

Monergism

# **Fellowship with GOD**

Twenty-Eight Sermons on the First and  
Second Chapters of the First Epistle of John

**HUGH BINING**

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# Fellowship With God

## Twenty-Eight Sermons on the First and Second Chapters of the First Epistle of John

by Hugh Binning

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**TO THE SINCERE SEEKER AFTER  
FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD,**

**AND**

**SERIOUSLY HEAVENWARD-TENDING  
CHRISTIAN**

Dear and well-beloved Friend,

As thou art in thyself a rare jewel, a most precious stone, one of a thousand, yea, of ten thousand, being compared with the many thousands of common stones, I mean, external possessors in the visible church, who rest on a bare name, and of whom that is verified in every nation, which our Saviour saith, Matt. 20:16, "Many are called, but few are chosen;" and of many of which that is also too true in every generation, (and, oh! that it were not too manifest in this also) which Paul observed in his time, Phil. 3:18, 19, "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now I tell you, even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things;" and as to Christ thy Lord, most comely, "as a lily among thorns, being his love among the daughters," Cant. 2:2; so also, thou in a special way art "the dearly beloved and longed for, the joy and crown," of every sincere servant of Christ in the gospel, Phil. 4:1. Thou art, if not the only, yet the chief object of their labours, their work being either to confirm and strengthen thee in thy way, "that thou mayest so stand fast in the Lord," or remove impediments, make crooked things straight, and so "prepare the way of the Lord before thee," or to guide thee by the light of God's word in the dark night of temptation and desertion. Now, as we are confident these sermons were preached at first by that blessed serious labourer in the work of the ministry, Mr. Hugh Binning, with a special eye to the advancement of sincere seekers after fellowship with God, and seriously heavenward-tending Christians among his hearers: so to whom shall we direct this posthumous, and, alas! unperfected work, but to thee, O serious Christian, who makest it thy work, not only to seek after the knowledge of God in Christ, in a mere speculative way, that thou mayest know, and therein rest, as if thy work were done, but also to follow after the enjoyment of that known God, and believed-on Saviour, and all the promised privileges of grace in this life, and of eternal glory in the life to come. To thee especially belong these precious soul-ravishing truths delivered in these sermons. Two things, we know, thou hast determined thy soul unto, and fixed thine eye on, as thine aim and mark in thy generation, viz. the light of knowledge, and the life of practice. As to knowledge, we are

confident that, with the apostle Paul, 1 Cor. 2:2, "Thou hast determined to know nothing but Christ, and him crucified;" and as to practice, with the said apostle thou prayest, "that thou mayest be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory of God," Phil. 1:11; "and that thou mayest be blameless and harmless, the Son of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, shining as a light in the world," Phil. 2:15. Now, in reading these sermons thou shalt perceive, that to help thee in both these hath been the very scope and design of this serious preacher. Desirest thou to know Jesus Christ, the Lord of life, either according to his eternal subsistence in the infinite understanding of the Father, as God, or as to his appearance in the flesh, as man, or fitness as Mediator, to reconcile thee to God his Father, both in respect of willingness and ability to save? Then here thou shall behold him delineated to the life. Wouldest thou be clearly informed anent the only true and sure foundation of fellowship with God, the way of entertaining it, the honour or happiness of it, and sweet fruits of it, that fulness of joy that accompanies it? Here shalt thou find so clear a light as shall rejoice thy soul. Wouldest thou be fortified against the incursions and recursions of sin and Satan? Then come to this magazine, and be furnished abundantly. Desirest thou to have thy soul increased in the love of God, and to see manifest demonstrations of his love in Christ to thee? Oh! then, turn in hither, and get satisfaction to thy soul's desires. If thou desirest, with David, to hate sin with a perfect hatred; here, if any where, thou shalt obtain thy desire. Yet let none think that we limit the benefit and usefulness of these sermons to serious Christians only, and so by consequence exclude all others from any hope of soul-advantage in reading them. Nay, we declare, that though it be undeniable, that John did write this epistle with a special respect to the spiritual advantage of serious Christians, and that this holy preacher also had this same design, yet we dare be bold to invite all of what degree soever, to the serious perusing of them, assuring them that in so doing "they shall not find their labour in vain in the Lord;" for here are such pregnant demonstrations of a Deity, infinite, eternal, omnipotent,

incomprehensible, governing all things by the word of his power, as may dash the boldness of the most metaphysical, notional, or profanely practical Atheist, and with conviction of spirit make him cry out, as in Psalm 73:22, "So foolish was I and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee!" Here are such clear discoveries of the vileness of sin, of its direct opposition to a holy God, and his most holy will, of its woful soul-damning effects, as may convince the most profane and stout-hearted carnalist, and awake him out of his soul-destroying sleep of security and presumption. Here are so glorious evidences of God's free and inconceivable love to the world, in Christ Jesus, the Son of his love, as are able to enlighten with the light of consolation the sadliest dejected and casten down soul, under the apprehension of the curse and wrath of God due to it for sin, and raise it up to the hope of mercy in and through so clearly a revealed Saviour. In a word, here are to be found convictions for Atheists, piercing rebukes to the profane, clear instructions to the ignorant, milk to babes in Christ, strong meat for the strong, strength to the weak, quickening and reviving for such as faint in the way. Restoratives for such as are in a decay, reclamations and loud oyesses after backsliders to recal them, breasts of consolations for Zion's mourners, whether under the first convictions of the law, and pangs of the new birth, or under the challenges and compunctions of heart for recidivations and relapses after conversion, even while they are groaning under the power and burden of the body of death, Rom. 7. And, to add no more, here are most excellent counsels and directions to serious seekers of fellowship with God, to guide them in their way and help them forward to the attainment of that fulness of joy which is to be had in fellowship with the Father and the Son. That the Lord may bless all such to whose hands these sermons shall come, with blessings suitable to their soul's condition, especially the serious Christian's, for whose soul's furtherance and advancement these sermons were first penned, and now printed, is the most affectionate desire of, thy servant in the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour,

A. S.

# I

1 John 1:1—That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life.

It is the great qualification of a disciple, or hearer, to be attentive and docile,—to be capable of teaching, and to apply the mind seriously to it. It is much to get the ear of a man; if his ear be gotten, his mind is the more easily gained. Therefore those who professed eloquence, and studied to persuade men to any thing, used in the entry to fall upon something that might stir up the attention of their hearers, or make them the more inclinable to receive instruction, or catch their favour or good-will, which is of great moment to persuasion: for it is sometimes fit to open the passages of the heart by such means, that there may be the more easy entry for instruction and persuasion. Truly there is something of this art runs here in a divine channel; as indeed all these rules of human wisdom attain their perfection, when they meet with a divine Spirit, that elevates them to a more transcendant use. Happy was that eloquence of Paul's, and something like the sweet inspirations of angels, by which they prevail with the spirits of men: "Nevertheless, being crafty," saith he, "I caught you with guile," 2 Cor. 12:16. These were *piæ fraudes*, whereby he used to catch poor souls out of the pit, and pluck them out of the fire; and he that said, "I will make you fishers of men," taught them to use some holy deceit, to present some things for the allurement of souls, and so to surround and inclose them with most weighty and convincing reasons. This beloved apostle, who leaned upon Christ's bosom, and was likely to learn the very secrets of the art of fishing souls,—you see how he goeth about the business. He useth an holy art in this preface. Being about to give a recapitulation

of the whole gospel, and to make a short summary of the doctrine of it, for the more effectual establishment and confirmation of souls already converted, and for the powerful persuasion of others to embrace it, he useth all the skill that can be in the entry, to dispose men's hearts to receive it. Like a wise orator, he labours to make them attentos, dociles, et benevolos; to stir up their attention, to conciliate their affection, and so to make them docile, and easily teachable. He stirs up attention, when he shews that he is not to speak about trifling light matters, or low things, or things that do not concern them; but concerning the greatest, most concerning, and important things to them, even the word of life, in which all their life was rapt up: which, though it was ancient in itself, yet withal it was a new thing to the world, and so for all respects deserved to be taken serious notice of. Then he conciliates their benevolence and goodwill, by showing his own good affection towards them, and his great design in it, that it was only for their good and salvation, that he had nothing else before him, but to have them partakers with himself, in that same happiness. He had found a jewel, and he hides it not, but proclaims it, that all men may have fellowship with him, and that is with God, and that cannot but bring in full joy to the heart. Now a soul being made thus attentive and willing to hear, it is the best disposition, that makes them most capable of being taught. If those two stays were come over—the careless regard that is in men's hearts towards the gospel, and the suspicious thoughts and prejudices against the ambassadors of it, then what would hinder to believe it? The great miseries of men are, inconsideration and misapprehension: either men are so noised with other things continually buzzing in their ears, and their hearts so possessed with the clamours of their lusts, and the cries of the things of this world, that they have no leisure so much as to hearken patiently to this blessed sound, or to apprehend seriously what weight and moment lies in it; and so the most part of men cannot give that earnest and deep attention that is necessarily required for this divine teaching; or else there are many mistakes and misconceptions of the gospel, which sometimes arise to that height of reasoning against God, and prejudices against them that carry his message, which usually are

joined together, and these stop the ears of men against the wisest and most powerful enchantment of preaching, that it gains not much ground on them. O that we would once listen to the gospel! "Hearken and incline your ears unto me," is the Lord's first great request: and if once you do but seriously apply your minds and hearts, to see what is held out unto you, and to prove what good is in it, certainly these sure and everlasting mercies will mercifully and sweetly catch you with guile, and deceive you (if I may say so) to your eternal advantage. Wisdom, the Father's wisdom, begs but an equal hearing of you. Let her have but a patient hearing, and a silent impartial judgment of the heart, and she will carry it off from all that suit you. It is lamentable that the voice of God should be outcried by men's continual uninterrupted flood of business, that fills the heart with a continual noise, and keeps men in such a constant hurry and distemper, that they can give time and patience to nothing else. And this is only the advantage the world and the lusts of it have; for if they come once under a sober and serious examination, and the other party, that is, Jesus Christ and the word of life, might have the liberty to be heard in the inward retired thoughts of the heart, it would soon be found how unequal they are, and that all their efficacy consists in our ignorance, and their strength in our weakness. Certainly Christ would carry it, to the conviction of all that is in the soul. I beseech you let us give him this attention.

He that answers a tale before he hear it, it is a folly and weakness to him. A folly certainly it is to give this gospel a repulse before ye hear it. It promiseth life and immortality, which nothing else doth; and you entertain other things upon lower promises and expectations, even after frequent experiences of their deceitfulness. What a madness then is it to hear this promise of life in Christ so often beaten upon you, and yet never so much as to put him to the proof of it! And to put him off continually who knocks at your hearts, before you will consider attentively who it is that thus importunes you. O, my beloved, that you would hear him to amen! Let him speak freely to your hearts, and commune with them in the night on your beds, in your greatest retirement from other things, that you may not be

disturbed by the noise of your lusts and business; and I persuade myself, you who have now least mind of this life and joy in God, should find it, and find it in him. But to cut off all convictions and persuasions at first, and to set such a guard at your minds, to provide that nothing of that kind come in, or else that it be cast out as an enemy, this is unequal, ignorant, and unreasonable dealing, which you alone will repent of, it may be, too late, when past remedy.

He propounds that which he is to speak in the fittest way, for the commendation of it to their hearts; and O! how vast a difference betwixt this, and the ordinary subject of men's discourses! Our ears are filled continually with reports: and it is the usual way of men to delight to hear, and to report even those things that are not so delightful in themselves. And truly there are not many occurrences in the world (suppose you had a diurnal of affairs of all men every week) that can give any solid refreshment to the heart, except in the holy meditation of the vanity, vexation, and inconstancy that God hath subjected all those things unto. But it is sad that Christians, who have so noble and divine, so pleasant and profitable things to speak upon one to another, are, notwithstanding, as much subject to that Athenian disease, to be itching after new things continually, and to spend our time this way, to report, and to hear news. And, alas! what are those things that are tossed up and down continually, but the follies, weaknesses, impotencies and wickedness, ambition and avarice of men, the iniquity and impiety of the world that lies in wickedness? And is there any thing in this either pleasant or profitable, that we should delight to entertain our own thoughts and others ears with them? But the subject that is here treated of is of another nature; nothing in itself so excellent, nothing to us so convenient: "That which was from the beginning, of the word of life, we declare unto you." O how pleasant and sweet a voice is that which sounds from heaven, be [i.e. in comparison with] those confused noises are, that arise from the earth! This is a message that is come from heaven, with him that came down from it; and indeed that is the airth, [i.e. quarter] from whence good news hath come. Since the first curse was pronounced upon the earth, the earth hath brought

forth nothing but thorns and briars of contention, strife, sorrow, and vexation. Only from above hath this message been sent to renew the world again, and re-create it, as it were. There are four properties, by which this infinitely surpasses all other things, can be told you:—For itself it is most excellent; for its endurance it is most ancient; and to us it is most profitable; and both in itself, and to us, it is most certain; and by these the apostle labours to prepare their hearts to serious attention.

For the excellency of the subject that he is to declare, it is incomparable, for it is no less than that jewel that is hid in the mine of the Scriptures, which he, as it were; digs up, and shews and offers it unto them; that jewel, I say, which when a man hath found, he may sell all to buy it; that jewel, more precious than the most precious desires and delights of men, even Jesus Christ, the substantial word of life, who is the substance of all the shadows of the old Testament, the end of that ministry, the accomplishment of the promises, and the very life of all religion, without which there is nothing more vain and empty. It is true, the gospel is the word of life, and holds out salvation to poor sinners; but yet it is Christ that is the life of that word, not only as touching the efficacy and power of it, but as touching the subject of it; for the gospel is a word of life only, because it speaks of him who is the life and the light of men. It is but a report of the true life, as John said, "I am not that light, but am sent to bear witness of that light," John 1:8. So the gospel, though it be called "the power of God to salvation," Rom 1:16, and "the Saviour of life, and the gospel of salvation," Eph. 1:13, yet it is not that true life, but only a testimony and declaration of it. It hath not life and immortality in itself, but only the bringing of those to light, and to the knowledge of men, 2 Tim. 1:10. It is a discovery where these treasures are lying, for the searching and finding.

To speak of this word of life, Jesus Christ, according to his eternal subsistence in the infinite understanding of the Father, it would certainly require a divine spirit, more elevated above the ordinary sphere of men, and separated from that earthliness and impurity that

makes us incapable of seeing that holy and pure Majesty. Angels were but low messengers for this; for how can they express to us what they cannot conceive themselves, and therefore wonder at the mystery of it? I confess, the best way of speaking these things, which so infinitely surpass created capacities, were to sit down in silence, and wonder at them; and withal to taste such a sweetness, in the immense greatness and infinite mysteriousness of what we believe, as might ravish the soul more, after that which is unknown, than all the perfections of the world, known and seen to the bottom, can do. This doctrine of the holy Trinity hath been propagated from the beginning of the world, even among the heathens, and derived by tradition from the first fathers, or the Hebrews, to neighbouring nations; and therefore they speak many divine things of that infinite, supreme Being, who is the fountain of the whole creation, and that he created all things by his most divine word, and that his blessed Spirit is the union and bond of both, and of all things besides. It is known what mysteries the Pythagoreans apprehended in the number three, what perfection they imagined to be in it. So much was let out, as might either make them without excuse, or prepare the world to receive readily the light, when it should be clearly revealed. It is commonly held forth, that this eternal word is the birth of the infinite understanding of God, reflecting upon his own most absolute and perfect Being; which is illustrated by some poor comparison to us creatures, who form in our minds, in the understanding of any thing, an inward word, or image of the object, some representation and similitude of that we understand. And this is more perfect than any external vocal expression can be; so we have a weak and finite conception of the acting of that infinite wisdom of God, by which he knows himself, that there results, as it were, upon it, the perfect substantial image, and the express character of the divine essence. And therefore is the Son of God called "the Word, which was with God," and "the wisdom of the Father," because he is, as it were, the very birth of his understanding, and not only the image of his own essence, but the idea in which he conceived, and by which he created the visible world. Then we use to conceive the Holy Ghost as the production of his blessed will, whereby he loves, delights, and hath

complacency in his own all-sufficient, all-blessed Being, which he himself alone perfectly comprehends, by his infinite understanding, and therefore called the Spirit, a word borrowed from resemblance to poor creatures, who have many impulses and inclinations to several things, and are carried to motion and action, rather from that part which is invisible in them—the subtilest parts, therefore called spirits. So the Lord applies his almighty power, and exerciseth his infinite wisdom, according to the pleasure and determination of his will, for that seems to be the immediate principle of working. Therefore there is mention made of the Spirit in the creation of the world, "He sent out his Spirit, and they were created," Psal. 104:30. These are the weak and low attempts of men to reach the height of that unsearchable mystery. Such conjecture we have of this word of God, and his eternal generation, as if trees could take upon them to understand the nature of beasts, or as if beasts would presume to give an account of the spirit that acts in men. Certainly the distance is infinitely greater between God and us; and he must needs behold greater vanity, folly, and darkness, in our clearest apprehensions of his majesty, than we could find in the reasonings and conceptions of beasts about our nature. When our own conception in the womb is such a mystery as made David to say, "O how wonderfully am I made, and fearfully!" He saw a curious art and wisdom in it that he could not understand, and he believed an infinite power he could not conceive, which surprised his soul with such unexpected matter of wonder, as made him fear and tremble at the thought of it. I say, when the generation of a poor creature hath so much depth of wisdom in it, how canst thou think to understand that everlasting wonder of angels, the birth and conception of that eternal wisdom of God? And if thou canst not understand from whence the wind comes, and whither it goes, or how thine own spirits beat in thy veins, what is the production of them, and what their motions; how can we then conceive the procession of the Holy Ghost, "which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to consider it?"

## II

1 John 1:1—That which was from the beginning, &c.

Things are commended sometimes, because they are ancient, especially doctrines in religion, because truth is before error, and falsehood is but an aberration from truth: and therefore there is so much plea and contention among men about antiquity, as if it were the sufficient rule of verity. But the abuse is, that men go not far enough backward in the steps of antiquity, that is, to the most ancient rule, and profession, and practice of truth in Scripture, to Christ and his apostles, but halt in their grandfathers' tombs. But sometimes things are commended, because new; the nature of man being inclined to change and variety, and ready to surfeit and loathe accustomed things. Even as the stomach finds appetite for new and unusual diets, so the mind of man hath a secret longing after new doctrines and things. Now, we have both these combined together in this subject, which makes it the more excellent and wonderful,—antiquity, and novelty. For antiquity, it is that which was from the beginning, and which was with the Father, and that is before all antiquity, even from eternity; not only from the beginning of time, but before all time, before all imaginable beginnings. He of whom he speaks, Christ Jesus, the Father's Word, "was with the Father from the beginning, with the Ancient of days," who infinitely and immeasurably antedates all antiquity, to whose endurance all antiquity that is renowned among men is but novelty; to whom the world is but as of six days standing, or but as of yesterday, if we consider that infinite, beginningless, immensurable endurance of God, before this world. What a boddom or clew is that, that can never be untwined by the imaginations of men and angels! To all eternity they should never unwind it, and come to the end of that thread of the age of the Father, and the Son, who possessed one another before the hills were, and before the foundations of the mountains. This is it that maketh religion the richest and most transcendant subject in the world, that it presents us with a twofold

eternity, and environs the soul before and behind with an eternity without end, communicated to angels and men, from God. That which was from the beginning, either real or imagined, how much moment and weight is in that, to persuade a soul and compose it, beyond all the specious and painted appearances of the world! To consider that such a Saviour is holden out unto us, to come unto and lean upon, that is, the Rock of ages, upon whose word this huge frame is bottomed, and stands firm; one who infinitely exceeds and prevents all things visible or invisible, all their mutations and changes; one who was possessed of the Father, as his delights, before the foundation of the world, and so most likely to reconcile him to us, and prevail with him. Yea, most certainly, they must have one will, and one delight, who were undivided from all eternity; and they then rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth, taking complacency in their own thoughts of peace and good will they had towards us, afterwards to break forth. And if both delighted in their very projects and plots upon the business, what may we think the accomplishment of the whole design will add, if it were possible to superadd to their delight? I would have you upon this, to gather two considerations for your edification: one, to think what an incomparably excellent Saviour we have, one with God, equal to him, yea, one with him from all eternity; and so how strong a foundation there is for faith and confidence! What a Rock to establish a tossed soul upon! Man's misery and curse being for all eternity, there is One to deliver from that, who was from all eternity. And who could purchase unto us such absolute blessedness throughout all eternity, who was not himself from all eternity? What marvellous congruity and beauty is in the ways of God! How is all fitted and framed by infinite wisdom, to the end that we may have strong consolation! Do you not see the infinite evil and heinousness of sin in the giving of such a precious ransom for it! O how is the black visage of sin pourtrayed in the beauty and glory of the Mediator's person? How is it painted, even to horror in his death! Again, what divinity and worth is put upon the immortal soul of man, that is but of yesterday, since the beginning; when he that was the delight of God, before all beginning, is weighed in the balance, as it were, with it, and no other thing found sufficient

for exchange and compensation, that the soul may be redeemed! And doth not this answer all the jealousies and suspicious thoughts, and fearful apprehensions, arising from the consideration of our own weakness and infirmity; when such an One is offered, as is able to save to the utmost? Then I would desire you may believe, that the Father is as well-minded to the salvation of sinners as the Son; for they were sweet company together from all eternity, and, as it were, contrived this plot and design between them, to save and redeem mankind. Some entertain harsher thoughts of the Father, as if Christ were more accessible and exorable; but the truth is, he hath given his Son this command, and therefore he professed, that it was not so much his will, as his Father's, he was about. Therefore, correct your apprehensions; do not stand back from the Father, as it were, till you have prevailed with Christ. No, that is not the way. Come, in your first address, to the Father, in the Son, for so he wills you; not because he must be overcome by his Son's persuasion, but because he would have his love to run in that channel, through Christ, to us. And indeed our Saviour was much in holding out the love of the Father, and laboured to persuade the world of it. Withal, I wish you to consider whom ye neglect and despise, who hear this gospel daily, and the word of life holden out unto you; and yet suffer not your hearts to be moved, or stirred after him. Alas, my beloved, to forsake so great a mercy, as the eternal word of life, as the infinite wisdom of the Father, and to let the offer of this every day run by us, and never to find leisure and vacancy from the multitude of businesses, and throng of the thoughts and lusts of the world, never to start so far backward, as to look beyond this world, to God, and his Son Jesus Christ, never to mind seriously, either him that was before all things visible, or our own souls, that must survive and out-live all this visible frame. This, I say, is the great misery and condemnation of the world, that this eternal light hath shined, and you love your own darkness better. But be persuaded, that one day ye will think one offer of this word of life better than life, better, infinitely better, than the most absolute life that the attendance and concurrence of all the creatures could yield you. O then, that ye would incline your ears and hearts to this that is declared unto you! to receive this word of life,

that was from the beginning, and ye may be persuaded, ye shall enjoy a blessedness without end.

But there is withal a newness in this subject, which both increases admiration, and may the more engage our affection; for "the life was manifested," (saith he) ver. 2; and he is a word of life, as though he was invisible and untouchable from the beginning, yet he was lately clothed with flesh, that made him both visible, and capable of being handled. Now, truly these are the two poles, about which the mystery, glory, and wonder of Christianity turns,—the antiquity of his real existence, as God; and the lateness or novelty of his appearance in the flesh, as man. Nothing so old, for he hath the infinite forestart of the oldest and most ancient creatures. Take those angels, the sons of God, who sung together in the first morning of the creation, yet their generation can soon be told, and their years numbered. It is easy to calculate all antiquity, and we should not reach six thousand years, when it is taken at the largest measure; and what are six thousand years in his sight, but as six days when they are past? And if we would run backward, as far before that point of beginning, and calculate other six thousand, yet we are never a jot nearer the age of the Son of God. Suppose a mountain of sand, as big as the earth, and an angel to take from it one grain in every year, your imagination would weary itself, ere ye reckoned in what space this mountain should be diminished, or removed: it would certainly trouble the arithmetic of the wisest mathematician. Now imagine as many years, or ages of years, to have run out before the world took its beginning, as the years in which the angel would exhaust this mountain; yet we have not come a whit nearer the endurance of our Lord and Saviour, whose being is like a circle, without beginning or end. "Behold, he is great, and we know him not, and the number of his years cannot be searched out," Job 36:26; "and who can tell his generation?" The age of this Word is such a labyrinth, with innumerable turnings and windings in it, which will always lead them round that enter in it; and so they are, after the longest progress and search, but just where they were, always beginning, and

never coming nearer the beginning of his duration, because it is the beginning of all things that hath a beginning, but hath none itself.

Now he that was thus blessed from everlasting, "who dwelt in inaccessible light and glory, which no man hath seen, nor can see," infinitely removed from all human capacities and senses: he, I say, begins to be manifested in the fulness of time; and to make himself visible, he takes on our flesh; and all for this purpose,—that he who was the substantial life in himself, and the eternal life, in an essential and necessary way, might become life to poor dead sinners, and communicate to them eternal life. And truly it was no wonder that all ages were in the expectation of this from the beginning of the world, since was first promised, that the inhabitants of heaven were in a longing expectation to see and look into this mystery for there is something in it more wonderful than the creation of this huge frame of heaven and earth. God made himself in a manner visible, by making the visible world. His power, goodness, and wisdom, are everywhere imprinted in great characters on the whole, and all the parts of it. The light, how glorious a garment is it, with which he is, as it were, clothed! The heavens, how majestic a throne! The earth, how stately a footstool! The thunder, how glorious and terrible a voice! In a word, the being, the beauty, the harmony, and proportion of this huge frame, is but a visible appearance of the invisible God. But in taking on our flesh, the Word is more wonderfully manifested, and made visible. For, in the first, the Creator made creatures to start out of nothing, at his first command; but in this, the Creator is made a creature. He once gave a beginning of being to things that were not. Being before all beginning himself, he now takes a beginning, and becomes flesh, that he was not. And what is it in which he was manifested? Is it the spiritual nature of angels? But though that far excels ours, yet it is no manifestation of him to us; for he should still be as unknown as ever. Is it in the glory, perfection, and power of the visible world, as in the sun, and lights of heaven? But though they have more shew of glory than the flesh of man, yet it makes not much to our comfort; there would not be so much consolation in that manifestation. Therefore, O how wisely and wonderfully is it

contrived, for the good of lost man! That the Son of God shall be made of a woman, that the Father of spirits shall be manifested in the lowest habit of our flesh. And the lower and baser that be, in which he appears, the higher the mystery is, and the richer the comfort is. Suppose the manifestation of glory should not be so great, yet the manifestation of love is so much the greater; and this is the great design, "God so loved the world," &c. John 3. Now, I may say, even the glory of "the only-begotten Son of God" was the more visibly manifested, that he appeared in so low and unequal a shape; for power to show itself in weakness, for glory to appear in baseness, for divinity to kythe [i.e. reveal, or make itself known] in humanity, and such glorious rays to break forth from under such a dark cloud; this was greater glory and more majesty, than if he had only shewed himself in the perfection of the creatures. Now it is easy to distinguish the vail from that it covers; so separate infirmity from divinity. But then it had been more difficult, if his outward appearance had been so glorious, to give unto God what was God's, and to give the creature what was the creature's. The more near his outward shape had been to his divine nature, the less able had we been to see the glory of his divinity through it.

Now, my beloved, when both these are laid together, the ancientness of our Saviour, and withal the newness of his appearance in flesh, by which he hath come so near us and, as it were, brought his own majesty within our sphere, to be apprehended by us; and for no other end, but to make life and immortality to shine forth, as beams from him, to the quickening of dead souls. O how should this conjunction endear him to us! That the everlasting Father should become a child for us; that is one wonder. The next wonder is, that "we, who are enemies, should be made the children of God by him." When the dark and obscure prophesying of this, when the twilight of Jewish types and shadows did create so much joy in the hearts of believers, in so much that they longed for, and rejoiced to see afar off that day. When such a dark representation of this word of life was the very life of the godly in the world for four thousand years, O how much is the cause of joy increased, by the Sun of Righteousness himself

appearing in the very darkest night of superstition and idolatry that ever was over the world! when the true Life hath arisen himself, and brought to open light the life that was obscurely couched up in prophecies and ceremonies, as hid under so many clouds. O then, let us open our hearts to him, and then entertain these new and fresh tidings with new delights! Though these be now more than sixteen hundred years old, yet they are still recent to a believing heart. There is an everlasting spring in them, that sends out every day fresh consolation to souls, as refreshing as the first day this spring was opened. This is the new wine that never grows old, nay, it is rather every generation renewed, with the accession of some new manifestation of the love of God. Christ's incarnation was the first manifestation of the Son, the very morning of light and life, the dayspring visiting the world, that was buried in an hellish darkness of heathen idolatry; and even the church of God, in the grave of superstition, and corruption of doctrine and manners. Then did that Sun of Righteousness first set up his head above the horizon. But it is but one day still. He hath been but coming by degrees to the meridian, and "shining more and more to the perfect day." That Sun hath not set since, but made a course, and gone round about the world, in the preaching of the gospel, and brought life and light about, by succession from one nation to another, and one generation to another; and therefore we ought to entertain it this day with acclamations and jubilation of heart, as the people that lie under the north do welcome the sun when it comes once a year to them. "After that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared," Tit. 3:4,—φιλανθρωπία, his kindly and affectionate love to mankind, that is it that shines so brightly. The beams of grace and love to men are the rays that are scattered from this Sun of Righteousness. O the hardness of men's hearts, the impenetrable obstinacy of man, that this cannot melt or pierce! How damnable and miserable a case are they in, who can neither be persuaded, with the eternity of this subject, to adore it, nor moved with the late appearance of the love of God to the world, in sending of his Son; whom neither Christ's majesty nor his humility can draw! Certainly this makes sinners under the gospel in a more deplorable condition

than Sodom; because "if he had not come, they had not had such sin, but now it is without excuse," &c.

### III

1 John 1:1, 2, 3—That which we have heard and seen of the word of life, declare we unto you, &c.

Things that are excellent in themselves will be loved for themselves; but they become the more suitable object of affection, if they have withal some suitableness and conveniency to us. Yet neither the excellency nor conveniency of the object is sufficient to engage the heart, if there be not something in the mind too, suitable to the object; that is, the apprehension of that reality and good that is in it. For, as there is a certainty in the object, that makes it a real, not imaginary thing; so there must be a certainty in the subject, whereby the thing is apprehended to be true, good, and excellent; and then the object of affection is completed. Some things there are in nature, excellent in nature, excellent in themselves, but they rather beget admiration than affection, because they are not suitable to our necessities. Other things of a more ordinary purchase have some conveniency to supply our wants; and though they be less worth in their own nature than precious stones, and such like, yet they are more desired. But there is this lamentable disproportion betwixt our apprehensions, and the things themselves, which is the ground of much disappointment; and so of vexation. The things of this world having nothing of that solid excellency, or true worth and conveniency to our souls, nothing suitable to our immortal spirits; but being empty vain shadows, and windy husks, instead of substantial true food; yet there are high apprehensions, and big conceits of them, which is a kind of monstrous production, or empty swelling of the mind; which, because it hath no bottom of solidity, it will fall and evanish. Again, take a view of spiritual things holden out

in the gospel, and there is as incongruous and unproportioned carriage of our hearts towards them. They have a certainty and reality and subsistence in themselves. They alone are excellent, and suitable to our spirits, notwithstanding the mind of man is most hugely misshapen towards them by unbelief, and hath nothing in his apprehension suitable to the things themselves. They are represented as far below their true worth, as things temporal above their just value; and therefore men are not enamoured with them, souls are not ravished after that beauty that is in them.

Now the end of these words read is, to reform this irregular, disorderly posture of our minds, to hold out to you things truly excellent, and exceedingly convenient. Things good and profitable, in the most superlative degree, in the highest rank that your imaginations can suppose; and then to persuade you, that you are not deceived with vain words, or fair promises, but that there is a certain truth, and an infallible reality in them, that you being ascertained in your souls, according to the certainty of the thing presented, may then freely, without any reserve, give your hearts to love, embrace, and follow them. O that there might be such a meeting between your hearts and this eternal life! that as he hath come near to us, to be suitable to us, your apprehensions might draw near to be suitable to him; and by this means, your souls might meet immediately with that word of life, and have that constant fellowship with him, that is spoken of, verse 3. So your joy should be full; for joy is but the full peace of the desires. Fill up all the wants of the heart, and then it is full of joy. And so, when such a satisfying object is pitched on, as doth exactly correspond, and answer the inward apprehensions of the mind, then there is no more room in the heart for any other thing: as, if two superficies were exactly plain and smooth, they could join so closely together, that no air could come between them, and then they could hardly be pulled asunder.

