, thinker, philosopher, moralist, practical benefactor; is it possible to apply such a thought as this to them—except with a hundred explanations and limitations—that they, however radiant, however wise, however beneficent, however fruitful their influence, make men sure that God loves them? The thing is ridiculous, unless you are using language in a very fantastic and artificial fashion.

Christ's mission reveals God's love, because Christ is the Son of God. If it is true, as Jesus said, that 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father,' then I can say, 'In Thy tenderness, in Thy patience, in Thy attracting of the publican and the harlot, in Thy sympathy with all the erring and the sorrowful, and, most of all, in Thy agony and passion, in Thy cross and death, I see the glory of God which is the love of God.' Brother, if you break that link, which binds the man Christ Jesus with the ever-living and the ever-loving God, I know not how you can draw from the record of His life and death a confidence, which nothing can shake, in the love of the Father.

Then there is another point. Christ's mission speaks to us about God's love, if—and I was going to say only if—we regard it as His mission to be the propitiation for our sins. Strike out the death as the sacrifice for the world's sin, and what you have left is a maimed something, which may be, and I thankfully recognise often is, very strengthening, very helpful, very calming, very ennobling, even to men who do not sympathise with the view of that work which I am now setting forth, but which is all that to them, very largely, because of the unconscious influence of the truths which they have cast away. It seems to me that those who, in the name of the highest paternal love of God, reject the thought of Christ's sacrificial death, are kicking away the ladder by which they have climbed, and are better than their creeds, and happily illogical. It is the Cross that reveals the love, and it is the Cross as the means of propitiation that pours the light of that blessed conviction into men's hearts.

### **III. My Last Question Is This: What Does Christ's Mission Say About God's Love To Me?**

We know what it ought to say. It ought to carry, as on the crest of a great wave, the conviction of that divine love into our hearts, to be fruitful there. It ought to sweep out, as on the crest of a great wave, our sins and evils. It ought to do this; does it? On some of us I fear it produces no effect at all. Some of you, dear friends, look at that light with lack-lustre eyes, or, rather, with blind eyes, that are dark as midnight in the blaze of noonday. The voice comes from the Cross, sweet as that of harpers harping with their harps, and mighty as the voice of many waters, and you hear nothing. Some of us it slightly moves now and then, and there an end.

Brethren, you have to turn the world-wide generality into a personal possession. You have to say, 'He loved me, and gave Himself for me.' It is of no use to believe in a universal Saviour; do you trust in your particular Saviour? It is of no use to have the most orthodox and clear conceptions of the relation between the Cross of Christ and the revelation to men of the love of God; have you made that revelation the means of bringing into your own personal life the conviction that Jesus Christ is your Saviour, the propitiation for your sins, the Giver to you of life eternal? It is faith that does that. Note that, in the great foundation passage to which I have made frequent reference, there are two conditions put in between the beginning and the end. Some of us are disposed to say, 'God so loved the world that every man might have eternal life.' That is not what Christ said, 'God so loved the world that'—and here follows the first condition—'He gave His Son that'—and here follows the second—'he that believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' God has done what it is needful for Him to do. His part of the conditions has been fulfilled. Fulfil yours—'He that believeth on Him.' And if you can say, not He is the propitiation for our sin, but for my sin, then you will live and move and have your being in a heaven of love, and will love Him back again with an echo and reflection of His own, and nothing shall be able to separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## **1 John 4:17 The Servant As His Lord**

**"As He is, so are we in this world."—1 John 4:17.**

LARGE truths may be spoken in little words. Profundity is often supposed to be obscurity, but the deepest depth is clear. John, in his gospel and epistles, deals with the deepest realities, and with all things in their eternal aspects, but his vocabulary is the simplest in the New Testament. God and the world, life and death, love and hate, light and darkness, these are the favourite words round which his thoughts gather. Here are nine little monosyllables. What can be simpler than, 'As He is, so are we in this world?' And what can go beyond the thought that lies in it, that a Christian is a living likeness of Christ?

But the connection of my text is quite as striking as its substance. John has been dwelling upon his favourite thought that to abide

in love is to abide in God, and God in us. And then he goes on to say that 'Herein'—that is, in such mutual abiding in love—'is love made perfect with us'; and the perfection of that love, which is thus communion, is in order that, at the great solemn day of future trial, men may lift up their faces and meet His glance—which is not strange to them, nor met for the first time—with open-hearted and open-countenanced 'boldness.' But 'love' and 'abiding' are the source of confidence in the Day of Judgment, because love and abiding are the source of assimilation to Christ's life. We have boldness, 'because as He is, so are we in this world'; and we are as He is, because we love and abide in Him. So here are three thoughts, the assimilation of the Christian man to Christ; the frank confidence which it begets; and the process by which it is secured.

### **I. A Christian Is Christ's Living Likeness.**

That is a startling thing to say, and all the more startling if you notice that John does not say 'As He was,' in this earthly life of humiliation and filial obedience, but 'as He is,' in His heavenly life and reign and glory. That might well repel us from all thought of possible resemblance, but the light, however brilliant it may be, is not blinding, and it is the Christ as He is, and not only—true as that is—the Christ as He was, who is the original of which Christian men are copies.

Now there is the difference between the teaching of such classes of religionists as represent Christ's humanity as all in all, and preach to us that He, in His earthly life is the pattern to whom we are to seek to conform our lives, and the true evangelical teaching. That dead Man is living, and His present life has in it elements which we can grasp, and to which every Christian life is to be conformed.

Is there anything, then, within the glory to which I, in my poor, struggling, hampered, imperfect life here on earth, can feel that my character is being shaped? Yes, surely there is. I have no doubt that, in the words of my text, the Apostle is remembering the solemn ones of our Lord's high-priestly prayer as recorded in the seventeenth chapter of his gospel, where the same antithesis of our being in the world, and His not being there, recurs; and where the analogy and resemblance are distinctly stated—'I in Thee, and Thou in Me, that they also may be in us.'

So, then, when we stand with our letter-writer in his Patmos island, and see the countenance 'as the sun shining in his strength, and the eyes as a flame of fire,' and the many crowns upon the head, and the many stars in the hand, though we may feel as if all resemblance was at an end, and aspiration after likeness could only fall at His feet and cover its face, yet there is within the glory something which may be repeated and reproduced in our lives, and that is, the indissoluble union of a Son with a Father, in all loving obedience, in all perfect harmony, in all mutual affection and outgoing of heart and thoughts. This is the centre of the life, alike of the Christ when He is glorified, and of the Christ when He was upon earth. So the very secret heart of the mysterious being of the Son is to be, and necessarily is, repeated in all those who in Him have received the adoption of sons.

Or to put the whole thing into plainer words, it is the religious and the moral aspects of Christ's being, and not any one particular detail thereof; and these, as they live and reign on the Throne, just as truly as these, as they suffered and wept upon earth—it is these to which it is our destiny to be conformed. We are like Him, if we are His, in this,—that we are joined to God, that we hold fellowship with Him, that our lives are all permeated with the divine, that we are saturated with the presence of God, that we have submitted ourselves to Him and to His will, that 'not my will, but Thine, be done' is the very inmost meaning of our hearts and our lives. And thus 'we,' even here, 'bear the image of the heavenly, as we have borne the images of the earthly.' Now I am not going to dwell upon details; all these can be filled in by each of us for himself. The centre-point which I insist upon is this—the filial union with God, the filial submission to Him, and the consequent purity as Christ is pure, righteousness as Christ is righteous, and walking even as Christ walked, for ever in the light.

But then there is another point that I desire to refer to. I have put an emphasis upon the 'is' instead of the 'was,' as it applies to Jesus Christ. I would further put an emphasis upon the 'are,' as it applies to us—'So are we.'

John is not exhorting, he is affirming. He is not saying what Christian men ought to strive to be, but he is saying what all Christian men, by virtue of their Christian character, are. Or, to put it into other words, likeness to the Master is certain. It is inevitably involved in the relation which a Christian man bears to the Lord. There may be degrees in the likeness, there may be differences of skill and earnestness in the artist. We have to labour like a portrait painter, slowly and tentatively approaching to the complete resemblance. It is 'a lifelong task ere the lump be leavened.' This likeness does not reach its completeness by a leap. It is not struck, as the image of a king is, upon the blank metal disc, by one stroke, but it is wrought out by long, laborious, and, as I said, approximating and tentative touches. My text suggests that to us by its addition, 'So are we, in this world.' The 'world'—or, to use modern phraseology, 'the environment'—conditions the resemblance. As far as it is possible for a thing encompassed with dust and ashes to resemble the radiant sun in the heavens, so far is the resemblance carried here. Some measure of it, and a growing measure, is inseparable from the reality of a Christian life.

Now, you Christian people, does that plain statement touch you anywhere? 'So are we.' Well! you would be quite easy if John had said: 'So may we be; so should we be; so shall we be.' But what about the so are we? What a ghastly contradiction the lives of

multitudes of professing Christians are to that plain statement! 'Like Jesus Christ'—would anybody say that about anything in me? 'So are we'—no words of mine, dear brethren, can make the statement more searching, more impressive; but, I pray you, lay this to heart: 'If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.' You may take sacraments and profess Christianity, or, as we Nonconformists have it, 'join churches,' and do all manner of outward work for ever and a day; but if you have not the likeness of Christ, at least in germ, and growing to something more than a germ, in your characters, you had better revise your position, and ask whether, after all, you have not been walking in a vain show, and fancied yourselves the servants of Christ, while you bear the image of Christ's enemy.

A very tiny gully on a hillside, made by showers of rain, may fall into the same slopes, and has been created by the very same forces, working according to the same laws, as have scooped out valleys miles broad, bordered by mountains thousands of feet high. And in my little life, poor as it is, limited as it is, environed as it is by the world, and therefore often hampered and stained, as well as helped and brightened, by its environment, there may be, and there will be, in some degree, if I am a Christian man, the very same power at work by which Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father shines as the sun on the throne of the universe.

But then, notice further, how that limitation to which I have referred in this world carries with it another message. There is Christ in the heavens, veiled and unseen. Here are you on earth, his representative. There is a rage at present for putting pictures into all books, and folk will scarcely read unless they get illustrated literature. The world has for its illustrations of the gospel the lives of us Christian people. In the book there are principles and facts, and readers should be able to turn the page and see all pictured in us.

That is what you are set to do in this world. 'As the Father sent Me, even so send I you.' 'As He is, so are we in this world.' It may be our antagonist, but it is our sphere, and its presence is necessary to evoke our characters. Christ has entrusted His reputation, His honour, to us, and many a man that never cares to look at Him as He is revealed in Scripture, would be wooed and won to look at Him and love Him, if we Christian people were more true to our vocation, and bore more conspicuously on our faces and in our characters the image of the heavenly.

## **II. Look For A Moment At The Second Thought That Is Here: The Day Of Judgment.**

Such a likeness to Jesus Christ is the only thing that will enable a man to lift up his head in the Day of Judgment.

'We have boldness,' says John, because 'as He is, so are we.' Now that is a very strong statement of a truth that popular, evangelical theology has far too much obscured. People talk about being, at the last, 'accepted in the beloved.' God be thanked, it is true. A sweet old hymn that a great many of us learned when we were children, though it is not so well known in these days, says:-

**'Bold shall I stand in that great day,  
For who aught to my charge shall lay,  
While through Thy blood absolved I am  
From sin's tremendous curse and shame?'**

I believe that, and I try to preach it. But do not let us forget the other side. My text is in full accordance with the principles of our Lord's own teaching; and who knows the principles of His own words so well as the judge, who tells us, in His pictures of that great day, that the question put to every man will be, not what you believe, but what did you do, and what are you?

But this truth of my text has been not only wounded in the house of the friends of Christianity, but it has been overlooked by one of the very frequent objections that we hear made to evangelical teaching, that, according to it, a man is judged according to his belief and not according to his deeds. A man is judged according to his—not belief—but according to his faith. But he is judged according also to—not his work—but according to his character.

And I wish, dear friends, to lay this upon your hearts, because many of us are too apt to forget it, that whilst unquestionably the beginning of salvation, and the condition of forgiveness here, and of acceptance hereafter, are laid in trust in Jesus Christ, that trust is sure to work out a character which is in conformity with His requirements and moulded after the likeness of Himself. 'The judgment of God is according to truth,' and what a man is determines where a man shall be, and what he shall receive through all eternity. Remember Christ's own teaching. Remember the teaching of that other apostle than John, according to which the 'wood, hay, stubble,' built by a man upon the foundation shall be burned up, and the builder himself be saved, yet so as by fire. And lay this to heart, that it is only when faith works in us, through love and communion, characters like Jesus Christ's, that we shall be able to stand—though even then we shall have to trust to divine and infinite mercy, and to the sprinkling of His blood—before the Throne of God. Lay up in store for yourselves a good foundation unto eternal life. And take this as the preaching of my text; character, and character alone, will stand the judgment of that great day.

There is no real antagonism between such truths and the widest preaching of salvation by faith. It is the same man who, in his gospel, says, as from the lips of the Lord Himself, 'He that believeth is not judged,' and in his letter says, 'We may have boldness in that day, because, as He is, so are we in this world.'

### **III. One Word About The Last Point; The Process By Which This Likeness Is Secured.**

That is contained, as I tried to show in my introductory remarks, in the earlier part of the verse. Our love is made perfect by dwelling in God, and God in us; in order that we may be thus conformed to Christ's likeness, and so have boldness in that great day. To be like Jesus Christ, what is needed is that we love Him, and that we keep in touch with Him. What is it to 'abide' in Him? —to direct the continual flow of mind and love and will and practical obedience to Him, to bear Him ever in the secret place of my heart whilst my hands are occupied with daily business, and my feet are running the sometimes rough race that is set before me. Think of Him ever, love Him ever. Let His name be like a perfume breathed through the whole atmosphere of your lives. Keep your wills in the attitude of submission, of acceptance, of indecision when necessary, and of absolute dependence upon Him. Let your outward acts be such as shall not bring a film of separation between Him and you. When thus our whole being is steeped and drenched with Christ, then it cannot but be that we shall be like Him. Even 'clouds themselves as suns appear, when the sun pierces them with light.' 'Abide in Me, and I in you.' You cannot make yourselves like Christ, but you can fasten yourselves to Christ, and He will give you power which shall make you like Him.

But, remember, such abiding is no idle waiting, no passive confidence. It is full of energy, full of suppression, when necessary, of what is contrary to your truest self, and full of strenuous cultivation of that which is in accord with the will of the Father, and with the likeness of the 'first-born among many brethren.'

Dear friends, lie in the light and you will become light. Abide in Christ, and you will get like Christ; and, being like Him, you will be able to lift up your heads, and rejoice when you front Him on the Throne, and you are at the bar. Then, when you are no more in the world, the likeness will be perfected, because the communion is complete. 'We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.'

## **1 John 4:18 Love And Fear**

**There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.' —1 John 4:18.**

JOHN has been speaking of boldness, and that naturally suggests its opposite—fear. He has been saying that perfect love produces courage in the day of judgment, because it produces likeness to Christ, who is the Judge. In my text he explains and enlarges that statement. For there is another way in which love produces boldness, and that is by its casting out fear. These two are mutually exclusive. The entrance of the one is for the other a notice to quit. We cannot both love and fear the same person or thing; and where love comes in, the darker form slips out at the door; and where Love comes in, it brings hand in hand with itself Courage with her radiant face. But boldness is the companion of love, only when love is perfect. For, inconsistent as the two emotions are, love, in its earlier stages and lower degrees, is often perturbed and dashed by apprehension and dread.

Now John is speaking about the two emotions in themselves, irrespective, so far as his language goes, of the objects to which they are directed. What he is saying is true about love and fear, whatever or whosoever may be loved or dreaded. But the context suggests the application in his mind, for it is 'boldness before him' about which he has been speaking; and so it is love and fear directed towards God which are meant in my text. The experience of hosts of professing Christians is only too forcible a comment upon the possibility of a partial Love lodging in the heart side by side with a fellow-lodger, Fear, whom it ought to have expelled. So there are three things here that I wish to notice—the empire of fear, the mission of fear, and the expulsion of fear.

### **I. The Empire Of Fear.**

Fear is a shrinking apprehension of evil as befalling us, from the person or thing which we dread. My text brings us face to face with that solemn thought that there are conditions of human nature, in which the God who ought to be our dearest joy and most ardent desire becomes our ghastliest dread. The root of such an unnatural perversion of all that a creature ought to feel towards its loving Creator lies in the simple consciousness of discordance between God and man, which is the shadow cast over the heart by the fact of sin. God is righteous; God righteously administers His universe. God enters into relations of approval or disapproval with His responsible creature. Therefore there lies, dormant for the most part, but present in every heart, and active in the measure in which that heart is informed as to itself, the slumbering, cold dread that between it and God things are not as they ought to be.

I believe, for my part, that such a dumb, dim consciousness of discord attaches to all men, though it is often smothered, often ignored, and often denied. But there it is; the snake hibernates, but it is coiled in the heart all the same; and warmth will awake it. Then it lifts its crested head, and shoots out its forked tongue, and venom passes into the veins. A dread of God is the ghastliest thing in the world, the most unnatural, but universal, unless expelled by perfect love.

Arising from that discomfiting consciousness of discord there come, likewise, other forms and objects of dread. For if I am out of harmony with Him, what will be my fate in the midst of a universe administered by Him, and in which all are His servants? Oh! I sometimes wonder how it is that godless men front the facts of human life and do not go mad. For here are we, naked, feeble, alone, plunged into a whirlpool, from the awful vortices of which we cannot extricate ourselves. There foam and swirl all manner of evils, some of them certain, some of them probable, any of them possible, since we are at discord with Him who wields all the forces of the universe, and wields them all with a righteous hand. 'The stars in their courses fight against' the man that does not fight for God. Whilst all things serve the soul that serve Him, all are embattled against the man that is against, or not for, God and His will.

Then there arises up another object of dread, which, in like manner, derives all its power to terrify and to hurt from the fact of our discordance with God; and that is 'the shadow feared of man,' that stands shrouded by the path, and waits for each of us.

God; God's universe; God's messenger, Death—these are facts with which we stand in relation, and if our relations with Him are out of gear, then He and all of these are legitimate objects of dread to us.

But now there is something else that casts out fear than perfect love, and that is—perfect levity. For it is the explanation of the fact that so many of us know nothing of this fear of which I speak, and fancy that I am exaggerating, or putting forward false views. There is a type of man, and I have no doubt there are some of its representatives among my hearers, who are below both fear and love as directed towards God; for they never think about Him, or trouble their heads concerning either Him or their relations to Him or anything that flows therefrom. It is a strange faculty that we all have, of forgetting unwelcome thoughts and shutting our eyes to the things that we do not want to see, like Nelson when he puts the telescope to his blind eye at Copenhagen, because he would not obey the signal of recall. But surely it is an ignoble thing that men should ignore or shuffle out of sight with inconsiderateness the real facts of their condition, like boys whistling in a churchyard to keep their spirits up, and saying, 'Who's afraid?' just because they are so very much afraid. Ah, dear friends, do not rest until you face the facts, and having faced them, have found the way to reverse them! Surely, surely it is not worthy of men to turn away from anything so certain as that between a sin-loving man and God there must exist such a relation as will bring evil and sorrow to that man, as surely as God is and he is. I beseech you, take to heart these things, and do not turn away from them with a shake of your shoulders, and say, 'He is preaching the narrow, old-fashioned doctrine of a religion of fear.' No! I am not. But I am preaching this plain fact, that a man who is in discord with God has reason to be afraid, and I come to you with the old exhortation of the prophet, 'Be troubled, ye careless ones.' For there is nothing more ignoble or irrational than security which is only made possible by covering over unwelcome facts. 'Be troubled'; and let the trouble lead you to the Refuge.

## **II. That Brings Me To The Second Point—Viz., The Mission Of Fear.**

John uses a rare word in my text when he says 'fear hath torment.' 'Torment' does not convey the whole idea of the word. It means suffering, but suffering for a purpose; suffering which is correction; suffering which is disciplinary; suffering which is intended to lead to something beyond itself. Fear, the apprehension of personal evil, has the same function in the moral world as pain has in the physical. It is a symptom of disease, and is intended to bid us look for the remedy and the Physician. What is an alarm bell for but to rouse the sleepers, and to hurry them to the refuge? And so this wholesome, manly dread of the certain issue of discord with God is meant to do for us what the angels did for Lot—to lay a mercifully violent hand on the shoulder of the sleeper, and shake him into aroused wakefulness, and hasten him out of Sodom, before the fire bursts through the ground, and is met by the fire from above. The intention of fear is to lead to that which shall annihilate it by taking away its cause.

There is nothing more ridiculous, nothing more likely to destroy a man, than the indulgence in an idle fear which does nothing to prevent its own fulfilment. Horses in a burning stable are so paralysed by dread that they cannot stir, and get burnt to death. And for a man to be afraid—as every one ought to be who is conscious of unforgiven sin—for a man to be afraid and there an end, is absolute insanity. I fear; then what do I do? Nothing. That is true about hosts of us.

What ought I to do? Let the dread direct me to its source, my own sinfulness. Let the discovery of my own sinfulness direct me to its remedy, the righteousness and the Cross of Jesus Christ. He, and He alone, can deal with the disturbing element in my relation to God. He can 'deliver me from my enemies, for they are too strong for me.' It is Christ and His work, Christ and His sacrifice, Christ and His indwelling Spirit that will grapple with and overcome sin and all its consequences, in any man and in every man; taking away its penalty, lightening the heart of the burden of its guilt, delivering from its love and dominion—all three of which things are the barbs of the arrows with which fear riddles heart and conscience. So my fear should proclaim to me the merciful 'Name that is above every name,' and drive me as well as draw me to Christ, the Conqueror of sin, and the Antagonist of all dread.

Brethren, I said I was not preaching the religion of Fear. But I think we shall scarcely understand the religion of Love unless we recognise that dread is a legitimate part of an unforgiven man's attitude towards God. My fear should be to me like the misshapen guide that may lead me to the fortress where I shall be safe. Oh, do not tamper with the wholesome sense of dread! Do not let it lie,

generally sleeping, and now and then waking in your hearts, and bringing about nothing. Sailors that crash on with all sails set—stunsails and all—whilst the barometer is rapidly falling, and boding clouds are on the horizon, and the line of the approaching gale is ruffling the sea yonder, have themselves to blame if they founder. Look to the falling barometer, and make ready for the coming storm, and remember that the mission of fear is to lead you to the Christ who will take it away.

### **III. Lastly, The Expulsion Of Fear.**

My text points out the natural antagonism, and mutual exclusiveness, of these two emotions. If I go to Jesus Christ as a sinful man, and get His love bestowed upon me, then, as the next verse to my text says, my love springs in response to His to me, and in the measure in which that love rises in my heart will it frustrate its antagonistic dread.

As I said, you cannot love and fear the same person, unless the love is of a very rudimentary and imperfect character. But just as when you pour pure water into a bladder, the poisonous gases that it may have contained will be driven out before it, so when love comes in, dread goes out. The river, turned into the foul Augean stables of the heart, will sweep out all the filth and leave everything clean. The black, greasy smoke-wreath, touched by the fire of Christ's love, will flash out into ruddy flames, like that which has kindled them; and Christ's love will kindle in your hearts, if you accept it and apprehend it aright, a love which shall burn up and turn into fuel for itself the now useless dread.

But, brethren, remember that it is 'perfect love' which 'casts out fear.'

Inconsistent as the two emotions are in themselves, in practice, they may be united, by reason of the imperfection of the nobler. And in the Christian life they are united with terrible frequency. There are many professing Christian people who live all their days with a burden of shivering dread upon their shoulders, and an icy cold fear in their hearts, just because they have not got close enough to Jesus Christ, nor kept their hearts with sufficient steadfastness under the quickening influences of His love, to have shaken off their dread as a sick man's distempered fancies. A little love has not mass enough in it to drive out thick, clustering fears. There are hundreds of professing Christians who know very little indeed of that joyous love of God which swallows up and makes impossible all dread, who, because they have not a loving present consciousness of a loving Father's loving will, tremble when they front in imagination, and still more when they meet in reality, the evils that must come, and who cannot face the thought of death with anything but shrinking apprehension. There is far too much of the old leaven of selfish dread left in the experiences of many Christians. 'I feared thee, because thou wert an austere man, and so, because I was afraid, I went and hid my talent, and did nothing for thee' is a transcript of the experience of far too many of us. The one way to get deliverance is to go to Jesus Christ and keep close by Him.