We spoke something of the excellency of that Word of life in himself, and it is but little that is said, when all is said, in respect of that which he truly is; but I fear we speak, and ye hear, more of these

things than either of us lively and affectionately apprehend, or lay up in our hearts. I fear, that as we say less than is, so more than we think, I mean, seriously think upon. But we shall proceed. Such an everlasting glorious person, though he have life in himself; though he be never so excellent as the Son of God, yet what is that to us? It seems he is never a whit nearer us, or not more suitable to restore us, than the very Majesty that we offended. How far is he without our sight, and without our comprehension! He is high as heaven, who shall ascend to bring down that eternal Life to us? But stay and consider, that he is not only so glorious in himself, but so gracious to us; he is not only invisible as God, but manifested to our senses as man; not only hath life in himself, but is an everlasting spring of life to us; not only hath his throne in heaven with his Father, but hath come down to the world, to bring that eternal life near us, even in our mouth and hearts; to preach it, to purchase it, to seal it, and to bestow it,—"and the life was manifested!" the life, and that eternal life, words of force, that have some emphasis in them. The life is much, that eternal Life is more; and yet these had been little to us, if not manifested to us. Life might have remained hid in God; eternal life might have resided in Christ, the fountain for all eternity, and nothing diminished of their happiness, if these had never sprung out and vented themselves. If that life that was with the Father from the beginning, had never come down from the Father, we would have missed it, not they. We alone had been miserable by it. Well, then, there is a manifestation of life in Christ's low descent to death. There is a manifestation of the riches of love and grace in the poverty and emptiness of our Saviour, and thus he is suited to us and our necessities, every way fitly correspondent. And now it is not only, "as the Father hath life in himself, so the Son hath life in himself;" but there is a derivation of that life to man. That donation of life to the Son, John 5:26, was not so much for any need he had of it, as by him to bestow it on us, that it might be, "As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father; so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me," John 6:57. As parents that retain affection to their children, albeit they have committed great injuries, for which they are driven out of their houses, yet they will, as it were, underhand bestow upon

them, and exercise that same love in a covered way, by a third person, by giving to them, to impart to their children. Notwithstanding, this halts too much, for our Father dissembles not his love, but proclaims it in sending his Son. Nor doth Christ hide it, but declares, that he is instructed with sufficient furniture for eternal life; that himself is the bread of life sent from heaven, that whosoever receiveth it with delight, and ponders, and meditates on it in the heart, and so digests it in their souls, they shall find a quickening, quieting, comforting, and strengthening virtue in him. Nay, there is a strait connection between his life and ours: "Because I live, ye shall live also;" as if he could no more want us, than his Father can want him, John 14:19; and as if he could be no more happy without us, than his Father without him. And whence is it come to pass, but from his manifestation for this very end and purpose? How should such strange logic hold? Whence such a because, if this had not been all his errand into the world, for which his Father dispensed to want him, as it were, and he did likewise condescend to leave his Father for a season? And now this being the business he came about, it is strange he appeared in so unsuitable and unlikely a form, in weakness, poverty, misery, ignominy, and all the infirmities of our flesh; which seemed rather contrary to his design, and to indispose him for giving life to others, whose life was a continued death in the eyes of men; and the last act of the scene seems to blow up the whole design of quickening dead sinners: when he who was designed Captain of salvation is killed himself; for if he save not himself, how should he save others? And yet behold the infinite wisdom, power, and grace of God, working under ground, giving life to the dead, by the death of life itself; saving those that are lost, by one that lost himself; overcoming the world by weakness; conquering Satan by suffering; triumphing over death by dying. Like that renowned king of the Athenians, who (when he heard of an oracle, that if the general were saved alive, the army could not be victorious) changed his habit, and went among the camp of his enemies, and fought valiantly till he was killed; whom, when the armies of the enemy understood to be the king and general, they presently lost their hearts, and retired and fled: so our Saviour, and captain of our salvation, hath

offered himself once for all; and by being killed, hath purchased life to all that believe in his death, and that eternal life. Therefore, he is not only the word of life in himself, and that eternal life in an essential manner, but he alone hath the words of eternal life, and is the alone fountain of life to us.

Now for the certainty of this manifestation of the Word of life in our flesh, both that he was man, and that he was more than a man, even God: this, I say, we have the greatest evidence of that the world can afford, next to our own seeing and handling. To begin with the testimony set down here, of those who were ear and eyewitnesses of all; which, if they be men of credit, cannot but make a great impression of faith upon others. Consider who the apostles were,—men of great simplicity, whose education was so mean, and expectations in the world so low, that they could not be supposed to conspire together to a falsehood; and especially when there was no worldly inducement leading them thereto, but rather all things persuading to the contrary. Their very adversaries could never object any thing against them but want of learning, and simplicity, which are furthest from the suspicion of deceitfulness. Now how were it possible, think you, that so many thousands every where should have received this new doctrine, so unsuitable to human reason, from their mouths, if they had not persuaded them that themselves were eye-witnesses of all those miracles that he did to confirm his doctrine, and that this testimony had been above all imaginable exception? Yea, so evident was it in matter of fact, that both enemies themselves confessed, the Jews and Gentiles that persecuted that way were constrained, through the evidence of the truth, to acknowledge that such mighty works shewed forth themselves in him, though they out of malice imputed it to ridiculous and blasphemous causes. And besides, the apostle used to provoke to the very testimony of five hundred, who had seen Jesus rise from death, which is not the custom of liars; neither is it possible for so many, as it were, of purpose, to conspire to such an untruth, as had so many miseries and calamities following on the profession of it, 1 Cor. 15:6.

But what say they? "That which we have heard of," not only from the prophets, who have witnessed of him from the beginning, and do all conspire together to give a testimony that he is the Saviour of the world; but from John, who was his messenger, immediately sent before his face, and whom all men, even Christ's enemies, acknowledged to be a prophet; and therefore, his visible pointing out the Lamb of God, his declaring how near he was, and preferring of him infinitely before himself, who had so much authority himself, (and so likely to have spoken the truth, being misled by no ambition or affectation of honour,) his instituting a new ordinance, plainly pointing out the Messiah at the doors, and publishing constantly that voice, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand!" These we, and all the people have heard, and heard, not with indignation, but with reverence and respect. But above all, we heard himself, the truth, prophet, and sweet preacher of Israel; since the first day he began to open his mouth in the ministry of the gospel, we have with attentive ears, and earnest hearts, received all from his mouth, and laid up these golden sayings in our hearts. He did not constrain them to abide with him, but there was a secret power that went from him, that chained them to him inevitably, "Lord, whither shall we go from thee, for thou hast the words of eternal life?" O that was an attractive virtue, a powerful conserving virtue, that went out of his mouth! We heard him, say they, and we never heard any speak like him, not so much for the pomp and majesty of his style,—for he came low, sitting on an ass, and was as condescending in his manner of speech as in his other behaviour,—but because "he taught with authority." There was a divine virtue in his preaching; some sparkles of a divine spirit and power in his discourses, broke out from under the plainness and simplicity of it; and made our souls truly to apprehend of him, what was sacrilegiously attributed in flattery to a man, "the voice of God, and not of man." We heard him so many years speak familiarly to us, and with us, by which we were certainly persuaded he was a true man. And then we heard him in his speeches open the hidden mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, revealing the will of the Father, which no man could know, but he that was with the Father, and came down from him. We heard him unfolding all these shadows and

coverings of the old Testament, expounding Moses and the prophets, taking off the vail, and uncovering the ark and oracles. And "how did our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us, and opened to us the scriptures?" We heard him daily in the synagogues expound the scriptures, whereof himself was the living commentary, when he read them; we saw the true exposition before our eyes.

Now, my beloved, you may be admitted to hear him too, for the sum of the living words that came from the Word of life are written. His sermons are abridged in the evangelists, that you may read them, and when you read them, think within yourselves that you hear his holy mouth speak them. Set yourselves, as amongst his disciples, "that so ye may believe, and believing, may have eternal life;" for this end are they written, John 20:30, 31.

## IV

1 John 1:1, 2—Which we have heard and seen, &c.

There is a gradation of certainty here: hearing himself speak is more than hearing by report; but an eye-witness is better than ten ear-witnesses, and handling adds a third assurance: for the sense of touching gives the last and greatest evidence of truth. It is true, that the sense is properly correspondent to sensible things, and of itself can only give testimony to his humanity; yet I conceive these are here alleged for both, even also to witness his glorious and divine nature; which, though it did not fall under sight and handling, yet it discovered itself to be latent, under that visible covering of flesh, by sensible effects, no less than the spirit of man, which is invisible, manifests its presence in the body, by such sensible operations, as can proceed from no other principle. And, therefore, this faithful witness adds, "which we have looked upon;" which relates not only to the outward attention of the eyes, but points at the inward intention

and affection of the heart. Our senses did bring in such strange and marvellous objects to our minds, that we stood gazing, and beheld it over and over again, looked upon it with reason, concluding what it might be. We gave entertainment to our minds, to consider it wisely and deliberately, and fastened our eyes, that we might detain our hearts in the consideration of such a glorious person. From this, then, ye have two things clear; one is, that our Lord Jesus Christ was a true man, and that his disciples had all possible evidence of it, which the history more abundantly shews. He conversed with them familiarly, he eat and drank with them, yea, his conversation in the world was very much condescending, in outward behaviour, to the customs of the world. He eat with Pharisees; when they invited him, he refused not; but he was more bold with publicans and sinners, to converse with them, as being their greatest friend. He was uncivil to none; would deter none through a rigid austere conversation. And, indeed, to testify the truth of his human nature, he came so low to partake of all human infirmities without sin, and to be subject to extraordinary afflictions and crosses, as to the eyes of the world it did quite extinguish his divine glory, and bury it in misbelief. This which we speak of, as a testimony and evidence that he was man, was the very grand stumbling-block and offence of the Jews and Gentiles; which they made use of as an evidence and certain testimony that he was not God. The evidence of the one seems to give an evidence to the other. But let us consider this, for it is a sweet and pleasant subject, if our hearts were suitably framed to delight in it, that there was as much evidence to the conviction of all men's senses, of his divine majesty, as of his human infirmity; and that there are two concurring evidences, which enlighten one another; which we shall shew, partly from his own works and miracles, and partly from the more than miraculous success and progress of the gospel after him.

For the first John testifies, that not only they saw the baseness of his outward shape, but "the glory of the only begotten Son of God, full of grace and truth," John 1:14. John the Baptist sent some of his disciples, because of their own unbelief, to enquire at Jesus, "Art thou he, or look we for another?" And what answer gave he them?

What reason to convince them? "Go," saith he, "and tell what ye have seen and heard, that the blind see, the lame walk, and the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor receive the gospel;" and blessed is he whoever shall not for my outward unseemliness and baseness offend, but go by that, into the glory that shines out in such works. It is said in Luke 7:21, that "the same hour he cured many." Before he spoke in answer, he answered them by his deeds. He gave a visible demonstration of that they doubted of, for they could not but see a power above created power in these works, which surpass nature and art. So many wonderful works done, so often repeated, before so many thousands, even many of his watchful and observant enemies; and all done so easily, by a word, infinite cures for number and quality wrought, which passed the skill of all physicians: devils dispossessed, life restored, water converted into excellent wine, without the maturation of the sun, or help of the vine tree; a little bread so strangely enlarged to the satisfaction of many thousands, and more remaining than was laid down; the winds and seas obeying his very word, and composing themselves to silence at his rebuke; and infinite more of this kind. Are they not, in the common apprehension of men, of a degree superior to that of nature? Who could restore life, but he that gave it? Whom would the devils obey, but him at whom they tremble? Who could transubstantiate water into wine, but he that created both these substances, and every year, by a long circuit of operations of nature, turns it into wine? Who could feed seven thousand with that which a few persons would exhaust, but he that can create it of nothing, and by whose word all this visible world started out of nothing? Nay, let us suppose these things to be done only by divine assistance, by some peculiar divine influence; then, certainly, if we consider the very end of this miraculous assistance of a creature, that it was to confirm the doctrine delivered by him, and make such a deep impression of the truth of it in the hearts of all, that it cannot be rooted out. This being the very genuine end of the wisdom of God in such works, it must needs follow, that all that which Christ revealed, both of himself and the Father, of his own being with him from the beginning, of his being one with him, and being his eternal Son; all this must needs be

infallibly true; for it is not supposable to agree with the wisdom and goodness of God, to manifest so much of his infinite power and glory, in so extraordinary a manner, to bear testimony to an impostor or deceiver. Therefore, though no more could be at first extorted from an enemy of Christ's doctrine, but that such mighty works did shew forth themselves, which could not be done but by the divine assistance and extraordinary help of God; yet even from that confession it may be strongly concluded, that seeing there was no other end imaginable of such extraordinary assistance, but the confirmation of his new doctrine, and that of his divine nature, being one of the chief points of it, it must needs enforce, that he was not only helped by God, as Moses, but that he was God, and did these things by his own power. By this then it appears, that though after so many prophecies of him, and expectations from the beginning, we see but a man, in outward appearance despicable, and without comeliness and form; yet, if we could open the eyes of our souls, and fix them upon him, we behold, as through some small crannies, majesty shining in his misery, power discovering itself in his weakness, even that power that made the world, and man too. He was born indeed, yet of a virgin; he was weak and infirm himself, yet he healed all others' infirmities, even by his word. He was often an hungered, yet he could feed five thousand at one time, and seven thousand at another, upon that which would not have served his disciples, or but served them. He was wearied with travels, yet he gave rest to wearied souls. At length himself died, and that an ignominious death, notwithstanding he raised the dead by his word, and at length he raiseth himself by his own power. All this is included in this, "we have seen and handled." We saw him gloriously transfigured on the mount, where "his countenance did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as light," and two, the greatest persons in the Old Testament, came out of heaven, as it were, to yield up the administration of shadows to his substance. And we saw the heaven opening in the sight of many thousands, and heard a testimony given him from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, hear him." And then, when he was buried, and our hope with him, we saw him risen again, and our hope did rise with him, and then some of us

handled his sides, to get full persuasion; and all of us eat and drank, and conversed with him forty days. And to make a period, at length we saw him ascending up to heaven, and a cloud receiving him as a chariot, to take him out of our sight. Thus, "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, as of the only begotten Son of God."

But besides that which the life and death of Jesus Christ carries engraven in it of divinity, there is one miracle, which may be said to transcend all that ever was done, and it is one continued wonder since his resurrection,—even the virtue and power of that crucified Saviour to conquer the world, by such unsuitable, yea, contrary means and instruments. Heathenish religion was spread indeed universally through the whole world, but that was not one religion, but one name; for as many nations, as many fancied gods, and in one nation many. And true it is, that Mahometanism hath spread itself far; but by what means? Only by the power of the sword, and the terror of an empire. But here is a doctrine contrary to all the received customs, and inbred opinions of men, without any such means, prevailing throughout the world. Cyrus, when he was about to conquer neighbouring nations, gave out a proclamation, "If any man will follow me, if he be a footman, I will make him an horseman; if he have a village, I will give him a city; if a city, I will bestow on him a country," &c. Now, mark how contrary the proceeding of our Lord is: "Go and preach," saith he; "repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Here is his proclamation, "Repent ye." And, "if any man will be my disciple, let him take up his cross and follow me, and deny himself." What disproportioned means? And yet how infinitely greater success? Cyrus could not gain the Lacedemonians to his side for all that, but Christ, though poor, despised and contemptible, while alive, and at length thought to be quite vanquished by the most shameful death, when he is lift up upon the cross, to the view and reproach of the world, he draws all men after him. He, by a few fishermen, not commanders, nor orators, persuades the world, and within a few years, that crucified Lord is adored further and wider than any empire did ever stretch itself. All the power, majesty, and

success of Alexander, could never persuade the nations, no, not his own followers, to adore him as God; but here one nailed to the cross, crowned with thorns, rejected of all men, and within a little space, adored, worshipped, suffered for throughout the nations, yea, kings and emperors casting down their crowns at his feet, many thousands counting it their honour to die upon that account. And do not the trophies of these apostolic victories remain to this day, in every corner of the world, after so many hundred years, in so many different, and so far distant nations; that same name preached, and all knees bowing to it? These things considered, how much done, and by means worse than nothing, it transcends all the miracles that ever the world wondered at. Now, my beloved, these things I mention for this end, that ye may be persuaded upon sure grounds, that he who is preached unto you, is "God able to save you," and according to the evidence of these grounds, ye may believe in him, and give that cordial assent to these everlasting truths, and that welcome entertainment to him in your heart that becomes. I think certainly there is very little even of this solid assent and persuasion of the gospel, in the hearts of the most part; because they take things or names rather implicitly, and never seriously consider what they believe, and upon what grounds. But I know not a more pleasant and profitable meditation than this, if we would enter into a serious consideration of the truth and certainty of those things we have received. O how would such evidence open the heart to an entire and full closure with them, and embracement of them!

## V

1 John 1:3—That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us, &c.

There are many things that you may desire to hear, and, it may be, are usually spoken of in public, which the generality of men's hearts

are more carried after. But truly, I should wrong myself and you both, if I should take upon me to discourse in these things, which, it may be, some desire, for direction or information concerning the times. For I can neither speak of them with so much certainty of persuasion as were needful, nor can I think it an advantage to shut out and exclude this which the apostle takes to declare, as the chief subject of his writing, which must needs be, if such things have place. Therefore I choose rather, with the apostle, to declare this unto you, which I can always do with a like certainty, and certainly might always be done to an infinitely greater advantage. There are these two peculiar excellencies in the gospel or word of life,—that it is never unprofitable, nor unseasonable; but doth contain in it at all times the greatest advantage to the souls of men, of infinitely more concernment and urgency, than any other thing can be supposed to be. And then we have no doubtful disputations about it. It varies not by times and circumstances. It may be declared with the same full assurances at all times, which certainly cannot be attained in other things. I would gladly know what Paul meant, when he said, "He determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified," 1 Cor. 2:2; and "that he counted all dross and dung to the super-excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ," Phil. 3:8. Sure it must amount to so much at least, that this should be the ordinary subject of the ministers of the gospel, since they are the ambassadors of Jesus Christ, not the orators of the state. Should not all other things be thought impertinent and trivial in respect of this,—the salvation of sinners? And what hath a connection with that, but Jesus Christ, and the Word of life?

But though this be the most pleasant and profitable subject, yet I fear, that few of them who pretend a calling to this embassy, are thus qualified and disposed to speak and declare it, as the apostle imports, "That which we have heard and seen," &c. It is true, there was something extraordinary in this, because they were to be first publishers of this doctrine, and to wrestle against the rebellion of men's hearts, and the idolatry and superstition of the world: yea, to undertake such a work, as to subdue all nations by the preaching of a

crucified man to them, which seemed to reason the most desperate and impossible employment ever given or taken. Therefore it behoved them to be the eye and ear-witnesses of his doctrine, life, miracles, and all; that being themselves persuaded beyond all the degrees of certainty that reason can afford, they might be the more confident and able to convince and persuade others. But yet there is something that holds by good proportion, that he that declares this eternal Life to others, should be well acquainted with it himself. He that preaches Jesus Christ, should first be conversant with him, and become his disciple and follower, before he can with any fruit become a teacher of others. Therefore the apostles, Acts 1 "choose out one that had been with them from the beginning, gone in and out with them, seen and heard all." O how incongruous is it for many of us, to take upon us to declare this unto others, which, I fear, few can say they have heard and seen in a spiritual manner, and handled by experience! No question, it prevails usually most with the heart, that comes from the heart. Affection is the fire that is most suitable to set affection on flame. It is a great addition to a man's power and virtue of persuading others, to have a full persuasion settled in his own heart concerning these things. Now it is much to be lamented, that there is so little of this, and so few carry the evidence on their hearts and ways, that they have been with Jesus, conversant in his company. I cannot say, but the ordinances, that carry their worth and dignity from God, and not from men, should be, notwithstanding, precious to your hearts; and that the word of life, however, and by whomsoever sent, if to you it be spoken, it should be suitably received with gladness of heart. But I confess, there is much of the success disappointed by the unsuitable carriage and disposition of instruments, which ought to be mourned under, as the greatest judgment of this nation.

Two principles have actuated this divine apostle,—the exceeding love of his master, for he loved much, as he was much beloved; and this carries him on all occasions to give so hearty a testimony to him, as you see, John 21:24, he characterizeth himself, or circumscribes his own name thus—"This is the disciple that testifieth these things, and

wrote these things, and we know his testimony is true." Where that divine love, which is but the result and overflowing of the love Christ carries to us, fills the heart. This makes the sweetest vent, and most fragrant opening of the mouth, whether in discourse, or in prayer, or preaching, that can be. O how it perfumes all the commendation of Christ! "Peter, lovest thou me? Feed my sheep." These have a natural connection together,—the love of Christ in the heart, and the affectionate, hearty, serious declaration of him to others. And then, another principle hath moved him, the love of others' salvation —"These things I declare, that ye may have fellowship with us." Finding in his own experience how happy he was, what a pearl he had found, how rare a jewel,—eternal life,—he cannot hide it, but proclaims it. His next wish is, Now since I am thus blessed, O that all the world knew, and would come and share with me! I see that unexhausted fountain of life, that unemptiable sea of goodness, that infinite fulness of grace in Jesus Christ, that I, and you, and all that will, may come and be satisfied, and nothing diminished! There is that immense fulness in spiritual things, that superabundance, and infinite excess over our necessities, that they may be enjoyed by many, by all, without envy or discontent, without prejudice to one another's fulness, which the scantiness and meanness of created things cannot admit. I believe, if ministers or Christians did taste of this, and had access into it to see it, and bless themselves in it; if they might enter into this treasury, or converse in this company, they would henceforth carry themselves as those who pity the world, and compassionate mankind. A man that is acquainted with this that is in Christ, would not find his heart easily stirred up to envy, or provoked upon others' prosperity or exaltation, but rather he would be constrained to commiserate all others, that they will not know nor consider wherein their own true tranquillity and absolute satisfaction consist. He that is lifted up to this blessed society, to converse with God, were it not for the compassion and mercy he owes to miserable mankind, he might laugh at the follies and vanities of the world, as we do at children. But as the φιλανθρωπια, the affectionate kind love our Saviour carried to human nature, made him often groan and sigh for his adversaries, and weep over Jerusalem, albeit his own joy was

full, without ebb: so in some measure a Christian learns of Christ to be a lover and pitier of mankind, and then to be moved with compassion towards others, when we have fullest joy and satisfaction ourselves. O that we might be persuaded to seek after those things which may be gotten and kept without clamour and contention, about which there needs be no strife nor envy! O seek that happiness in fellowship with God, which, having attained, you lack nothing but that others may be as happy!

"These things I declare, that ye may have fellowship with us." Oh! that ministers of the gospel might say so, and might, from their own experience, invite others to partake with them, as Paul requests others to be followers of him, as he was of Christ. So those who succeed Paul in this embassy of reconciliation, and are sent to call to the feast, might upon good ground interpose their own experience thus. O come and eat with us! O come and share with us, for it will suffice us all without division! When some get into the favour of great and eminent persons, and have the honour to be their companions, they will be very loath to invite promiscuously others to that dignity. This society would beget competition and emulation. But, O of how different a nature is this fellowship! which, whosoever is exalted to, he hath no other grief, but that his poor brethren and fellow creatures either know not, or will not be so happy. Therefore, he will always be about the declaring of this to others. But if ministers cannot use such an expression to invite you to their fellowship, yet I beseech you, beloved in the Lord, let all of us be here invited by the apostle to partake of that which will not grieve you to have fellows and companions in, but rather add to your contentment.

Moreover, this may be represented to you, that ye are invited to the very communion with the apostles. The lowest and meanest amongst you have this high dignity in your offer,—to be fellow-citizens with the saints, with the eminent pillars of the church, the apostles.

It might be thought by the most part of Christians, who are more obscure, little known, and almost despised in the world, that they

might not have so near access into the court of this great King. Some would think those who continued with him in his temptations, who waited on his own person, and were made such glorious instruments of the renovation of the world, should have some great preference to all others, and be admitted into the fellowship of the Father and the Son, beyond others; even as many would think, that Christ's mother and kinsmen in the flesh, should have had prerogatives and privileges beyond all his followers. But, O the wonderful mystery of the equal, free, and irrespective conveyance of this grace of the gospel in Christ Jesus! "neither bond nor free, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision." There is "one common salvation," Jude, ver. 3, as well as "common faith," Tit. 1:4; and it is common to apostles, to pastors, to people, "to as many as shall believe in his name;" so that the poorest and meanest creature is not excluded from the highest privileges of apostles. We have that to glory in, in which Paul gloried, that is, the cross of Christ. We have the same access, by the same Spirit, unto the Father; we have the same Advocate to plead for us, the same blood to cry for us, the same hope of the same inheritance. In a word, "we are baptized into one body," and for the essentials and chief substantial of privilege and comfort, the head equally respects all the members. Yea, the apostles, though they had some peculiar gifts and privileges beyond others, yet they were forbidden to rejoice in these, but rather in those which were common to them with other saints. "Rejoice not," saith Christ, "that the spirits are subject unto you but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven," Luke 10:20. The height and depth of this drowns all other differences.

Now, my beloved, what can be more said for our comfort? Would you be as happy as John, as blessed as Paul? Would you think yourselves well, if it were possible to be in as near relation and communion with Christ as his mother and brethren? Truly, that is not only possible, but it is holden out to you, and you are requested to embrace the offer, and come and share with them. "He that heareth my words and doeth them, the same is my mother, and sister, and brother." You shall be as dear to him as his dearest relations, if you believe in him,

and receive his sayings in your heart. Do not then entertain jealous and suspicious thoughts, because you are not like apostles or such holy men as are recorded in Scripture. If you forsake not your own mercy, you may have fellowship with them in that which they account their chiefest happiness. There is no difference of quality or condition, no distance of other things can hinder your communion with them. There are several sizes and growths of Christians, both in light and grace. Some have extraordinary raptures and ecstasies of joy and sweetness; others attain not that, but are rather kept in attendance and waiting on God in his ways. But all of them have one common salvation. As the highest have some fellowship with the lowest in his infirmities; so the lowest have fellowship with the highest in his privilege. Such is the infinite goodness of God,—that which is absolutely necessary, and most important either to soul or body, is made more universal, both in nature and grace, as the common light of the sun to all, and the Sun of righteousness too, in an impartial way, shining on all them that come to him.

## VI

1 John 1:3—And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, &c.

It was both the great wisdom and infinite goodness of God, that he did not only frame a creature capable of society with others of his own kind, but that he fashioned him so, as to be capable of so high an elevation,—to have communion and fellowship with himself. It is less wonder of angels, because they are pure incorporeal spirits, drawing towards a nearer likeness to his nature, which similitude is the ground of communion; but that he would have one of the material and visible creatures below, that for the one half is made of the dust of the earth, advanced to this unconceivable height of privilege, to have fellowship with him,—this is a greater wonder. And for this end

he breathed into man a spirit from heaven, that might be capable of conformity and communion with him, who is the Father of spirits. Now take this in the plainest apprehension of it, and you cannot but conceive that this is both the honour and happiness of man. It is honour and dignity, I say, because the nature of that consists in the applause and estimation of those that are worthy, testified one way or another; and the highest degrees of it rise according to the degree or dignity of the persons that esteem us, or give us their fellowship and favour. Now truly, according to this rule, the honour is incomparable, and the credit riseth infinitely above all the airy and fancied dignities of men;—for the footstool to be elevated up to the throne, for the poor contemptible creature to be lifted up to the society and friendship of the most high and glorious God, the only fountain of all the hierarchies of heaven, or degrees upon earth. So much as the distance is between God and us, so much proportionally must the dignity rise, to be advanced out of this low estate to fellowship with God. The distance between creatures is not observable in regard of this, and yet poor worms swell, if either they be lifted up a little above others, or advanced to familiarity with those that are above them. But what is it to pride ourselves in these things, when we are altogether, higher and lower, at one view, as grasshoppers in his sight? Therefore man, being in honour, and understanding not wherein his true honour and dignity consists, associates himself to beasts. Only the soul that is aspiring to this communion with God, is extracted out of the dregs of beastly mankind, and is elevated above mankind, and associated to blessed apostles, and holy angels, and spirits made perfect. And that were but little, though it be an honour above regal or imperial dignities; but it is infinitely heightened by this,—that their association is with God, the blessed and holy Trinity.

Now herein consists man's happiness too, for the soul being enlarged in its capacity and appetite, far beyond all visible things, is never fully satiated, or put to rest and quiet, till it be possessed with the chiefest and most universal good, that is, God; and then all the motions of desire cease,—then the soul rests from its labours,—then

there is a peace and eternal rest proclaimed in the desires of the soul,—"Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with me," Psal. 116:7. O what a poor short requiem do men sing to their own hearts from other enjoyments! Oftentimes men's hearts, whether dreaming or waking, speak in this manner,—Soul, take thy rest; but how ill-grounded is that peace, and how false a rest, daily experience in part witnesseth, and the last day will fully declare! But O, how much better and wiser were it for you to seek the favour and light of his countenance upon you, and to be united to him who is the fountain of life; so ye might truly, without hazard of such a sad reprehension as that fool got, or grievous disappointment, say, Soul, take thy rest in God!

Man was advanced to this dignity and happiness, but he kept not his station, for the great dragon falling down from that pinnacle of honour he had in heaven, drew down with him, "the third part of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth." And thus man, who was in honour, is now associated with, and made like to beasts or devils. He is a stranger to God from the womb. All the imaginations of his heart tend to distance from God. He is exiled and banished from God's presence, the type whereof was his being driven out of the garden; and yet he is not long out, nor far away, when the infinite love of God moves an embassy to send after him and to recall him. Many messengers are sent before-hand to prepare the way, and to dispose men's hearts to peace; many prophecies were, and fore intimations of that great embassy of love, which at length appeared; for God sent his Son, his own Son, to take away the difference, and make up the distance. And this is the thing that is declared unto us by those eye and ear-witnesses, to this end, that we may know how to return to that blessed society which we had forsaken, to our own eternal prejudice. Is man banished out of the paradise of God into the accursed earth? Then the Son is sent out from his own palace and the paradise above, to come into this world, and to save the world. Is there such a gulph between us and heaven? Christ hath put his own body between, to fill it up. Do the cherubim watch with flaming fire to keep us from life? Then the Son hath shed

his own blood in abundance, to quench that fire, and so to pacify and compose all in heaven and earth. Is there such odds and enmity between the families of heaven and earth? He sent his Son, the chief heir, and married him with our nature, and in that eternal marriage of our nature with him, he hath buried in everlasting oblivion all the difference, and opened a way for a nearer and dearer friendship with God than was before. And when was it, I pray you, that God dwelt among men; first, in a tabernacle, then in a fixed temple, even among the rebellious sons of men? and that so many were admitted and advanced again to communion with God? Abraham had the honour to be the friend of God. O incomparable title, comprehending more than king or emperor! Was it not all from this,—the anticipating virtue of that uniting and peace-making sacrifice? It was for his sake who was to come, and in his flesh to lay a sure foundation for eternal peace and friendship between God and man.

Now, that you see the ground of our restitution to that primitive fellowship with God, my earnest desire is, that ye would lay hold on this opportunity. Is such an high thing in our offer? Yea, are you earnestly invited to it by the Father and the Son? Then, sure, it might at the first hearing beget some inward desire, and kindle up some holy ambition after such a happiness. Before we know further what is in it, (for the very first sound of it imports some special and incomparable privilege,) might not our hearts be inflamed, and ought we not to enquire at our own hearts, and speak thus unto them, Have I lived so long a stranger to God, the fountain of my life? Am I so far bewitched with the deceitful vanities of the world, as not to think it incomparably better, to rise up above all created things to communicate with the Father and the Son? And shall I go hence without God and without Christ, when fellowship with them is daily, freely, and plentifully holden forth? I beseech you consider where it must begin, and what must be laid down for the foundation of this communion, even your union with Jesus Christ, the mediator between God and man; and you cannot be one with him, but by forsaking yourselves, and believing in him; and thence flows that constant abode and dwelling in him, which is the mutual

entertainment of Christ and a soul, after their meeting together,—"Can two walk together except they be agreed?" We are by nature enemies to God; now, certainly reconciliation and agreement must intervene by the blood of the cross, before any friendly and familiar society be kept. Let this, then, be your first study, and it is first declared in the gospel, Jesus Christ is holden out as partaking with you in all your infirmities. He is represented as having fellowship with us in our sins and curses; in our afflictions and crosses. He hath fellowship in our nature, to bear our sins and infirmities. Now, since he hath partaken in these, you are invited to come and have fellowship with him in his gifts and graces; in the precious merits of his death and suffering; in his rising again and returning to glory. And this is the exchange he makes and declares in the gospel,—I have taken your sins and curses, O come and take my graces, and that which is purchased by my blood. Now this is the first beginning of a soul's renewed fellowship with God; and it is the foundation of all that is to come, to embrace this offer, to accept him cordially as he is presented to us; and to pacify and quiet our own hearts by faith in that he hath done. And this being once laid down as the ground-stone, the soul will grow up into more communion with him.