And my last word to you is, see that you resort only to the sane, sound way of getting rid of the wholesome, rational dread of which I have been speaking. You can ignore it; and buy immunity at the price of leaving in full operation the causes of your dread—and that is stupid. There is only one wise thing to do, and that is, to make sure work of getting rid of the occasion of dread, which is the fact of sin. Take all your sin to Jesus Christ; He will—and He only can—deal with it. He will lay His hand on you, as He did of old, with the characteristic word that was so often upon His lips, and which He alone is competent to speak in its deepest meaning, 'Fear not, it is I,' and He will give you the courage that He commands.

'God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.' 'Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father,' and cling to Him, as a child who knows his father's heart too well to be afraid of anything in his father, or of anything that his father's hand can send.

## **1 John 4:19 The Ray And The Reflection**

**"We love Him, because He first loved us."—1 John 4:19.**

Very simple words! but they go down into the depths of God, lifting burdens off the heart of humanity, turning duty into delight, and changing the aspect of all things. He who knows that God loves him needs little more for blessedness; he who loves God back again offers more than all burnt offering and sacrifices. But it is to be observed that the correct reading of my text, as you will find in the Revised Version, omits 'Him' in the first clause, and simply says 'we love,' without specifying the object. That is to say, for the moment John's thought is fixed rather on the inward transformation effected, from self-regard to love—than on considering the object on which the love is expended. When the heart is melted, the streams flow wherever there is a channel. The river, as he goes on to show us, parts into two heads, and love to God and love to man are, in their essence and root-principle, one thing.

So my text is the summary of all revelation about God, the ultimate word about all our relations to Him, and the all-inclusive directory as to our conduct to one another. To know that God loves, and to love again—there is a little pocket encyclopaedia in two volumes, which contains the smelted-down essence of all theology and of all morality. Let us look at these three points.

### **I. The Ultimate Word About God.**



'He first loved us.' Properly and strictly speaking, that 'first' only declares the priority of the divine love towards us over ours towards Him. But we may fairly give it a wider meaning, and say—first of all, ere Creation and Time, away back in the abysmal depths of an everlasting and changeless heart, changeless in the sense that its love was eternal, but not changeless in the sense that love could have no place within it—first of all things was God's love; last to be discovered because most ancient of all. The foundation is disclosed last when you come to dig, and the essence is grasped last in the process of analysis.

So one of the old psalms, with wondrous depth of truth, traces up everything to this, 'For His mercy endureth for ever.' Therefore, there was time; therefore, there were creatures—'He made great lights, for His mercy endureth for ever.' Therefore, there were judgments—'He slew famous kings for His mercy endures forever.' And so we may pass through all the works of the divine energy, and say, 'He first loved us.'

It is no accident that there are but foregleams of this great thought brightening the words and the thoughts of psalmist and prophet, saint and sage, from the beginning onwards, while the articulate utterance of the simple sentence was first heard from the lips of Him who declared the Father, and stands in that part of the Book which, both in its position there, and in its date of composition is the last of the Apostolic utterances. 'God is love';—that is in one aspect the foundation of His being, and in another aspect the shining ruby set on the very sky piercing summit of the completed process of the revelation of that Being to man. 'He first loved us'; and thence, from that centre and germinal point, streams out the whole train of consequences in the divine activity, and in the divine self-revelation.

I need not ask you to contrast with this infinitely simple and infinitely deep utterance all other thoughts of a divine Being—the cold abstractions of Theism, the dim dreads of popular apprehension, the vague utterances of any mythology, the clouds that men's thoughts have covered over the face of this great truth—and then, to set by the side of all these groping, these peradventures, these fears, these narrow, unworthy ideas, the clear simplicity, the infinite depth of 'He first loved us.'

But I may ask you to consider, but for a moment, the relation which all the other perfection of the divine nature have to this central and foundation one. There are all those pompous names, 'Omnipresence' and 'Omniscience' and the like, which are but the negations of the limitations of humanity or of finite creatures. There are the more spiritual and moral thoughts of Wisdom and Righteousness and the like. These are but the fringes of the glory: I was going to venture to say that the divinest thing in God is love. There is the central blaze; the rest is but the brilliant periphery that encloses it. And that infinite love stands to all these other attributes in the relation of being their master and motive spring. They are Love's instrument, and in the divine nature Love is Lord of all. They give it majesty; it gives them tenderness. We may reverently say, in regard to the divine nature, what the Apostle says about our humanity, that love is the 'bond of perfectness'—the girdle which, braced round all the garments, keeps them in their place.

For round these infinite, innumerable, unnameable, and named divine perfections, is that which brings them all into symmetry and keeps them all in harmonious action—Love. He has wisdom, and power, and eternal being, but He is Love.

But do not let us forget that whilst thus my text proclaims the ultimate truth, these other attributes, as they are called, are all smelted down, as it were, into, and present in, the love which is their crown. The same Apostle, who has thus the honour of ringing out to the world the good news that God is Love, declares that 'this is the message' which he has to tell, that 'God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.' So the light of righteousness, as well as the lambent flame of love, burn together on that central fire of the universe. We must not so conceive of the love of God, as to darken the radiance of His righteousness, or to obscure the brilliancy of that pure light which tolerates no admixture of darkness.

May I venture a step further, and ask whether we are not warranted in believing that in that which we call the love of God there do abide the same elements as characterise the thing that bears the same name in our human experience? The spectrum has told us that the constituents of the mighty sun in the heavens are the same as the constituents of this little darkened earth. And there are the same lines in the divine spectrum that there are in ours. So if we can venture to say of Him, He is Love, do not let us shrink from saying that then, like us, He delights in the companionship of His beloved; that, like us, He rejoices in giving Himself to His beloved; that, like us, but infinitely, He desires the good of His beloved; and that, like us, He seeks only for the requital of an answering love. All these things, the joy of the Lord in 1 John 5:19 man, the yielding of the Lord to man, the beneficent desire of the Lord for the good of man, and the hunger of the Lord for the response of love from man—all these things are affirmed when we affirm that God is Love.

Our Apostle would concur heartily in the great text which was the theme of a recent sermon. Paul said, 'God establishes His love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.' John says, 'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.'

So the Cross of Christ is the one demonstration that God loved us. Looking to it we can say, with a great modern teacher:—

**“So the All-great were the All-loving too,  
So through the thunder comes a human voice,  
Saying “Oh! heart I made; a heart beats here,  
Face, My hands fashioned, see it in Myself;  
Thou hast no power, nor mayest conceive of Mine  
But love I gave thee, with Myself to love,  
And thou must love Me, who have died for thee.”**

## **II. Here We Have The Ultimate Word As To Our Religion.**

‘We love Him, because He first loved us.’ There is a bridge wanted between these two, and the bridge is supplied abundantly in this letter, in entire harmony with the teaching of the rest of the New Testament. Much has been said, and profitably said, with reference to the modification of the general type of Christian teaching in the writings respectively of Paul, Peter, James, and John. I thankfully recognise the diversities. They are not divergences; they are perfectly complementary, and may all be made to harmonise. This Apostle of love has also declared to us how it comes that the love which burns at the centre of things, where there is a heart, kindles a responding love away out on the circumference of things, where there are men with hearts; and the bridge is—‘We have known and believed the love that God hath to us.’ So says John. And Paul, the Apostle of faith, who sometimes seems as if his only conception of the link of union between God and man was, on the part of man, faith, responds when he speaks of a faith which worketh, comes to energetic operation, through the love which it has kindled.

So we come to this, that a simple trust in the love of God, as manifested in Jesus Christ, our Lord, is the only thing which will so deal with man’s natural self-regard and desire to make himself his own object and centre, as to substitute for that the victorious love to God. You cannot love God, unless you believe that He loves you. You will never be absolutely sure of that, unless you have learned it from the Cross of Christ. You will not respond with the love that He desires, but there will be a film between your ice and the fire that could melt it, until that is swept away by the simple act of confidence in God manifested to you in Jesus Christ. This is Christianity; this, nothing less, is religion—to love God, because I believe that in Jesus Christ God has loved me.

And that is the only thing that He desires or accepts. The Religion of Fear; what is it? ‘Thou wert an austere man and I was afraid.’ Yes! and what did you do when you were afraid? ‘I hid my talent in the ground,’ and was utterly idle. Here rise, on either side of the valley, two mountains—Ebal and Geranium. From the one were thundered the curses, from the other broke the benediction of the blessings; the one is barren, the other is verdant—which thing is an allegory.’ The Religion of Fear does nothing, the Religion of Love does all. The Religion of Self-interest is narrow, poor, mostly inoperative of any lofty enthusiasm or high nobleness of character. The Religion of Duty; ‘I ought to worship, I am bidden to do this, that, or the other thing, which I do not a bit like to do. I am forbidden to do this, that, and the other thing which I should very much like to do, if I durst’—that religion is the religion of a slave; and there are hosts of us that know nothing better. And so our Christianity is a feeble and an uncomfortable thing; and there are little joy, and little subjugation of the will, and little leaping up of the heart in glad obedience in it. I was talking to a good, aged man, not long ago, whose religion was of a very gloomy type. He said to me, ‘As to love, I know next to nothing about it.’ Ah! brethren, I am afraid that is true about a good many of us who call ourselves Christians.

Then let me say, too, that if we love Him, it will be the motive power and spring of all manner of obedience’s and glad services. Love is the mother-tincture, so to speak, which you can colour, and to which you can add in various ways, and produce variously tinted and tasted and perfumed commixtures. Love lies at the foundation of all Christian goodness. It will lead to the subjugation of the will; and that is the thing that is most of all needed to make a man righteous and pure. So St. Augustine’s paradox, rightly understood, is a magnificent truth, ‘Love! and do what you will.’ For then you will be sure to will what God wills, and you ought.

If this be the summing-up of all religion, a practical conclusion follows. When we feel ourselves defective in the glow and operative driving power of love to God, what is the right thing to do? When a man is cold, he will not warm himself by putting a clinical thermometer into his mouth, and taking his temperature, will he? Let him go into the sunshine and he will be warmed up. You can pound ice in a mortar, and except for the little heat generated by the impact of the pestle, it will keep ice still. But float the iceberg south into the tropics, and what has become of it? It has all run down into sweet, warm water, and mingled with the warm ocean that has dissolved it. So do not think about yourselves and your own loveless hearts so much, but think about God, and the infinite welling up of love in His heart to you, a great deal more. ‘We love Him, because He first loved us’; therefore, to love Him more, we must feel more that He does love us.

## **III. Lastly, Here Is The Ultimate Word About Our Conduct To Men.**

I said that John, by leaving out any specification of the object of love, as well as by the verses that immediately follow, shows that he regards the emotion as one, though its direction is two-fold. That just comes to the plain truth, that the only victorious antagonist to the self-regarding temperament of average men, and the only power which will change philanthropy from a sentiment into a self-denying and active principle of conduct, is to be found in the belief of the love of God in Jesus Christ, and in answering love to Him.

That is a lesson for many sorts of people to-day. What they call altruism is no discovery of Christianity, but its practice is. I freely admit that there is much honest and self-sacrificing beneficence and benevolence which are not connected, in the men who practice them, with faith in Jesus Christ. But I question very much whether these would have existed if the story of the Cross had been unknown. And sure I am that the history of non-Christian attempts to promote the brotherhood of man, and to diffuse a wide and operative love of mankind, teaches us, on the one side, that the emotion is not strong enough to last, and to work, unless it is based on God's love in Jesus Christ. And the history of Christianity, on the other side, though with many defects and things to be ashamed of, teaches us, conversely, that wherever there is a genuine love of God, its exterior form, so to say, the outside of it which is presented to the world, will be true love to man.

Christian people, lay this to heart; you are to be mirrors of the love to which you turn for all blessedness and peace. It is of no use to say, 'My religion is the love of God' unless the love of God is manifested in the love of man. If you love God, you will love those that God loves, those for whom Christ died, those who are just like what you were when you learned that God loved you. The service of God is the service of man.

One last word, 'We love Him, because He first loved us.' Do you? Or is it rather true of you: 'I do not love God, though He has loved me'? I saw not long since, up on the flank of a mountain, an obstinate patch of snow, that had fronted, in unbelted cold, months of the summer sun. There are some of us who lift a broad shield of thick-ribbed ice between ourselves and the radiance of the warm heart of God. Oh! brother; do not shut that love out of your heart; for if you do, you shut out peace and goodness, and shut in all manner of poisonous creatures and doleful shapes, whose companionship will be misery and death.

## 1 John 5:4 Faith Conquering The World

**'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.'**—1 John 5:4.

No New Testament writer makes such frequent use of the metaphors of combat and victory as this gentle Apostle John. None of them seem to have conceived so habitually of the Christian life as being a conflict, and in none of their writings does the clear note of victory in the use of that word 'overcometh' ring out so constantly as it does in those of the very Apostle of Love. Equally characteristic of John's writings is the prominence which he gives to the still contemplation of, and abiding in, Christ. These two conceptions of the Christian life appear to be discordant, but are really harmonious.

There is no doubt where John learned the phrase. Once he had heard it at a time and in a place which stamped it on his memory for ever. 'Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world,' said Christ, an hour before Gethsemane. Long years since then had taught John something of its meaning, and had made him to understand how the Master's victory might belong to the servants. Hence in this letter he has much to say about 'overcoming the wicked one,' and the like; and in the Apocalypse we never get far away from hearing the shout of victory, whether we consider the sevenfold promises of the letters that stand at the beginning of the visions, or whether we listen to such sayings as this:—'They overcame by the blood of the Lamb,' or the last promise of all:—'He that overcometh shall inherit all things.'

Thus bound together by that link, as well as by a great many more, are all the writings which the tradition of the Church has attributed to this great Apostle.

But to come to the words of my text. They appear in a very remarkable context here. If you read a verse or two before, you will get the full singularity of their introduction. 'This is the love of God,' says he, 'that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous.' They are very heavy and hard in themselves; it is very difficult to do right, and to walk in the ways of God, and to please Him. His commandments are grievous, per se; a heavy burden, a difficult thing to do—but let us read on:—'They are not grievous, for whatsoever is born of God'—keepeth the commandments? No! 'Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: That, thinks John, is the same thing as keeping God's commandments. 'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.' Notice, then, first, What is the true notion of conquering the world? secondly, How that victory may be ours.

### I. What Is The True Notion Of Conquering The World?

Let us go back to what I have already said. Where did John learn the expression? Who was it that first used it? It comes from that never-to-be-forgotten night in that upper room; where, with His life's purpose apparently crushed into nothing, and the world just ready to exercise its last power over Him by killing Him, Jesus Christ breaks out into such a strange strain of triumph, and in the

midst of apparent defeat lifts up that clarion note of victory:—'I have overcome the world!'

He had not made much of it, according to usual standards, had He? His life had been the life of a poor man. Neither fame nor influence, nor what people call success, had He won, judged from the ordinary points of view, and at three-and-thirty is about to be murdered; and yet He says, 'I have beaten it all, and here I stand a conqueror!' That threw a flood of light for John, and for all that had listened to Christ, on the whole conditions of human life, and on what victory and defeat, success and failure in this world mean. Not so do men usually estimate what conquering the world is. Not so do you and I estimate it when we are left to our own folly and our own weakness. Our notion of being victorious in life is when each man, according to his own ideal of what is best, manages to wring that ideal out of a reluctant world. Or, to put it into plainer words, a man desires, say, conspicuous notoriety and fame. He accounts that he has conquered when he scrambles over all his fellows, and writes his name, as boys do, upon a wall, higher than anybody else's name, with a bit of chalk, in writing that the next winter's storm will obliterate! That is victory! The ultra-commercial ideal says, 'Found a big business and make it pay.' That is to conquer! Other notions, higher and nobler than that, all partake of the same fallacy that if a man can get the world, the sum of external things, into his grip, and squeeze it as one does a grape, and get the last drop of sweetness out of it into his thirsty lips, he is a conqueror.

Well! and you may get all that, whatever it is, that seems to you best, sweetest, most needful, most toothsome and delightsome—you may get it all; and in a sense you may have conquered the world, and yet you may be utterly beaten and enslaved by it. Do you remember the old story—I make no apology for the plainness of it—of the man that said to his commanding officer, 'I have taken a prisoner.' 'Bring him along with you.' 'He won't let me.' 'Come yourself, then.' 'I can't'? So you think you have conquered the world when it yields you the things you want, and all the while it has conquered and captivated you.

You say 'Mine '! It would be a great deal nearer the truth if the possessions, or the love, or the wealth, or the culture, or whatever else it may be, that you have set your desire upon, were to rise up and say you are theirs! Utterly beaten and enslaved many a man is by the things that he vainly fancies he has mastered and conquered. If you think of how in the process of getting, you narrow yourselves; of how much you throw away; of how eyes become blind to beauty or goodness or graciousness; of how you become the slaves of the thing that you have won; of how the gold gets into a man's blood and makes his complexion as yellow as jaundice—if you think of all that, and how desperate and wretched you would be if in a minute it was all swept away, and how it absorbs your thoughts in keeping it and looking after it, say, is it you that are its master, or it that is yours?

Now let us turn for a moment to the teaching of this Epistle. Following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ Himself, the poor man, the beaten man, the unsuccessful man, may yet say, 'I have overcome the world.' What does that mean? Well, it is built upon this—the world, meaning thereby the sum total of outward things, considered as apart from God—the world and God we make to be antagonists to one another. And the world woos me to trust to it, to love it; crowds in upon my eye and shuts out the greater things beyond; absorbs my attention, so that if I let it have its own way I have no leisure to think about anything but itself. And the world conquers me when it succeeds in hindering me from seeing, loving, holding communion with and serving my Father, God.

On the other hand, I conquer it when I lay my hand upon it and force it to help me to get nearer Him, to get liker Him, to think more often of Him, to do His will more gladly and more constantly. The one victory over the world is to bend it to serve me in the highest things—the attainment of a clearer vision of the Divine nature, the attainment of a deeper love to God Himself, and of a more glad consecration and service to Him. That is the victory—when you can make the world a ladder to lift you to God. That is its right use, that is victory, when all its tempting voices do not draw you away from listening to the Supreme Voice that bids you keep His commandments. When the world comes between you and God as an obscuring screen, it has conquered you. When the world comes between you and God as a transparent medium, you have conquered it. To win victory is to get it beneath your feet and stand upon it, and reach up thereby to God.

Now, dear brethren, that is the plain teaching of all this context, and I would lay it upon your hearts and upon my own. Do not let us be deceived by the false estimates of the men around us. Do not let us forget that the one thing we have to live for is to know God, and to love and to please Him, and that every life is a disastrous failure, whatsoever outward artificial apparent success it may be enriched and beautified with, that has not accomplished that.

You rule Nature, you coerce winds and lightnings and flames to your purposes. Rule the world! Rule the world by making it help you to be wiser, gentler, nobler, more gracious, more Christ-like, more Christ-conscious, more full of God, and more like to Him, and then you will get the deepest delight out of it. If a man wanted to find a wine-press that should squeeze out of the vintage of this world its last drop of sweetest sweetness, he would find it in constant recognition of the love of God, and in the coercing of all the outward and the visible to be his help thereto.

There are the two theories; the one that we are all apt to fall into, of what success and victory is; the other the Christian theory. Ah! many a poor, battered Lazarus, full of sores, a pauper and a mendicant at Dives' gate; many a poor old cottager; many a lonely woman in her garret; many a man that has gone away from Manchester, for instance, unable to get on in business, and obliged to creep into some corner and hide himself, not having succeeded in making a fortune, is the victor! And many a Dives, fettered by his

own possessions, and the bond-slave of his own successes, is beaten by the world shamefully and disastrously! Pray and strive for the purged eyesight which shall teach you what it is to conquer the world, and what it is to be conquered by it.

## II. This Victory Over The World.

And now let me turn for a moment to the second of the points that I have desired to put before you, viz., the method by which this victory over the world, of making it help us to keep the commandments of God, is to be accomplished. We find, according to John's fashion, a threefold statement in this context upon this matter, each member of which corresponds to and heightens the preceding. We read thus:—'Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world.' 'This is the victory that overcometh the world,' or more accurately, 'hath overcome the world, even our faith.' Who is he that overcometh the world? He that believeth that Jesus Christ is 'the Son of God.' Wherein there are, speaking roughly, these three statements, that the true victory over the world is won by a new life, born of and kindred with God; that that life is kindled in men's souls through their faith; that the faith which kindles that supernatural life, the victorious antagonist of the world, is the definite, specific faith in Jesus as the Son of God. These are the three points which the Apostle puts as the means of conquest of the world.

The first consideration, then, suggested by these statements is that the one victorious antagonist of all the powers of the world which seek to draw us away from God, is a life in our hearts kindred with God, and derived from God.

Now I know that a great many people turn away from this central representation of Christianity as if it were mystical and intangible. I desire to lay it upon your hearts, dear brethren, that every Christian man has received and possesses through the open door of his faith, a life supernatural, born of God, kindred with God, therefore having nothing kindred with evil, and therefore capable of meeting and mastering all the temptations of the world.

It is a plain piece of common-sense, that God is stronger than this material universe, and that what is born of God partakes of the Divine strength. But there would be no comfort in that, nor would it be anything germane and relevant to the Apostle's purpose, unless there was implied in the statement what in fact is distinctly asserted more than once in this Epistle, that every Christian man and woman may claim to be thus born of God. Harken to the words that almost immediately precede our text, 'Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.' Harken to other words which proclaim the same truth, 'To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, which were born, not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.' He does come with all the might of His regenerating power into our poor natures, if and when we turn ourselves with humble faith to that dear Lord; and breathes into our deadness a new life, with new tastes, new desires, new motives, new powers, making us able to wrestle with and to overcome the temptations that were too strong for us.

Mystical and deep as this thought may be, God's nature is breathed into the spirits of men that will trust Him! and if you will put your confidence in that dear Lord, and live near Him, into your weakness will come an energy born of the Divine, and you will be able to do all things in the might of the Christ that strengthens you from within, and is the life of your life, and the soul of your soul. To the little beleaguered garrison surrounded by strong enemies through whom they cannot cut their way, the king sends reliefs, who force their passage into the fortress, and hold it against all the power of the foe. You are not left to fight by yourselves, you can conquer the world if you will trust to that Christ, trusting in whom God's own power will come to your aid, and God's own Spirit will be the strength of your spirit.

And then there is the other way of looking at this same thing, viz., you can conquer the world if you will trust in Jesus Christ, because such trust will bring you into constant, living, loving contact with the Great Conqueror. There is a beautiful accuracy and refinement in the language of these three clauses which is not represented in our Authorised Version. The central one which I have read as my text this morning might be translated as it is translated in the Revised Version—'This is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith.' By which I suppose the Apostle means very much what I am saying now, viz., that my faith brings me into contact with that one great victory over the world which for all time was won by Jesus Christ. I can appropriate Christ's conquest to myself if I trust Him. The might of it and some portion of the reality of it passes into my nature in the measure in which I rely upon Him. He conquered once for all, and the very remembrance of His conquest by faith will make me strong—will 'teach my hands to war and my fingers to fight.' He conquered once for all, and His victory will pass, with electric power, into my life if I trust Him. I am brought into living fellowship with Him. All the stimulation of example, and all that lives lofty and pure can do for us, is done for us in transcendent fashion by the life of Jesus Christ. And all that lives lofty and pure can never do for us is done in unique fashion by the life and death of Him whose life and death are alike the victory over the world and the pattern for us.

So if we join ourselves to Him by faith, and bring into our daily life, in all its ignoble effort, in all its little duties, in all its wearisome monotones, in all its triviality, the thought, the illuminating thought, the ennobling thought, of the victorious Christ our companion and our Friend—in hoc signo vinces—in this sign thou shalt conquer! They that keep hold of His hand see over the world and all its falsenesses and fleeting-nesses. They that trust in Jesus are more than conquerors by the might of His victory.