To speak aright of this communion would require more acquaintance with it, than readily will be found amongst us; but it is more easy to understand in what it is exercised and entertained, than to bring up our hearts unto it. Certainly, it must neither be taken so low and wide, as if it consisted all in those external duties and approaches of men unto God; for there is nothing capable of communion with the Father of spirits, but a spirit; and sure I am, the most part of us remove them, and act a little that way. It is a lamentable thing that men pretend to please God with such vain empty shows, and bodily appearances, without any serious exercise of their souls, and attention of their minds in divine worship. Neither yet must it be taken so high, and made so narrow, as if it consisted only in those ravishments of the soul after God, which are joined with extraordinary sweetness and joy, or in such rare pieces of access and liberty; for though that be a part of it, yet it is neither universal to all

God's children, nor yet constant in any. There may be some solid serious attendance on God in his ordinances, which may have more true substantial life in it, and more of the marrow of Christianity in it, though a soul should not be acquainted with those raptures, nor ever carried without the line of an equal walking with God. Therefore that which I would exhort you to, is to acquaint yourselves with Jesus Christ, and you shall find a new way opened in him, by which you may boldly come to God, and having come to God in him, you are called to walk with him, to entertain that acquaintance that is made, till all the distance and estrangedness of your hearts be worn out. And I know not any thing which is more apt, either to beget or preserve this fellowship, than the communication of your spirits often with him in prayer, and with his word in meditation. And this is not to be discharged as a custom, but the love of God within, drawing the heart willingly towards communication with him, and constraining to pour out your requests to him, and wait on him, even though we should not find that sensible sweetness that sometimes is found. It were a happy advancement in this fellowship, if converse with God, whether in prayer and solemn retirements, or in meditation, or in our ordinary walking, were become the delight of our hearts, at least, that they might be carried that way towards the entertaining the thoughts of his majesty, his glory, and grace, and goodness, and wisdom shining everywhere, as from a natural instinct, even when we are not engaged with the present allurements of that sweetness that sometimes accompanies it.

## VII

1 John 1:3, 4—And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full

It was sin that did first break off that fellowship that was between God and man, and cut off that blessed society, in which the honour and happiness of man consisted. But that fundamental bond being loosed, it hath likewise untied all the links of society of men among themselves, and made such a general dispersion and dissipation of mankind, that they are almost like wild beasts, raging up and down; and in this wilder than beasts, that they devour one another, which beasts do not in their own kind; and they are like fishes of the sea, without rule and government. Though there be some remnants of a sociable inclination in all men, that shews itself in their combinings in societies, and erecting governments; yet generally that which is the true bond and ligament of men, which alone can truly knit them together, is broken, that is, love, the love of God and our neighbours. And therefore, notwithstanding of all the means used to reduce, and to contain mankind in order and harmony by government, yet there is nothing but continual rents, distractions, dissipations, divisions, and dissolutions in commonwealths amongst themselves, and between nations; so that all men may be represented as lions, tigers, wolves, serpents, and such like unsociable creatures, till the gospel come to tame them and subdue them, as it is often holden out in the prophets, Isa. 2:4; 11:6, 7, 8, and 65:25.

Now indeed you have here the express end and purpose of the gospel,—to make up these two great breaches in the creature, between God and men, and between men and men. It is a gospel of peace. Wherever it takes hold of men's spirits, it reduceth all to a peaceable temper, joins them to God, and one to another: for the very sum and substance of it is the love of God to mankind, and proposed for this end,—to engage the love of man again; and love is the glue, the cement that alone will conjoin unto this fellowship. It is a strange thing, and much to be lamented, that Christendom should be a field of blood, an aceldama, beyond other places of the world; that, where the gospel is pretended to be received, men have so far put off even humanity, as thus to bite and devour one another. Certainly it is, because where it is preached, it is not believed: therefore, sin taketh occasion by it to become the more sinful. Always

let us take heed to this, that it is the great purpose and grand design of the gospel preached to us, to restore us to a blessed society and fellowship with the Father, and, withal, to a sweet fellowship among ourselves, for both you see are here.

We are called to fellowship with the Father; and what is that, but to have the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ thy father, and thou to be his son by adoption of grace? It is certainly the very marrow and extract of the whole covenant, and all the promises thereof—"I will be your Father, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty," 2 Cor. 6:18. "I go," saith Christ, "to your Father and my Father, and to your God and my God." O what a sweet complication and interchange of relations! Job 20:17

"I will be your God and ye shall be my people." Here is the epitome of all happiness and felicity. In this word all is inclosed, and without this nothing is to be found that deserves the desires of an immortal spirit. For hence it follows, that a soul is filled with the all-fulness of God, Eph. 3:19; for that is made over to thee who believest the gospel, and thou hast as real a right and title to it as men have to their father's inheritance. Then to have fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ is another branch of this dignity; and this is that which introduceth the other. Christ is the middle person, the Mediator between God and man, given for this end,—to recover men from their woful dispersion and separation from God, and reduce them again to that blessed society. And therefore our acquaintance, as it were, first begins with him, and by him we are led to the Father: "No man can come to the Father but by the Son;" therefore, if you have his friendship you have done the business, for he and his Father are one.

Now this fellowship, to branch it forth more particularly, is either real or personal: Real, I mean, κοινωνία, bonorum, a communion of all good things, a communion with him in his nature, offices, and benefits;—and this must be laid down as the foundation-stone of this fellowship. He came near us, to partake of flesh and blood with us,

that we might have a way, a new and living way consecrated, even the vail of his flesh, to come to God by; for certainly this gives boldness to a soul to draw near to God, with some expectation of success and acceptance, when it is seriously considered that our nature is so nearly conjoined already to God. By this step a soul climbs up to the majesty of God; and by means of this, we become partakers of the divine nature, as God of human nature, 2 Pet. 1:4. So by the same degrees we ascend to God that God hath descended to us. He drew near us by our nature, and we, by the intervention of that same, ascend to him, and receive his image and stamp on our souls; for the Lord did stamp his own image upon Christ's human nature, to make it a pattern to us, and to represent to us, as in a visible symbol and pledge, what impression he would put upon us. Then we have fellowship with him in his offices. I need not branch them out severally;—you know what he was anointed for, to be a Priest, to offer sacrifice, and to reconcile us to God, and to make intercession for us: to be a King, to rule us by his word and Spirit, and defend us against our enemies: to be a Prophet, to reveal the will of God to us, and instruct us in the same. Here is a large field of fellowship. We have admittance, by faith in Jesus Christ, to the real advantage and benefit of all these. There is nothing in them but it relates to us, and redounds to us. The living virtue of that sacrifice is as fresh and recent this day, to send up a savour of rest to heaven, and to pacify a troubled conscience, as the first day it was offered. That perfect sacrifice is as available to thy soul, as if thou hadst offered it thyself; and this day ye have the benefit of his prayers in heaven. We partake of the strong cries and tears in the days of his flesh, and of his intercession since, more than of our own supplications. What shall I say? Ye have one to teach you all things that are needful for you, one to subdue your sins under you; and by virtue of fellowship with Jesus Christ in these offices, there is something derived from it, and communicated to us by it, that we should be kings and priests to God our Father: kings to rule over our own spirits and lusts, in as far as grace reigns in us to eternal life, and that is truly an heroic royal spirit, that overcomes himself and the world; and priests, to offer unto God continually the sacrifice of prayer and praises, 1 Pet. 1:3, 4,

5, which are sweet-smelling and pleasant in his sight; yea, we should offer up our own bodies as a reasonable service, Rom. 12:1; and this is a holy and living sacrifice, when we dedicate and consecrate all our faculties, members, and abilities to his will and service; and do not spare to kill our lusts, which are his and our enemies.

Let us sum up all in this,—whatsoever grace or gift is in Christ Jesus, whatsoever pre-eminence he hath above angels and men; whatsoever he purchased, he purchased by his obedient life, and patience in death; there is nothing of all that, but the soul may be admitted to fellowship in it, by its union with him by faith. Have him, and have all that he hath: faith makes him yours, and all that he hath is a consequential appendix to himself. The word of the gospel offers him freely to you, with all his benefits, interests, and advantages. O that our hearts may be induced to open to him!

Now being thus united to Jesus Christ, that which I would persuade you next to, is a personal communion, that is, a suitable entertainment of him, a conjunction of your soul to him by love, and a conspiracy of all your endeavours henceforth to please him. It is certain, that true friendship is founded on a conjunction and harmony of souls by affection, by which they cease to be two, and become in a manner one; for love makes a kind of transport of the soul into another, and then all particular and proper interests are drowned in oblivion,—no more mine and thine, but he makes an interchange, mine thine, and thine mine, my heart thine, and thy honour mine. Now certain it is, that in this God hath given us a rare pattern, and leads us the way; for he declares his love to the world in the rarest effects of it, which give the clearest demonstrations possible,—"God so loved the world that he sent his Son." And you have the most infallible argument of the Son's love,—"Greater love hath no man than this," to lay down his life for his friends,—but he for his enemies. Now then, you see the heart of God and his Son Jesus Christ is fixed from everlasting on the sons of men; so unalterably, and so fully set towards them, that it hath transported the Son out of his own glory, and brought him down in the state of a

servant. But it is not yet known what particular persons are thus fixed upon, until that everlasting love break out from under ground, in the engagement of thy soul's love to him; and till he have fastened this chain, and set this seal on thy heart, which makes thee impatient to want him. Thou knowest not the seal that was on his heart from eternity. But now the love of a believer being the result of his love,—this is it that is the source and spring of constant communion, and it vents itself in converse with God, and daily entertainment of him in our spirits and ways. There is a keeping of company with him in prayer and meditation, and all the ordinances. There is a communication and familiar conference of the heart with him, either in thinking on him, or pouring out our requests to him. There is a mutual and daily intercourse and correspondence of that soul with God, in answering his word by obedience, in praying to him, and receiving answers from him, and then returning his answer again with a letter of thanks and praise, as it were. These are the ways to increase that love of God, and kindle it up to a higher flame; and it being thus increased, it gathers in all the endeavours and abilities of the soul, and sets all on fire, as a sweet-smelling sacrifice to please him. It is henceforth the great study of the soul, to remove all things that are offensive to him; for the entertaining of sin, his enemy, is most inconsistent with this true fellowship and friendship. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me," Psal. 66:18. This will mar that sweet correspondence in prayer and praises; for it is a breach of peace and covenant to regard and maintain his enemies. Therefore the soul that loves God, will study to compose itself in all things to his good pleasure, as well as his love, that is strong as death, puts him upon a careful watching, to do all things for our profit; and so this takes in our whole carriage and walking in religious approaches, or in common businesses, to have this our great design,—conversing with God and walking to all well-pleasing.

Now if we were once enrolled in this blessed fellowship with the Father and the Son, then it follows, as a fruit and result of this, that we should have fellowship one with another. And truly the more unity with God, the more unity amongst ourselves: for he is the

uniting, cementing principle, he is the centre of all Christians; and as lines, the further they are from the centre, the further distant they are one from another, so the distance and elongation of souls from God, sets them at further distance amongst themselves. The nearer we come every one to Jesus Christ, the nearer we join in affection one to another; and this is imported in that of Christ's prayer, "That they may be one in us," John 17:21, 22. No unity but in that one Lord, and no perfect unity, but in a perfect union with him. I would exhort to study this more,—to have fellowship one with another, as members of the same body, by sympathy, by mutual helping one another in spiritual and temporal things. Even amongst Christians that live obscurely in a city, in a village, there is not that harmonious agreement and consent of hearts, that contention and plea of love, of gentleness and forbearance, who shall exercise most of that: but there are many jealousies, heart-burnings, grudgings, strifes, evil-speakings, &c., to the stumbling of others, and the weakening of yourselves, which certainly argue that ye are much carnal, and walk as men, and that the love of God, and fellowship with him, is waxed cold, and is languished and dead, &c.

## VIII

1 John 1:4—And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full

All motions tend to rest and quietness. We see it daily in the motions below, and we believe it also of the circular revolutions of the heavens above, that there is a day coming in which they shall cease, as having performed all they were appointed for. And as it is in things natural, so it is in things rational in a more eminent way. Their desires, affections, and actions, which are the motions and stretches of the soul towards that it desires and apprehends as good, tends of their own nature, and are directed by the very intention of

the soul, to some rest and tranquillity, some joy and contentation of spirit. If other things that have no knowledge, have their centre of rest, how much more must man, who is an understanding creature, have it by the ordination and appointment of God? But there is this wide difference in the point of capacity of happiness between man and other creatures, that they, whatsoever excellent virtues or properties they have, yet know them not themselves, and so can neither enjoy what excellency themselves have, nor have use of what is in others. For to what purpose is it to shine forth, if there be no eye to see? What advantage hath the rose in its fragrancy, if it cannot smell itself? That which is not perceived, is as if it were not. And therefore it is an evident testimony, that all these visible things were created, not for themselves, but for man's sake, who knows them, can use them, and enjoy them. Here is then the peculiar capacity that God hath given to man,—to discern and know what he seeks, what he hath, and possesses, that so he may be able to enjoy it, or use it, according to the nature of it. This is a great point of God's image and conformity with him, whose infinite blessedness and joy riseth from that perfect comprehension and intuitive beholding of himself, and his own incomprehensible riches. So then, man's happiness or misery must depend upon this, both what the soul fixeth upon, and what it apprehendeth to be in it. For, if that eternal and universal good, the all-fulness of God, be the centre of the soul's desires and endeavours, and there be apprehended and discovered in God that infinite excellency and variety of delights, which nothing else can afford so much as a shadow of, then there cannot but result from such a conjunction of the soul's apprehension, suitable to the fulness of God, and of the excellency and goodness of God, suitable to the desires of the soul, such a rest and tranquillity, such joy and satisfaction, as cannot choose but make the soul infinitely happier than the enjoyment of any other thing could do.

This being the thing then, which all men's desires naturally tend unto; this tranquillity and perfect satisfaction of the heart being that which carries all men's hearts after it, and that which men seek for itself, and which they seek in all other things, the great misery of

man is, that he mistakes the way to it, and seeks it where it is not to be found. The generality of men are so far degenerated both from the impression of a divine majesty, and the sense of an immortal being within themselves, that they imagine to content and ease their own hearts, in these outward, unconstant, perishing things; and so their life is spent in catching at shadows, in feeding on the wind, in labouring in the fire. There is nothing so plentifully satisfies our expectations, as can quit the cost, and recompense the expense of our labour, toil, grief, and travel about it. There is nothing therefore but a continual, restless agitation of the heart, from one thing to another, and that in a round, circling about, from one thing that now displeases or disappoints, to things that were formerly loathed; as a sick man turns him from one side to another, or changes beds often, and at length returns, expecting to find some ease where he lay at first. And it may be judged, that all circular motions are eternal, and so they can never be supposed to attain their end; that is, rest and tranquillity. Therefore a soul thus carried in a round, by the vain imaginations of his heart, is likely never to settle and find solid rest and peace. Nay, how is it possible that they can give that tranquillity and contentation to the heart and soul of man, that are so utterly in their natures disproportioned to it? Both because they are only suited to the senses, and likewise that they are changeable. Now the soul is framed with a higher capacity, and can no more be satiated with visible things, than a man that is hungry can be satisfied with gold; and besides, it is immortal, and must have something to survive all the changes of time, and therefore is likely to rest no where, but in that which hath eternal stability. Now, though these things cannot truly fill the heart, yet they swell the belly, like the east-wind, or like the prodigal's husks,—fill it with wind, which causeth many torments and distempers in the soul; and though they cannot give ease, yet they may be as thorns to prick and pierce a man through with many sorrows, as our Saviour speaks. So that there is no more wisdom or gain in this, than in gathering an armful of thorns, and inclosing and pressing hard unto them,—the more hardly and strongly we grip them, the more grievously they pierce us; or as if a man would flee into a hedge of thorns in a tempest,—the further

he thrust into it, he is the worse pricked: and that which he is fallen into is worse than that he fleeth from. I am sure all your experiences give a harmonious testimonious testimony to this, that there is no solid, permanent, constant, and equable heart-joy and contentation in all the fancied and imaginary felicities that this world adores. There is nothing of these things, that is not lesser, and lower in actual possession, nor in the first apprehension of them afar off. Nothing in them answers either our desires or expectations; and therefore, instead of peace and tranquillity, they breed more inward torment and disquiet, because of that necessary and inevitable disappointment that attends them. Therefore the apostle passeth all these things in silence, when he is to write of purpose, to give a fulness of joy; for he knows that in them there is neither that joy, nor that fulness of joy he would wish for from them; but it is other things he writes for this end.

Now indeed there hath been some wiser than others, that have their apprehension far above the rest of mankind, and have laboured to frame some rules and precepts to lead man into this true rest and tranquillity. And truly, in this they have done much to discover the vanity and madness of the common practice of men, and to draw man from sensible and outward things, to things invisible and spiritual. Yet there is a defectiveness in all the rules that natural reason can reach unto. There is some crookedness withal adheres to them, which shews our departure from our original. There are many excellent discourses of morality in heathen writings, which may be very subservient to a Christian, and useful to the composing and settling of his mind, amidst all the fluctuations and uncertainties of this world. They may come well in as subsidies and guards to a Christian's heart, to preserve that peace and joy it hath from God, and keep out the ordinary tumultuous passions that disturb the most part of men. But here is the lamentable failing, that while they call a man off things without, as adventitious, they lead him but into his own spirit within, as if he could there find that rest in the very enjoyment of his poor, miserable, wretched self. But Christ Jesus calls us into our own spirits, not to dwell there; for O what a

loathsome and irksome habitation is a defiled heart, and a guilty conscience! But rather, that finding nothing of that joy and refreshment within, we may then freely and fully forsake ourselves, as well as the world without, and transport into God in Christ, the only habitation of joy and delight, that being filled with anguish from the world, and from ourselves, we may more willingly divorce from both, and agree to join unto Jesus Christ, and to embrace him in our hearts, who is the only fountain of life and joy; who had no other errand and business from heaven, but to repair man's joy,—as grievous a breach as any in the creation,—a thing as much missed and sought after, as any thing, yea, sought after in all things that are sought: John 15:11, "These things I have spoken to you, that your joy may be full." Therefore the apostle propounds this as the end of his writing on this subject, "The Word of life; these things I write that your joy may be full;" and the way to attain the fulness of joy, he expressed in the former verse, "by fellowship with the Father and the Son."

That which makes all other things disproportioned to the soul of man, to give it this joy, is the extreme unsuitableness between them. The soul hath an infinite capacity, and, besides, an immortality of endurance, but they are condemned under impotency to supply that infinite void and inconstancy, by which they must needs perish, and leave the soul without all comfort, and with more anxiety. But in those things written here, we find all things suited and proportioned to the very great exigence of the soul. There is a suitableness in them, because of their spiritual nature, whereby they may close immediately with thy spirit. Other things are material and corporeal, and what union, what fellowship can a spirit be supposed to have with them? They are extrinsic, advenient things, that never come to a nearer union with thy soul; and though they could, they would debase thy soul, and not exalt it, because of a baser inferior nature. But these things,—Jesus Christ, eternal life in him, these precious promises of the gospel, these spiritual privileges of sonship, &c., these are of a more divine nature, and by meditation and faith souls come to close with them. These are inward things more near the soul

that believes, than himself is to himself; and so he may always carry them about in his heart, which may be a spring of everlasting joy. "This no man can take from him." John 16:22. For the ground and fountain is inward, seated without the reach of all these vicissitudes and changes. Then, as they have a suitableness, so they have a fulness in them, to create fulness of joy. They are cordials to the heart, things that are in their own nature refreshing to the soul, and apt to beget heart-joy. Other things are not suitable to this, to produce any such inward soul-complacency. The things that are from without reach not so deep as the heart; they make their impressions rather on the outward senses, to tickle and please them, or the countenance, to put some pleasing shape upon it. But the wise man pronounceth all those joys that arise from external things, to be superficial, only skin deep. "In the midst of laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness," Prov. 14:13. *Extrema gaudii luctus occupat.* There is no solid recreation to the soul, in its retired thoughts, from all the delights of the senses; it is but like the pleasure of the itch, which no man esteems pleasure. But besides, as the things of the gospel affect the heart and soul, by bringing soul-mercies, and treasures, as forgiveness of sin, hope of heaven, &c., so there is a fulness in them, which may answerably fill all the corners of the heart with joy. There is an unexhaustedness in these things, an universality in Christ;—"all in all, all the treasures of wisdom are in him;" and may not this cause surely a high spring-tide of joy? The heart is eased upon the lowest clear apprehension of Christ and the gospel. It gives a heart serenity and calmness to a troubled soul, that nothing else could do. Yet to make up the fulness of joy, as well as the solidity of it; to extend the measure of it, as well as to beget the true quality, it is requisite that not only there be a fulness in the object,—that is, full, superabundant, ample matter of rejoicing; but there must be a kind of fulness in the apprehension. It must be represented fully as it is, and the clouds of unbelief scattered; and then indeed, upon the full aspect of the gospel, and Christ in it, there is a fulness of joy that flows into the soul, as the sea is filled upon the full aspect of the moon. Oh! that we could believe this, that there is a fulness of joy here, and no where else. Certainly

this alone being pondered and sunk into our hearts, would be a powerful reformer in us, and among us. How would it carry men's hearts to a disgracing and despising all the things that are held in admiration by men! How would it turn the channel of men's judgments, opinions, affections, and conversations! For certainly whithersoever the tide of joy flows, thither the heart is carried, and this it is that all men are seeking, though they take many contrary and divers ways, as their own fancy leads them. Now, if once this were established in thy soul, that here is that truth and fulness of joy, which elsewhere is ignorantly and vainly sought, would it not divert thy desires, and turn the current of thy affections and endeavours, to fall into this ocean of gladness and delight? Elsewhere there is neither true joy, nor full joy,—*nec verum ec plenum gaudium*. There is no verity in it; it is but an external garb and shadow, and there is no plenty or fulness. It fills not the hand of the reaper, it satisfieth not his very hunger. But here, when a soul is possessed with Christ by faith, and dwelleth in God by love, there is both reality and plenty. All the dimensions of the heart may be filled up. Some allegorize upon the triangular composition of men's heart, that no orbicular thing, such as this world, can fill it exactly without vacuity, but only the blessed and holy Trinity. Truly we may conceive this fulness of joy, excluding all the latent griefs of the heart, and filling up all the vacant corners, doth flow from that blessed fellowship of the Father and the Son. Now, though these two be only mentioned, yet the Holy Ghost must not be excluded, for the apostolic prayer doth attribute chiefly our fellowship with God to the Spirit; so that it is the Spirit unites our hearts, and associates them to God, and that seems to correspond between him and us. So then there is such a fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, that leaves no vacuity in the heart, that fills all the dimensions and corners of it with peace and joy.

But add unto this, in the third place, that these things have not only a fulness, but withal a durableness; not only plenty, but besides, eternity and perpetuity, to correspond to the immortality of the soul. And this certainly is a great congruity, and so makes up much beauty

and harmony; for what more incongruous and unsuitable, than for an immortal spirit to spend itself, and give up itself to that which is not, which must leave it, which is mortal, and fading in its own nature, without which, it must continue infinitely longer than it can enjoy it? And what more comely, than for an immortal thing to associate with eternal things, and to derive its joy from an eternal spring? For when all things visible are done away, and things mortal abolished, then its joy none can take from it; because it takes its joy from that which must survive all these changes. Suppose any thing could for the present give a fulness of joy, and absolute content to the heart, yet if we imagine that that thing may be separated and disjoined from the heart, and cease to be, certainly the very expectation of such an eternal separation would almost extinguish all the joy, and make it dry up of the fulness: for, may a soul think, what shall I do for ever when this well dries? Whence shall I draw water of joy? Out of what well? But now, that fear is removed, and the soul needs not lose the sweetness of the present enjoyment of God, through anxious foresight of the future, because he may know, that the perfect fulness that shall never ebb, is but coming, and the sun is but ascending yet towards the meridian, from whence he shall never go down, but stand fixed, to the eternal wonder and delight of angels and men.

Now, though it be true, that Christians here, have neither that plenty, nor that perpetuity of this joy, that the object of it gives ground for; though their hearts be often filled with griefs and sorrows, partly from outward, partly from inward evils and afflictions; yet certainly this ariseth but from the dark apprehension, dim belief, and slight consideration of those things that Christ spoke, and his apostles wrote unto us. We might, no question, keep our hearts in more peace and tranquillity, in all the commotions of the times, or alterations in ourselves, if we did more stedfastly believe the gospel, and keep more constant fellowship with God. But, however it be, there is radically a fulness of joy in every believer's heart. That seed is sown, that shall one day be ripe, of fulness of joy; it is always lying at the root, and reserved for them. O let us lay these things to heart, which being laid

to heart, and laid up in the heart, will fill it with this sweet fragrant perfume of peace and joy! They are written for this end; let us hear them for this end too, that our joy may be full. It is true, indeed, that this fulness of joy suits only the life to come, when the vessel is both enlarged and strengthened to contain it. Things that have strong spirits in them, must have strong new bottles, such as our crazy mortal bodies are not; therefore the Lord hath reserved the just fulness, the overflowings of this joy, for the time that the soul shall be purified from all sin, and the body delivered from all corruption. Because that sin lurks in many corners of the heart now, therefore this joy cannot fill up the heart and all the vacuities of it; for it is of so pure and heavenly a nature, that it will not compound and intermingle with sin or sinful lusts. But when nothing of that remains in the heart then it flows in apace, and leaves no corner of the heart unsatisfied and unsupplied. I would have you, who get some tastes of this joy and peace by the way, not disquieted and troubled, because it abides not to be ordinary food. If you be set down again to your ordinary spare diet of manna in the wilderness, and have not these first fruits and grapes of Canaan often sent to you, think it not strange, for the fulness which you seek you are not capable of here, but you shall be capable of it hereafter. You ought with patience to wait for that day, "when your joy shall be full," as Christ is full; full measure heaped up, and running over, will he mete out unto you then; and this shall be without the fear of any ebb or diminution of it for all eternity. Neither shall this fulness, and constant fulness, cloy the soul or breed any satiety in it. There is fulness of joy without surfeit, without satiety; that which they have, they shall always desire, and that which they desire, they shall always have: everlasting desire and everlasting delight being married together in their fulness. But yet so much is attainable here, as may truly be called fulness, in regard of the world. The fulness of joy that all the pleasures of this earth can afford, is but scarcity and want, to the inward fulness of joy and contentation the poorest believers may have in God, reconciled in Christ. That which the wise man gives as the character of all earthly joy suits well, "I said of laughter, it is mad; and of mirth, what doeth it?" Eccl. 2:2. Truly, it cannot be supposed

to be more real than that which is the ground and spring of it. It must be a perfunctorious, superficial, and empty joy, that is derived and distilled from such vanities. Nay, there is a madness in it besides, for men's apprehensions to swell so excessively towards poor, narrow, and limited things. It is a monster in reason, to put such a value upon nothing, and make ourselves glad upon our own dreams and fancies. There is such a manifest abuse and violation of reason in it, that it can be supposed to proceed from nothing but a distemper in men's hearts. But besides this, there are two other characters of it given, Prov. 14:13, "Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness." There is no pure earthly joy; for it hath always a mixture of grief and sadness in the inward retired closet of the heart. It is of such deadness and inefficacy, that it drives not out of the heart all discontentments, and anxieties; but if the most jovial man, that seems to be transported with his delights, would but retire within and examine his own conscience, he would find those delights have but little power to affect his heart. He will find terrible and dreadful representations there, that his joys may well for a time darken them, but cannot drive them away. And then it is the very natural law and fatal necessity that grief follows those joys at the heels, yea, is perpetually attending them, to come in their place. God hath so conjoined them together, and so disposed them, that men's joy shall be mingled with grief, but their grief is pure and unmixed; and that he who draws up joy to him from the creatures, must draw grief and vexation in that same chain, inseparably annexed to it by the wise ordination of God.

But there are joys of the Holy Ghost arising from the intimation and apprehension of the gospel, from the consideration of the grace and goodness of God manifested in it, and the experience of that in the soul, which are of another stamp and nature. These, indeed, affect the heart, and give the answer of a good conscience in the blood of Christ, which is a continual feast. These drive out the bitter and dreadful apprehensions of sin and wrath; these sweeten and refresh the soul in all worldly afflictions and griefs. "The heart of man knoweth his own bitterness, and a stranger doth not intermeddle

with his joy." Prov. 13:10. Indeed, the torments and perplexities of a troubled soul are better felt by themselves than known by others, and so are the joys of that heart that apprehends Jesus Christ, and peace purchased in him. They are such as no man that is a stranger to such things in his experience can apprehend. It is a joy unspeakable O what unspeakable content gives it to the heart! And truly if you did not interpose the clouds of unbelief and sin between you and his shining countenance, there needed not be so often an eclipse in the joys of believers. Yet the day is coming that ye shall see him fully as he is, and nothing be interposed between you and him, and then your joy shall be full, &c.

## IX

1 John 1:5—This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, &c.

The great design of the gospel is to make up the breach of man's joy, and open up the way to the fulness of it; and therefore it is the good news and glad tidings of great joy, the only best message that ever came to the world. Now it shews unto us the channel in which this river of gladness and joy runs; it discovers what is the way of the conveyance of it to the soul, and what are the banks it runs between; and that is fellowship with the Father and the Son. In this channel that river of delight runs, between the banks of the love of God to us, and our love to him. Herein a soul is happy, and accounts itself happy; and truly, in so much do we profit by the word, and answer the design of the gospel, by how much we estimate our happiness from this alone from the communication of God to us. Whensoever the gospel takes hold of your hearts, it will undoubtedly frame them to this, to a measuring of all blessedness from God alone. And this will carry the heart to an undervaluing of all other things, as being too low, and unworthy for this end; and so to a forsaking of every

thing for the closer enjoyment of God. I fear many believers are little acquainted with this joy, because they draw not their joy singly out of the pure fountain of delight, but turn aside to other external comforts, and drown their souls in them. Now, indeed, these two cannot well consist together. If we take in any thing else to make up our happiness and comfort, so much we lose of God, and that which is truly spiritual, and therefore our hearts would be more purified from carnal delights; if we would have experience of this joy, we must hang only upon his countenance and company, else we lose the sweetness of it.

Now the apostle prosecutes this further, to discover what conformity must be between them that should keep this fellowship; and what likeness of nature and qualities is necessary for them who would be happy in God's society. "This is the message we have heard," saith he, "and which we declare unto you, that God is light," &c. Take this jointly with that which went before; "this we declare, that ye may have fellowship with the Father and the Son." And to the end this fellowship may hold and yield you fulness of joy, it is necessary that the nature of God be laid down as the pattern to which ye must be conformed,—"God is light;" and therefore you must be light too, if ye would have fellowship with that pure light. Now this, I say, is the full message of the gospel, that which was sent down from heaven with the Son of God, the messenger of the covenant, and which the apostles heard from him. Indeed, the very manner of the proposal of these things stirs up our hearts to attention, and makes us more serious than commonly we are. That there is one, and such an one sent from heaven, with such an embassy as this is, to invite us to society with God again; one whose interest lies in this to make us happy; and this he declares unto us, that he hath no other design but to fulfil our joy. O how powerful might this be on our hearts, to conquer them, to make them willingly hearken to him! Any message that comes from heaven should be received with great reverence and respect of mortal men; because it comes from the court and palace of the great king. But when this is the substance of it, to make us happy in himself, to advance us to this incomparable dignity of society with

himself, in which society there is a fulness of joy, then how should we receive it with open hearts, and entertain it gladly! If we could take it always thus as a messenger from heaven, and look upon it, and hear it in that notion, I think the fruit would be incomparably greater; for what is it that makes it dead and ineffectual in men's hearts, but that the apprehension of it degenerates and falls down from God to creatures; because it is not taken so as his word, carrying the stamp of his divine authority? We bring it forth, not as a message from him, but as from ourselves; and you receive it not as from him, but from us; and thus it is adulterated and corrupted on both hands. My beloved, let us jointly mind this, that whatsoever we have to declare is a message from God to mortal men; and therefore let us so compose ourselves in his sight, as if he were speaking to us. The conscience of a very heathen was awaked, when Ehud told him he had a message from God to him, "Eglon arose out of his seat," that he might hear it reverently, Judg. 3:20, though it was a bloody message, as it proved in the event. Yet so much the common dictates of reason might teach you, that ye should arise and compose yourselves to reverend and awful attention to what the Lord God will speak. But when, moreover, we know that the sum of the message is to make us blessed, and raise us up to communion with him in his joy and happiness, we are not only called to reverence, as to God, but to ardent affection and desire, as to him who by all means seeks our happiness. O how happy were he that could first hear and receive this message from him, and then declare it to others! But, however, though we should fail in that, this doth not change either the authority or nature of the message itself; and therefore, if men should be so far destitute of God, as not to bring it from him immediately, yet do not you forsake your own mercy too; but receive it as that which is come forth from God; receive it for itself, as carrying in its bosom a fulness of joy to you; and receive it for his sake who moved this embassy first after sinners, and his sake who carried it to sinners, that is, for the Father and Son, to whose fellowship you are here invited. Let us then hear the message.