And then there is the last thought, which, though it be not directly expressed in the words before us, is yet closely connected with

them. You can conquer the world if you will trust Jesus Christ, because your faith will bring into the midst of your lives the grandest and most solemn and blessed realities. Faith is the true anaesthesia of the soul;—the thing that deadens it to the pains and the pleasures that come from this fleeting life. As for the pleasures, I remember reading lately of some thinker of our own land who was gazing through a telescope at the stars, and turned away from the solemn vision with one remark, 'I don't think much of our county families!' And if you will look up at Christ through the telescope of your faith, it is wonderful what Lilliputians the Brobdingnagians round about you will dwindle into, and how small the world will look, and how coarse the pleasures.

If a man goes to Italy, and lives in the presence of the pictures there, it is marvellous what daubs the works of art, that he used to admire, look when he comes back to England again. And if he has been in communion with Jesus Christ, and has found out what real sweetness is, he will not be over-tempted by the coarse dainties that people eat here. Children spoil their appetites for wholesome food by sweetmeats; we very often do the same in regard to the bread of God, but if we have once really tasted it, we shall not care very much for the vulgar dainties on the world's stall.

Dear brethren, set your faith upon that great Lord, and the world's pleasures will have less power over you, and as for its pains—

**'There's nothing either good or bad,**

**But thinking makes it so.'**

If a man does not think that the world's pains are of much account, they are not of much account. He who sees athwart the smoke of the fire of Smithfield, the face of the Captain of his warfare, who has conquered, will dare to burn and will not dare to deny his Master or his Master's truth. The world may threaten in hope of winning you to its service, but if its threats, turned into realities, fail to move you, it is the world which inflicts, and not you who suffer, that is beaten. In the extremest case they 'kill the body and after that have no more that they can do,' and if they have done all they can, and have not succeeded in wringing the incantation from the locked lips, they are beaten, and the poor dead martyr that they could only kill has conquered them and their torments. So fear not all that the world can do against you. If you have got a little spark of the light of Christ's presence in your heart, the darkness will not be very terrible, and you will not be alone.

So, brethren, two questions:—Does your faith do anything like that for you? If it does not, what do you think is the worth of it? Does it deaden the world's delights? Does it lift you above them? Does it make you conqueror? If it does not, do you think it is worth calling faith?

And the other question is: Do you want to beat, or to be beaten? When you consult your true self, does your conscience not tell you that it were better for you to keep God's commandments than to obey the world? Surely there are many young men and women in this place to-day who have some desires high, and true, and pure, though often stifled, and overcome, and crushed down; and many older folk who have glimpses, in the midst of predominant regard for the things that are seen and temporal, of a great calm, pure region away up there that they know very little about.

Dear friends, my one word to you all is: Get near Jesus Christ by thought, and love, and trust. Trust to Him and to the great love that gave itself for you. And then bring Him into your life, by daily reference to Him of it all: and by cultivating the habit of thinking about Him as being present with you in the midst of it all, and so holding His hand, you will share in His victory; and at the last, according to the climax of His sevenfold promises, 'To Him that overcometh will I give to sit down with Me on My throne, even as I also overcame, and am sat down with My Father on His Throne.'

## **1 John 5:18 Triumphant Certainties - 1**

**'We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.'**—1 John 5:18.

JOHN closes his letter with a series of triumphant certainties, which he considers as certified to every Christian by his own experience. 'We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not, we know that we are of God, and we know that the Son of God is come.' Now, that knowledge which he thus follows out on these three lines is not merely an intellectual conviction, but it is the outcome of life, and the broad seal of experimental possession is stamped upon it. Yet the average Christian reads this text, and shrugs his shoulders and says, 'Well! perhaps I do not understand it, but, so far as I do, it seems to me to say a thing which is contradicted by the whole experience of life.' 'We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not'; and some of us are driven by such words, and parallel ones which occur in other places, to a presumptuous over-confidence, and some of us to an equally unscriptural despondency; and a great many of us to laying John's triumphant certainty up upon the shelf where the unintelligible things are getting covered over with dust.

So I wish, in this sermon, to try, if I can, to come to the understanding, that in some measure I may help you to come to the joyful possession, of the truth which lies here, and which the Apostle conceives to belong to the very elements of the Christian character.

## **I. First, Then, I Ask The Question—Of Whom Is The Apostle Speaking Here?**

'We know that whosoever is born of God'—or, as the Revised Version reads it, 'begotten of God'—'sinneth not.' Now we must go back a little—and sometimes to go a long way from a subject is the best way to get at it. Let me recall to you the Master's words with which He all but began His public ministry, when He said to Nicodemus, 'Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.' There is the root of all that this epistle is so full of, the conception of a regeneration, a being born again, which makes men, by a new birth, sons of God, in a fashion and in a sphere of their nature in which they were not the sons of the Heavenly Father before that experience. Jesus Christ laid down, as the very first principle which He would insist upon, to a man who was groping in the midst of mere legal conceptions of righteousness as the work of his own hands, this principle,—there must be a radical change, and there must be the entrance into every human nature of a new life-principle before there is any vision, any possession of, or any entrance into, that region in which the will of God is supreme, and where He reigns and rules as King. John is only echoing his Master when he here, and in other places of this letter, lays all the stress, in regard to practical righteousness and to noble character, upon being born again, subjected to that change which is fairly paralleled with the physical fact of birth, and has, as its result, the possession by the man who passes through it of a new nature, sphered in and destined to dominate and cleanse his old self.

Then there is a further step to be taken, and that is that this sonship of God, which is the result of being born again, is mediated and received by us through our faith. Remember the prologue of John's Gospel, where, as a great musician will hint all his subsequent themes in his overture, he gathers up in one all the main threads and points of his teaching. There he says, 'To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God.' Long years afterwards, when an old man in Ephesus, he writes down in this last chapter of his first epistle the same truth which he there set blazing in the forefront of his Gospel when he says, in the first verse of this chapter, 'Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.' On condition, then, of a man's faith in Jesus Christ, there is communicated to him a new life direct from God, kindred with the Divine, and which dwells in him, and works in him precisely in the measure of his personal faith. That is the first point that I desire to establish.

You will remember, I suppose, that this same conception of the deepest result of the Christian faith being no mere external forgiveness of sins, nor alteration of a man's position in reference to the Divine judgments, but the communication of a new life-power and principle to him, is not the property of the mystic John only, but it is the property likewise of the legal James, who says, 'Of His own will begat He us by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures'; and it is set forth with great emphasis and abundance in all the writings of the Apostle Paul, who insists that we are sons through the Son, who insists that the gift of God is a new nature, formed in righteousness' after the image of Him that created Him,' and who is ever dwelling upon the necessity that this new nature should be cultivated and increased by the faith and effort of its recipient.

Keeping these things in mind, I take the second step, and that is that this new birth, and the new Divine life which is its result, co-exist along with the old nature in which it is planted, and which it has to coerce and subdue, sometimes to crucify, and always to govern. For I need not remind you that if the analogy of birth is to be followed, we have to recognise that that Divine life, too, like the physical life, which is also God's gift, has to pass through stages; and that just as the perfect man, God manifest in the flesh,' increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man,' so the Divine life in a soul comes to it in germ, and has its period of infancy and growth up into youth and manhood. This Apostle puts great emphasis upon that idea of advancement in the Divine life. For you remember the long passage in which he twice reiterates the notion of the stages of children and young men and fathers. So the new life has to grow, grow in its own strength, grow in its sphere of influence, grow in the power with which it purges and hallows the old nature in the midst of which it is implanted. But growth is not the only word for its development. That now nature has to fight for its life. There must be effort, in order that it may rule; there must be strenuous and continuous diligence, directed not only to strengthen it, but to weaken its antagonist, in order that it may spread and permeate the whole nature. Thus we have the necessary foundation laid for that which characterises the Christian life, from the beginning to the end, that it is a working out of that which is implanted, a working out, with ever widening area of influence, and a working in with ever deeper and more thorough power of transforming the character. There may be indefinite approximation to the entire suppression and sanctification of the old man; and whatsoever is born of God manifests its Divine kindred in this, that sooner or later it overcomes the world.

Now, if all that which I have been saying is true—and to me it is undeniably so—I come to a very plain answer to the first question that I raised: Who is it that John is speaking about? 'Whosoever is born of God' is the Christian man, in so far as the Divine life which he has from God by fellowship with His Son, through His own personal faith, has attained the supremacy in Him. The Divine nature that is in a man is that which is born of God. And that the Apostle does not mean the man in whom that nature is implanted, whether he is true to the nature or no, is obvious from the fact that, in another part of this same chapter, he substitutes 'whatsoever' for 'whosoever,' as if he would have us mark that the thing which he declares to be victorious and sinless is not so much the person as the power that is lodged in the person. That is my answer to the first question.

## **II. What Is Asserted About This Divine Life?**

'Whosoever is born of God sinneth not.' That is by no means a unique expression in this letter. For, to say nothing about the general drift of it, we have a precisely similar statement in a previous chapter, twice uttered. 'Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not'; 'whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, for His seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.' Nothing can be stronger than that. Yes, and nothing can be more obvious. I think, then, that the Apostle does not thereby mean to declare that, unless a man is absolutely sinless in regard of his individual acts, he has not that Divine life in him. For look at what precedes our text. Just before he has said, and it is the saying which leads him to my text, 'If any man seeth his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life.' So, then, he contemplated that within the circle of sons of God, who were each other's brethren because they were all possessors of that Divine birth, there would exist 'sin not unto death,' which demanded a brother's brotherly intercession and help. And do you suppose that any man, in the very same breath in which he thus declared that brotherhood was to be manifested by the way in which we help a brother to get rid of his sins, would have stultified himself by a blank, staring contradiction such as has been extracted from the words of my text? I say nothing about inspiration; I only say common-sense forbids it. The fact of the matter is that John, in his simple, childlike way, does not wait to concatenate his ideas, or to show how the one limits and explains the other, but he lays them down before us, and the fact of their juxtaposition limits, and he does not expect that his readers are quite fools. So he says in the one breath, 'If any man see his brother sin a sin,' and in the next breath, 'Whosoever is born of God sinneth not.' Surely there is a way to bring these two sayings into harmony. And it seems to me to be the way that I have been suggesting to you—viz., to take the text to mean—not that a Christian is, or must be, in order to vindicate his right to be called a Christian, sinless, but that there is a power in him, a life-principle in him which is sinless, and whatsoever in him is born of God overcometh the world and 'sinneth not.'

Now, then, that seems to me to be the extent of the Apostle's affirmation here; and I desire to draw two plain, practical conclusions. One is, that this notion of a Divine life-power, lodged in, and growing through, and fighting with the old nature, makes the hideousness and the criminality of a Christian man's transgressions more hideous and more criminal. The teaching of my text has sometimes been used in the very opposite direction. I do not need to say anything about that. There have been people that have said 'It is no more I, but sin, that dwelleth in me; I am not responsible.' There have been types of so-called Christianity which have used this loftiest and purest thought of my text as a minister of sin. I do not suppose that there are any representatives of that caricature and travesty here, so I need not say a word about it. The opposite inference is what I urge now. In addition to all the other foulnesses which attach to any man's lust, or lechery, or drunkenness, or ambition, or covetousness, this super-eminent brand and stigma is burned in upon yours and mine, Christian men and women, that it is dead against, absolutely inconsistent with, the principle of life that is bedded within us. And whilst all men, by every transgression, flout God and degrade themselves, the Christian man who comes down to the level of living for flesh and sense and time and self, has laid the additional and heaviest of all weights of guilt upon his back in that he has done despite to the Spirit of grace, and grieved and contradicted and thwarted the life of God that is within him. The deepest guilt and the darkest condemnation attach to the sins of the man who, with a Divine life in his spirit, obeys the flesh. 'To whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required.'

Another consideration may fairly be urged as drawn from this text, and that is that the one task of Christians ought to be to deepen and to strengthen the life of God, which is in their souls, by faith. There is no limit, except one of my own making, to the extent to which my whole being may be penetrated through and through and ruled absolutely by that new life which God has given.

**'Tis life, whereof our nerves are scant,**

**Oh life, not death, for which we pant!**

**More life, and better, that I want.'**

It is all very well to cultivate specific and sporadic virtues and graces. Get a firmer hold and a fuller possession of the life of Christ in your own souls, and all graces and virtues will come.