"This then is the message, that God is light," &c. The ground of communion of persons is, their union in nature, or likeness one to another. There is some general society between all mankind, as being conjoined in one common nature; but the contracting of that in narrower bounds of affinity and consanguinity, doth enlarge the affection the more. You see it is natural for those who are joined by such relations of blood one to another, to love one another more than others out of these bonds. But true friendship draws the circle yet narrower, and contracts the love that is scattered abroad to mankind in a strange channel, to run towards one, or a few; and the foundation of this is some peculiar and particular similitude, and likeness in manners, and sympathy of disposition, which makes the souls of men to melt one into another, after some converse and acquaintance together. This is the bond that knits this near society; some conformity necessarily presupposed to communion and fellowship. Now, that which holds so in the communion of man with man, must be much more needful in man's communion with God: for all the societies, combinations, and conjunctions of the creatures, are but shadows of this higher communication of the spirit of man with God the Father of spirits. And, indeed we may find some rude draughts and resemblances of this divine society, and of the rule according to which it must be modelled, in all the friendly or near conjunctions of creatures; for every thing is best preserved, and agreeth best with things of its own nature. See the disposition of the parts of the world; things contiguous and nearest other are also likest in nature one to another. So it is among men; the several agreements and symbolizings of men's spirits in different qualities and tempers, make several sorts of men, and part them into so many companies: *Pares paribus congregantur, simile simili gaudet.*

Now, my beloved, this same supernatural and divine society that we speak of, must be constituted according to this fundamental rule, that is, it is necessary, to the end that God and man may have fellowship together, that they come nearer in likeness one to another. Now for God, you know he cannot be liker us, for he is unchangeably holy and good. That were most absurd to bring down his majesty to

partake of our wretched infirmities of sin and darkness. Indeed in this he hath come as far as his own nature and our good would permit, to communicate in our nature, and all the sinless infirmities of it. It is impossible then, that he should make up the distance by any change in himself; but we must be changed, and some way raised up to partake of the purity of his nature, and be transformed into some likeness to him, and then is the foundation of society and fellowship laid down. This is the apostle's meaning, in declaring to us what God is, that according to that pattern, and in that glass we may see what to conform ourselves to, and may have a particular determination of the great qualification of those who pretend to have fellowship with God. "God is light, and in him is no darkness." Now take the just opposition,—man is darkness, and in him is no light. Now, what communion then can light have with darkness? Either the light must become darkness, or the darkness become light; either the light must leave its glorious purity, and forsake its nature, which cannot be admitted, or else the darkness of men's souls must be wiped off, and abolished by the brightness of God's light; and then there may be a communion between the primitive light and the derivative light, between the original light and that which flows out from the original. But take darkness remaining darkness, and light remaining light, and they cannot compeone together; for the first great separation that was made in the world, was between light and darkness: "And God saw the light that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness," Gen. 1:4. And so it is impossible for men that live in the darkness of their minds, in ignorance, and in the darkness of sinful lusts, that they can have any fellowship with God, who is a fountain of pure light, and undefiled sanctity. "What hast thou to do to take my covenant in thy mouth," &c.; and this God saith to the wicked. It is an incongruous and unsuitable thing, for man to pretend nearness and interest in this God, and yet be buried in darkness and hatred of the light of personal reformation, as a gold ring in a swine's nose, that rather deforms the jewel than beautifies the beast: so are the pretensions of ignorant and wicked men to this divine society, &c.

## X

1 John 1:5—This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, &c.

Who is a fit messenger to declare this message? Can darkness comprehend the light, or apprehend it? Or can those that are blind form any lively notion of light, to the instruction and persuasion of others? Truly, no more can we conceive or speak of God, who is that pure light, than a blind man can discourse on colours, or a deaf man on sounds. Who is blind as the Lord's servant? and therefore, who are more unmeet to declare this message of light? What reverence and godly fear ought this to be declared withal, when mortal man speaks of the eternal God unto men? What composure of spirit should be in us? What trembling and adoration? For, at our best, we can but declare our own ignorance; and the furthest attainment in this knowledge is but a further discovery of man's darkness. We have three ways of creeping towards that glorious light of God. First, his own works are like some visible appearances of that invisible and incomprehensible God; and in these we know him, but not what he is in himself. Consider how dark and dull we are in piercing into the hidden natures of things, even below us, as beasts and plants. We behold some effects flow from them, but from what principle these do flow, that we know not: how much less can we apprehend anything suitable of the divine majesty, that is infinitely above us, from these wonderful and glorious works of his power and wisdom? Man is endowed with wisdom to do some excellent works of art, as planting, grassing, building, painting, weaving, and such like. But the beasts that are below us cannot apprehend from these works what the nature of man is. Now is there not a more infinite distance, a greater disproportion between us and the divine nature, so that we cannot rise up to an understanding notion of it, in itself? Nay, besides, one man will do many things which another cannot

understand,—he beholds the art of it, he sees the matter, but yet he cannot pierce into the mind of the workman, and look upon that wisdom and idea of his mind. Therefore all that we can conclude from these wonderful works of God, is some silent admiration of him. If these be such, then what must he be? How infinitely distant from them, and transcendent over them? But what he is, these cannot declare, and we cannot apprehend. Then we use to climb up to the knowledge of God, by attributing to him all the perfections, excellencies, and eminencies of the creatures. Whatsoever commends them, we apprehend that originally and infinitely in him; and thus we spell out that name that is most simply one, in many letters and characters, according to our mean capacity, as children when they begin to learn. So we ascribe to him wisdom, goodness, power, justice, holiness, mercy, truth, &c. All which names being taken from the creatures, and so having significations suited to our imperfections, they must needs come infinitely short of him, and so our apprehensions of them. These are scattered among the creatures, therefore they cause divers conceptions in us; but all these are united in him. He is a most simple, pure Being, that eminently and virtually is all things; and properly is none of all.

Another way we have of apprehending him, by way of negation, denying all the imperfections of the creatures, and removing them at an infinite distance from him; and truly, though this be an imperfection in knowledge, yet it is the greatest knowledge we can attain to, to know rather what he is not, than what he is. He is not limited to any place, nor bounded with any measures and degrees of perfection, as creatures are; therefore we call him infinite: he is not comprehended within the limits of time, but comprehends all within himself; therefore he is eternal: he is not subject to changes and alterations; therefore called immutable: he is not compounded, as a result of divers parts; therefore he is most purely simple, and one: he is not like those things we see and hear, that fall under our senses; therefore we call him a Spirit, or a spiritual Being. Now, in all these weak endeavours of man, to detain and fix his own spirit in the contemplation of God, if he cannot reach the understanding of what

God is, yet certainly he will attain this great point of wisdom,—not to be ignorant of his own ignorance. And truly, my beloved, this is the thing I would have us to learn to know, that the admiration of God in silence is the best expression of him. We would not search into these mysteries, to satisfy our curiosity, but rather compose our hearts to a continual silent wondering before him; for where our understandings are confounded, and our minds overwhelmed with the infiniteness of that glory, so that we can see nothing but our ignorance of all, this should certainly compose all to quiet admiration, for silence and wonder is the proper and natural posture of a soul that is at a stand, and can neither win [i.e. get] forward for inaccessible light, nor will retire backward, for that it apprehends already.

"This then is the message, that God is light;" because we cannot conceive in our poor narrow minds what God is in himself, therefore he expresseth to us often in similitudes to the creatures, and condescends to our capacity. As he stands in manifold relations to us, so he takes the most familiar names, that may hold out to our dull senses what we may expect of him. Therefore he calls himself a Father, a King, a Husband, a Rock, a Buckler, and strong Tower, a Mountain, and whatsoever else they may represent to our hearts, that which may strengthen them in believing. But there is no creature so directly attributed to God, as light: none used to express his very nature and being, as abstracted from these relations, but this—"God is light;" and Christ takes it to himself—"the light of the world," and "the life of men." The truth is, it hath some excellency in it above all other visible creatures, that it may fitly carry some resemblance to him. The scripture calls "light his garment," Psal. 104:2. And truly it is a more glorious robe of majesty than all the royal and imperial robes and garments of state that either angels or men could contrive. The light is, as it were, a visible appearance of the invisible God. He hath covered his invisible nature with this glorious garment, to make himself in a manner visible to man. It is true, that light is but, as it were, a shadow of that inaccessible light, umbra Dei. It is the dark shadow of God, who is himself infinitely more beautiful and glorious. But yet, as to us, it hath greater glory

and majesty in it, than any creature besides. It is the chief of the works of God, without which the world would be without form, and void. It is the very beauty of the creation, that which gives lustre and amiableness to all that is in it, without which the pleasantest paradise would become a wilderness, and this beautiful structure, and adorned palace of the world, a loathsome dungeon. Besides the admirable beauty of it, it hath a wonderful swift conveyance, throughout the whole world, the upper and lower, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. It is carried from the one end of heaven to the other in a moment, "and who can say by what way the light is parted?" Job 38:24. Moreover, it carries alongst with it a beautiful influence, and a refreshing heat and warmth, which is the very life and subsistence of all the creatures below. And so, as there is nothing so beautiful, so nothing so universally and highly profitable. And to all this, add that singular property of it, that it is not capable of infection; it is of such absolute purity, that it can communicate itself to the dunghill, as well as to the garden, without receiving any mixture from it. In all the impurities it meets withal, it remains unmixed and untainted, and preserves its own nature entire. Now you may perceive, that there is nothing visible that is fitter to resemble the invisible God, than this glorious, beautiful, pure, and universally communicable creature, light.

Hereby you may have shadowed out unto you the nature of God, that he is an all-knowing, intelligent Being. As light is the first and principal visible thing, yea, that which gives visibility to all things, and so is in its own nature a manifestation of all things material and bodily; so God is the first object of the understanding—*primum intelligibile, et primum intelligens*. Nothing so fit an emblem of knowledge as light, and truly in that respect God is the original light, a pure intellectual light, that hath in himself the perfect idea and comprehension of all things. He hath anticipated in himself the knowledge of all, because all things were formed in his infinite understanding, and lay, as it were, first hid in the bowels of his infinite power. Therefore he is a globe or mass of light and knowledge, like the sun, from whom nothing is hid: "Hell and

destruction are not covered to him." There is no opacity, no darkness or thickness in the creation, that can terminate or bound this light, or hinder his understanding to pierce into it. Now as all things, by the irradiation of the light, become visible, so the participation of this glorious Sun of Righteousness, and the shining of his beams into the souls of men, makes them to partake of that heavenly intellectual nature, and reflects a wonderful beauty upon them, which is not in the rest of the world.

Besides, here is represented to us the absolute purity and perfection of God's nature,—"God is light, and in him is no darkness." Besides the purity of the light of knowledge, there is a purity of the beauty of holiness,—the glorious light of God's virtue, and power, and wisdom, is communicated to all the creatures. There is an universal extent of his influence towards the good and bad, as the sun shines on both, and yet there is no spot or stain upon his holiness or righteousness, from all his intermingling with the creatures, the worst and basest creatures. All his works are holy and righteous, even his works in unholy and unrighteous men. He draws no defilement from the basest of the creatures, nor yet from the sinfulness of it. He can be intimately present and conjoined in working, in virtue and power, in care and providence, with the dirt and mire of the streets, with the beasts of the field, and yet that is no stain upon his honour or credit, as men would suppose it be, no more than it is a dishonour to the sun to shine on the dunghill. In a word, there is no mixture of ignorance, darkness, impurity, or iniquity in him, not the least shadow of change or turning, not the least seed of imperfection;—in regard of him the moon is not clean, and the sun is spotted; in respect of his holiness, angels may be charged with folly.

Then add unto this, to make up the resemblance fuller, the bounty and benignity of his influence upon the world, the flowings forth of his infinite goodness, that enrich the whole earth. Look as the sun is the greatest and most universal benefactor,—his influence and heat is the very renovation of the world; it makes all new, and green, and flourishing; it puts a youth upon the world, and so is the very spring

and fountain of life to all sublunary things. How much is that true of the true light, of the substantial, of whom this sun is but a shadow. He is "the life of the world, and the light of men. Every good gift, and every perfect donation descends from him," James 1:17. His influence is more universal to the being, to the moving, to the living of all things. And then Jesus Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, is carried about in the orb of the gospel, and in his beams there is a healing virtue. These are the refreshments of poor wearied souls, that are scorched with the anger of God. There is an admirable heat and warmth of love and affection that this glorious light carries embosomed in it, and that is it that pierces into souls, and warms hearts, and quickens dead spirits, and puts a new face upon all again. This is the spring of all the life that is truly spiritual, and it hath as sweet and comfortable effects upon the souls of men, who receive the truth in love, the light in love, that is, the light with heat, as ever the sun approaching near the earth hath had upon plants and living creatures.

And to complete the resemblance more, there may be something of the infallibility and incomprehensibility of the divine majesty here represented. For though nothing be clearer than the light, yet there is nothing in its own nature darker than light: that which is so manifest to the eyes, how obscure is it to the understanding. Many debates and inquiries have been about it, but yet it is not known what that is, by which we know all things. Certainly, such is the divine light. It is inconceivable and inexpressible, therefore is he said "to dwell in light inaccessible, and full of glory," 1 Tim. 6:16. There is a twofold darkness that hinders us to see God, a darkness of ignorance in us, and a darkness of inaccessible light in him. The one is a vail upon our hearts, which blinds and darkens the souls of men, that they do not see that which is manifest of God, even in his works. O that cloud of unbelief that is spread over our souls, which hinders the glorious rays of that divine light to shine into them! This darkness Satan contributes much to, who is the prince of darkness, 2 Cor. 4:4. This makes the most part of souls like dungeons within, when the glorious light of the gospel surrounds them without. This earthliness and

carnality of our hearts makes them, like the earth, receive only the light in the upper and outward superface, and not suffer it to be transmitted into our hearts to change them. But when it pleaseth him, who at the first, by a word of power, "commanded light to shine out of darkness," he can scatter that cloud of ignorance, and draw away the veil of unbelief, and can by his power and art, so transform the soul, as to remove its earthly quality, and make it transparent and pure, and then the light will shine into the heart, and get free access into the soul. But though this darkness were wholly removed, there is another darkness, that ariseth not from the want of light, but from the excessive super-abundance of light—*caligo lucis nimiae*; that is, a divine darkness, a darkness of glory, such an infinite excess and superplus of light and glory, above all created capacities, that it dazzles and confounds all mortal or created understandings. We see some shadows of this, if we look up to the clear sun. We are able to see nothing for too much light. There is such an infinite disproportion here between the eye of our mind, and this divine light of glory, that if we curiously pry into it, it is rather confounding and astonishing; and therefore it fills the souls of saints with continual silent admiration and adoration.

## XI

1 John 1:4—This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all

True religion consists not only in the knowledge of God, but especially in conformity to him, and communion with him. Communion and fellowship with God is the great end and design of the gospel, and it is the great result of all a Christian's pains and progress. It is not only the greatest part of religion, but the very reward of religion too, for piety hath its reward of happiness in the bosom of it, without borrowing from external things. Now, that which this sweet and fragrant fruit, which perfumes all the soul with delight, and fills it with joy, springs out of, is conformity to God. Assimilation of nature and disposition, some likeness to God imprinted on the soul again in holy affections and dispositions, a coincidency of our will with the will of God, drowning of it in the sea of his good pleasure, his law in the inward parts. Now what is the root of this conformity, but the knowledge of God? This is that which hath a virtue to transform the soul into his similitude. You see then where true religion begins lowest, and by what means it grows up to the sweet fruit of that eternal joy that shall be pressed out of the grapes of fellowship with God. So then, whatsoever is declared of God unto us in his word, whatsoever is holden forth of him, is not only set forth to be the subject of our knowledge, but especially to be a pattern for imitation, and to be an inflaming motive to our affection. This is the very substance of the verse.

"This then is the message I declare, that God is light;" and this I heard not from Christ only, for the satisfaction of my curiosity, nor do I declare it to you only, that you may know it, as if you had no more to do with it, but especially that ye may know in what ye ought

to be in conformity to that light. The end of your knowing God, is to become liker God, if so be ye would have communion with him.

Let us take this rule, then, to measure all our searchings after God, and inquirings into him. Certainly there ought to be more meditation and inquiry of heart upon this subject, because it is the spring of all life to the soul. It is that which enricheth it most, and fills it with peace, joy, and delight, and brings in a treasure into a man's heart, such as Christ speaks of—"a good man out of the good treasure of his heart," &c. Meditation, much meditation on God, a stayedness and fixedness of spirit upon him, lays up a treasure in the heart. This is it that makes such a difference between the heart and mouth of a righteous man, and a wicked man. The heart of the wicked is little worth, for the total want of this; and therefore, their lips and tongues are void of edification, full of corruption. But where this spring floweth within, it maketh the mouth of a man like a well of life; it maketh his lips like choice silver. O the scantiness and neglect of this amongst Christians, makes all to wither and decay! There is little searching after the Almighty, little employing and entertaining our spirits about him; low, slender, and single thoughts and apprehensions of him, which cannot but cause a deliquium and decay in all the parts of Christianity, when the very sun is eclipsed from us by our ignorance and inconsideration of him: and that so long, it must have dreadful effects upon us. Therefore, let us be exhorted to this study, to give our spirits to this employment,—to think more on God. But, as I was saying, there is need of a rule to measure us in it, and of some caution about it, that is, that we have our end rightly established, what we aim at in inquiring after, or meditating upon God. If it be only to give entertainment to the curiosity of our minds, as in the contemplation of natural things; if it be only to pry into secrets and mysteries, and to labour to comprehend that which is incomprehensible, then we lose our labour, and we are in danger to meet with a consuming fire, instead of instructing and refreshing light. I would therefore have this guarded against,—the insatiable desire and greediness of our minds after the knowledge of secret mysteries. We may set bounds here,

and not overstretch or strain our understandings, to compass his infinite Being, as it is in itself. Let us rather take him up as he is revealed in the scriptures, and so meditate on him as manifested in his word and works, his grace, mercy, power, wisdom, &c. and read his name with delight in those large volumes spread before our eyes, &c.

Now, the just measuring and regulating of all knowledge of God, is to direct it to a further end, to have nothing before us but this, that we may reverence, adore, fear, and love him so much the more. And this is the thing that maketh access to him most easy and sweet, when the design a soul hath, in all its searchings about him, is for this purpose, to the end it may love him, and worship him more suitably, and be more conformed to him, when he is looked upon as a pattern of our conformity, that is, the right apprehension and uptaking of him, to know that God is light, and so to know it, as in it to behold the necessity of what qualification should be in us; that is indeed to know God. My beloved, let us consider that so much we know of God, as we love him, and fear him, and are conformed unto him; for that knowledge, which is not about this work and design, is no other purpose, but to be a witness against a man, and the most heinous aggravation of his sins.

To come then to the particular in hand, "God is light;" and that is holden out and declared for this end, that there may be a pattern of the qualification of all that intend to enter into that society; if ye would have fellowship with God, then consider what you engage into, what manner of person he is, for the intimate knowledge of one another is presupposed to all constant friendship. You must know then what God is, if ye would have communion with him, because there is no communion without some conformity, and no conformity without knowledge of him. Therefore, as he is light, so the soul must be made light in him, and enlightened by him, that would have his society. We must be transformed into that nature, and made children of light, who were children of darkness. Now, as there is a light of understanding and wisdom in God, and a light of holiness and

purity, so there is in our souls, opposite to these, a darkness of ignorance and unbelief, and a darkness of sin, and impurity of affections. Now, what communion can light have with darkness? Let every man ask this at his own heart, If there be no happiness without this society, and no possibility of this society, while I remain in darkness; then is it not high time to come to the light? This, then, is the first change that is made in a soul, the darkness of ignorance and unbelief is driven out, by the approach of that glorious light of the gospel into the heart. Then is discovered unto the soul that deformity of sin, that loathsomeness in itself, that it never apprehended. Then there is a manifestation of the hidden works of darkness, of the desperate wickedness of the heart, which lay unobserved and unsuspected all the while. And now a man cannot in that view but abhor himself for that which none else can see in him. And there is withal manifested that glorious holiness and purity in God, that inviolable righteousness, that omnipotent power, which formerly were never seriously thought upon. Now these are represented to the life before a sinner. And to close up all, there is a manifestation of the grace and goodness of God in Christ, which discovers a way of salvation, and delivery from sin and wrath; and this perfumeth and refresheth all the faculties of the soul. Thus the soul is in a part conformed to that original light, when a beam is sent from it, and hath pierced into the heart, and scattered the darkness that did alienate the minds of men from God. But it is not only an illumination of the foreface and outer side of the soul, not only a conviction of the judgment in these things; but by virtue of that divine heat that is transmitted with the light of the gospel, the soul is purified and cleansed from its grosser nature, and so is made transparent, that the light may shine into the very inwards of the heart. And this is the special point of conformity to God,—to have our souls purged from the darkness of sinful, earthly, and muddy affections,—to have them purified by the light of God, from all the works and lusts of darkness, and the shining beauty of holy affections and inclinations, to succeed and fill up the vacant room. If knowledge only reside in our brains, and send not down warm beams to quicken and inflame the heart, then it is barren and unfruitful, it is

cold and unprofitable. If it hover only alone in our heads, and keep a motion there, but send down no refreshing showers to the affections, which may make us abound in good fruits, then it is like the windy clouds, clouds without rain, that pass away without any benefit to the thirsty ground. Let us then take this along with us, let the impression of this description of the divine majesty abide in our hearts: "God is light;" and if we often ruminare and ponder on this, I think it will make us often to reflect upon ourselves, how we are darkness; and this will breed some carefulness and desire in the soul, how to have this darkness removed, that there may be a soul capable of divine illustration. This is it that advanceth the soul to the nearest conformity with God,—the looking often upon God, till our souls be enlightened, and our hearts purified; and this again puts the soul in the nearest capacity for that blessed communion with God: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," Matt. 5:8. Truly it is not profoundness of engeny, [i.e. genius] it is not acuteness and sharpness of wit, it is not pregnancy in understanding, or eminency in parts, that will dispose the soul to this blessed vision of God, and frame it to a capacity of fellowship with him. No, there needs no extraordinary parts for this, nothing but that the heart be purified from corruptions, those inward earthly qualities, that are like so many vicious and gross humours, filling the organs of the sight; these, pride, conceit, self-love, passion, anger, malice, envy, strife, covetousness, love of pleasures, ambition; these, I say, that possess the hearts of the most excellent natural spirits, cast a mist upon their eyes, and hinder them to see God, or enjoy that delight in him, that some poor, weak, and ignorant creatures, whose hearts the Lord had purged from sin, do find in God. Therefore if any of you have an aim at this, to have fellowship with God, know both for your direction and your encouragement, that "God is light." For your direction, because that must be your pattern, and if you have no study that way to be like him in holiness, you shall not see him. But take it likewise for an encouragement, for that stile carries not only the necessity of what he must be, but it holds out likewise the fountain and store-house of all our qualifications; for God is light, the original, primitive light,—all must borrow of him, and that light is freely and impartially

communicable to poor sinners: "with thee is the fountain of life, and in thy light shall we see light." Let a soul that apprehends its own darkness and distance from him thus encourage itself: My light is but a beam derived from his light, and there is no want in him. He is a sun of righteousness. If I shut not up my heart through unwillingness and unbelief; if I desire not to keep my sins, they would be purged from them, then that glorious light may shine without stop and impediment into my heart. He is not only light in his own nature, but he is a light to us, and if he please to remove that which is interposed between him and us, it shall be day-light in our hearts again. Thus a soul may strengthen itself to wait on him, and by looking thus up to him, and fixing on him, we shall be enlightened, and our faces not be ashamed.

## XII

1 John 1:6—If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, &c.

There is nothing in which men suffer themselves to be so easily deceived as in this highest concernment of religion, in which the eternal interest of their souls lies. There is no delusion either so gross or so universal in any other thing, as in this thing, in regard of which all other things are nothing. This hath overspread the world, (to speak only of that part which pretends to Christianity,) a strong, pertinacious, and blind fancy of being in Jesus Christ and having interest in salvation. I call it a blind and ignorant fancy, for truly ignorance and darkness is the strongest foundation of such conceits. Papists call it the mother of devotion. It is true, in this sense it is the mother of a man's groundless devotion towards himself, that is, of delusion. This, together with self-love, which always hoodwinks the mind, and will not suffer a serious impartial examination of a man's self; these, I say, are the bottom of this vain persuasion, that

possesseth the generality of men. Now, what it wants of knowledge, it hath of wilfulness. It is a conceit altogether void of reason, but it is so wilful and pertinacious, that it is almost utterly unconvincible, and so it puts souls in the most desperate forlorn estate that can be imagined. It makes them, as the apostle speaks, Ephes, 5:6. ὄντιον τῆτ ἀπειθεία, children of impersuasion;—it is rendered commonly, "children of disobedience." And, indeed, they are joined together. They are children of disobedience, carrying the manifest characters of wrath upon them; yet they are withal children of impersuasion, incapable of any persuasion contrary to these deluding insinuations of their own minds. Though they be manifest to all men to be sons of disobedience, living in rebellion against God, yet it is not possible to persuade them of it. They are as far from conviction of what they are, as reformation to what they should be. Notwithstanding, if men would but give an impartial and attentive ear to what the apostle says here, I suppose the very frame of his argument is so convincing, that he could not but leave some impression. If any thing will convince a child of impersuasion, the terms here propounded are fittest, "God is light, and in him is no darkness." Hence it follows, by unavoidable consequence, as clear as the light, that no man can have fellowship with God that walks in darkness.

Those that delude themselves in this matter are of two kinds. The generality pretend to Christianity in general, and to an interest in salvation, but if we descend into the chief parts and members of Christianity, as holiness, fellowship with God, walking after the Spirit, and such like, these they do not so much as pretend to. And withal, they think they have a dispensation from such strictness, and make it a sufficient plea that they are not such, because they never professed to be such. Others again, though fewer, can pretend even to these higher points of Christianity, as communion with God, walking after the Spirit, and indeed in this they are more consonant to their profession of Christianity. But as the apostle saith, there may be a practical lie in it too, if we consider and compare their practice with their profession.

I would speak a word, by way of preparation, to you who are of the first sort, that is, the very multitude of professing Christians, who, because you do not profess so much as others, and do not give out yourselves for the students of holiness, think yourselves exempted from the stroke of all this soul-piercing doctrine. You think readily it is not pertinent to apply this to you, of walking contrary to your profession, and so committing this gross lie in not doing the truth. "If any man say I have fellowship with God," &c. And who will say that, say ye? Who will speak such a high word of himself as this? Therefore, since you do not presume so high, you think you have escaped the censure that follows.

But I beseech you, consider what your professions import, and what you engage yourselves to, even by the general profession of Christianity. I know you will all say you are Christians, and hope to be saved. Now, do ye understand what is included in that? If any man say that he is a Christian, he really says that he hath fellowship with God; if any man say he is a Christian, he says he hath fellowship with Christ and is partaker of his Spirit; for, as the apostle, Rom. 8:9, declares unto you, "If any have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his;" that is, he is no Christian. For what is it, I pray you, to be a Christian? Is it not to be a new creature, formed again by the Spirit of Christ? 2 Cor. 5:17. Therefore, in as far as you pretend to be Christians, and yet are not professors of holiness, and think you have a dispensation from such a walking in God and after Christ, you fall under a twofold contradiction, and commit a twofold lie: first, between your profession and practice; then in your profession itself, —your practice is directly cross to the very general profession of Christianity. But besides that, there is a contradiction in the bosom of your profession; you affirm you are Christians, and yet refuse the profession of holiness; you say ye hope for heaven, and yet do not so much as pretend to godliness and walking spiritually. Nay, these you disjoin in your profession, which are really one, without which the name of Christianity is an empty, vain, and ridiculous appellation. There must be then a great darkness of misapprehension in your minds, that you take on the name of Christians, and will not know

what it imports; and therefore in the meantime, you profess that which destroys and annuls your former profession. Now, certainly, this is a grosser lie, a flatter contradiction, than it needs much inquiry into, to find it out. It is so palpable, that I wonder that these very common and received principles of truth do not rise up within to testify against it; for if ye do not own the profession of holiness and communion with God, what advantage have you then of Christianity? Tell me, what will it serve you for? Can it save you? Can a bare, empty, contradicted, and blasphemed title save you? And if it do not save you, it will make your condemnation the greater. Let this then first be settled in our hearts, and laid down as a principle,—that the most general profession of Christianity lays an inviolable bond and obligation upon us, to all that is imported in the particular expressions of a Christian's nature, walk, and society. Whether we take it so or not, thus it is: to be a Christian infolds all that can be said; and if it do not import these, it is not true to its own signification nor conformed to Christ's meaning. You may deprave the world as you please, and deform that holy calling so, as it may suit to your carriage, but according to this word, in this acceptance of it, you shall be judged; and if your judge shall in that great day lay all this great charge upon you, what will it avail you now to absolve yourselves in your imaginations, even from the very obligation itself?

Let us suppose, then, that you are convicted of this, that Christianity, in the most general and common acceptance, is inclusive of fellowship and communion with God, and that you profess and pretend to both; then let us apply this just rule of the apostle's, to examine the truth and reality of such a profession. The rule is straight, and so may be a trial both of that which is straight and crooked: *Rectum sui et obliqui index*. And here the application being made, there is a discovery of the falsehood and crookedness of most men's hearts. This golden rule of examination is a rule of proportion, so to speak, or it is founded upon the harmony that should be between profession and practice, words and deeds; and upon that conformity should intercede between those that have communion one with another. Now apply these to the generality of Christians,

and behold there is no harmony and consent between their speaking and walking. Their calling and profession, as Christians, imports communion with God, who is the pure unmixed light, and yet they declare otherwise, that themselves are in darkness of ignorance, and walk in the darkness of sin, and so that communion must be pretended, where there is no conformity and likeness to God intended. The result then of all is this; herein is the greatest lie, and most dangerous withal, committed,—it is the greatest lie, because it takes in all a man's conversation, which all alone makes up one universal lie, a lie composed of infinite contrarieties, of innumerable particular lies; for every step, every word, and action, is in its own nature contrary to that holy profession, but all combined together, makes up a black constellation of lies—one powerful lie against the truth. And, besides, it is not against a particular truth, but against the whole complex of Christianity. And error is a lie against such a particular truth as it opposeth; but the tract and course of an ignorant ungodly conversation is one continued lie against the whole bulk and body of Christianity. It is a lie drawn the length of many weeks, months, and years, against the whole frame of Christian profession: for there is nothing in the calling of a Christian, that is not retracted, contradicted, and reproached by it. Oh! that ye could unbowel your own ways, and see what a cluster of lies and incongruities is in them; what reproaches and calumnies these practical lies cast upon the honour of your Christian calling; how they tend of their own nature, to the disgracing of the truth, and the blaspheming of God's name! These things ye would find, if ye would rip up your own hearts and ways; and if you found how great that lie is, you could not but fear the danger of it: for it being no less than a denying of Jesus Christ, and a real ab-renunciation of him, it puts you without the refuge of sinners, and is most likely to keep you without the blessed city, for "there shall in no ways enter therein anything that defileth, or maketh a lie," Rev. 21:27. What shall then become of them whose life all along is but one continued lie?

## XIII

1 John 1:6—If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, &c.

That which is the sum of religion, sincerity, and a correspondency between profession and practice, is confirmed by reason, and much strengthened by nature itself; so that religion, reason, and nature, conspire in one, to hold out the beauty and comeliness of sincerity, and to put a note and character of infamy and deformity upon all hypocrisy and deceit, especially in the matters of religion. There is nothing so contrary to religion. There is nothing so contrary to religion, as a false appearance, a shew of that which is not: for religion is a most entire and equable thing, like itself, harmonious in all parts of it, the same within and without, in expression and action, all correspondent together. Now, to mar this harmony, and to make it up of unequal, dissimilar parts, and to make one part give the lie to the other, the course of a man's life, in ignorance, negligence, and sin, proclaiming contrary to the profession of Christianity: this is to make religion a monstrous thing, to deny the nature of it, and in our imaginations to contrive an impossible union of inconsistent things. It is a creature made up of contradictions, which can have no subsistence in the truth, but only in the fancies of deluded souls; one professing Christianity, and so by consequence fellowship with the original light, the Sun of Righteousness, and yet darkness of ignorance possessing the mind, and the heart carried away in the ways of the lusts of ignorance, and walking in that darkness. This is a monster in Christianity, one so far misshapen, that the very outward form and visage of it doth not remain. But I told you, reason confirms this; for what more suitable to the very natural frame and constitution of a reasonable being, than that the outward man should be the image and expression of the inward, and that they should answer one another, as face answers face in the water; that the tongue should be the interpreter of the mind, and the actions of a man's life the interpreter of his tongue? Here is that beautiful

proportion, and that pleasing harmony, when all these, though different in their own nature, yet conjoin together, and make up one sweet concord. Now truly, if we take upon us the profession of Christianity, and yet our ordinary and habitual speeches are carnal and earthly, never salted with grace, often poisoned with blasphemies, oaths, and cursings, and often defiled with filthy speeches, and often intermingled with reproaches of others; if our conversation be conformed to the course of the world, according to those lusts that hurry away multitudes of mankind to perdition, and look to the heart within, and behold never any labour about the purifying of it from corruption, never any mortification of evil affections, and little or no knowledge of the truth, not so much as may let Christ into the soul: this, I say, is as unreasonable and absurd, as it is irreligious. It wholly perverts that beautiful order, makes an irreconcilable discord between all the parts in man, that neither mind, nor mouth, nor hands, answer one another, nor all of them, nor any of them answer that holy calling a man pretends to. Such a one pretends ordinarily the goodness of his heart towards God, but now the tongue cannot interpret the heart. It is exauctorated out of that natural office, for the ordinary current is contrary to that pretended goodness of the heart; "for a good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, sendeth forth good things," but all there are either evil, or never seasoned with that spiritual goodness. Then the ways and actions of a man's life which ought to interpret and expound his professions, these are rendered altogether incapable of that. They give no confirmation to them, but rather a manifest contradiction; for what are your multiplied oaths, drunkennesses, fornications railings, contentions, lyings, sabbath-profanations? Your woful neglect of prayer in secret, and in your families, your continuing in these evils that ever you walked into? what are they, but a manifest violation of both religion and reason, and a clear confirmation that "ye are liars, and the truth is not in you?"

There is something even in nature to declare the absurdity and unnaturalness of this general discordance between men's profession

and practice. Look upon all the creatures, and do they not all with one voice proclaim sincerity? Hath not every beast and every bird its own outward shape, outward gesture, and voice, and external workings, which declare the inward nature of it? And is not this a staple-known rule in nature, that every thing is known by the effects of it? A lion by his roaring, a lark by its singing, a horse by his neighing, and an ox by his lowing, &c. All these speak forth nothing but sincerity, in so much, that if these marks and signs should be confounded, and beasts use them indifferently, all human knowledge should suddenly fall to nothing, this would put such a confusion both in the world and mankind. O how doth this condemn those who pretend to this high calling of Christianity! and yet there is no way left to discern them by, nothing appearing in them, and ordinarily proceeding from them, which may give a signification of the inward truth of their fellowship with God; but rather that which gives a demonstration of the vanity of the pretension. There were no consent in nature, if that were not, neither is there any harmonious agreement in religion, where this proportion and correspondence is not kept in a man's life. The very heathens did not account them philosophers, but those that expressed their doctrines in works, as well as words; and truly, the liveliest image of truth is in practice. They commended them that were sparing in words, and abundant in deeds; who had short speeches, but long and large discourses in their life; and what is this, but that which our Saviour every where, from his own example, inculcates upon us? These words are emphatic, "To do the truth, to walk in the light, to do his words, to believe with the heart," and such like: all which declare, that in so far we have the truth, and have fellowship with the Light, as it is impressed in the affection, and expressed again in the conversation; for the infinite truth and the infinite life is one, and the original Light and primitive life and love is one too, and whoever truly receives the truth and light, as it is, cannot but receive him as the living truth and life-giving Light, and to be heated and warmed inwardly by his beams, which will certainly cause some stirring and working without. For as much as in nature heat is always working, so is the fire of love, kindled in the heart, incessant that way,—"Faith working by love;"

for action is the very life of life, that which both shews it, and preserves it.

Now what shall we say, to carry these things home to your hearts? Where shall convincing words be had which may break the hardness of your hearts? It is strange that you are in such a deep dream of delusion, that nothing can awake you out of it? And how little is that in which you have to please yourselves? Some external privileges, the temple of the Lord his covenant, and the seals of it, your ordinary hearing the word, and such like: but are there not many things in your hearts and ways that act the most contradictory lie to these that can be? For wherefore do we thus meet together? Do ye know an end, or propose any? I scarce believe it of the most part. We come out of custom, and many as by constraint, and with little or no previous consideration of the great end of this work; and when ye go forth, what fruit appears? Your ordinary carnal and civil discourses succeed; and who is it either bows his knee to pray for the divine blessing, or entertains that holy word either in his own meditation, or speaks of it to the edification of others? Are you not, the most part of you, that ground of which Christ speaks, "that lies in the way side," and every thing comes and takes the seed up? Do ye either listen and apply your hearts to a presentness in hearing? Or is there any more account of it, than a sound in the ear, or any footstep or impression left in the heart, more than the flight of a bird in the air? And, alas! how many souls are choked and stifled? The truth suffocated in the very springing, by the thorns of the cares of this world, and the throng and importunity of businesses, and earthly desires? How many good motions come to no maturity by this means? How few of you use to pray in secret, and dedicate a time for retirement from the world, and enjoyment of God? Nay, you think you are not called to it, and if any be induced to it, and to public worship in their families, yet all the day over is but a flat contradiction to that. What earthly-mindedness! What unholiness of affection! What impurity of conversation! What one lust is subdued? What one sin mortified? Who encreaseth more in knowledge of the truth, or in love of God? Is it not midnight with the most part of you? O the darkness of the

ignorance of your minds, by which you know not that religion you profess, more than Turks who persecute it! And what are the ways in which ye walk? Are they not such ways as "will not come to the light, and hate the light, because it reproves them?" John 3:19, 20, and 11:9, 10. Are they not such in which men stumble, though they seem to walk easily and plainly in them? Yet, O that everlasting stumble that is at the end of them! when you shall fall out of one darkness of sin and delusion into an utter extreme, eternal darkness of destruction and damnation! O that fearful dungeon and pit of darkness you post unto! Therefore, if you love your own souls, be warned. I beseech you be warned to flee from that utter darkness; be awaked out of your deceiving dreams, and deluding self-flattering imaginations, and "Christ shall give you light." The discovery of that gross darkness you walked in, in which you did not see whither you went; I say, the clear discerning of what it is, and whither it leads, is the first opening of that light, the first visit of that morning-star, that brings salvation.

If ye will not be convinced of that infinite danger you are in, yet ye are not the further from it. "He that walketh in darkness lieth," &c. His strong confidence and persuasion hath a lie, a contradiction in the bosom of it, and that will never bottom any true happiness. It is a lie acted by the hand, the foot, and all the members: a lie against the holy truth and word of God, and the very reproach of the name of Christ; a lie against yourselves, and your own professions, a foul-murdering lie, as well as a Christ-denying lie. And this lie (as a holy man saith) hath filled houses, cities, families, countries. It hath even overspread the whole nation, and filled all with darkness, horror, confusion, trouble, and anguish. Once being a holy nation by profession of a covenant with God, and our open, manifest, universal retraction of that, by an unholy, ungodly, and wicked conversation: this hath brought the sword against a hypocritical nation, and this will bring that far greater, incomparably more intolerable day of wrath upon the children of disobedience. Therefore let me exhort all of you, in the name of the Lord, as ye desire to be admitted to that eternally blessed society within the holy city, and not to be excluded

among those "who commit abomination, and make a lie," that ye would henceforth impose this necessity upon yourselves, or know that it is laid upon you by God, to labour to know the will and truth of God, that you may see that light that shines in the gospel; and not only to receive it in your minds, but in your hearts by love, that so you may endeavour in all sincerity the doing of that truth, the conscionable practising of what you know. And this, as it is a great point of conformity to the light, so it will make you capable of more light from God; for he delights to shew his liberality, where he hath any acceptance. Be not satisfied, O be not satisfied, with knowing these truths, and discoursing upon them; but make them further your own, by impressing them deeply in your hearts, and expressing them plainly in your ways! "This is pure religion and undefiled," James 1:27. "And is not this to know me, saith the Lord?" Jer. 22:16. Practice is real knowledge, because it is living knowledge. It is the very life and soul of Christianity, when there needs no more but the intimation of his will to carry the whole man. This is what we should all aspire unto, and not satisfy ourselves in our poor attainments below this.

## XIV

1 John 1:7—But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin

Art is the imitation of nature, and true religion is a divine art, that consists in the imitation of God himself, the author of nature. Therefore it is a more high and transcendent thing, of a sublimer nature than all the arts and sciences among men. Those reach but to some resemblance of the wisdom of God, expressed in his works; but this aspires to an imitation of himself in holiness, which is the glory of his name, and so to a fellowship with himself. Therefore there is

nothing hath so high a pattern, or sublime an end. God himself, who is infinitely above all, is the pattern, and society with God is the end of it: and so it cannot choose, but where religion makes a solid impression on a soul. It must exceedingly raise and advance it to the most heroic and noble resolutions that it is capable of, in respect of which elevation of the soul after God, the highest project, the greatest aspirings, and the most elevating designs of men, are nothing but low, base, and wretched, having nothing of true greatness of mind in them, but running in an earthly and sordid channel, infinitely below the poorest soul that is lifted up to God.

Since we have then so high a pattern as God, because he is infinitely removed from us in his own nature, we have him expressed to us under the name and notion of light, which makes all things manifest. Not only as dwelling in inaccessible light; that is, in his own incomprehensible, ineffable essence, even before this light was created; for he is in the light, and was in the light, when there was no sun to give light, because he was in himself environed, so to speak, with the infinite light and splendour of his own understanding, and beauty of his own holiness, and so dwelling in an all-fulness and self-sufficiency of blessedness. Not only is he thus in light, but he is a light to poor sinners, the most communicative Being, that ceaseth not continually to send forth streamings of that light and life into dark and dead souls. And therefore he is not only light himself, but a sun of righteousness, most beneficial in his influences, most impartial and free in his illumination; and so he is often called,—"my light and my salvation," "our light," "a light to me," Psal. 27:1; Micah 7:8; Isa. 42:6, 7. Now, it is this emission of light from him that first drives away that gross darkness that is over souls; for till then, in the darkness all was hid and covered, nothing seen, neither ourselves, nor God, neither the temper of our hearts, nor the course of our ways, nor the end they lead to. But it is the breaking in of a beam of that Sun of Righteousness that maketh any such discovery; as motes are not seen till the sun shine, though the house be full of them. In darkness there is nothing but confusion and disorder; and light only makes that disorder visible to the soul, to the affecting of the heart.

Now, when once the soul hath received that light, there is a desire kindled in the heart after more of it; as when the eye hath once perceived the sweetness and pleasantness of the light, it opens itself, and exposeth itself to a further reception of more. And so the soul that is once thus happily prevented by the first salutation and visit of "that day-spring from on high, while he was sitting in darkness, and in the shadow of death," Luke 1:78, 79, afterwards follows after that light, and desires nothing more than to be imbosomed with it. That tender preventing mercy so draws the heart after it, that it can never be at perfect rest till the night be wholly spent, and all the shadows of it removed, and the sun clearly up above the horizon, and that is the day of that clear vision of God's face. But in the mean time, this is the great ambition and endeavour of such an one, to walk in that light, and this is the very entertainment of that fellowship with God. He is already in the light, that is to say, he is translated from a state of darkness to light, and endued with the living and saving knowledge of God in Jesus Christ. This is his state. He is in the light, one enlightened from above, having his eyes opened to discover the mystery of the iniquity of his own heart, and to see far off, to that bottomless pit of misery which his way would lead him to; one who hath by this divine illustration discovered eternal things, and seen things not seen; and withal, gotten some knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins. Now, such an one, being thus in the light, his duty is, and his infinite dignity besides, to walk in that light, that is, to lead all his life under that eternal light of God, which shines in the word, and to bring it all forth in his view; to make our whole course a progressive motion towards heaven, wherein that glorious light shines most gloriously. It is almost all one with that of Paul's, to have our conversation in heaven; for, to walk in the light, it is a kind of elevation of our actions, a raising them up to heaven, to that pure light; for after that and towards that is the soul's design.

Now to express to you in what it consists, I desire not to branch it forth in many particulars, which rather distract the mind than affect the heart. Only you may know, it consists especially in the inward retirements of the soul to God, and the outward shining of that light

in our conversation to others. These are the chief parts of it, borrowing from his light, and then lending and imparting it to others, by a holy conversation. Truly, we must needs conceive that the most lively and unmixed partaking of the light of God, and the sweetest society with him, is in the secret withdrawals of the soul from the world, and reposes upon God those little intervals, and, as it were, stolen hours of fellowship with God, that are taken from the multitude and throng of our business. These are the fittest opportunities of the transforming the soul into his similitude, and of purifying it as he is pure, of filling it with divine light and love; for then the heart lies, as it were, perpendicularly under his beams, and is opened before him, to give admission and entry to this transforming light; and it is the shining of God's countenance then upon the soul that draws it most towards conformity with him, and leaves an impression of light and love upon the soul.

Oh! that you were more acquainted with this, this aprication, so to speak, that is, sunning yourselves, and warming in the sun, the exposing and opening of your hearts frequently in secret, before this Sun of Righteousness. Now this, if you were acquaint with it, "would make your light so to shine before men, as your heavenly Father may be glorified," Matt. 5:16,—and that is the walking in that light of God. This makes a Christian to come forth, as Moses from the mount, with his face shining. He comes out from the retired access to God, with a lustre upon his carriage, that may beautify the gospel; and (as one saith well) with the tables of the law in both his hands, written in his practice, the light of the law shining in his life. And truly this is the Christian's diurnal motion in his lower sphere, wherein he carries about that light that is derived from the higher light. In all his converse with men, it shines from him to the glorifying of him that is the Father of lights, walking righteously and soberly, without offence, "doing good to all, especially the children of light;" extending offices of love and benevolence to every one; forbearing and forgiving offences, not partaking with other men's sins; and, finally, declaring in word and deed, that we have communion with the fountain of pure light, and one day expect to be translated out of this lower orb, where

we are so far distant from him, and fixed in the highest of all; where we may have the immediate, full, uninterrupted, and clearest aspect of his countenance, which shall then make the description that is here given of God communicable to us, that, as he is light, and in him is no darkness, so we, being fully and perfectly shined upon by him, may be light likewise, without any mixture of darkness, as here it is not.

Now, my beloved in the Lord, this is that we are called unto,—to walk thus in the light, in the light of obedience and sanctification; and that is the great thing ye would learn to aspire unto, rather than to enjoy the light of consolation. Indeed, I conceive, that which maketh many of us walk in darkness, as is spoken in Isa. 1:10, that is, without comfort, peace, and joy, and without clear discerning our interest in God, is, because we walk in another darkness, that is, of sin and distance from God. The one darkness is introductive of the other; nay, they cannot be long without other. The dark cloud of bold sinning, and careless uncircumspect walking, that cannot but eclipse the light of consolation, and fill the soul with some horror, anguish, and confusion. Therefore, if ye would walk in the light of joy and comfort, O take heed nothing be interposed between God and your souls! You must likewise walk in the light of his law, which is as a lamp to the feet; and this light, as the ray, begets that light of comfort, as the splendour, which is the second light of the sun. I know it is a disconsolate and sad condition, to walk without the light of the knowledge of our interest in God; but I would earnestly recommend unto you two things to support you, and help you in that. One is, that you do not give over the chief point of this society with God, that is, walking in the light of his law and commandments, but that you do the more seriously address to the one, that you want the other. Certainly, it ought to be no hinderance of your obedience, and patient continuing in obedience, that you know not your own interest, and that his countenance shines not so upon you. You know that sweet resolution, "I will wait upon the Lord, who hides his face," &c. Isa. 8:17; Mic. 7:7; and his own command, Isa. 1:10; Hos. 12:6, "Ye that walk in such darkness," nevertheless, "stay upon God."

Truly, there could be no greater evidence of thy interest than this,—to give patient attendance upon him in the ways of obedience, till he shine forth. This would in due time "bring forth thy righteousness as the light," if we would not subtract and withdraw ourselves from under the light, because it is presently overclouded. Then, moreover, you would know, that all this while that your interest in Christ lies dark and under cloud, you would then be most in the application of that blood to your souls, most in trusting and staying upon the name of God, and his absolute promises. Suppose thou do not as yet know that he is thine, yet dost thou not know that he is made thine, by believing in him? And therefore, while it is inevident that it is already, thou oughtest so much the more to labour, that what is not may be. Now, if thou canst not apply him to thy soul, as thine own possession, yet thou mayest, and so much the more oughtest to apply thy soul to him, and resign and offer thyself to him, as willing to be his possession, to be his, and no more thine own. In a word, when thine own experimental feeling of the work of God's Spirit fails within thee, then so much the more insist, and dwell upon the meditation and belief of the general promises, which are the proper object of faith, and not of sense. As our own interest is the proper object of sense, and not of faith; therefore the defect in the one needs not resound upon the other. To sum up all in one word,—if thou thinkest that thou hast not yet believed in Christ, and hast no interest in him, I will not dispute with thee, to persuade thee thou art mistaken, for all this debate would be in the dark, because thou art in darkness. But one thing I would say unto thee,—labour to do that which thou wouldest do, which thou must do, if such a case were granted. Suppose it were so, that thou hadst no interest in him, what wouldst thou do then? I am sure thou wouldst say, I would labour by any means to have him mine. Why, then, thou knowest that cannot be before believing, and receiving him on his promises, and not at all but by believing. Therefore, since that this is it you must at length turn unto, suppose the case were decided, why do you not presently, rather without more wearying yourselves in the greatness of your way, turn in thither, as to a place of refuge, without further disputing in the business; and so by believing in Christ, and waiting upon him

in his ways, you shall put that out of question, which debating would make an endless question. The Lord make you wise to know the things that belong to your peace.

## XV

1 John 1:7—And the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin

Can two walk together except they be agreed? As darkness cannot have fellowship with light, till it be changed into some conformity to the light; even so there can neither be any fellowship in walking, nor conformity in nature, between God and us, who are enemies to him by nature, unless there be some agreement and reconciliation of the difference. Now, here is that which maketh the atonement,—“The blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” This is it that takes away the difference between God and men, and makes reconciliation for us; this blood hath quenched the flame of indignation and wrath kindled in heaven against us. And this alone can quench and extinguish the flames and furies of a tormented soul, that is burned up with the apprehension of his anger. All other things thou canst apply or cast upon them will be as oil to increase them, whether it be to cool thyself in the shadows of the world's delights, such a poor shift as the rich glutton would have taken in hell. Those drops of cold water that thou canst distil out of the creature will never give any solid ease to thy conscience; thou mayest abate the fury of it, or put it off for a season. Thou who art afraid of hell and wrath, mayest procure some short vacancy from those terrors by turning to the world; but certainly they will recur again, and break out in a greater fire, like a fever that is not diminished, but increased by much drinking cold water. Or if thou go about to refresh thyself, and satisfy thy challenges by thy own attainments in religion, and by reflection upon thy own heart and ways; finding something in thy esteem that

may counter-balance thy evils, and so give thee some confidence of God's favour; these, I say, are but deceitful things, and will never either quench the displeasure of God for thy sins, but rather add fuel to it, because thou justifiest thyself, which is an abomination before him. Nor yet will it totally extinguish and put to silence the clamours of thy conscience, but, that some day thou shalt be spoiled of all that self-confidence and self-defence, and find thyself so much the more displeasing to God, that thou didst please thyself, and undertake to pacify him. Therefore, my beloved, let me, above all things, recommend this unto you, as the prime foundation of all religion, upon which all our peace with God, pardon of sin, and fellowship with God must be built,—that the blood of Jesus Christ be applied unto your consciences by believing; and that, first of all, upon the discovery of your enmity with God, and infinite distance from him, you apply your hearts unto this blood, which is the atonement—to the reconciling sacrifice, which alone hath virtue and power with God. Do not imagine that any peace can be without this. Would ye walk with God, which is a badge of agreement? Would ye have fellowship with God, which is a fruit of reconciliation? Would ye have pardon of sins, and the particular knowledge of it, which is the greatest effect of favour? And all this, without and before application of Christ, "who is our peace," in whom only the Father is well pleased? Will ye seek these, and yet dispute this point of believing, as if it were possible to attain these without the sprinkling of that blood on the heart, which indeed cleanseth it from an evil-accusing conscience? If you desire to walk in the light, as he is in the light, why weary ye yourselves in bye-ways? Why take ye such a compass of endless and fruitless agitation, and plerplexity of mind, and will not rather come straightway at it, by the door of Jesus Christ; for he is the new and living way into which you must enter, if ye would walk in the light? And the wounds of his side, out of which his blood gushed, these open you a way of access to him, because he was pierced for us. That stream of blood, if ye come to it and follow it all along, it will certainly carry you to the sea of light and love, where you have fellowship with God. And, oh! how much comfort is in it, that there is such a stream running all the way of our walking with

God—all the way of our fellowship! That fountain of Christ's blood runs not dry, but runs along with the believer, for the cleansing of his after pollutions of his defilements, even in the very light itself. This, then, as it is the foundation of peace and communion with God, so it is the perpetual assurance and confirmation of it, that which first gives boldness, and that alone which still continues boldness in it. It is the first ground, and the constant warrant and security of it, without which it would be as soon dissolved as made. If that blood did not run along all this way, to wash all his steps; if the way of light and fellowship with God were not watered and refreshed with the continual current of this blood, certainly none could walk in it without being consumed. Therefore it is, that the mercy of God, and riches of grace in Christ, hath provided this blood for us, both to cleanse the sins of ignorance before believing, and the sins of light after believing, that a poor sinner may constantly go on his way, and not be broken off from God by his infirmities and escapes in the way.

You see, then, the gospel runs in these two golden streams,—pardon of sin, and purity of walking. They run undividedly, all along in one channel; yet without confusion one with another, as it is reported of some great rivers that run together between the same banks, and yet retain distinct colours and natures all the way, till they part. But these streams that glad the city of God never part one from another. The cleansing blood and the purifying light, these are the entire and perfect sum of the gospel. Purification from sin, the guilt of sin, and the purity of walking in the light flowing from that, make up the full complexion of Christianity; which are so nearly conjoined together, that if they be divided they cease to be, and cannot any of them subsist, save in men's deluded imagination. The end of washing in the blood of Christ is, that we may come to this light, and have fellowship with it; for the darkness of hell, the utter darkness of the curse of God, which overspreads the unbelieving soul, and eclipses all the light of God's countenance from him,—that dark and thick cloud of guiltiness, that heap of unrenewed conversation; this, I say, must be removed by the cleansing of the blood of Christ, and then the soul is admitted to enjoy that light, and walk in it. And it is

removed chiefly for this end, that there may be no impediment in the way of this fellowship. This blood cleanseth, that you, being cleansed, may henceforth walk in purity; and there is no purity like that of the light of God's countenance and commands. And so you are washed in the blood of Christ, that you may walk in the light of God; and take heed that you defile not your garments again. But if so be, and certainly it will be, considering our weakness, that you defile yourselves again, like foolish children, who, after they have washed, run to the puddle again, forgetting that they were cleansed; if either your daily infirmities trouble, or some grosser pollution defile and waste your conscience, know that this blood runs all along in the same channel of your obligation to holy walking, and is as sufficient now as ever, to cleanse you from all sin, from sins of daily incursion, and sins of a grosser nature. There is no exception in that blood, let there be none in your application to it and apprehension of it. Now, this is not to give boldness to any man to sin, or continue in sin, because of the lengthened use and continued virtue and efficacy of the blood of Christ; for if any man draw such a result from it, and improve it to the advantage of his flesh, he declares himself to have no portion in it, never to have been washed by it. For what soul can in sobriety look upon that blood shed by the Son of God, to take away the sins of the world, and find an emboldening to sin from that view? Who can wash and cleanse here, and presently think of defilement, but with indignation?

I speak these things the rather, because there is a twofold misapprehension of the gospel among Christians, and on both hands much darkness and stumbling is occasioned. We have poor narrow spirits, and do not take entire truth in its full comprehension, and so we are as unfit and unequal discerners of the gospel, and receivers of it, as he that would judge of a sentence by one word, of a book by one page, of a harmony by one note, and of the world by one parcel of it. The beauty and harmony of things consist in their entire union; and though there should appear many discrepancies and unpleasant discords in several parts, yet all united together, makes up a pleasant comfort. Now this is our childish foolishness, that we look upon the

gospel only by halves, and this being alone seen, begets misapprehensions and mistakes in our minds; for ordinarily we supply that which we see not with some fancy of our own. When the blood of Jesus Christ is holden out in its full virtue, in the large extent of its efficacy, to cleanse all sin, and to make peace with God, and wipe away all transgressions, as if they had never been; the generality of you never apprehending much your own desperate condition, nor conceiving an absolute necessity of a change; you think this is all that is in the gospel, and begin to flatter yourselves, and bliss yourselves, though you live in the imaginations of your own hearts, and never apprehend the absolute need and inevitable sequel of walking in purity after pardon. And, alas! there is something of this sometimes overtakes the hearts of true believers, in the slight and overly consideration of the mercy of God, and blood of Christ; you do not lay the constraint upon your hearts to a holy conversation. I say, it is not because you apprehend that blood, that you take more liberty to the flesh, but rather because you too slightly and superficially consider it, and that but the one half of it, without piercing into the proper end of that cleansing, which is, that we may walk in purity.

But, on the other hand, some believing souls, having their desires enlarged after more holiness and conformity to God, and apprehending not only the necessity of it, but the beauty and comeliness of it, yet finding withal, how infinitely short they come, and how oft their purposes are broken and disappointed, and themselves plunged in the mire of their own filthiness; this doth discourage them, and drives them to such a despondency and dejection of spirit, that they are like to give over the way of holiness as desperate. Now, my beloved, for you who look upon the gospel by a parcel, and such a parcel as enjoins much upon you, I would earnestly beseech to open and enlarge your hearts to receive the full body of the truth; to look upon that cleansing blood as well as that pure light; to consider the perpetual use of the one, until you have fully attained the other. Know that the fountain is kept open, and not shut; not only to admit you to come at first, but to give ready access

in all after-defilement; and there is no word more comprehensive than this here, "it cleanseth from all sin." All thy exceptions, doubts, and difficulties, are about some particular sins and circumstances; thy debates run upon some exception; but here is an universal comprehensive word, that excludes all exception—no kind of sin, either for quality, or degree, or circumstance, is too great for this blood; and therefore, as you have reason to be humbled under your failings, so there is no reason to be discouraged, but rather to revive your spirits and vigour again in the study of this walking in the light, knowing that one day we shall be in the light, as he is in it. Nay, take this along with you, as your strength and encouragement to your duty, as the greatest provocation to more purity,—that there is so constant readiness of pardon in that blood.

## XVI

1 John 1:8—If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us

"The night is far spent, the day is at hand," Rom. 13:12. This life is but as night, even to the godly. There is some light in it,—some star-light, but it is mixed with much darkness of ignorance and sin; and so it will be, till the sun arise, and the morning of their translation to heaven come. But though it be called night in one sense, in regard of that perfect glorious perpetual day in heaven, yet they are called the children of light, and of the day, and are said to walk in the light, and are exhorted to walk honestly as in the day; because, though there is a mixture of darkness in them, of weakness in their judgments, and impurity in their affections, yet they are nati ad majora, born to greater things, and aspiring to that perfect day. There is so much light as to discern these night monsters, their own corruptions, and Satan's temptations,—to fight continually against them. They are about this noble work, the purifying themselves from sin and

darkness; so that they lie in the middle, between the light of angels and glorified spirits, that hath no darkness in it, and the midnight of the rest of the world, who are buried in darkness and wickedness, and lie entombed in it, as the word is, 1 John 5:19, "The whole world, κέῖται, lieth in wickedness: but we know that we are of God:" therefore the apostle subjoins here very seasonably a caution or correction of that which was spoken about the walking in the light, and fellowship with God; which words sound out some perfection, and, to our self-flattering minds, might possibly suggest some too high opinion of ourselves. If we, even we that have fellowship with God, even I, the apostle, and you believing Christians; if we say, we have no sin, no darkness in us, "we do but deceive ourselves, and deny the truth." But who will say that I have no sin? Solomon gives a challenge to all the world, Prov. 20:9, "Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?" And, indeed, there is no man so far a stranger to himself; but if he, in sobriety and calmness, retire into his own heart, the very evidence of the impurity of it will extort this confession from him. As it useth to be said of an atheist, he feels that Divine Majesty within his secret thoughts and conscience which he denieth with his mouth; and he is often forced to tremble at the remembrance of him whom he will not confess. So if there be any so far bewitched and enchanted into so gross and impudent a delusion, as to assert his own perfection and vacancy from sin, and freedom from obligation to any divine command, (as this time is fruitful in such monsters), yet I dare be bold to say, that in the secret and quiet reflection on themselves, they find that which they will not confess. Inwardly they feel what outwardly they deny, and cannot but some time or other be filled with horror and anguish in their consciences, by that inwardly witnessing and checking principle, when God shall give it liberty to exercise its power over them. The end of such will be, as of professed atheists. They pretend the most secure contempt and most fearless disregard of God; but then, when he awakes to judgment, or declares himself in something extraordinary, they are subject to the most panic fears and terrors, because then there is a party armed within against them, which they had disarmed in security, and kept in chains. So, whensoever such men, of such high

pretensions, and sublime professions, who love to speak nothing but mysteries, and presume to such glorious discoveries of new lights of spiritual mysteries; when these, I say, have flattered themselves for a season, in the monstrous exorbitant conceit of their own perfection, and immunity from sin, and, it may be, deceived some others too; when they have lived some time in this golden dream of innocency, the time will come, either when the mighty hand of God is on them here, or when they must enter eternity, that they shall awake, and find all their iniquities in battle array, mustered by the Lord of hosts, in their conscience against themselves; and then they shall be the rarest examples of fear, terror, and unbelief, who pretended to the greatest confidence, clearness, and innocency. My beloved, let us establish this as an infallible rule, to discern the spirits by, and to know what religion is,—if it tend to glorify God, and abase man, to make him more humble, as well as holy,—if it give the true and perfect discovery of God to man, and of man to himself,—"that is true religion and undefiled." But away with those sublime speculations, those winged and airy mysteries, those pretensions to high discoveries and new lights, if they do not increase that good old light of "humble walking with thy God," &c. If they tend to the loosing of the obligation of divine commands on thee; if they ravish man so high that he seeth not himself any more to be a poor, miserable, and darkened creature, certainly that is no fellowship with the pure light, which is not continually the discovery and further manifestation of more sin and darkness in us. For, what is a man's light in the dark night of this life, but the clearest light of that darkness that is in man? And his holiness, what is it, but the abhorring of himself for that? It is true, something further is attained than the knowing of this; but it is always so far short of that original pattern, that the best way of expressing our conformity to it, is by how much we apprehend our distance and deformity from it.

But, my beloved, this is not all that is here meant, nor must we take it so grossly, as if this did only check the open professors of a sinless, spotless sanctity. Nay, certainly, there is another way of saying this than by the tongue, and many other ways of self-deceiving than that

gross one, many more universal and more dangerous, because less discernible. There is something of this, that even true believers fall into, and there is something of it more common to the generality of professed Christians.

Among believers in Christ there is much difference in self-judging; extreme contrarieties, both between diverse persons, and in one and the same, at diverse times. You know that some are kept in the open view of their own sins and infirmities, and, while they aim at holiness, they are wholly disabled to that worthy endeavour by their discouragements, arising from the apprehension of their own weakness and infinite short-coming. Now, to elevate and strengthen such spirits, that word was seasonably cast in, "and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin:" for it properly belongs to the comfort of such fainting souls; and it is all one, as if he had said, Up and be doing, and the blood of Christ shall cleanse your evil doings. He goeth not about to persuade them to have better thoughts of themselves, or lower apprehensions of their sins, but only to have higher and more suitable thoughts of Christ, and the virtue of his blood; and this is the only cure,—not to abate from that low esteem of ourselves, but to add to the esteem, and grow in the lively apprehension of Christ. I would not counsel you to think yourselves better, but to think better of him, that all your confidence may arise from him.