### **III. Now, I Have One Last Question—What Is The Ground Of John's Assertion About Him 'That Is Born Of God'?**

My text runs on, 'but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself.' If any of you are using the Revised Version, you will see a change there, small in extent, but large in significance. It reads, 'He that is begotten of God keepeth him.' And although at this stage of my sermon it would be absurd in me to enter upon exegetical considerations, let me just say in a sentence that the original has considerable variation in expression in these two clauses, which variation makes it impossible, I think, to adopt the idea contained in the Authorised Version, that the same person is referred to in both clauses. The difference is this. In the first clause, 'He that is begotten of God' is the Christian man; in the second, 'He that is begotten of God' is Christ the Saviour.

There is the guarantee that 'Whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not,' because round his weakness is cast the strong defence of the Elder Brother's hand; and the Son of God keeps all the sons who, through Him, have derived into their natures the life of God. If, then, they are kept by the only begotten Son of the Father, who, that 'He might bring many sons unto glory,' has Himself worn the likeness of our flesh apart from sin, then the one thing for us to do, in order to nourish and deepen and strengthen, and bring to



sovereign power in our poor natures that previous and enduring principle of life, is to take care that we do not run away from the keeping hand nor wander far from the only safety. When a little child is set out for a walk by the parent with an elder brother, if it goes staring into shop windows, and gaping at anything that it sees upon the road, and loses hold of the brother's hand, it is lost, and breaks into tears, and can only be consoled and secured by being brought back. Then the little fingers clasp round the larger hand, and there is a sense of relief and of safety.

Dear brethren, if we stray away from Christ we lose ourselves in muddy ways. If we keep near Him, as merchantmen in time of war keep near the men-of-war convoy, or as pilgrims across a dangerous desert keep close to the heels of the horses of their escort, 'that wicked one toucheth us not.' And so we may be sure that 'that which is born of God' will come to the sovereign power within us, and He that was born of the Spirit will cast out him that was born of the flesh.

## 1 John 5:19 Triumphant Certainties - 2

**'We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.'—1 John 5:19.**

THIS is the second of the triumphant certainties which John supposes to be the property of every Christian. I spoke about the first of them in my last sermon. It reads, 'We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not.' Now, there is a distinct connection and advance, as between these two statements. The former of them is entirely general. It is particularised in my text; the 'whosoever' there is pointed into 'we' here. The individuals who have the right to claim these prerogatives are none other than the body of Christian people.

Then there is another connection and advance. 'Born of God' refers to an act; 'of God' to a state. The point is produced into a line. There is still another connection and advance. 'Whosoever is born of God sinneth not,' and that wicked one toucheth him not.' That glance at a dark surrounding, from which he that is born of God is protected, is deepened in my text into a vision of the whole world as 'lying in the wicked one.'

Now, I know that sayings like this of my text, which put into the forefront the Christian prerogative, and which regard mankind, apart from the members of Christ's body, as in a dark condition of subjection under an alien power, have often been spoken of as if they were presumptuous, on the one hand, and narrow, uncharitable, and gloomy on the other. I am not concerned to deny that, on the lips of some professing Christian, they have had a very ugly sound, and have ministered to distinctly un-Christlike sentiments. But, on the other hand, I do believe that there are few things which the average Christianity of to-day wants more than a participation in that joyous confidence and buoyant energy which throb in the Apostle's words; and that for lack of this triumphant certitude many a soul has been lamed, its joy clouded, its power trammelled, and its work in the world thwarted. So I wish to try to catch some of that solemn and joyous confidence which the Apostle peals forth in these triumphant words.

### I. I Ask You, Then, To Look First At The Christian Certainty Of Belonging To God.

'We know that we are of God.' Where did John get that form of expression, which crops up over and over again in his letter? He got it where he got most of his terminology, from the lips of the Master. For, if you remember, our Lord Himself speaks more than once of men being 'of God.' As, for instance, when He says, 'He that is of God heareth God's words. Ye therefore hear them not because ye are not of God.' And then He goes on to give the primary idea that is conveyed in the phrase when He says, in strong contrast to that expression, 'Ye are of your father, and the lusts of your father ye will do.' So, then, plainly, as I said, what was a point in the previous certitude, is here prolonged into a line, and expresses a permanent state.

The first conception in the phrase is that of life derived, communicated from God Himself. Fathers of the flesh communicate life, and it is thenceforth independent. But the life of the Spirit, which we draw from God, is only sustained by the continual repetition of the same gift by which it was originated. So the second idea that lies in the expression is that of a life dependent upon Him from whom it originally comes. The better life in the Christian soul is as certain to fade and die if the supply from Heaven is cut off or dammed back, as is the bed of a stream to become parched and glistening in the fierce sunshine, if the head-waters flow into it no more. You can no more have the life of the Spirit in the spirit of a man without continual communication from Him than a sunbeam can subsist if it be cut off from the central source. Therefore, the second of the ideas in this expression is, the continual dependence of that derived life upon God. Christian people are 'of God,' in so far as they partake of that new life, in an altogether special sense, which has a feeble analogy in the dependence of all Creation upon the continual effluence of the Divine power. Preservation is a continual creation, and unless God operated in all physical phenomena and change there would neither be phenomena, nor change, nor substance, which could show them forth. But high above all that is the dependence of the renewed soul upon Him for the continual communication of His gifts and life.

If that life is thus derived and dependent, there follows the last idea in our pregnant phrase, viz., that it is correspondent with its source. 'Ye are of God,' kindred with Him and developing a life which, in its measure, being derived and dependent, is cognate with, and assimilated to, His own. This is the prerogative of every Christian soul.

Then there is another step to be taken. The man that has that life knows it. 'We know,' says the Apostle, 'that we are of God.' That word 'know' has been usurped, or at all events illegitimately monopolised by certain forms of knowledge. But surely the inward facts of my own consciousness are as much facts, and are certified to me as validly and reliably as are facts in other regions which are attested by the senses, or arrived at by reasoning. Christian people have the same right to lay hold of that great word, 'we know,' and to apply it to the facts of their spiritual experience, as any scientist in the world has to apply it to the facts of his science. I do not for a moment forget the differences between the two kinds of knowledge, but I do feel that in regard of certitude the advantage is at least shared, and some of us would say that we are surer of ourselves than we are of anything besides. How do you know that you are at all? The only answer is, 'I feel that I am.' And precisely the same evidence applies in regard to these lofty thoughts of a Divine kindred and a spiritual life. I know that I am of God. I have passed through experiences, and I am aware of consciousness which certify that to me.

But that is not all For, as I tried to show in my last sermon, the condition of being 'born of God' is laid plainly down in this very chapter by the Apostle, as being the simple act of faith in Jesus Christ. So, then, if any man is sure that he believes, he knows that he is born of God, and is of God.

But you say, 'Do you not know that men deceive themselves by a profession of being Christians, and that many of us estimate their professions at a very different rate of genuineness from what they estimate them at?' Yes, I know that. And this whole letter of John goes to guard us against the presumption of entertaining inflated thoughts about ourselves as being kindred with God, unless we verify the consciousness by certain plain facts. You remember how continually in this epistle there crops up by the side of the most thorough-going mysticism, as people call it, the plainest, home-spun practical morality, and how all these lofty, towering thoughts are brought down to this sharp test, 'Let no man deceive you; he that doeth not righteousness is not of God; neither he that loveth not his brother.' That is a test which, applied to many a fanatical dream, shrivels it up.

There is another test which the Master laid down in the words that I have quoted already for another purpose, when He said, 'He that is of God heareth God's words. Ye, therefore, hear them not because ye are not of God.' Christian people, take these two plain tests—first, righteousness of life, common practical morality, the doing and the loving to do, the things that all the world recognises to be right and true; and, second, an ear attuned and attent to catch God's voice—and control your consciousness of being God's son by these, and you will not go far wrong.

And now, before I go further, one word. It is a shame, and a laming and a weakening of any Christian life, that this triumphant confidence should not be clear in it. 'We know that we are of God.' Can you and I echo that with calm confidence? 'I sometimes half hope that I am.' 'I am almost afraid to say it.' 'I do not know whether I am or not.' 'I trust I may be.' That is the kind of creeping attitude in which hosts of Christian people are contented to live; and they stare at a man as if he was presumptuous, and soaring up into a region that they do not know anything about, when he humbly echoes the Apostle, and says, 'We know that we are God's.' Why should our skies be as grey and sunless as those of a northern winter's day when all the while, away down on the sunny seas, to which we may voyage if we will, there are unbroken sunshine, ethereal blue, and a perpetual blaze of light? Christian men and women! it concerns the power of your lives, their progress in holiness, and their possession of peace, that you should be far more able than, alas! many of us are, to say, and that without presumption, 'We know that we are of God.'

## **II. We Have Here The Christian View Of The Surrounding World.**

I need not, I suppose, remind you that John learned from Jesus to use that phrase 'the world,' not as meaning the aggregate of material things, but as meaning the aggregate of godless men. If you want a modern translation of the word, it comes very near a familiar one with us nowadays, and that is 'Society'; the mass of people that are not of God.

Now, the more a man is conscious that he himself, by faith in Jesus Christ, has passed into the family of God, and possesses the life that comes from Him, the more keen will be his sense of the evil that lies round him, and of the contrast between the maxims and prevalent practices and institutions and ways of the world, and those which belong to Christ and Christ's people. Just as a native of Central Africa, brought to England for a while, when he gets back to his kraal, will see its foulnesses and its sordidnesses as he did not before, or as, according to old stories, those that were carried away into fairyland for a little while came back to the work-a-day life of the world, and felt themselves alien from it, and had visions of what they had seen ever floating before them; so the measure of our conscious belonging to God is the measure of our perception of the contrast between us and the ways of the men about us.

I am not concerned for a moment to deny, rather, I most thankfully recognise the truth, that a great deal of 'the world' has been ransomed by the Cross, by which its prince has been cast out, and that much of Christian morality, and of the Christian way of looking at things, has passed into the general atmosphere in which we live, so as that, between the true Christian community and the surrounding world in which it is plunged, there is less antagonism than there was when John in Ephesus wrote these words beneath the shadow of Diana's temple. But the world is a world still, and the antagonism is there; and if a man will live true to the

life of God that is in him, he will find out soon enough that the gulf is not bridged over. It never will be bridged. The only way by which the antagonism can be ended is for the kingdoms of this world to become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ. Society is not of God, and the institutions of every nation upon earth have still in them much of the evil one. Christian people are set down in the midst of these, and the antagonism is perennial.

### III. Lastly, Consider The Consequent Christian Duty.

Let me put two or three plain exhortations. I beseech you, Christian people, cultivate the sense of belonging to a higher order than that in which you dwell. A man in a heathen land loses his sense of home, and of its ways; and it needs a perpetual effort in order that we should not forget our true affinities. 'We are of God' may be so said as to be the parent of all manner of un-Christlike sentiments, as I have already remarked. It may be the mother of contempt and self-righteousness, and a hundred other vices; but, rightly said, it has no such tendency. But unless we are ever and anon seeking to renew that consciousness, it will fade and become dim, and we shall forget the imperial palace whence we came, and be content to live in the barren fields of the citizens of that country, and even to feed upon the husks that are in the swine's trough. So I say, cultivate the sense of belonging to God.

Again, I say, be careful to avoid infection. Go as men do in a plague-stricken city. Go as our soldiers in that Ashanti expedition had to go, on your guard against malaria, the 'pestilence that walketh in darkness,' and smites ere we are aware, bringing down our notions, our views of life, our thoughts of duty, to the low level of the people around us. Go as these same soldiers did, on the watch for ambuscades and lurking enemies behind the trees. And remember that the only safety is keeping hold of Christ's hand.

Look on the world as Christ looked on it. There must be no contempt; there must be no self-righteousness; there must be no pluming ourselves on our own prerogatives. There must be sorrow caught from Him, and tenderness of pity, like that which forced itself to His eyes as He gazed across the valley at the city sparkling in the sunshine, or such as wrung His heart when He looked upon the multitude as sheep without a shepherd.

Work for the deliverance of your brethren from the alien tyrant. Notice the difference between the two clauses in the text. 'We are of God'; that is a permanent relation. 'The world lieth in the wicked one'; that is not necessarily a permanent relation. The world is not of the wicked one; it is 'in' him, and that may be altered. It is in the sphere of that dark influence. As in the old stories, knights hung their dishonoured arms upon trees, and laid their heads in the lap of an enchantress, so men have departed from God, and surrendered themselves to the fascinations and the control of an alien power. But the world may be taken out of the sphere of influence in which it lies. And that is what you are here for. 'For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil'; and for that purpose He has called us to be His servants. So the more we feel the sharp contrast between the blessedness of the Divine life which we believe ourselves to possess, and the darkness and evils of the world that lies around us, the more should sorrow, and the more should sympathy, and the more should succour be ours. Brethren, for ourselves let us remember that we cannot better help the world to get away from the alien tyrant that rules it than by walking in the midst of men, with the aureola of this joyful confidence and certitude around us. The solemn alternative opens before every one of us—Either I am 'of God,' or I am 'in the wicked one.' Dear friends, let us lay our hearts and hands in Christ's care, and then that will be true of us which this Apostle declares for the whole body of believers: 'Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome, because greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.'

## 1 John 5:20 Triumphant Certainties - 3

**'And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding. that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ.'**—1 John 5:20.

ONCE more John triumphantly proclaims 'We know.' Whole-souled conviction rings in his voice. He is sure of his footing. He does not say 'We incline to think,' or even 'We believe and firmly hold,' but he says 'We know.' A very different tone that from that of many of us, who, influenced by currents of present opinions, feel as if what was rock to our fathers had become quagmire to us! But John in his simplicity thinks that it is a tone which is characteristic of every Christian. I wonder what he would say about some Christians now.

This third of his triumphant certainties is connected closely with the two preceding ones, which have been occupying us in former sermons. It is so, as being in one aspect the ground of these, for it is because 'the Son of God is come' that men are born of God, and are of Him. It is so in another way also, for properly the words of our text ought to read not 'And we know,' rather 'But we know.' They are suggested, that is to say, by the preceding words, and they present the only thought which makes them tolerable. 'The whole world lieth in the wicked one. But we know that the Son of God is come.' Falling back on the certainty of the Incarnation and its present issues, we can look in the face the grave condition of humanity, and still have hope for the world and for ourselves. The certainty of the Incarnation and its issues, I say. For in my text John not only points to the past fact that Christ has come in the flesh, but to a present fact, the operation of that Christ upon Christian souls—'He hath given us an understanding.' And not only so, but he points, further, to a dwelling in God and God in us as being the abiding issue of that past manifestation. So these three things —

the coming of Christ, the knowledge of God which flows into a believing heart through that Incarnate Son, and the dwelling in God which is the climax of all His gifts to us—these three things are in John's estimation certified to a Christian heart, and are not merely matters of opinion and faith, but matters of knowledge.

Ah! brethren, if our Christianity had that firm strain, and was conscious of that verification, it would be less at the mercy of every wind of doctrine; it would be less afraid of every new thought; it would be more powerful to rule and to calm our own spirits, and it would be more mighty to utter persuasive words to others. We must know for ourselves, if we would lead others to believe. So I desire to look now at these three points which emerge from my text, and,

### **I. I Would Deal With The Christian's Knowledge That The Son Of God Is Come.**

Now, our Apostle is writing to Asiatic Christians of the second generation at the earliest, most of whom had not been born when Jesus Christ was upon earth, and none of whom had any means of acquaintance with Him except that which we possess—the testimony of the witnesses who had companied with Him. And yet, to these men—whose whole contact with Christ and the Gospel was, like yours and mine, the result of hearsay—he says, 'We know.' Was he misusing words in his eagerness to find a firm foundation for a soul to rest on? Many would say that he was, and would answer this certainty of his 'We know; with, How can he know? You may go on the principle that probability is the guide of life, and you may be morally certain, but the only way by which you know a fact is by having seen it; and even if you have seen Jesus Christ, all that you saw would be the life of a man upon earth whom you believed to be the Son of God. It is trifling with language to talk about knowledge when you have only testimony to build on.

Well! there is a great deal to be said on that side, hut there are two or three considerations which, I think, amply warrant the Apostle's declaration here, and our understanding of his words, 'We know,' in their fullest and deepest sense. Let me just mention these briefly. Remember that when John says 'The Son of God is come' he is not speaking—as his language, if any of you can consult the original, distinctly shows—about a past fact only, but about a fact which, beginning in a historical past, is permanent and continuous. In one aspect, no doubt, Jesus Christ had come and gone, before any of the people to whom this letter was addressed heard it for the first time, but in another aspect, if I may use a colloquial expression, when Jesus Christ came, He 'came to stay.' And that thought, of the permanent abiding with men, of the Christ who once was manifest in the flesh for thirty years, and,

**'Walked the acres of those blessed fields**

**For our advantage,'**

runs through the whole of Scripture. Nor shall we understand the meaning of Christ's Incarnation unless we see in it the point of beginning of a permanent reality. He has come, and He has not gone—'Lo! I am with you alway'—and that thought of the fulness and permanence of our Lord's presence with Christian souls is lodged deep and all-pervading, not only in John's gospel, but in the whole teaching of the New Testament. So it is a present fact, and not only a past piece of history, which is asserted when the Apostle says 'The Son of God is come.' And a man who has a companion knows that he has him, and by many a token not only of flesh but of spirit, is conscious that he is not alone, but that the dear and strong one is by his side. Such consciousness belongs to all the maturer and deeper forms of the Christian life.

Further, we must read on in my text if we are to find all which John declares to be a matter of knowledge. 'The Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding.' I shall have a word or two more to say about that presently, but in the meantime I simply point out that what is here declared to be known by the Christian soul is a present operation of the present Christ upon his nature. If a man is aware that, through his faith in Jesus Christ, new perceptions and powers of discerning solid reality where he only saw mist before have been granted to him, the Apostle's triumphant assertion is vindicated.

And, still further, the words of my text, in their assurance of possessing something far more solid than an opinion or a creed, in Christ Jesus and our relation to Him, are warranted, on the consideration that the growth of the Christian life largely consists in changing belief that rests on testimony into knowledge grounded in vital experience. At first a man accepts Jesus Christ because, for one reason or another, he is led to give credence to the evangelical testimony and to the apostolic teaching: but as he goes on learning more and more of the realities of the Christian life, creed changes into consciousness; and we can turn round to apostles and prophets, and say to them, with thankfulness for all that we have received from them, 'Now we believe, not because of your saying, but because we have seen Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.' That is the advance which Christian men should all make, from the infantile, rudimentary days, when they accepted Christ on the witness of others, to the time when they accepted Him because, in the depth of their own experience, they have found Him to be all that they took Him to be. The true test of creed is life. The true way of knowing that a shelter is adequate is to house in it, and be defended from the pelting of every pitiless storm. The medicine we know to be powerful when it has cured us. And every man that truly grasps Jesus Christ, and is faithful and persevering in his hold, can set his seal to that which to others is but a thing believed on hearsay, and accepted on testimony.

'We know that the Son of God is come.' Christian people, have you such a first-hand acquaintance with the articles which constitute your Christian creed as that? Over and above all the intellectual reasons which may lead to the acceptance, as a theory, of the truths of Christianity, have you that living experience of them which warrants you in saying 'We know'? Alas! Alas! I am afraid that this supreme ground of certitude is rarely trodden by multitudes of professing Christians. And so in days of criticism and upheaval they are frightened out of their wits, and all but out of their faith, and are nervous and anxious lest from this corner or that corner or the other corner of the field of honest study and research, there may come some sudden shock that will blow the whole fabric of their belief to pieces. 'He that believeth shall not make haste,' and a man who knows what Christ has done for him may calmly welcome the advent of any new light, sure that nothing that can be established can touch that serene centre in which his certitude sits enshrined and calm. Brother, do you seek to be able to say, 'I know in whom I have believed'?

## **II. Note The New Power Of Knowing God Given By The Son Who Is Come.**

John says that one issue of that Incarnation and permanent presence of the Lord Christ with us is that 'He hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true.' Now, I do not suppose that he means thereby that any absolutely new faculty is conferred upon men, but that new direction is given to old ones, and dormant powers are awakened. Just as in the miracles of our Lord the blind men had eyes, but it needed the touch of His finger before the sight came to them, so man, that was made in the image of God, which he has not altogether lost by any wandering, has therein lying dormant and oppressed the capacity of knowing Him from whom he comes, but he needs the couching hand of the Christ Himself, in order that the blind eyes may be capable of seeing and the slumbering power of perception be awakened. That gift of a clarified nature, a pure heart, which is the condition, as the Master Himself said, of seeing God—that gift is bestowed upon all who, trusting in the Incarnate Son, submit themselves to His cleansing hand.

In the Incarnation Jesus Christ gave us God to see; by His present work in our souls He gives us the power to see God. The knowledge of which my text speaks is the knowledge of 'Him that is true,' by which pregnant word the Apostle means to contrast the Father whom Jesus Christ sets before us with all men's conceptions of a Divine nature; and to declare that whilst these conceptions, in one way or another, fall beneath or diverge from reality and fact, our God manifested to us by Jesus Christ is the only One whose nature corresponds to the name, and who is essentially that which is included in it.

But what I would dwell on especially for a moment is that this gift, thus given by the Incarnate and present Christ, is not an intellectual gift only, but something far deeper. Inasmuch as the Apostle declares that the object of this knowledge is not a truth about God but God Himself, it necessarily follows that the knowledge is such as we have of a person, and not of a doctrine. Or, to put it into simpler words: to know about God is one thing, and to know God is quite another. We may know all about the God that Christ has revealed and yet not know Him in the very slightest degree. To know about God is theology, to know Him is religion. You are not a bit better, though you comprehend the whole sweep of Christ's revelation of God, if the God whom you in so far comprehend remain a stranger to you. That we may know Him as a man knows his friend, and that we may enter into relations of familiar acquaintance with Him, Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, and this is the blessing that He gives us—not an accurate theology, but a loving friendship. Has Christ done that for you, my brother?

That knowledge, if it is real and living, will be progressive. More and more we shall come to know. As we grow like Him we shall draw closer to Him; as we draw closer to Him we shall grow like Him. So the Christian life is destined to an endless progress, like one of those mathematical spirals which ever climb, ever approximate to, but never reach, the summit and the centre of the coil. So, if we have Christ for our medium both of light and of sight, if He both gives us God to see and the power to see Him, we shall begin a course which eternity itself will not witness completed. We have landed on the shores of a mighty continent, and for ever and for ever and ever we shall be pressing deeper and deeper into the bosom of the land, and learning more and more of its wealth and loveliness. 'We know that we know Him that is true.' If the Son of God has come to us, we know God, and we know that we know Him. Do you?

## **III. Lastly, Note Here The Christian Indwelling Of God, Which Is Possible Through The Son Who Is Come.**

Friendship, familiar intercourse, intimate knowledge as of one with whom we have long dwelt, instinctive sympathy of heart and mind, are not all which, in John's estimation, Jesus Christ brings to them that love Him, and live in Him. For he adds, 'We are in Him that is true.' Of old Abraham was called the Friend of God, but an august title belongs to us. 'Know ye not that ye are the temples of the living God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?' Oh! brethren, do not be tempted, by any dread of mysticism, to deprive yourselves of that crown and summit of all the gifts and blessings of the Gospel, but open your hearts and your minds to expect and to believe in the actual abiding of the Divine nature in us. Mysticism? Yes! And I do not know what religion is worth if there is not mysticism in it, for the very heart of it seems to me to be the possible interpenetration and union of man and God—not in the sense of obliterating the personalities, but in the deep, wholesome sense in which Christ Himself and all His apostles taught it, and in which every man who has had any profound experience of the Christian life feels it to be true.

But notice the words of my text for a moment, where the Apostle goes on to explain and define how 'we are in Him that is true,' because we are 'in His Son Jesus Christ.' That carries us away back to 'Abide in Me, and I in you.' John caught the whole strain of such thoughts from those sacred words in the upper room. Christ in us is the deepest truth of Christianity. And that God is in us, if Christ is in us, is the teaching not only of my text but of the Lord Himself, when He said, 'We will come unto him and make our abode with him.'

And will not a man 'know' that? Will it not be something deeper and better than intellectual perception by which he is aware of the presence of the Christ in his heart? Cannot we all have it if we will? There is only one way to it, and that is by simple trust in Jesus Christ. Then, as I said, the trust with which we began will not leave us, but will be glorified into experience with which the trust will be enriched.