Now there are others, (and it may be that same person at another time,—for the wind of temptation winds about, and is sometimes in one corner, sometimes in another;—our adversary useth many stratagems, and will seem to flee before us, in yielding us the victory over our unbelief, that he may in his flight return, and throw some other dart upon us unawares), when they have attained any fervency of desires, and height of design after holiness and walking with God, and this is seconded with any lively endeavours, and this confirmed and strengthened with those presences of God, and accesses into the soul, that fill it with some sweetness;—then, I say, they are ready to apprehend too highly of themselves, as if they had attained, and to

look below upon others with some disdain. Then there is not that present discovery of themselves, that may intermingle humble mourning with it, but a kind of unequal measuring their attainments by their desires, which in all true Christians are exceedingly mounted above themselves. Now, indeed, this is in effect, and really to say, "we have no sin." Herein is a delusion, a self-deceiving fancy, that begets too much self-pleasing. Let us know where our stance is, infinitely below either our duty or our desire; and remind this often, that we may not be in hazard to be drunk with self-love and self-deceit in this particular. Besides, are there not many Christians, who, having been once illuminated, and had some serious exercises in their souls, both of sorrow for sin and fear of wrath, and comfort by the gospel, and being accustomed to some discharge of religious duties in private and public, sit down here, and have not mind of further progress? They think, if they keep that stance, they are well, and so have few designs or endeavours after more communion with God, or purification from sin. Now this makes them degenerate to formality. They wither and become barren, and are exposed by this to many temptations which overcome them. But, my beloved, is not this really and indeed to say, "we have no sin?" Do not your walking, and the posture of your spirits import so much, as if you had no sin to wrestle with, no more holiness to aspire unto; as if ye had no further race to run to obtain the crown? Do not deceive yourselves, by thinking it sufficient to have so much honesty and grace, as in your opinion may put you over the black line in irregeneration, as if ye would seek no more than is precisely necessary for salvation? Truly, if ye be so minded, you give a miserable hint, that you are not yet translated from the black side of darkness. I do not say that all such are unconverted; but, if you continue thus, without stirring up yourselves to a daily conversion and renovation, ye do too much to blot out the evidence of your conversion, and at length it may prove to some a self-destroying deceit, when they shall find themselves not passed over that line that passeth between heaven and hell, which they were studying to find out, only that they might pass so far over it, as might keep their soul and hell asunder, without earnest desires and advancement towards heaven in conformity to God. Now, for the

generality of professed Christians, though there be none who have that general confession of sin oftener and more readily in their mouths; yet, I suppose, it is easy to demonstrate that there is much of this self-deceit in them, which declares that the truth is not in them. You know both God and man construct of men by their ways, not by their words; and the Lord may interpret your hearts by their dispositions, and raise a collection of atheism out of all together: "The fool hath said in his heart," &c. Even so say I, many pretended Christians say in their heart, "we have no sin." How prove ye that? I seek nothing else to prove it, than your own ordinary clearings and excusings of yourselves. Ye confess ye are sinners, and break all the commands; yet come to particulars, and I know not one of twenty that will cordially or seriously take with almost any sin. Yea, what you have granted in a general, you retract and deny it in all the particulars; which declares both that even that which you seem to know, you are altogether strangers to the real truth of it, and that you are over-blinded with a fond love of yourselves. I know not to what purposes your general acknowledgments are, but to be a mask or shadow to deceive you, to be a blind to hide you from yourselves; since the most part of you, whensoever challenged of any particular sin, or inclination to it, justify yourselves; and whenever ye are put to a particular confession of your sins, you have all rapt up in such a bundle of confusion, that you never know one sin by another. Certainly, "ye deceive yourselves, and the truth is not in you."

Let me add, moreover, another instance. Do you not so live, and walk in sin so securely, so impenitently, as if you had no sin, no fear of God's wrath? Do not the most part contentedly and peaceably live in so much ignorance of the gospel, as if they had no need of Christ? and so, by consequence, as if they had no sin: for if you did believe in the heart, and indeed consider that your hearts are sinks of iniquity and impurity, would you not think it necessary to apply to the Physician? And would you not then labour to know the Physician, and the gospel, which is the report of him? Certainly, inasmuch as you take no pains for the knowledge of a Saviour, you declare that you know not your sin; for if ye know the one, ye could not but

search to know the other. What is the voice of most men's walking? Doth it not proclaim this, that they think there is no sin in them? For if there be sin in you, is there not a curse upon you, and wrath before you? And if you did really see the one, would you not see the other? And did you see it, would it not drive you to more serious thoughts? Would it not fright you? Would it not cause you often to retire into yourselves, and from the world? And, above all, how precious would the tidings of a Saviour be, that now are common and contemptible? Would you not every day wash in that blood? Would the current of repentance dry? But, forasmuch as you are not exercised this way, give no thoughts nor time for reconciliation with God, walk without any fear of hell, and without any earnest and serious study of changing your ways, and purifying your hearts; in a word, though ye confess sin in the general, yet your whole carriage of heart and ways declare so much, that you think it not a thing much to be feared, or that a man should busy himself about it; that a man may live in it, and be well here and hereafter. And is not this to deny the very nature of sin, and to deceive your own souls?

## XVII

1 John 1:9—If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, &c.

The current of sin dries not up, but runs constantly while we are in this life. It is true, it is much diminished in a believer, and it runs not in such an universal flood over the whole man as it is in the unbeliever. Yet there is a living spring of sin within the godly, which is never ceasing to drop out pollution and defilement, either upon their whole persons, or, at least, to intermingle it with their good actions. Now, there is no comfort for this, but this one, that there is another stream of the blood of Jesus Christ that never dries up, is never exhausted, never emptied, but flows as full and as free, as clear

and fresh as ever it did: and this is so great, and of so great virtue, that it is able to swallow up the stream of our pollutions, and to take away the daily filth of a believer's conversation. Now indeed, though the blood of Jesus Christ be of such infinite virtue and efficacy, that it were sufficient to cleanse the sins of the whole world, it would be an over-ransom for the souls of all men, there is so much worth in it. That flood of guiltiness that hath drowned the world,—this flood of Christ's blood that gushed out of his side, is of sufficient virtue to cleanse it perfectly away. Notwithstanding of this absolute universal sufficiency, yet certain it is, that it is not actually applied unto the cleansing of all men's sins, but yet the most part of men are still drowned in the deluge of their own wickedness, and lie entombed in darkness; therefore it concerns us to know the way of the application of this blood to the cleansing of sinners; and this way is set down in this verse, "If we confess our sins, he is just to forgive." There was something hinted at obscurely in the preceding verse; for when he shews, that such as say they have no sin, who either, by the disposition of their hearts, or carriage of their ways, do by intrepertation say, they want sin, "such deceive themselves, and the truth is not in them," and so they have no benefit of that blood that cleanseth from all sin. And so it is imported here, that though the blood of Christ be fully sufficient to cleanse all sin, yet it is not so prostituted and basely spent upon sinners, as to be bestowed upon them who do not know their sins, and never enter into any serious and impartial examination of themselves. Such, though they say they are sinners, yet never descending into themselves to search their own hearts and ways, and so never coming to the particular knowledge of their sins, and feeling of them, they cannot at all make application of that blood to their own consciences, either seriously or pertinently. Though the river and fountain of Christ's blood run by them, in the daily preaching of the gospel, yet being destitute of this daily self-inspection and self-knowledge, being altogether ignorant of themselves, they can no more wash here than those who never heard of this blood. They being strangers to themselves, sets them at as great distance and estrangement from the blood of Christ, as if they were wholly strangers to the very preaching of this blood. Let us,

then, have this first established in our hearts,—that there is no cleansing from sin, without the knowledge of sin; and that there is no true knowledge of sin, without a serious soul examination of sin. These are knit together in their own nature. For how should our sins be pardoned, when we know nothing of them but in a confused generality that can never affect the heart? How should our sins not be opened and discovered before the holiness of God, when they are always covered unto us and hid from our eyes? Certainly, the righteousness and wisdom of God require, that such a monstrous thing, so great an enemy of God's holiness, be not wholly passed away in silence without observation. If we do not observe, he will; for to what purpose should pardon be so lavished upon them who are not capable of knowing what favour and grace is in it? And certainly, that none can know without the feeling knowledge of the height and heinousness of sin. Now, I pray you, how should you know your sins, when you will not allow any time for the searching of yourselves? Many cannot say, that ever they did purposely and deliberately withdraw from the world, and separate their spirits for this business of self-examination; and therefore you remain perpetually strangers to yourselves, and as great strangers to the power and virtue of this blood.

Now, in this verse, he declares it plainly in what way and method sin is pardoned by this blood. By the former verse, we have so much, that it is necessary we must search and try our ways, that so we may truly know our sins, and charge them upon ourselves; and here it is superadded, that we must confess them to him: and the promise is annexed, "he is just and faithful to forgive." Now, this confession of sin is very fitly subjoined, both to that which he declared of the great end of that gospel,—communion with God,—and that which was immediately holden forth of the remaining virtue of Christ's blood. For might a poor soul say, How shall I come to partake of that blessed society? I am a sinner, and so an enemy to God; how shall this enmity be removed? And if the answer be made, "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin," and so maketh access for a sinner to enter into this society; yet a question remains, and how

shall the virtue of that be applied to my soul? It is sufficient I know, for all, but what way may I have the particular benefit of it? Here it is fully satisfied, "if we confess our sins, God is just and faithful to forgive." He lieth under some obligation to pardon us. Now, many of you may think, if this be the way, and these be the terms of pardon, then we hope all shall be pardoned; for if there be no more but to confess our sins, who will not willingly do that, and who doth not daily do it? As one said, if it be sufficient to accuse, none will be innocent: *si accusasse sufficiat, nemo innocens erit*; so you may think, *si confiteri sufficiat, nemo reus erit*. If it be sufficient to confess, none will be guilty. But, my beloved, let us not deceive ourselves with the present first apprehensions of words that occur in this kind. It is true, as ye take confession, there is nothing more ordinary; but, if it be taken in the true scripture meaning, and in the realest sense, I fear there is nothing among men so extraordinary. I desire you may but consider how you take this word, in your dealings with men;—you take it certainly in a more real sense than you use it in religion. If any had done you some great wrong or injury, suppose your servant, or inferior, what acknowledgment would you take from him of his wrong? If he confessed his wrong only in generally ambiguous terms; if he did it either lightly, or without any sense or sorrow for it; if he did withal excuse and extenuate his fault, and never ceased, notwithstanding of all his confession, to do the like wrong when occasion offered, would you not think this a mockery, and would it not rather provoke you than pacify you? Now, when you take words in so real and deep significations in your own matters, what gross delusion is it, that you take them in the slightest and emptiest meaning in those things that relate to God? And I am sure the most part of men's confessions are of that nature which I have described,—general, ignorant, senseless, without any particular view, or lively feeling of the vileness and loathsomeness of sin, and their own hearts. Whenever it comes to particulars, there is a multitude of extenuations and pretences to hide and cover the sin; and generally men never cease the more from sinning. It puts no stop in their running, as the horse to the battle. To-day they confess it, and to-morrow they act it again with as much delight as before. Now, of this

I may say, "Offer it to thy governor, and see if he will be pleased with thee," or let another offer such an acknowledgment of wrong to thee, and see if it will please thee; and if it will not, why deceive ye yourselves with the outward visage of things in these matters that are of greatest soul-concernment? Should they not be taken in the most inward and substantial signification that can be? Lest you be deceived with false appearances, and, while you give but a shadow of confession, you receive but a shadow of forgiveness, such a thing as will not carry and bear you out before God's tribunal; therefore we must needs take it thus, that confession of sin is the work of the whole man, and not of the mouth only. It is the heart, tongue, and all that is in a man, joining together to the acknowledgment of sin, and God's righteousness; therefore it includes in it, not only a particular knowledge of our offences, and the temper of our hearts, but a sensible feeling of the loathsomeness and heinousness of these. And this is the spring that it flows from,—a broken and contrite heart, that is bruised under the apprehensions of the weight of guiltiness, and is embittered with the sense of the gall of iniquity that possesseth the heart. Here, then, is the great moment of confession and repentance; what is the inward fountain it flows from? If the heart be brought to the distinct and clear view of itself, and to discern the iniquity and plague of it, and so to fall down under the mighty hand of God, and before his tribunal, as guilty, as not being able or willing to open his mouth in an excuse or extenuation of sin, or to plead for compassion from any consideration in himself; a soul thus placed between iniquities set in order and battle array, on the one hand, and the holy law and righteousness of God on the other hand; the filthiness of the one filling with shame and confusion, and the dreadfulness of the other causing fear and trembling: in this posture, I say, for a soul to come and fall at the Judge's feet, and make supplication to him in his Son Christ; thus being inwardly pressed to vent and pour out our hearts before him, in the confession of our sins, and to flee unto the city of refuge,—his mercy and grace that is declared in Jesus Christ,—this, I say, is indeed to confess our sins: for then confession is an exoneration and disburdening of the heart,—it flows from the abundance of the inward contrition of it.

And as this must be the spring of it, so there is another stream that will certainly flow from the ingenuous confession of our sins, that is, a forsaking of them. These are the two streams that flow from one head and spring, the inward fountain of contrition and sorrow for sin; there is a holy indignation kindled in the heart against sin, and an engagement upon such a soul, as indeed flees to mercy, to renounce sin; and here is the complete nature of true repentance. Solomon joins them, "He that confesseth and forsaketh shall have mercy," Prov. 27:13. And this is opposed to covering of sins—"for he that covereth his sins shall not prosper." And what is that to cover his sin? Confessing them in a general confused notion, without any distinct knowledge, or sense of any particular guiltiness, that is covering of sins, or confessing sin; and not forsaking of it, that is a covering of sin: for to act sin over again, with continual fresh delight and vigour, is to retract our confessions and to bury and cover them with the mould of new transgressions. Now, take this unto you, "you shall not prosper!" what can be said worse? For you are but in a dream of happiness, and you shall one day be shaken out of it, and that fancied pardon shall vanish, and then your sins that you covered in this manner, shall be discovered before the Judge of the world, and "you shall not stand in judgment."

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## XVIII

1 John 1:9—If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, &c.

The freedom of God's grace, and the greatness of his wisdom, shine forth most brightly in the dispensation of the gospel, and both of them beautify and illustrate one another. That there is, first, an expiation of sin by the blood of Jesus Christ, that a way is laid down

of reconciling the world, and that "by the blood of the cross;" that peace is purchased, and so preached unto sinners, as a thing already procured, and now only to be applied unto the soul by faith;—herein doth the inestimable riches of the grace of God expose itself to the view of angels and men. That the great work of redemption is ended, ere it come to us; and there remains nothing, but to publish it to the world, and invite us to come and receive it, and have a part in it;—all is ready, the feast prepared, and set on the table, and there wants nothing but guests to eat of it, and these are daily called by the gospel to come to this table, which the wisdom of the Father hath prepared for us, without either our knowledge or concurrence. Besides, the very terms of proposing the gospel, speak forth absolute freedom: what can be more free and easy than this? "Christ is sent to die for sinners, and to redeem them from the curse,—only receive him, come to him, and believe in him." He hath undertaken to save, only do you consent too, and give up your name to him;—ye have nothing to do to satisfy justice, or purchase salvation, only be willing that he do it for you, or rather acquiesce in that he hath done already, and rest on it. But how shall our sins be pardoned, and justice satisfied? Only confess your sins to him, and ye are forgiven, not for your confession, but for Christ; only acknowledge thine iniquity and wrongs, and he hath taken another way to repair his justice than by thy destruction and condemnation. He is so far from extending his justice against thee, that he is rather engaged upon his faithfulness and justice to forgive thee, because of his promise.

Yet, ye would not conceive so of this manner of proposal of forgiveness and salvation, as if the requiring of such a thing as repentance in thee were any derogation from the absoluteness of his grace; for it is not required, either to the point of satisfaction to God's justice, and expiation of sin, for that is done already upon the cross. Christ was not offered to save sinners, he was not sent upon the previous condition of their repentance: nay, "while we were yet enemies, Christ died for the ungodly." So that to the business of our redemption there was no concurrence upon our part, nor influence upon it by our carriage; for he considered us as sinners, and

miserable, and so saved us. And now, to the actual application of these preventing mercies,—it is true, it is needful in the wise and reasonable dispensation of God, that sinners be brought to the knowledge and sensible acknowledgment of their sin and misery, and so be upon rational inducements of misery within, and mercy without, of self-indigency, and Christ's sufficiency, be drawn unto Jesus Christ, and so to a partaking of those purchased privileges of forgiveness of sin, peace with God, &c. I say, all this is so far from diminishing a jot of that absolute freedom of grace, that it rather jointly proclaims the riches of grace and wisdom both, that repentance should be given to an impenitent sinner, and faith freely bestowed on an unbelieving sinner; and withal, that remission and salvation, together with faith and repentance, should be brought to us by his death, while we were yet enemies;—this doth declare the most unparalleled bounty and grace that the heart of man can imagine; and withal, that remission of sins is joined to confession, and salvation to faith, herein the wisdom of God triumphs; for what way is it possible to declare that freedom of grace, to the sensible conviction of a sinner, and so to demonstrate it to all men's consciences except by making them return within, to see their own absolute unworthiness, vileness, and incorrespondency to such mercies, and so drawing an acknowledgment of his grace from the mouths and consciences of all? How shall a soul know that rich superabundant grace, if he know not the abundance of his sins? How shall he profess the one, except he withal confess the other? Let us imagine an impenitent sinner, continuing in rebellion, pardoned and forgiven: and is there anything more contrary to common sense and reason, to be in God's favour, and yet not accepting that favour; to be a friend, and yet an enemy; to have sins forgiven, and yet not known, not confessed? These, I say, sound some plain dissonancy and discord to our very first apprehension. Certainly, this is the way to declare the glory of his grace, in the hiding and covering of sin, even to discover sin to the sinner; else if God should hide sin, and it be hid withal from the conscience, both thy sin and God's grace should be hid and covered, neither the one nor the other would appear. Take it thus then,—the confession of sin is not for this end, to have any

casual influence upon thy remission, or to procure any more favour and liking with God; but it is simply this, the confession of sin is the most accommodate way of the profession and publication of the grace of God in the forgiving of sins. Faith and repentance are not set down as conditions pre-required on thy part, that may procure salvation or forgiveness, but they are inseparably annexed unto salvation and forgiveness, to the end that they may manifest to our sensible conviction, that grace and freedom of grace which shines in forgiveness and salvation.

"He is just and faithful," &c. Herein is the wonder of the grace of God increased, that when we are under an obligation to infinite punishment for sin, and bound guilty before his justice, that the "most great and potent Lord," who can easily rid himself of all his enemies, and do all his pleasure in heaven and earth, should come under an obligation to man to forgive him his sin. A strange exchange! Man is standing bound by the cords of his own sins over the justice of God,—he is under that insoluble tye of guiltiness. God in the mean time is free, and loosed from the obligation of the first covenant, that is, his promise of giving life to man. We have loosed him from that voluntary engagement, and are bound under a curse. And yet, behold the permutation of grace,—man is loosed from sin, to which he was bound, and God is bound to forgive sin, to which he was not bound. He enters into a new and voluntary engagement by his promise, and gives right to poor creatures to sue and seek forgiveness of him, according to his faithfulness. Yet in this plea, as it becomes us to use confidence, because he gives us ground by his promises, so we should season it with humility, knowing how infinitely free and voluntary his condescension is, being always mindful, that he may in righteousness exact punishment of us for sin, rather than we seek forgiveness from him. And yet seek it we ought, because he hath engaged his faithful promise; which opportunity to neglect, and not to improve, either through fear or security, were as high contempt and disobedience to him, as those sins by which we offend him.

Certainly, the very name of God, revealed to us or known by nature's light, those general characters of his name, mercy and goodness, power and greatness, might suffice to so much, as to make us, in the apprehensions of our own guiltiness and provocations of his holiness, to look no other way than to his own merciful and gracious nature. Suppose we had nothing of a promise from him, by which he is bound; yet as the very apprehension of the general goodness, and unlimited bounty, and original happiness that is in God, ought naturally to draw the creature towards him in all its wants, to supplicate his fulness, that can supply all necessities, without lessening his own abundance; even so, if we did only apprehend that God is the fountain of mercy, and that he is infinitely above us and our injuries, and that all our being and well-being eternally consists in his sole favour; this, I say, alone considered, might draw us to a pouring out our hearts before him, in the acknowledgment of our guiltiness, and casting ourselves upon his mercy, as the term is used in war, when there is no quarter promised, and no capitulation made. It is the last refuge of a desperate sinner, to render unto God upon mercy, to resign himself to his free disposal. Since I cannot but perish, may a soul say, without him, there is no way of escaping from his wrath, I will rather venture, and "go in to the King, and if I perish, I perish." There is more hope in this way to come to him, than to flee from him. Perhaps he may shew an act of absolute sovereign goodness, and be as glorious in passing by an offence, as just in punishing it. Do I not see in man, in whom the divine majesty hath imprinted some characters of conscience and honesty, that it is more generous and noble to forgive than to revenge? And do I not see generally among men, clemency and compassion are commended above severity and rigour, though just, especially towards those who are inferior, weak, unable to resist, and have yielded themselves to mercy. Now, shall I not much more apprehend that of God which I admire in a sinful man? Shall not that be most perfect in him which is but a maimed and broken piece of his image in lost man? Certainly, it is the glory of God to conceal an offence as well as to publish it, and he can shew as much greatness and majesty in mercy as in justice; therefore I will wholly commit myself to him. I think a

man ought to reason so, from the very natural knowledge he hath of God. But when ye have not only his name and nature published, but his word and promise so often proclaimed, himself come under some tye to receive and accept graciously all sinners that fly in under the shadow of his wings of mercy; then, O with how much persuasion and boldness should we come to him, and lay open our sins before him, who not only may pardon them, and not only is likely to do it, seeing he hath a gracious nature, but certainly will pardon them, cannot but do it, because his faithfulness requireth it! Certainly, he hath superadded his word to his name, his promise to his nature, to confirm our faith, and give us ample ground of strong consolation.

There is another more suitable notion about the justice of God, in forgiving sin, which hath some truth in the thing itself, but whether it be imported here, I dare not certainly affirm. Some take his faithfulness in relation to his word of promise, and his justice in relation to the price and ransom paid by Christ, importing as much as this,—whatever sinner comes to God in Christ, confessing his own guiltiness in sincerity, and supplicating for pardon, he cannot in justice refuse to give it out unto them, since he hath taken complete satisfaction of Christ. When a sinner seeks a discharge of all sin, by virtue of that blood, the Lord is bound by his own justice to give it out and to write a free remission to them; since he is fully paid, he cannot but discharge us, and cancel our bonds. So then a poor sinner that desires mercy, and would forsake sin, hath a twofold ground to suit this forgiveness upon—Christ's blood, and God's own word, Christ's purchase and payment, and the Father's promise; he is just and righteous, and therefore he cannot deny the one, nor yet take two satisfactions, two payments for one debt; and he is faithful, so he cannot but stand to the other, that is, his promise, and thus is forgiveness ascertained and assured unto the confessing sinner. If any would take this in relation to confession, as if it reflected upon that which preceded; and the meaning should be, if any man confess his sin, he is just to requite his confession with remission,—he cannot in righteousness deny one that deserves it so well, he is just to return some suitable recompense to such a humble confession; this sense

were a perverting of the whole gospel, and would overturn the foundations of grace: for there is no connection between our confession and his remission, but that which the absolute good pleasure of his will hath made; besides, that repentance is as free grace given from the exalted Prince, as remission of sins is.

## XIX

1 John 1:9, 10—If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, &c.

And who will not confess their sin, say you? Who doth not confess sins daily, and, therefore, who is not forgiven and pardoned? But stay, and consider the matter again; take not this upon your first light apprehensions, which in religion are commonly empty, vain, and superficial; but search the scriptures, and your own hearts, that ye may know what confession means. It may be said of that external custom of confession that many of you have, that the Lord hath not required it,—“sacrifices and burnt-offerings thou wouldest not.” Some external submissions and confessions, which you take for compensation for sins and offences against God,—these, I say, are but abomination to the Lord; “but a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise,” Psal. 51:16, 17. And, “Lo, I come to do thy will, I delight in it,” Psal. 40:7, 8. When external professions and confessions are separated from the internal contrition of the heart and godly sorrow for sin; and when both internal contrition and external profession and confession are divided from conformity, or study of conformity to God's will, then they are in no better acceptance with God than those external sacrifices which God rejected, though he had required them, because they were disjoined from the true life of them and spiritual meaning, that is, faith in a mediator, and love to obedience. If confession flow not from some

contrition of heart, there be not some inward spring of this kind, the heart, opened and unfolding its very inside before God, breaking in pieces, which makes both pain of sense, and likewise gives the clearer view of the inward parts of the heart; and if it be not joined with affection to God's will and law, earnest love to new obedience, it is but a vain, empty, and counterfeit confession, that denies itself. I suppose, a man that confesses sin which he feels not, or forsakes not, in so doing, he declares that he knows not the nature of sin; he may know such an action that is commonly called sin, and, it may be, is ashamed and censured among men, and therefore he confesseth it; but while he confesseth it without sense or feeling, he declares that he takes it not up as sin, hath not found the vileness and loathsomeness of the nature of it, nor beheld it as it is a violation of the most high Lord's laws, and a provocation of his glorious holiness. Did a soul view it thus, as it is represented in God's sight, as it dishonours that glorious Majesty, and hath manifest rebellion in it against him, and as it defiles and pollutes our spirits; he could not, I say, thus look upon it, but he would find some inward soul-abhorrence and displicence at it, and himself too. How monstrous would it make him in his own sight? It could not but affect the heart, and humble it in secret before God; whereas your forced and strained confessions made in public, they are merely taken on then, and proceed from no inward principle. There is no shadow of any soul humiliation in secret, but as some use to put on sackcloth when they come to make that profession, and put it off when they go out, so you put on a habit of confession in public, and put it off you when you go out of the congregation. To lie mourning before the Lord, in your secret retirements,—that you are strangers to. But I wonder how you should thus mock God, that you will not be as serious and real in confessing as in sinning. Will you sin with the whole man, and confess only with the mouth? Will ye act tin with delight, and not confess it with a true sorrow that indeed affects the heart? Now, do you honour God by confessing, when the manner of it declares, that you feel not the bitterness of sin, and conceive not the holiness and righteousness of God, whom you have to do withal? Even so, when you confess sin, which you do not forsake, you in so far declare that

you know not sin, what it is you confess, and so, that you have mocked him who will not be mocked; for, what a mockery is it, to confess those faults which we have no solid effectual purpose to reform! To vomit up your sins by confession, that we may with more desire and lust lick up the vomit again, and to pretend to wash, for nothing else, but to return to the puddle, and defile again! My brethren, "out of the same fountain comes not bitter water and sweet," James 3:11. Since that which ordinarily proceeds from you is bitter, unsavory to God and man, carnal, earthly, and sensual, your ways are a displayed banner against God's will, then lay your account, all your professions and acknowledgments are of the same nature,—they are but a little more sugared over, and their inward nature is not changed, as unacceptable to God, as your sins are.

I would give you some characters out of the text, to discover unto you the vanity and emptiness of your ordinary confessions. The confession of sin must be particular, universal, perpetual, or constant:—particular, I say, for there are many thousands who confess that they are sinners, and yet do not at all confess their sins: for, to confess sins, is to confess their own real actual guiltiness, that which they indeed have committed, or are inclined to do. So the true and sincere confession of a repenting people is expressed, 1 Kings 8:38, "What prayer or supplication soever be made by any man, which shall know the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands, then hear thou in heaven, and forgive every man whose heart thou knowest." Now consider whether or not you be thus acquainted with your own hearts and ways, as to know your particular plague and predominant sin. Are you not rather wholly strangers to yourselves, especially the plague of your hearts? There are few that keep so much as a record or register of their actions done against God's law, or their neglects of his will; and therefore, when you are particularly posed about your sins, or the challenge of sin, you can speak nothing to that, but that you never knew one sin by another; that is, indeed, you never observed your sins, you never knew any sin, but contented yourself with the tradition you received that you were sinners; but if any man be used to reflect upon his own ways,

yet generally, the most part of men are altogether strangers to their hearts; if they know any evil of themselves it is at most but something done or undone, some commission or omission, but nothing of the inward fountain of sin is discovered. I beseech you, then, do not deceive yourselves with this general acknowledgment that you are sinners, while in the mean time your real particular sins are hid from you, and you cannot choose but hide in a generality from God. Certainly, you are far from forgiveness, and that blessedness of which David speaks, Psal. 32, for this belongs to the man "that hideth not his sins, in whose heart there is no guile." And this is the plainness and sincerity of the heart, rightly to discern its own plagues, and unfold them to him. David, no doubt, would at any time have confessed that he was a sinner, but mark how heavy the wrath of God was on him for all that, because he came not to a plain, ingenuous, and humble acknowledgment of his particular sins. "I confessed my sin, and mine iniquity I hid not." While you confess only in general terms, you confess others' sins rather than yours; but this is it—to descend into our own hearts, and find out our just and true accusation, our real debt, to charge ourselves as narrowly as we can, that he may discharge us fully, and forgive us freely.

Next, I say, confession must be universal, that is, of all sin, without partiality or respect to any sin. I doubt if a man can truly repent of any sin, except he in a manner repent of all sin; or truly forsake one sin, except there be a divorcement of the heart from, and forsaking of all sin; therefore the apostle saith, "If we confess our sins," not sin simply, but sins, taking in all the body and collection of them; for it is opposed to that, "if we say we have no sin," &c. Then there lies a necessity upon us to confess what we have; we have all sin, and so should confess all sins. Now, my meaning is not, that it is absolutely necessary that a soul come to the particular knowledge and acknowledgment of all his sins, whether of ignorance or infirmity; nay, that it is not possible; for "who can understand his errors?" saith David; "cleanse thou me from secret sins," Psal. 19:12. There are many sins of ignorance, that we know not to be sins, and many escapes of infirmity, that we do not advert to, which otherwise we

might know. Now, I do not impose that burden on a soul, to confess every individual sin of that kind; but this certainly must be,—there must be such a discovery of the nature of sin, and the loathsomeness of it in God's sight, and the heinous guilt of it, as may abase and humble the soul in his presence; there must be some distincter and clearer view of the dispositions and lusts of the heart, than men attain generally unto; and, withal, a discovery of the holy and spiritual meaning of God's law, which may unfold a multitude of transgressions, that are hid from the world, and make sin to abound in a man's sight and sense—"for when the law enters, sin abounds;" and to close up this, as there are many sins now discovered unto such a soul, which lay hid before, "the light having shined in upon the darkness," and, above all, the desperate wickedness of the heart is presented; so there is no sin known and discerned, but there is an equal impartial sorrow for it, and indignation against it. As a believer hath respect to all God's commands, and loves to obey them, so the penitent soul hath an impartial hatred of all sin, even the dearest and most beloved idol, and desires unfeignedly to be rid of it. Hence your usual public confessions of sin are wiped out of the number of true and sincere confessions, because you pretend to repent of one sin, and in the mean time, neither do ye know a multitude of other sins that prevail over you, nor do you mourn them, nor forsake them. Nay, you do not examine yourselves that way, to find out the temper of your hearts, or tenor and course of your ways. You pretend to repent for drunkenness, or such like, and yet you are ordinary cursers, swearers, liars, railers, neglecters of prayer, profaners of the Sabbath and such like, and these you do not withal mourn for. In sum, he that mourns only for the sin that men censure, knoweth and confesseth no sin sincerely. If you would indeed return unto God from some gross evils, you must be divorced in your affections from all sin.

Then this confession should be perpetuated and continued as long as we are in this life, for that is imported by comparing this verse with those it stands between. "If we say we have no sin," if we say at any time, while we are in this life, if we we imagine or dream of any such

perfection here, "we lie." Now, what should we do then since sin is always lodging in our mortal bodies, during this time of necessary abode beside an ill neighbour? What should be our exercise? Even this,—confess your sins, confess, I say, as long as you have them, draw out this the length of that. Be continually groaning to him under that body of death, and mourning under your daily infirmities and failings. That stream of corruption runs continually,—let the stream of your contrition and confession run as incessantly; and there is another stream of Christ's blood, that runs constantly too, to cleanse you. Now, herein is the discovery of the vanity and deceitfulness of many of your confessions, public and private; the current of them soon dries up, there is no perpetuity or constancy in them, no daily humbling or abasing yourselves, but all that is, is by fits and starts, upon some transient convictions, or outward censures and rebukes; and thus men quickly cover and bury their sins in oblivion and security and forget what manner of persons they were. They are not under a daily impartial examination of their ways, take notice of nothing but some solemn and gross escapes, and these are but a short time under their view.