Brethren, the sum and substance of all that I have been trying to say is just this: lay your poor personalities in Christ's hands, and lean yourselves upon Him; and there will come into your hearts a Divine power, and, if you are faithful to your faith, you will know that it is not in vain. There is a tremendous alternative, as I have already pointed out, suggested by the sequence of thoughts in my text, 'the whole world lieth in the wicked one' but 'we are in Him that is true.' We have to choose our dwelling-place, whether we shall dwell in that dark region of evil, or whether we shall dwell in God, and know that God is in us.

If we are true to the conditions, we shall receive the promises. And then our Christian faith will not be dashed with hesitations, nor shall we be afraid lest any new light shall eclipse the Sun of Righteousness, but, in the midst of the babble of controversy, we may be content to be ignorant of much, to hold much in suspense, to part with not a little, but yet with quiet hearts to be sure of the one thing needful, and with unfaltering tongues to proclaim 'We know that the Son of God is come, and we are in Him that is true.'

## 1 John 5:20–21 The Last Words Of The Last Apostle

**'This is the true God, and eternal life. 21. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.'**—1 John 5:20–21.

So the Apostle ends his letter. These words are probably not only the close of this epistle, but the last words, chronologically, of Scripture. The old man gathers together his ebbing force to sum up his life's work in a sentence, which might be remembered though much else was forgotten. Last words stick. Perhaps, too, some thought of future generations, to whom his witness might come, passed across his mind. At all events, some thought that we are here listening to the last words of the last Apostle may well be in ours. You will observe that, in this final utterance, the Apostle drops the triumphant 'we know,' which we have found in previous sermons reiterated with such emphasis. He does so, not because he doubted that all his brethren would gladly attest and confirm what he was about to say, but because it was fitting that his last words should be his very own; the utterance of personal experience, and weighty with it, and with apostolic authority. So he smelts all that he had learned from Christ, and had been teaching for fifty years, into that one sentence. The feeble voice rings out clear and strong; and then softens into tremulous tones of earnest exhortation, and almost of entreaty. The dying light leaps up in one bright flash: the lamp is broken, but the flash remains. And if we will let it shine into our lives, we shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.

### I. Here We Have The Sum Of All That We Need To Know About God.

'This is the true God.' The first question is, What or whom does John mean by 'this'?

Grammatically, we may refer the word to the immediately preceding name, Jesus Christ. But it is extremely improbable that the Apostle should so suddenly shift his point of view, as he would do if, having just drawn a clear distinction between 'Him that is true,' and the Christ who reveals Him, he immediately proceeded to apply the former designation to Jesus Christ Himself. It is far more in accordance with his teaching, and with the whole scope of the passage, if by 'this' we understand the Father of whom he has just been speaking. It is no tautology that he reiterates in this connection that He is 'true.' For he has separated now his own final attestation from the common consciousness of the Christian community with which he has previously been dealing. And when he says, 'This is the true God' he means to say, 'This God of whom I have been affirming that Jesus Christ is His sole Revealer, and of whom I have been declaring that through Jesus Christ we may know Him and dwell abidingly in Him,' 'this'—and none else—is the true God.'

Then the second question that I have to answer briefly is, What does John mean by 'true'? I had occasion, in a previous sermon on the foregoing words, to point out that by that expression he means, whenever he uses it, some person or thing whose nature and character correspond to his or its name, and who is essentially and perfectly that which the name expresses. If we take that as the signification of the word, we just come to this, that the final assertion into which the old Apostle flings all his force, and which he wishes to stand out prominent as his last word to his brethren and Lo the world, is that the God revealed in Jesus Christ, and with whom a man through Jesus Christ may have fellowship of knowledge and friendship—that He and none but He answers to all that men mean when they speak of a God; that He, if I might use such an expression, fully fills the part.

Brethren, if we but think that, however it comes (no matter about that), every man has in him a capacity of conceiving of a perfect Being, of righteousness, power, purity, and love, and that all through the ages of the world's yearnings there has never been presented to it the realisation of that dim conception, but that all idolatry, all worship, has failed in bodying out a Person who would answer to the requirements of a man's spirit, then we come to the position in which these final words of the old fisherman go down to a deeper depth than all the world's wisdom, and carry a message of consolation and a true gospel to be found nowhere besides.

Whatsoever embodiments men may have tried to give to their dim conception of a God, these have been always limitations, and often corruptions, of it. And to limit or to separate is, in this case, to destroy. No pantheon can ever satisfy the soul of man who yearns for One Person in whom all that he can dream of beauty, truth, goodness shall be ensphered. A galaxy of stars, white as the whitest spot in the Milky Way, can never be a substitute for the sun. 'This is the true God'; and all others are corruptions, or limitations, or divisions, of the indissoluble unity.

Then, are men to go for ever and ever with 'the blank misgivings of a creature, moving about in worlds not realised'? Is it true that I can fancy some one far greater than is? Is it true that my imagination can paint a nobler form than reality acknowledges? It is so, alas! unless we take John's swan-song and last testimony as true, and say:—This God, manifest in Jesus Christ, on whose heart I can lay my head, and into whose undying and unstained light I can gaze, and in whose righteousness I can participate, this God is the real God; no dream, no projection from my own nature, magnified and cleansed, and thrown up first from the earth that it may come down from heaven, but the reality, of whom all human imaginations are but the faint transcripts, though they be the faithful prophets.

For, consider what it is that the world owes to Jesus Christ, in its knowledge of God. Remember that to us orphaned men He has come and said, as none ever said, and showed as none ever showed: 'Ye are not fatherless, there is a Father in the heavens.' Consider that to the world, sunk in sense and flesh, and blotting its most radiant imaginations of the Divine by some veil and hindrance, of corporeity and materialism, He comes, and has said, 'God is a Spirit.' Consider that, taught of Him, this Apostle, to whom was committed the great distinction of in monosyllables preaching central truths, and in words that a child can apprehend, setting forth the depths that eternity and angels cannot comprehend, has said, 'God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all.' And consider that he has set the apex on the shining pyramid, and spoken the last word when he has told us, 'God is Love.' And put these four revelations together, the Father; Spirit; unsullied Light; absolutely Love; and then let us bow down and say, 'Thou hast said the truth, O aged Seer. This is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This—and none beside—is the true God.'

I know not what the modern world is to do for a God if it drifts away from Jesus Christ and His revelations. I know that it is always a dangerous way of arguing to try to force people upon alternatives, one of which is so repellent as to compel them to cling to the other. But it does seem to me that the whole progress of modern thought, with the advancement of modern physical science, and other branches of knowledge which perhaps are not yet to be called science, are all steadily converging on forcing us to this choice—will you have God in Christ, or, will you wander about in a Godless world, and for your highest certitude have to say, 'Perhaps'? 'This is the true God,' and if we go away from Him I do not know where we are to go.

## **II. Here We Have The Sum Of His Gifts To Us.**

'This is the true God, and eternal life.' Now, let us distinctly and emphatically put first that what is here declared is primarily something about God, and not about His gift to men; and that the two clauses, 'the true God,' and 'eternal life,' stand in precisely the same relation to the preceding words, 'This is.' That is to say, the revelation which John would lay upon our hearts, that from it there may spring up in them a wondrous hope, is that, in His own essential self, the God revealed in Jesus Christ, and brought into living fellowship with us by Him, is 'eternal life.' By 'eternal life' he means something a great deal more august than endless existence. He means a life which not only is not ended by time, but which is above time, and not subject to its conditions at all. Eternity is not time spun out for ever. And so we are not lifted up into a region where there is little light, but where the very darkness is light, just as the curtain was the picture, in the old story of the painter.

That seems to part us utterly from God. He is 'eternal life'; then, we poor creatures down here, whose being is all 'cribbed, cabined, and confined' by succession, and duration, and the partitions of time, what can we have in common with Him? John answers for us. For, remember that in the earlier part of this epistle he writes that 'the life was manifested, and we shew unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us,' and 'we declare it unto you; that ye also may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son.' So, then, strange as it is, and beyond our thoughts as it is, there may pass into creatures that very eternal life which is in God, and was manifested in Jesus. We have to think of Him because we know Him to be love, as in essence self-communicating, and whatsoever a creature can receive, a loving Father, the true God, will surely give.

But we are not left to wander about in regions of mysticism and darkness. For we know this, that however strange and difficult the thought of eternal life as possessed by a creature may be, to give it was the very purpose for which Jesus Christ came on earth. 'I

am that Bread of Life.' 'I am come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly.' And we are not left to grope in doubt as to what that eternal life consists in; for He has said: 'This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.' Nor are we left in any more doubt as to that bond by which the whole fulness of this Divine gift may flow into a man's spirit. For over and over again the Master Himself has declared, 'He that believeth hath everlasting life.'

Thus, then, there is a life which belongs to God on His throne, a life lifted above the limitations of time, a life communicated by Jesus Christ, as the waters of some land-locked lake may flow down through a sparkling river, a life which consists in fellowship with God, a life which may be, and is, ours, on the simple condition of trusting Him who gives it, and a life which, eternal as it is, and destined to a glory all undreamed of, in that future beyond the grave, is now the possession of every man that puts forth the faith which is its condition. 'He that believeth hath'—not shall have, in some distant future, but has to-day—'everlasting life,' verily here and now. And so John lays this upon our hearts, as the ripe fruit of all his experience, and the meaning of all his message to the world, that God revealed in Christ 'is the true God,' and as Himself the possessor, is the source for us all, of life eternal.

### **III. Lastly, We Have Here The Consequent Sum Of Christian Effort.**

'Little children, keep yourselves from idols,' seeing that 'this is the true God,' the only One that answers to your requirements, and will satisfy your desires. Do not go rushing to these shrines of false deities that crowd every corner of Ephesus—ay! and every corner of Manchester. For what does John mean by an idol? Does he mean that barbarous figure of Diana that stood in the great temple, hideous and monstrous? No! he means anything, or any person, that comes into the heart and takes the place which ought to be filled by God, and by Him only. What I prize most, what I trust most utterly, what I should be most forlorn if I lost; what is the working aim of my life, and the hunger of my heart—that is my idol. We all know that.

Is the exhortation not needed, my brother? In Ephesus it was hard to have nothing to do with heathenism. In that ancient world their religion, though it was a superficial thing, was intertwined with daily life in a fashion that puts us to shame. Every meal had its libation, and almost every act was knit by some ceremony or other to a god. So that Christian men and women had almost to go out of the world, in order to be free from complicity in the all-pervading idol-worship. Now, although the form has changed, and the fascinations of old idolatry belong only to a certain stage in the world's culture and history, the temptation to idolatry remains just as subtle, just as all-pervasive, and the yielding to it just as absurd. You and I call ourselves Christians. We say we believe that there is nothing else, and nobody else, in the whole sweep of the universe that can satisfy our hearts, or be what our imagination can conceive, but God only. Having said that on the Sunday, what about Monday?

They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living water, and hewed to themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water.' 'Little children'—for we are scarcely more mature than that—'little children, keep yourselves from idols.'

And how is it to be done? 'Keep yourselves.' Then you can do it, and you have to make a dead lift of effort, or be sure of this—that the subtle seduction will slide into your heart, and before you know it, you will be out of God's sanctuary, and grovelling in Diana's temple. But it is not only our own effort that is needed, for just a sentence or two before, the Apostle had said: 'He that is born of God'—that is, Christ 'keepeth us.' So our keeping of ourselves is essentially our letting Him keep us. Stay inside the walls of the citadel, and you need not be afraid of the besiegers; go outside by letting your faith flag, and you will be captured or killed. Keep yourselves by clinging 'to Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless.' Make experience by fellowship with Him who is the only true God, and able to satisfy your whole nature, mind, heart, will, and these false deities, the whole rabble of them, will have no power to tempt you to bow the knee.

Brethren! here is the sum of the whole matter. There is one truth on which we can stay our hearts, one God in whom we can utterly trust, the God revealed in Jesus Christ. If we do not see Him in Christ, we shall not see Him at all, but wander about all our days in a world empty of solid reality. There is one gift which will satisfy all our needs, the gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ. There is one practical injunction which will save us from many a heartache, and which our weakness can never afford to neglect, and that is to keep ourselves from all false worship. These golden words of my text, in their simplicity, in their depth, in their certainty, in their comprehensiveness, are worthy to be the last words of Revelation; and to stand to all the world, through all ages, as the shining apex, or the solid foundation, or the central core of Christianity. 'This'—this, and none else—'is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols.'