Now, let us apply a little to the encouragement of poor souls, who being inwardly burdened with the weight of their own guiltiness, exoner themselves by confession in his bosom. As you have two suits, and two desires to him,—one, that your sins may be forgiven, another, that they may be subdued; so he hath two solemn engagements and ties to satisfy you—one to forgive your sins, and another to cleanse you from all unrighteousness. The soul that is truly penitent, is not only desirous of pardon of sin,—that is not the chief or only design of such a soul in application to Christ,—but it is withal to be purified from sin and all unrighteousness, and to have ungodly lusts cleansed away. And herein is the great probation of such an one's reality—it will not suffice or satisfy such an one, to be assured of delivery from wrath and condemnation, but he must likewise be redeemed from sin, that it hath no dominion over him. He desires to be freed from death, that he may have his "conscience withal purged from dead works, to serve the living God," Heb. 9:14.

He would have sin blotted out of an accusing conscience, that it may be purged out of the affections of the heart, and he would have his sins washed away, for this end especially, that he may be "washed from his sins," Rev. 1:5. Now, as this is the great desire and design of such a heart, in which there is no guile, to have sin purified and purged out of us, as well as pardoned, so there is a special tye and obligation upon God our Father, by promise, not only to pardon sin, but to purge from sin; not only to cover it with the garment of Christ's righteousness, and the breadth of his infinite love, but also to cleanse it by his Spirit effectually applying that blood to the purifying of the heart. Now, where God hath bound himself voluntarily, and out of love, do not ye loose him by unbelief, for that will bind you into a prison: but labour to receive these gracious promises, and to take him bound as he offers. Believe, I say, that he will both forgive you, and in due time will cleanse you heart from the love and delight of sin. Believe his promise, and engagement by promise to both, and this will set a seal to his truth and faithfulness. There is nothing in God to affright a sinner, but his justice, holiness, and righteousness; but unto thee who, in the humble confession of thy sins, fliest into Jesus Christ, that very thing which did discourage thee, may now encourage and imbolden thee to come, for "he is just and faithful to forgive sins." His justice being now satisfied, is engaged that way to forgive, not to punish.

## XX

1 John 1:10—If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us

There is nothing in which religion more consists, than in the true and unfeigned knowledge of ourselves. The heathens supposed that sentence, γνωθὶ σεαυτὸν, "know thyself," descended from heaven. It was indeed the motto of the wisest and most religious amongst them.

But certain it is, that the true and sincere understanding of ourselves descends from "the Father of lights," and is as great a gift as man is capable of, next to the knowledge of God himself. There is nothing more necessary to man, either as man or as a Christian, either as endowed with reason or professing religion, than that he should be thoroughly acquainted with himself, his own heart, its dispositions, inclinations, and lusts, his ways and actions; that while he travels abroad to other creatures and countries, he may not commit so shameful an absurdity, as to be a stranger at home, where he ought to be best acquainted. Yet how sad is it, that this which is so absolutely needful and universally profitable, should be lying under the manyest difficulties in the attainment of it? So that there is nothing harder, than to bring a man to a perfect understanding of himself:—what a vile, haughty, and base creature he is—how defiled and desperately wicked his nature—how abominable his actions; in a word, what a compound of darkness and wickedness he is—a heap of defiled dust, and a mass of confusion—a sink of impiety and iniquity, even the best of mankind, those of the rarest and most refined extraction, take them at their best estate. Thus they are as sepulchres painted without, and putrified within—outwardly adorned, and within all full of rottenness and corruption: "the imagination of his heart only evil continually." Now, I say, here is the great business and labour of religion,—to bring a man to the clear discerning of his own nature,—to represent unto him justly his own image, as it is painted in the word of God, and presented in the glass of the law; and so by such a surprising monstrous appearance, to affect his heart to self-abhorrency in dust and ashes, and to have this representation, however unpleasant, yet most profitable, continually observant to our minds, that we may not forget what manner of persons we are. Truly, I may say, if there be a perfection in this estate of imperfection, herein it consists; and if there be any attainment of a Christian, I account this the greatest,—to be truly sensible of himself, and vile in his own eyes.

It was the custom of Philip, king of Macedonia, after he had overcome the famous republic of Greece, to have a young man to

salute him first every morning with these words, Phillippe homo es,— Philip, thou art a man; to the end that he might be daily minded of his mortality, and the unconstancy of human affairs, lest he should be puffed up with his victory; and this was done before any could have access to speak with him, as if it were to season and prepare him for the actions of the day. But O how much more ought a Christian to train up his own heart and accustom it this way, to be his continual remembrancer of himself; to suggest continually to his mind, and whisper this first into his ear in the morning, and mid-day, and evening,—peccator es, thou art a sinner; to hold our own image continually before us, in prayer and praises, in restraints, in liberties of spirit, in religious actions, and in all our ordinary conversation, that it might salt and season all our thoughts, words, and deeds, and keep them from that ordinary purification and corruption of pride and self-conceit, which maketh all our ointment stink.

"If we say we have no sin, we make him a liar." Why is this repeated again, but to shew unto us, even to you Christians who believe in Christ, and are washed in his blood, how hard it is to know ourselves aright? If we speak of the grosser sort of persons, they scarce know any sin, nor the nature and vileness of any that they know; therefore they live in security and peace, and bless themselves in their own hearts, as if they had no sin. For such, I say, I shall only say unto them, that your self-deceiving is not so subtile, but it may soon be discerned: your lie is gross, and quickly seen through. But I would turn myself to you Christians, who are in some measure acquainted with yourselves; yet there is something against you from this word. After ye have once got some peace from the challenge of sin, and hope of pardon, you many times fall out of acquaintance with yourselves. Having attained, by the Lord's grace, to some restraint of the more visible outbreakings of sin, you have not that occasion to know yourselves by; and so you remain strangers to your hearts, and fall into better liking with yourselves, than the first sight of yourselves permitted you. Now, my beloved in the Lord, herein you are to be blamed, that you do not rather go to the fountain, and there

behold the streams, than only to behold the fountain in the streams. You ought rather, upon the Lord's testimony of man, to believe what is in you, before you find it, and see it breaking out; and keep this character continually in your sight, which will be more powerful to humble you than many outbreakings. I think we should be so well acquainted with our own natures, as to account nothing strange to them that we see abroad; but rather think all the grossness and wickedness of men suitable and correspondent to our spirits,—to that root of bitterness that is in them. The goodness of God in restraining the appearance of that in us, which is within us in reality, should rather increase the sense of our own wickedness, than diminish it in our view.

Indeed, self-love is that which blinds us, and bemists us in the sight of ourselves. We look upon ourselves through this false medium, and it represents all things more beautiful than they are; and therefore the apostle hath reason to say, "We deceive ourselves, and we make God a liar." O how much practical self-conceit is there in the application of truth! There are many errors contrary to the truths themselves, and many deceivers and deceived, who spread them; but I believe there are more errors committed by men in the application of truths to their own hearts, than in the contemplation of them; and more self-deceiving than deceiving of others. It is strange to think, how sound, clear, and distinct a man's judgment will be against those evils in others, which yet he seeth not in himself; how many Christians will be able to decipher the nature of some vices, and unbowl the evils of them, and be quick-sighted to espy the least appearance of them in another, and to condemn it; and yet so partial are they in judging themselves—self-love so purblinds them in this reflection, that they cannot discern that in themselves, which others cannot but discern! How often do men declaim against pride, and covetousness, and self-seeking, and other evils of that kind? They will pour out a flood of eloquence and zeal against them; and yet it is strange they do not advert, that they are accusing themselves, and impannelling themselves in such discourses, though others, it may be, will easily perceive a predominancy of these evils in them. "Who

art thou, O man, who judgeth another, and doest the same thing? Canst thou escape God's judgment?" Rom. 2:1. Consider this, O Christian, that thou mayest learn to turn the edge of all thy censures and convictions against thyself, that thou mayest prevent all men's judgments of thee, in judging thyself of all things that men can judge thee, that is, a chief of sinners, that hath the root of all sin in thee; and so thou mayest anticipate the divine judgment too, "for if we judge ourselves, we shall not be judged." Labour thou to know those evils that are incident to thy nature, before others can know them, that is, in the root and fountain, before they come to the fruit and stream; to know sins in the first conceptions of them, before they come to such productions as are visible; and this shall keep thee humble, and preserve thee from much sin, and thou shalt not deceive thyself, nor dishonour God, in making him a liar, but rather set to thy seal to this truth, "and his word shall abide in thee."

There is a common rule that we have in judging ourselves, by comparing ourselves amongst ourselves, which, as Paul saith, "is not wisdom," 2 Cor. 10:12. When we do not measure ourselves by the perfect rule of God's holy word, but parallel ourselves with other persons, who are still defective from the rule, far further from it than any one is from another: this is the ordinary method of judging of self-love. We compare with the worst persons; and if we be not so bad as they, we think ourselves good. If not so ignorant as some are, we presume that we know; if not so profane as many, we believe ourselves religious. "Lord, I am not as this publican," so say many in their hearts,—there is a curser, a swearer, a drunkard, a blind ignorant soul, that neglects prayer in private and public, and upon these ruins of other sins, they build some better estimation of themselves. But, I pray you, what will that avail you, to be unlike them, if you be more unlike your pattern than they are unlike you? It must be, others will compare with those that are good, but it is with that which is worst in them, and not that which is best. How often do men reckon this way,—here is a good man, here is an eminent person, yet he is such and such, subject to such infirmity, and here self-love flatters itself, and, by flattering, deceives itself. My beloved,

let us learn to establish a more perfect rule, which may shew all our imperfections. Let our rule ascend, that our hearts may descend in humility. But when our rule and pattern descends to men of like infirmities, then our pride and self-conceit ascends; and the higher we be that way in our own account, the lower we are indeed, and in God's account; and the lower we be in ourselves we lose nothing by it: for, as God is higher in our account, so we are higher in God's account, according to that standing rule, Matth. 23:12, "Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased, and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted."

## XXI

1 John 2:1—My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, &c.

The gospel is an entire uniform piece; all the parts of it are interwoven through other, and interchangeably knit together, so that there can be no dividing of it any more than of Christ's coat that was without seam. If you have it not altogether by the divine lot, you cannot truly have any part of it, for they are so knit together, that if you disjoin them, you destroy them; and if they cease to be together, they cease altogether to be. I speak this, because there may be pretensions to some abstracted parts of Christianity. One man pretends to faith in Jesus Christ, and persuasion of pardon of sin, and in this there may be some secret glorifying arising from confidence; another may pretend to the study of holiness and obedience, and may endeavour something that way to do known duties, and abstain from gross sins. Now, I say, if the first do not conjoin the study of the second; and if the second do not lay down the first as the foundation, both of them embrace a shadow for the thing itself, because they separate those things that God hath joined,

and so can have no being but in men's fancy, when they are not conjoined. He that would pretend to a righteousness of Christ, without him, must withal study to have the righteousness of the law fulfilled within him; and he that endeavours to have holiness within must withal go out of himself, to seek a righteousness without him, whereupon to build his peace and acceptance with God; or else, neither of them hath truly any righteousness without them, to cover them, or holiness within, to cleanse them. Now, here the beloved apostle shews us this divine contexture of the gospel. The great and comprehensive end and design of the gospel is, peace in pardon of sin, and purity from sin: "These things I write unto you, that you sin not," &c. The gospel is comprised in commands and promises; both make one web, and link in together. The immediate end of the command is, "that we sin not;" nay, but there is another thing always either expressly added, or tacitly understood—"but if any man sin," that desires not to sin, "we have an advocate with the Father." So the promise comes in as a subsidiary help to all the precepts. It is annexed to give security to a poor soul from despair; and therefore the apostle teacheth you a blessed art of constructing all the commands and exhortations of the gospel, those of the highest pitch, by supplying the full sense with this happy and seasonable caution or caveat, "but if any man sin," &c. Doth that command, "Be ye holy as I am holy, perfect as your heavenly Father," which sounds so much unattainable perfection, and seems to hold forth an inimitable pattern; doth it, I say, discourage thee? Then use the apostle's art, add this caution to the command, subjoin this sweet exceptive. "But if any man," that desires to be holy, and gives himself to this study, "fail often," and 'fall' and defile himself with unholiness, let him not despair, but know, that "he hath an advocate with the Father." If that of Paul's urge thee, "present your bodies a living sacrifice, and be not conformed to the world, but transformed, and glorify God in your bodies and spirits, which are his," Rom. 12:1, 2, and 1 Cor. 6:20;—and, "cleanse yourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit," 2 Cor. 7:1;—and, "walk in the Spirit, and walk as children of the light," &c.;—if these do too rigorously exact upon thee, so as to make thee lose thy peace, and weaken thy heart and hands, learn to make out a

full sentence, and fill up the full sense and meaning of the gospel, according as you see it done here. "But if any man,"—whose inward heart-desires, and chief designs are toward these things; who would think himself happy in holiness and conformity to God, and estimates his blessedness or misery, from his union or separation from God,—"sin," then "we have an advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the righteous," who hath all that we want, and will not suffer any accusation to fasten upon us, "as long as he lives to make intercession for us."

On the other hand, take a view of the promises of the gospel; though the immediate, and next end of them is, to give peace to troubled souls, and settle us in the high point of our acceptance with God, yet certainly, they have a further end, even a purity from sin, as well as pardon of sin, cleansing from all sin and filthiness, as well as covering of filthiness. "These things I write unto you, that ye sin not." What things? Consider what goes before, and what follows after, even the publication of the word of life, and eternal life in him, the declaration of our fellowship with God in Christ, the offering of the blood of Christ, able to cleanse all sin, the promise of pardon to the penitent, confession of sin,—"all these things I write, that ye sin not;" so that this seems to be the ultimate end and chief design of the gospel, unto which all tends, unto which all work together. The promises are for peace, and peace is for purity; the promises are for faith, and faith is for purifying of the heart, and performing the precepts, so that, all at length returns to this, from whence, while we swerved, all this misery is come upon us. In the beginning it was thus,—man was created to glorify God, by obedience to his blessed will; sin interposeth and marreth the whole frame, and from this hath a flood of misery flowed in upon us. Well, the gospel comes offering a Saviour, and forgiveness in him. Thus peace is purchased, pardon granted, the soul is restored unto its primitive condition and state of subordination to God's will; and so redemption ends where creation began, or rather in a more perfect frame of the same kind. The second Adam builds what the first Adam broke down, and the Son re-creates what the Father in the beginning created, yea, with

some addition. In this new edition of mankind, all seems new—"new heavens, and new earth;" and that because the creature that was made old, and defiled with sin, is made new by grace. Now, hence you may learn the second part of this lesson that the apostle teaches us; as ye ought to correct, as it were, precepts of the gospel, by subjoining promises in this manner, so ye ought to direct promises towards the performance of his precepts, as their chief end. Whensoever you read it written, "The blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin;"—"If we confess, he is faithful to forgive our sins;"—"God so loved the world that he gave his Son;"—"He that believeth hath everlasting life," &c—then make up the entire sense and meaning, after this manner, "These things are written that we sin not." Is there a redemption from wrath published? Is there reconciliation with God preached? And are we beseeched to come and have the benefit of them? Then say, and supply within thine own, "These things are written, published, and preached, that we may not sin." Look to the furthest end of these things, it is, "that we sin not." The end of things, the scope of writings, and the purpose of actions, is the very measure of them, and so that is the best interpreter of them. The scope of Scripture is by all accounted the very thread that will lead a man right in and out of the labyrinths that are in it. And so it is used as the rule of the interpretation in the parts of it. Now, my beloved in the Lord, take here the scope of the whole Scriptures, the mark that all the gospel shoots at, "These things I write unto you, that ye sin not." You hear, it is true, of "pardon of sin, of delivery from wrath, of not coming into condemnation, of covering offences, of blotting them out as a cloud;" all these you read and hear; but what do they all aim at? If you consider not that attentively, you shall no more understand the plain gospel, than you can expound a parable without observing the scope of it. Do you think these have no further aim, than to give you peace, and to secure you from fears and terrors, that you may then walk as you list, and follow the guiding of your own hearts? Nay, if you take it so, you totally mistake it. If you do not read on, and find all these things written to this end, "that we sin not, you err, not understanding," or misunderstanding, "the Scriptures."

"These things I write unto you, little children." To enforce this the more sweetly, he useth this affectionate compellation, "little children," for in all things affection hath a mighty stroke, almost as much as reason. It is the most suitable way to prevail with the spirit of a man, to deal in love and tenderness with it; it insinuates more sweetly, and so can have less resistance, and therefore works more strongly. It is true, another way of terrors, threatenings, and reproofs, mingled with sharp and heavy words of challenges, may make a great deal of more noise, and yet it hath not such virtue to prevail with a rational soul. The Spirit of the Lord was not in the wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire, but in the still and calm voice which came to Elijah, 1 Kings 19:11, 12. These suit not the gentle, dove-like disposition of the Spirit; and though they be fit to rend rocks in pieces, yet they cannot truly break hearts, and make them contrite. The sun will make a man sooner part with his cloak than the wind; such is the difference between the warm beams of affection, and the boisterous violence of passions or terror. Now, O that there were such a spirit in them who preach the gospel, such a fatherly affection, that with much pity and compassion they might call sinners from the ways of death! O there is no subject, in which a man may have more room for melting affections, nothing that will admit of such bowels of compassion as this,—the multitude of souls posting to destruction, and so blindfolded they cannot see it! Here the fountain of tears might be opened to run abundantly. The Lord personates a tender-hearted father or husband often, "Oh, why will ye die? Ye have broken my heart with your whorish heart: O Jerusalem, how oft would I, but thou wouldst not?" When he, who is not subject to human passions, expresseth himself thus, how much more doth it become us poor creatures to have pity on our fellow-creatures? Should it not press out from us many groans, to see so many perishing, even beside salvation. I wish you would take it so, that "the warning you to flee from the wrath to come," is the greatest act of favour and love that can be done to you. It becomes us to be solicitous about you, and declare unto you, that you will meet with destruction in those paths in which you walk; that "these ways go down to the chambers of death." O that it might be done with so

much feeling compassion of your misery, as the necessity of it requires! But, why do many of you take it so hard to be thus forewarned, and have your danger declared unto you? I guess at the reason of it. You are in a distemper as sick children distempered in a fever, who are not capable of discerning their parents' tender affection, when it crosseth their own inclinations and ways.

## XXII

1 John 2:1—My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not: And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, &c.

"Christ Jesus came by water and by blood, not by water only, but by blood also," and I add, not by blood only, but by water also, chap. 5:6. In sin there is the guilt binding over to punishment, and there is the filth or spot that defileth the soul in God's sight. To take away guilt, nothing so fit as blood: for there is no punishment beyond blood; therefore saith the apostle, "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin," Heb. 9:22; and for the stain and spot, nothing is so suitable as water, for that is generally appointed for cleansing. And some shadow of this the heathens had, who had their lustrations in water, and their expiations by blood; but more significantly and plainly, the Jews, who had their purifications by sprinkling of water, Numb. 8:7 and expiations by sacrificing of slain beasts. But all these were but evanishing shadows; now the substance is come, "Jesus Christ is come in water and blood;" in water, to cleanse the spots of the soul, to purify it from all filthiness; and in blood, to satisfy for sin, and remove the punishment. You have both in these words of the apostle, for he labours to set out unto us the true Christ, whole and entire, "these things I write unto you, that ye sin not." Here is the proper end of the water—and "if any man sin, we have Christ a propitiation for our sins." Here is the blood—

the end of the blood is to save us, the end of the water is that we sin not, since we are saved. He came in the blood of expiation, because we had sinned; he came in the water of sanctification, that we might not sin. His blood speaks peace to the soul, and the water subjoins, "but let them not return to folly." His blood cries, "behold thou art made whole," and the water echoes unto it, "sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee," John 5:14. These two streams of water and blood, which are appointed for purity and pardon, run intermingled all along, and so the proper effects of them are interchangeably attributed to either of them; "he hath washed us in his blood," Rev. 1:5; and 7:14. "And the blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin." Then, certainly, this blood cannot be without water, it is never separated from it. The proper effect of blood is to cover sin; but because the water runs in that channel, and is conveyed by the blood thither, therefore it doth cleanse sin, as well as cover it.

"These things I write unto you, that ye sin not." This then is the design of the whole gospel, the great and grand design,—to destroy sin, and save the sinner. There is a treaty of peace made with the sinner, and "Christ is the peace-maker." A tender of life and salvation is made to him, but there is no treaty, no capitulation or composition with sin; out it must go, first out of its dominion, then out of its habitation. It must first lose its power, and then its being in a believer. Yea, this is one of the chief articles of our peace, not only required of us as our duty, that we should destroy that which cannot but destroy us; for, if any man will needs hug and embrace his sins, and cannot part with them, he must needs die in their embracements, because the council of heaven hath irrevocably passed a fatal sentence against sin, as the only thing that in all the creation hath the most perfect opposition to his blessed will, and contrariety to his holy nature,—but also, and especially, as the great stipulation and promise upon his part, "to redeem us from all our iniquities, and purify us to himself, a people zealous of good works;" and not only to redeem us from hell, and deliver us from wrath, Tit. 2:14. He hath undertaken this great work, to compece this mutiny and rebellion that was raised up in the creation by sin, else what

peace could be between God and us, as long as his enemy and ours dwelt in our bosom, and we at peace with it.

Now, take a short view of these things that are written in the preceding chapter, and you shall see that the harmonious voice of all that is in the gospel, is this, "that we sin not." Let me say further, as "these things are written that we sin not," so all things are done "that we sin not." Take all the whole work of creation, of providence, of redemption,—all of them speak one language, "that we sin not." "Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge: there is no speech or language where their voice is not heard," Psalm 19:2, 3. And, as in that place, their voice proclaims the glory, majesty, and goodness of God, so they, with the same sound, proclaim and declare, that we should not sin against such a God, so great, and so good. All that we see suggests and insinuates this into our hearts; all that we hear whispers this unto our ears, "that we sin not, that he made us, and not we ourselves, and that we are the very work of his hands." This speaks our absolute and essential dependence on him, and therefore proclaims with a loud voice, that sin, which would cut off this subordination, and loose from this dependence upon his holy will, is a monstrous unnatural thing. Take all his mercies towards us, whether general or particular, the transcendant abundance of his infinite goodness in the earth, that river of his riches that runs through it, to water every man, and brings supply to his doors, that infinite variety that is in heaven and earth, and all of them of equal birth-right with man; yet by the law of our Maker, a yoke of subjection and service to man is imposed upon them, so that man is, in a manner, set in the centre of all, to the end, that all the several qualifications and perfections that are in every creature, may centre and meet together in him, and flow towards him. Look upon all his particular acts of care and favour towards thee, consider his judgments upon the world, upon the nation, or thine own person. Put to thine ear, and hear, this is the joint harmonious melody, this is the proclamation of all, "that we sin not, that we sin not against so good a God," and so "great a God." That were wickedness, this were madness. If he wound, it is "that we sin not:" if he heal again, it is

"that we sin not." Doth he kill?—it is "that we sin not!" Doth he make alive?—it is for the same end. Doth he shut up and restrain our liberty, either by bondage, or sickness, or other afflictions; why?—he means "that we sin not." Doth he open again?—he means the same thing, "that we sin no more, lest a worse thing befall us." Doth he make many to fall in battle, and turn the fury of that upon us?—the voice of it is, that you who are left behind, should "sin no more." Is there severity towards others, and towards you clemency? O the loud noise of that is, "sin not!" But alas, the result of all is, that which is written, Psal. 78:32—"Nevertheless they sinned still." In the midst of so many concurring testimonies, in the very throng of all the sounds and voices that all the works of God utter, in the very hearing of these, nevertheless "to sin still, and not to return and inquire early after God:" this is the plague and judgment of the nation.

But let us return to the words, "these things," &c. "That which is written of the word of life, that which was from the beginning, and was manifested unto us," that is written "that we sin not:" For, saith this same apostle, chap 3:5, 8, "And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins, and in him is no sin;" yea, for this very purpose, saith he, "that he might destroy the works of the devil." Now, this is the great business, that drew the Son out of the Father's bosom,—to destroy the arch-enemy and capital rebel, sin, which, as to man, is a work of Satan's, because it first entered in man by the devil's suggestion and counsel. All that misery and ruin, all those works of darkness and death, that Satan had by his malice and policy wrought upon and in poor mankind, "Jesus was manifested in the flesh without sin, to destroy and take away sin out of our flesh, and to abolish and destroy Satan's work," which he had builded upon the ruins of God's work, of the image of God, and to repair and renew that first blessed work of God in man, Eph. 4:23, 24.

Now, O how cogent and persuading is this; one so high, come down so low, one dwelling in inaccessible glory, manifested in the flesh, in the infirmity and weakness of it, to this very purpose, to repair the creation, to make up the breaches of it, to destroy sin, and save the

sinner! What force is in this to persuade a soul that truly believes it, "not to sin!" For, may he think within himself, shall I save that which Christ came to destroy, shall I entertain and maintain that which he came to take away, and do what in me lies to frustrate the great end of his glorious and wonderful descent from heaven? Shall I join hands, and associate with my lusts, and war for them, "which war against my soul," and him that would save my soul? Nay, let us conclude, my beloved, within our own hearts, Is the word and prince of life manifested from heaven, and come to mar and unmake that work of Satan, that he may rescue me from under his tyranny? Then God forbid that I should help Satan to build up that which my Saviour is casting down, and to make a prison for myself, and cords to bind me in it for everlasting. Nay, will a believing soul say, rather let me be a "worker together with Christ." Though faintly, yet I resolve to wrestle with him, to pull down all the strong holds that Satan keeps in my nature, and so to congratulate and consent to him, who is the avenger and asserter of my liberty.

Then consider the greatest end and furthest design of the gospel, how it is inseparably chained and linked into this, "that we sin not." We are called to "fellowship with the Father and the Son," and herein is his glory, and our happiness. Now, this proclaims with a loud voice, "that we sin not;" for, what more contrary to that design of union, and communion with God, than to sin, which disunites and discommunicates the soul from God. The nature of sin you know, "it is the transgression of his law;" and so it is the very just opposition of the creature's will to the will of him that made it. Now, how do ye imagine that this can consist with true friendship and fellowship, which looseth that conjunction of wills and affections, which is the bond of true friendship, and the ground of fellowship. *Idem velle atque idem nolle, hæc demum vera amicitia est.* The conspiracy of our desires and delights in one point with God's, this sweet coincidency makes out communion; and what communion then, can there be with God, when that which his soul abhors is your delight, and his delight is not your desire? "What communion hath light with darkness?" Sin is darkness. All sin, but especially sin entertained and

maintained, sin that hath the full consent of the heart, and carrieth the whole man after it, that is Egyptian darkness, an universal darkness over the soul. This being interposed between God and the soul, breaks off communion, eclipses that soul totally. Therefore, my beloved, if you do believe that you are called unto this high dignity of fellowship with God, and if your souls be stirred with some holy ambition after it, consider that "these things are written that ye sin not." Consider what baseness is in it, for one that hath such a noble design, as fellowship with the highest, to debase his soul so far and so low, as to serve sinful and fleshly lusts. There is a vileness and wretchedness in the service of sin, that any soul, truly and nobly principled, cannot but look upon it with indignation, because he can behold nothing but indignity in it. "Shall I who am a ruler," saith Nehemiah, "shall such a man as I flee? and who is there, that being as I am, would flee?" Neh. 6:11. A Christian hath more reason. Shall such a man as I, who am born again to such a hope, and called to such a high dignity; shall I, who aim and aspire so high as fellowship with God, debase and degrade myself with the vilest servitude? Shall I defile in that puddle again, till my own clothes abhor me, who aim at so pure and so holy a society? Shall I yoke in myself with drunkards, liars, swearers, and other slaves of sin? Shall I rank myself thus, and conform myself to the world, seeing there is a noble and glorious society to incorporate with, the King of kings to converse with daily? Alas, what are these worms that sit on thrones to him? But far more, how base are these companions in iniquity, your pot companions, &c.? And what a vile society is it like that of the bottomless pit, where devils are linked together in chains?

## XXIII

1 John 2:1—My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not: And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, &c.

In the gospel we have the most perfect provision against both these extremities, that souls are ready to run upon the rock of desperate distrust, and the quicksands of presumptuous wantonness. It may be said to be a well ordered covenant in all things, that hath caveated and cautioned the whole matter of our salvation, in such a way, that there is neither place for discouragement and downcasting, nor yet room for liberty in sin. There is no exemption from the obligation of God's holy law, and yet there is pardon for the breach of it, and exemption from the curse. There is no peace, no capitulation with sin, and yet there is peace concluded with the sinner, who is, by that agreement, bound to fall out with sin. There is no dispensation for sin, and from the perfection of holiness, and yet there is an advocacy for the sinner, who aims and studies after it. So that, in sum, the whole gospel is comprised in this,—"he speaks peace to his saints, but let them not return to folly; thou art made whole, sin no more." All that is in the gospel saith this, "that thou shouldst sin no more." But because sin is necessarily incident, therefore all that is in the gospel speaks this further,—though ye be surprised in sin, yet believe; and this is the round in which a believer is to walk,—to turn from pardon to purity, and from pollution again to pardon, for these voices and sounds are interchanged continually. "If ye have sinned, believe in Christ the advocate and sacrifice, and, because ye have believed, sin not; but if ye be overtaken in sin yet believe." And as this is daily renewed, so the soul's study and endeavour in them, should be daily renewed too. If ye have sinned, despair not; if ye be pardoned, yet presume not. After sin there is hope, it is true, because "there is forgiveness with him!" but after forgiveness, there must be fear to offend his goodness; "for there is forgiveness with him, that he may be feared," Psal 130:4. And this is the situation I would desire my soul in,—to be placed between hope of his mercy and fear of sin, the faith of his favour and the hatred of sin, which he will not favour; and how happy were a soul to be confined within these, and kept captive to its true liberty?

I spake a little before, how those fundamental truths that are set down before, do all aim at this one mark, "that we sin not;" now I

proceed. That declaration what God is, verse 5, is expressly directed to this purpose and applied, verse 6—"God is light," and therefore "sin not," for sin is darkness; "he is light," for purity and beauty of holiness, and perfection of knowledge,—that "true light in which is no darkness"—that unmixed light, all homogeneous to itself,—therefore "sin not;" for that is a work of the night, and of the darkness, that proceeds from the blindness and estrangement of your minds, and ignorance of your hearts, and it cannot but prepare and fit you for those everlasting chains of darkness. Call God what you will; name all his names, styles, and titles; spell all the characters of it, and still you may find it written at every one of them, "sin not." Is he light?—then sin not. Is he life?—then sin not; for sin will separate you from his light and life; sin will darken your souls and kill them. Is he love?—then sin not. "God is love," saith John; O then sin not against love! Hatred of any good thing is deformed; but the hatred of the beautiful image of the original love, that is monstrous. "God is love," and in his love is your life and light; then to sin against him, it is not simple disobedience, nor is it only grosser rebellion, but it hath that abominable stain of ingratitude in it. Do you read, that it is written, "he is holy," then sin not, for this is most repugnant to his holiness,— "his holy eyes cannot see it." Therefore, if thou wouldst have him look upon thee with favour, thou must not look upon sin with favour, or entertain it with delight. Is it written, that he is great and powerful?—then sin not—that were madness. Is it written, that he is good and gracious? then it is written, that ye sin not, for that were wickedness; it were an unspeakable folly and madness, to offend so great a God, that can so easily avenge himself; and it were abominable perverseness and wickedness, to sin against so good and gracious a God, who, though he may avenge himself, yet offers pardon and peace, and beseecheth us to accept it. Is he just?—then sin not; for "he will not acquit the wicked, nor hold them guiltless,"—them who do acquit themselves, and yet hold by their sins. And is he merciful?—then, O then, sin not, because he hath acquitted thee, because he is ready to blot out thy guilt. Wilt thou sin against mercy, that must save thee? Again, is it written, "that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin?"—that is written, that ye sin not. It is

true, it is written, because ye have sinned already, that ye may know how it may be pardoned. But, moreover, it is written, "that ye sin no more," that so, more sin may be prevented, at least, deliberate continued walking in sin. So that this blood hath a twofold virtue and use, to be the greatest encouragement to a soul troubled for sin, and the chiefest argument and inducement for a soul not to sin. This medicine, or this plaster, hath two notable virtues, restorative and preservative, "to restore the bones that already are broken, through falling in sin;" and "to preserve our feet from further falling in sin." It hath a healing virtue for those bruises that are in the soul; and, besides, it is an antidote and sovereign preservative against the poison and infection of sin and the world. What motive is like this? "The Son of God shed his blood for our sins;" they cost a dear price. O how precious was the ransom! More precious than gold, and silver, and precious stones, because "the redemption of the soul is so precious, that it would have ceased for ever" without it. Now, what soul can deliberately think of this, and receive it with any affection into the heart, but he shall find the most vehement persuasion against sin? He cannot but behold the heinousness and infinite evil that is in it, which required such an infinite recompense. And can a soul on that view run to the puddle and defile again, when he sees how dearly the fountain for cleansing was purchased? Can a believing heart have such treacherous thoughts harboured within him, "to crucify afresh the Lord of glory," and, as it were, "to trample under feet his blood?" No, certainly, he that believes in this blood, cannot use it so dishonourably and basely: as it is written, "that he sin not," so he reads it, and believes it, that he may not sin, as well as because he hath sinned. Many speak of this blood, and think they apply it to the cleansing of their sin past. But it is rather that they may sin with more liberty, as if the end of vomiting up a surfeit of sin were to surfeit more; and the end of washing, were nothing else but to defile again. Certainly this blood is not for such souls,—not one word of comfort in the word,—not one drop of hope in the blood, to those who pretend to believe in Christ's blood, and continue in sin, as fresh and lively as ever they did, nothing abated of their desires or customs. But if we confess our sins, God will forgive, say you, and

this we may do at any time, and this we do daily. Nay, but saith John, "this is written that you sin not;" not to encourage you to sin. It is not recorded for this end, that you may live after your own imaginations and former customs, with security and peace, upon this presumption, that pardon is easily procurable, if I say, "God have mercy upon me," ere I die. Do not deceive yourselves, for it is written for the just contrary, "that you sin no more, and return no more to folly." If he had said, if we sin, though we confess, yet he is just to punish us, you would then be driven to desperation, and from that to a desperate conclusion. Since we must be punished, however, let us not punish ourselves here, in mortifying our flesh,— "let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die." Die we must, let us deserve it; for where there is no hope, there is no help for reformation.

But now, when there is such an unexpected proposal of grace; when God, who is free to punish us, becomes indebted by his promise to forgive our debts, we humbly submitting to him, and confessing our guiltiness; this surprisal of clemency and moderation should, yea, certainly will, overcome any heart that truly believes it, and conquer it to his love and obedience. The more easily he forgives sin, the more hardly will a believing heart be drawn to sin. You know any ingenuous spirit will more easily be conquered by kindness and condescendency, than severity and violence. These "cords of love are the bands of a man," suited to the nature of men in whom there is any sparkle of ingenuousness remaining. How often have men been engaged and overcome by clemency and goodness, who could not be conquered by force of arms! Enemies have been made friends by this means, such power is in it to knit hearts together. Augustus, when he was acquainted with the conspiracy of one of his chief minions, Cinna, whom he had made a friend of an enemy, by kindness and courtesy, takes the same way to make of a traitor a constant friend. He doth not punish him as he had done others, but calls for him, and declares unto him his vile ingratitude, that when he had given him life and liberty, he should conspire to take away his prince's life. Well, when he is confounded and astonished, and cannot open his mouth, saith Augustus, I give thee thy life again, first an open enemy,

and now a traitor; yet from this day, let an inviolable friendship be bound up between us, and so it proved; for this way of dealing did totally overcome his heart, and blot out all seditious thoughts. But, O how incomparably greater is his condescendency and clemency, whose person is so high and sacred; whose laws are so just and holy, and we so base and wretched,—to pardon such infinite guilt, rebellion, and treachery, against such an infinite majesty; and that, when a soul doth but begin to blush, and be ashamed with itself, and cannot open its mouth! I say, this rare and unparalleled goodness, and mercy being considered, cannot but tame and daunt the wildest and most savage natures. Wild beasts are not brought into subjection and tamed, but by gentle usage. It is not fierceness and violence can cure their fierceness, but meekness and condescendency to follow their humours, and soft dealing with them. As a rod is not bowed by great strength, but broken, even so those things of the promise of pardon for sin, of the grace and readiness of God to pardon upon the easiest terms, are written for this end, that our wild and undaunted natures may be tamed, and may bow and submit willingly to the yoke of his obedience, and may henceforth knit such a sacred bond of friendship and fellowship with God, as may never be broken.

But, say ye, who is he that sins not? "Who can say, my heart is pure, and my way is clean? Who can say, I have no sin?" And therefore that cannot be expected which you crave. Nay, but saith the apostle, "These things I write unto you, that ye sin not." Because sin is in all, therefore you excuse yourselves in your sins, and take liberty to sin. But the very contrary is the intent of the declaring unto us that we have sin; he shews that none want it, not that ye may be the more indulgent towards it, but the more watchful against it. It is not to make you secure, but rather to give you alarm. Even the best and holiest,—it is an alarm to them, to tell them that sin is in confiniis on their very borders, that the enemy is even in their quarters, yea, in their bosom. Certainly, this should so much the more excite us against it, and arm us for it every moment, lest either by fraud or force, by secret undermining or open violence, it draw us away from God. This word, "if we say we have no sin, we lie," is a watchword

given to men, a warning to enter in consideration of themselves; for the enemy being within, there is no flying from him. We carry him about with us, and being within, he is less discerned, and therefore we ought to awake, and so walk circumspectly, with eyes in our head, lest we be surprised at unawares, either in that time we know not of, or at that place we least suspect. And to others of you, who have never attained any victory over your sins, and scarce have a discerning of them, I would only say this, that the universality of sin's inhabitation, or being in all men, even the godly, will not excuse sin's domination and reign in you. It is strange, that since the holiest have need of continual watching against this bosom enemy, that ye who have both little knowledge and strength, should think ye may live securely, and not trouble yourselves. If they have need to take heed, how much more have ye, since it is but in them, but it reigns in you?

## XXIV

1 John 2:1—And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, &c.

There is here a sad supposition, but too certain, that any man may sin; yea, that all men will sin, even those who have most communion with God, and interest in the blood of Christ. Yet they are not altogether exempted from this fatal lot of mankind. It is incident even to them to sin, and too frequently incident: but yet we have a happy and sweet provision, for indemnity from the hazard of sin,—"we have an advocate with the Father." Grant the probability, yea, the necessity and certainty of that supposal, "if any man do sin," yet there is as much certainty of indemnity from sin, as of necessity of falling into sin. It is not more sure, that we shall carry about with us

matter of sorrow or mourning; but that it is as sure, that we have always without us matter of rejoicing.

Let me then speak a word to these particulars: First, That sin is incident to the best, even after all persuasions, convictions, resolutions, desires, and designs to avoid sin; next, That it is usual for sins after mercy, convictions, and resolution, to appear so heinous, that they may seem to overtop the mercy of God, and the merits of Christ; a soul is most apt to be troubled with guilt contracted after pardon, and a desire of purity. But withal, I would, in the last place, represent to you, that there is no ground of despair or discouragement for such an one, though there be ground of humiliation and mourning. There is a provision made in the gospel against these continually incident fears; there is a security against the hazard of surprising sins; and, that this comfort belongs only to such souls as unfeignedly desire not to sin, and are in some measure persuaded by the grace of God not to sin, not to those who willingly give up themselves to their own lusts. It is as common a doctrine as any, that sin hath some lodging in every man's heart and flesh, and is not totally cast out, but only bound with chains within, that it do not exercise its old dominion over a believer. But I fear, the most common truths, though they be most substantial in themselves, yet are but circumstantial in our apprehensions, and very rarely and extraordinarily have place in the deeper and more serious thoughts of our hearts. They are commonly confessed, it is true, but as seldom considered, I am sure; for who did truly ponder the inclineableness of our nature to sin, the strong propension of the heart to evil, the deceitfulness of sin itself, and the many circumstantial helps and additions it gets to its strength, but he would stand in awe, and watch seriously over himself. I dare say, many sin, rather because of a misapprehended immunity from it, and a misreckoning of their own measure and strength, than because of the strength of sin itself. I know no one thing makes sin so strong as this,—that we do not apprehend our own weakness, and so give over watchfulness, which is the greatest and best part of our armour of defence, when it is done in faith, and this watch kept on the tower of the Lord's promises. The

apprehension of our escaping the pollutions of the world, and of some strength to resist them: this adds no more strength to us, but diminisheth and taketh from our vigilance, and so exposeth us, as it were, naked and secure, to the cruelty of our adversary. I would wish every Christian to be thoroughly acquainted, and often conversant in two books of sophistry, I may so term them—"The deceitfulness of his own heart, and the deceivableness of sin," Jer. 17 and Heb. 3:13. These are the volumes he would daily turn over, to learn to discern the sophistications, self-flatteries, blindness, darkness, and self-love of his own heart; to take off the deceiving mask of pretences and appearances of good, and behold sensibly the true and real inclinations of the heart to wickedness, to passion, pride, uncleanness, malice, envy, and all those affections of the flesh;—to find out the true beating of the pulse of the heart. And indeed this just discerning and discovery of the thief in the soul, is a great part of his arraignment; for if sin lie under the view of an eye that hates it, and loves God, much of its power and virtue, which lie in darkness, is taken away. I press this the more, because I verily apprehend it to be the plague of many Christians, who have some general insight into the matter of good and evil, and espy some more gross corruption in themselves, and have some affection to good; yet this estrangedness to our own hearts, and the vein or strain of them, the not unbowelling of our hidden affections, and not discerning of the poison of pride, self-love, love of the world, and such like lusts, which are intermingled in all that we do, and spread, as it were, universally through the whole man; this, I say, makes most of us be subject to so many surprisals by sin. We are often rooted before we draw up; and often conquered ere we consider. This makes us such unproficients in mortification, so that scarce any sin is killed, while the roots of all sin lie hid under the ground from us. Then withal, I desire you to study how deceivable a thing sin is,—how many deceitful fair pretences it is covered with. "It hath the voice of Jacob, but the hands of Esau." Look, what it is that is pleasant or suitable to our natural spirits,—it insinuates itself always under the shadow of that; and if there be not much heedfulness and attention, and much experience of the wiles of that subtile one, it is a great hazard to be

caught with it unadvisedly, while we clasp about another thing, which is presented as a bait and allurement. Now, is it any wonder that a poor soul be drawn to sin often, when our enemy doth not for the most part profess hostility, but friendship, and under that colour pleads admission within our ports? [i.e. gates.] And, besides, we have a treacherous friend in our bosom, that betrays us into his hands; that is, our own deceitful hearts. These things I mention to put you in remembrance of what condition you are in in this world, and what posture you should be in. "Watch, I say, and when ye have done all, stand with your loins girt;" and though you cannot possibly escape all sin, yet certainly it is not in vain thus to set against it, and keep a watch over it, for by this means you shall escape more sin, and sin less. As he that aims at the mark, though he do not hit it, yet he shall ordinarily come nearer it, than he that shoots only at random; and as the army that is most vigilant and watchful, though they cannot prevent all losses and hazards, yet commonly are not found at such a loss, as those who are proud, confident, and secure.

Now, as it is supposed, that sin is ordinarily incident to the child of God, so it is especially to be caveated, that he despair not in his sins; for it is imported in this provision, that the believer is in great hazard upon new lapses into sin, either of daily incursion, or of a grosser nature, to be discouraged. As there is so much corruption in any man's heart, as will "turn the grace of God into wantonness," and incline him, upon the proposal of free grace, to presume to take liberty to the flesh; so that same corruption, upon another occasion, works another way, upon the supposal of new sins, aggravated with preceding mercy and grace in God, and convictions and resolutions in him, to drive him into despondency and dejection of spirit, as if there were no pardon for such sins. And indeed, it is no wonder if the soul be thus set upon, if we set aside the consideration of the infinite grace of God, that far surpasseth the ill deserts of men. To speak of the very nature of the thing itself, there is no sin in its own nature more unpardonable than sin after pardon; nothing so heinous, aggravated with so many high circumstances, which mingleth it with the worst ingredients, as this sin, after so much grace revealed in the

gospel, to the end that we may not sin. Sins washed so freely, in so precious a fountain, and yet to defile again; sins forgiven so readily and easily, the debt whereof, in justice, the whole creation was not able to pay, and yet to offend so gracious a Father; a soul being thoroughly convinced of the vanity, folly, and madness of sin, of the deceitfulness and baseness of its pleasures, and set in a posture against it, as the most deadly enemy; and yet, after all this, to be foiled, deceived, and ensnared:—here, I say, are very piercing considerations, which cannot but set the challenge very deep into the heart of a Christian, and wound him sore. How will he be filled with shame and confusion of face, if he look upon God, every look or beam of whose countenance represents unto the soul the vilest and most abominable visage of sin? Or if he look into himself, there is nothing but self-condemning there. He finds his own conscience staring him as a thousand witnesses. Thus the soul of a believer being environed, he is ready to apprehend, that though God should have pardoned the sins of his ignorance, yet that there is more difficulty in this,—to pardon his returnings to folly; and therefore are some put to harder exercise, and greater terrors after conversion, than in the time of it. The sins of ignorance being, as it were, removed as a cloud, and scored out in a heap; but the sins of knowledge after mercy, lying more distinctly and clearly in the view of the soul, it is more difficult to blot them out of the conscience, and sprinkle the heart from an evil conscience. These things I speak to you for this reason, that you may be afraid to sin. I suppose that there is no hazard of eternal damnation by sin. Grant that you know beforehand, that if you sin, there is yet forgiveness with him, and there is no hazard of perishing by it; yet, sure I am, it is the most foolish adventure in the world, to take liberty on that account; for though there be indemnity that way, as to thy eternal estate, yet I am persuaded, that there is more damage another way, in thy spiritual estate in this world, than all the gains of sin can countervail. There is a necessary loss of peace, and joy, and communion of the Holy Ghost. It is inevitable, in the very ordinary and natural course and connection of things, but that sin, that way indulged, will eclipse thy soul, and bring some darkness of sorrow and horror over it. To speak

after the manner of man, and in the way of reason itself, the entertainment of that which God hates will deprive thee of more solid joy and sweetness in him, than all the pleasures of sin could afford. Therefore I dare not say to you, as one too unadvisedly expresseth it, "Fear not, though you do sin, of any hurt that can come by these sins: for if you sin, it shall do you no hurt at all:" I say, this were indeed but to make you too bold with sin. I had rather represent unto you, that though ye be secured in your eternal estate, and there can come no condemnation that way, yet there is much hurt comes by sin, even in this world; and sure, I think it a very rational and Christian inducement, to prevail with a Christian not to sin, to tell him that he shall make a foolish bargain by it, for he shall lose much more than he can gain. Is there no hurt or loss incident to men, but eternal perdition? Nay, my beloved, there is a loss Christians may sustain by sinning freely, which all the combined advantages of sin cannot compensate. Is not one hour's communion with God, are not the peace of your own consciences, and the joy of the Spirit, such inestimable jewels, that it were more suitable for a man to sell the world, and buy them, than to sell them, and buy a poor momentary trifling contentment, which hath a sting in the tail of it, and leaves nothing but vexation after it? O these bruises in David's bones, these breaches in his spirit, that loss of the joy of his salvation! Let these teach you who are escaped the great hurt of sin, to fear, at least, to be hurt by it this way, more than ever you can expect to be helped by it.

But then, I desire to add this in the third place, that there is provision made against the discouragement of those souls that desire not to sin, and yet sin against their desire. If the challenge I spoke of be written in thy conscience, as it were with the point of a diamond, deeply engraven; yet my beloved, consider, "that if any man sin, we have an advocate," &c. There is an express caution against thy discouragement. Certainly our Saviour hath provided for it. Since the case is so incident, and the supposition so ordinary, it is not conceivable that he hath not caveated and secured thy salvation in such cases: for he knew certainly before he pardoned thee, and

visited thee at first, that thou wast to be subject unto this necessary burden of sin, and that it would often-times molest and trouble you, and sometimes prevail over you. All this he knew, that when he should order your forces, and draw out against sin, with the greatest desire and resolution, that yet you might be foiled unexpectedly; and this was not unknown to him, when he shewed mercy at first. Therefore, since his love is unchangeable, and his wisdom, being infinite, saith it should be so, he would never have cast his love on such persons, if those things which were then before him, could make him change. Now, I grant there is more wonder in the pardon of following sins, than in the first pardon; and therefore you should still love more, and praise more; but what is this wonder, to the wonder of his grace? It is swallowed up in that higher wonder, "for his thoughts and ways are not like ours;" his voice is, "Return, thou backsliding sinner, to thy first husband, though thou hast played the harlot." Therefore, I desire that whatsoever be presented in that kind, to aggravate your sins, let it humble you more indeed, and make you hate sin, but let it not hinder you to think as highly of his mercy and grace, and to set that in the heavens above it.

## XXV

1 John 2:1—And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, &c.

It is the natural office of the conscience to accuse a man in evil doing. As every man by sin is liable to the judgment of the supreme court of heaven, so he is likewise subject to the inferior court of his own conscience; for the most high God hath a deputy within every man's breast, that not only is a witness, but a judge, to fasten an accusation, and pronounce a sentence upon him according to the law of God. And while it is so, that a man is accused in both courts, at the supreme tribunal, and the lower house of a man's own conscience;

when man's accuser is within him, and God, his righteous Judge, above him, who can come in to plead such a man's cause? A person self-condemned, who shall plead for his absolution? If he cannot but accuse himself, and stop his mouth, being guilty before God of the transgression of all his law, then what place for an advocate to excuse him, or defend his cause? And who is it that can enter in the lists with God, who, because the supreme and highest Judge, must be both judge and party? Where shall a "daysman be found to lay his hands on both," and advocate the desperate-like cause of sinners? Truly, here we had been at an eternal stand, and here had the business stuck for ever, for anything that the creation could imagine, had not the infinite grace and wisdom of God opened themselves to mankind, in opening a door of hope to broken and outlaw sinners. And behold, here is the provision made for the security and salvation of lost souls,—*"there is one able and mighty to save,"*—a person found out fit for this advocacy, who taketh the broken cause of sinners in hand, and pleads it out, and makes out justice to be for them, and not against them,—*"If any man sin, we have an advocate,"* &c.

There is one thing imported, that sin maketh a man liable to a charge and accusation, and brings him under the hazard of judgment. Indeed it is hard enough to endure an accusing conscience, and a spirit wounded with the apprehension of wrath. When our Saviour would express great affliction, he doth it thus—*"A man's enemies shall be those of his own house."* If a domestic enemy be so ill, what shall a bosom enemy be; when a man's accuser is not only beside him, but within him, not only in the house with him, but in the field too, carried about with him whithersoever he goeth, so that he can have no retiring or withdrawing place from it! Indeed, some poor souls make a mad escape from under the challenge of their consciences; they get away from their keepers to more excess in sin, or make some vain diversion to company, and other things of the world. But the end thereof shall be more bitterness, for that will not still sleep within them, but shall awake upon them with more terror, and one day put them in such a posture, that all the comforts of the

world shall be but as a drop of water to a man in a burning fever, or as oil to a flame. But, as I told you, that is not the greatest matter, to be self-accused, and self-condemned, if there were not a higher tribunal, which this process originally flows from, one greater than the conscience, who speaks to us in his word, and hath written his charge and sentence against us, and this is it which sets the soul most on edge, and it is but the very apprehension of that higher judgment, which is the gall and wormwood, the poison of those challenges in the conscience. I would desire you to look upon this, and consider that there is a sentence passed in the word of God upon all your actions, that the wrath of God is revealed in the scriptures as due to you, however you may flatter yourselves in your sins, and fancy an immunity from wrath, though you live in sin. I wish ye were once persuaded of this,—that all sinners must once appear before God's tribunal, and hear the righteous sentence of the dueness of punishment pronounced; I say, all must once appear, either to hear and believe it, or to see it executed. The wisdom of God requires, that all men's guilt, which is a transgression of the law, should once come to a judicial trial and decision by the law; and either this must be done in your own consciences here, that ye may sist yourselves before him, and take with your sins, and humble yourselves in his sight, and then the matter is put over upon a mediator: or else you must give him leave, nay he will take leave, to cite you to appear, to see the sentence executed, which was pronounced, since ye would not apply it to your own hearts. O! happy is that soul that anticipates that great day of final judgment, by a previous self-judgment and self-trial. Well, then, hath the scriptures "included all under sin, that all men might be guilty, and every mouth stopped before God," Rom. 3:19. What shall we do then? Since righteousness and justice is against us, who can plead for us? It would seem that there could be no relaxing, no repealing, no dispensing with this law; at least, that if there be anything of that kind, that righteousness and judgment can have no hand in it; yet, behold what follows, "we have an advocate," &c. And an advocate's office is to sue out the client's right, from principles of justice. Elsewhere Christ hath the office of a Judge, here he is an advocate for the party, and both of these may have a

comfortable consideration: John 5:22. "The Father judgeth none, but hath committed all judgment to the Son." And yet, here we have an advocate with the Father, and that is, with the Father as judge. These do not cross one another, but make out our abundant consolation, that one entire office of our Saviour is represented under all these various notions suited to our capacity. A Judge he is: yea, his tribunal is the highest and supreme, from which there is no appeal; the ultimate decision lies here of all capital, or soul cases or causes. It is true, the Father doth not wholly divest himself of judgment and authority in the matters of life and death, for the gospel is his contrivance, as it was the Son's, but Christ is, as it were, substituted his vicegerent, in the administration of the second covenant. You read of a preparatory tribunal erected in the word by God the Creator, that is, of the law which condemns us. Now, such is the mercy and grace, and free love of God, that he hath relaxed that sentence as to the persons. He hath not taken that advantage which in justice he had against us; but upon some valuable considerations hath committed to the Son a royal power of prescribing new laws of life and death, and new terms of salvation; and Christ having, at his Father's will, satisfied the law, in what it did threaten us, he is, as it were, in compensation of such a great service, "made Lord and King both of the dead and living," Rom. 14:9; and "all things in heaven and earth are given to him," Matt. 28:19; John 13:2. And therefore, whatever soul is aggrieved under the accusation and charge of the law, hath liberty, yea, and is called to it, of duty, to appeal unto this new erected tribunal, where Christ sits to dispense life, according to the terms of grace; and he may be sure the Father will not judge him according to the law, if the Son absolve him in the gospel.

Now, with this it consists, that he who hath all final judgment in his hand, yet is our advocate in another consideration, as we consider God the Father sitting upon the tribunal of justice, and proceeding according to the terms and tenor of his first law, or covenant of life and death. Then Christ comes in with his advocacy for poor sinners, and sustains their persons, and maintains their cause, even from the principles of justice. He presents his satisfactory sacrifice,

and pleads that we are not to be charged with that punishment that he hath suffered, because he hath indeed fulfilled our legal righteousness; and by this means the law's mouth is stopped, which had stopped our mouth, and the sinner is absolved, who was found guilty. Thus you see the salvation and absolution of believers is wonderfully secured, for there is a sentence for it in the court of the gospel, pronounced by the Son. But lest you think he should usurp such an absolute power, then hear, that he is an advocate to plead out the equity and justice of it, before the very tribunal of the law, that the law itself being the rule, the Father himself, who made the law, being the Judge, the poor soul that flies unto him as a refuge, may be saved, since what it craved of us it gets in him, and is as fully satisfied that way, as it could have been by us; therefore, that same righteousness which bids condemn the sinner, commands to save the believer in Christ, though a sinner. What shall a soul then fear? "Who shall condemn? it is Christ that justifieth;" for he is judge of life and death, and that is much. But it is the Father that justifieth, and that is more: whatsoever tribunal you be cited unto, you may be sure. Is it the gospel? then the Son is judge. Is it the law? then the Son is advocate. He will not only give life himself, but see that his Father do it, and warrant you from all back-hazards. Nay, before the matter shall misgive, as he comes down from off the throne, to stand at the bar and plead for sinners, who devolve themselves upon him, so he will not spare, if need require, to degrade himself further, if I may so say, and of an advocate become a supplicant. And truly he ceased not in the days of his flesh to pray for us, "with strong cries and tears," Heb. 7. "And now he lives still to make intercession for us." He can turn from the plea of justice, to the intercession and supplication of mercy, and if strict justice will not help him, yet grace and favour he is sure will not disappoint him.

There is a divine contexture of justice and mercy in the business of man's redemption; and there is nothing so much declares infinite wisdom, as the method, order, and frame of it. Mercy might have been shewed to sinners, in gracious and free pardon of their sins, and dispensing with the punishment due to their persons, yet the Lord's

justice and faithfulness in that first commination might be wronged and disappointed by it, if no satisfaction should be made for such infinite offences, if the law were wholly made void both to the punishment, as also to the person. Therefore, in the infinite deeps of God's wisdom, there was a way found out to declare both mercy and justice, to make both to shine gloriously in this work; and indeed that is the great wonder of men and angels, such a conjunction or constellation of divine attributes in one work. And indeed, it is only the most happy and favourable aspect in which we can behold the divine Majesty. The Psalmist, Psalm 85, expects much good from this conjunction of the celestial attributes, and prognosticates salvation to be near hand, and all good things, as the immediate effect of it. There is a meeting there, as it were, of some honourable personages (vers. 10, 11) as are in heaven. The meeting is strange, if you consider the parties,—Mercy and Truth, Righteousness and Peace. If mercy and peace had met thus friendly, it had been less wonder; but it would seem, that righteousness and truth should stand off, or meet only to reason and dispute the business with mercy; but here is the wonder,—Mercy and Truth meet in a friendly manner, "and kisseth one another." There is a perfect agreement and harmony amongst them, about this matter of our salvation. There was a kind of parting at man's fall, but they met again at Christ's birth. Here is the uniting principle "Truth springing out of the earth," because he who is "the truth and the life," was to spring out of the earth, therefore, "righteousness will look down from heaven," and countenance the business, and this will make all of them to meet with a loving salutation.

Now, as this was the contexture of the divine attributes in the business of redemption; so our Lord and Saviour taketh upon him divers names, offices, and exercises, different functions for us, because he knoweth that his Father may justly exact of man personal satisfaction, and hath him at this disadvantage, and that he might have refused to have accepted any other satisfaction from another person. Therefore he puts on the habit and form of a supplicant and intercessor for us; and so, while he was in the flesh, "he ceased not to

offer up prayers and supplications with strong cries and tears;" and he is said "still to make intercession for us." As he learned obedience, though a Son, so he learned to be a humble supplicant, though equal with God." Because our claim depends wholly on grace, he came off the bench, and stood at the bar, not only pleading but praying for us, entreating favour and mercy to us. And then, he personates an advocate in another consideration, and pleads upon terms of justice, that we be pardoned, because his Father once having accepted him in our stead, he gave a satisfaction in value equal to our debt, and performed all that we were personally bound to. So then you may understand how it is partly an act of justice, partly an act of mercy in God to forgive sin to believers, though indeed mercy and grace is the predominant ingredient, because love and grace was the very first rise and spring of sending a Saviour and Redeemer, and so the original of that very purchase and prize. He freely sent his Son, and freely accepted him in our stead; but once standing in our room, justice craves that no more be exacted of us, since he hath done the business himself.

A sinner stands accused in his own conscience, and before God; therefore, to the end that we get no wrong, there is a twofold advocate given us, one in the earth, in our consciences, another in the heavens with God. Christ is gone up to the highest tribunal, where the cause receives a definitive sentence, and there he manageth it above; so that though Satan should obtrude upon a poor soul a wrong sentence in its own conscience, and bring down a false and counterfeit act, as it were, extracted out of the register of heaven, whereby to deceive the poor soul, and condemn it in itself, yet there is no hazard above; he dare not appear there, before the highest court, for he hath already succumbed on earth. When Christ was here, "the prince of the world was judged and cast out," and so he will never once put in an accusation into heaven, because he knoweth our faithful advocate is there, where nothing can pass without his knowledge and consent. And this is a great comfort, that all inferior sentences in thy perplexed conscience, which Satan, through violence, hath imposed upon thee, are rescinded above in the highest

court, and shall not stand to thy prejudice, whoever thou be that desirest to forsake sin and come to Jesus Christ.

But how doth Christ plead? Can he plead us not guilty? Can he excuse or defend our sins? No, that is not the way. That accusation of the word and law against us is confessed, is proven, all is undeniably clear; but he pleads satisfied, though guilty,—he presents his satisfactory sacrifice, and the savour of that perfumes heaven, and pacifieth all. He shews God's bond and discharge of the receipt of the sum of our debt, and thus is he cleared, and we absolved. Therefore I desire you whoever you are that are challenged for sin, and the transgression of the law, if ye would have a solid way of satisfaction and peace to your consciences, take with you guiltiness; plead not "not guilty;" do not excuse or extenuate, but aggravate your guilt. Nay, in this you may help Satan, accuse yourselves, and say that you know more evil in yourselves than he doth, and open that up before God. But in the meantime, consider how it is managed above. Plead thou also, satisfied in Christ though guilty; and so thou mayest say to thy accuser, If thou hast any thing to object against me, why I may not be saved, though a sinner, thou must go up to the highest tribunal to propone it, thou must come before my judge and advocate above; but forasmuch as thou dost not appear there, it is but a lie, and a murdering lie.

Now this is the way that the Spirit advocates for us in our consciences, John 14 and 15:26. Παρακλητος is rendered here "Advocate," there "Comforter." Both suit well, and may be conjoined in one, and given to both, for both are comfortable advocates,—Christ with the Father, and the Spirit with us. Christ is gone above for it, and he sent the Spirit in his stead. As God hath a deputy judge in man, that is, man's conscience, so the Son, our advocate with God, hath a deputy advocate to plead the cause in our conscience, and this he doth, partly by opening up the Scriptures to us, and making us understand the way of salvation in them, partly manifesting his own works and God's gifts in us by a superadded light of testimony, and partly by comforting us against all outward and inward sorrows.

Sometimes he pleads with the soul against Satan "not guilty," for Satan is a slanderous and a false accuser, and cares not calumniari fortiter ut aliquid hæreat, to calumniate stoutly, and he knoweth something will stick. He will not only object known sins and transgressions of the law, but his manner is to cast a mist upon the eye of the soul, and darken all its graces, and then he brings forth his process, that they have no grace, no faith in Christ, no love to God, no sorrow for sin. In such a case, it is the Spirit's office to plead it out to our consciences that we are not totally guilty, as we are charged; and this is not so much a clearing of ourselves, as a vindication of the free gifts of God, which lie under his aspersion and reproach. Indeed, if there be a great stress here, and, for wise reasons, the Spirit forbear to plead out this point, but leave a poor soul to puddle it out alone, and scrape its evidences together in the dark—I say, if thou find this too hard for thee to plead not guilty, then my advice is, that ye wave and suspend that question. Yield it not wholly, but rather leave it entire, and do as if it were not. Suppose that article and point were gained against thee, what wouldst thou do next? Certainly thou must say, I would then seek grace and faith from him who giveth liberally. I would then labour to receive Christ in the promises. I say, do that now, and thou takest a short and compendious way to win thy cause, and overcome Satan. Let that be thy study, and he hath done with it.

But in any challenge about the transgression of the law, or desert of eternal wrath, the Spirit must not plead "not guilty," for thou must confess that; but in as far as he driveth at a further conclusion, to drive thee away from hope and confidence to despondency of spirit; in so far the Spirit clears up unto the conscience that this doth no ways follow from that confession of guiltiness, since there is a Saviour that hath satisfied for it, and invites all to come, and accept him for their Lord and Saviour.

## XXVI

1 John 2:1—We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous

There is no settlement to the spirit of a sinner that is once touched with the sense of his sins, and apprehension of the justice and wrath of God, but in some clear and distinct understanding of the grounds of consolation in the gospel, and the method of salvation revealed in it. There is no solid peace giving answer to the challenges of the law and thy own conscience, but in the advocacy of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of sinners. And therefore the Apostle propones it here for the comfort of believers who are incident to be surprised through the suddenness of sin, and often deceived by the subtilty of Satan, whose soul's desires and sincere endeavours are to be kept from iniquity, and therefore they are made to groan within themselves, and sometimes sadly to conclude against themselves, upon the prevailing of sin. Here is the cordial, I say. He presents to them Jesus Christ standing before the bar of heaven, and pleading his satisfaction in the name of such souls, and so suiting forth an exemption and discharge for them from their sins. So he presents us with the most comfortable aspect, Christ standing between us and justice, the Mediator interposed between us and the Father, so there can come no harm to such poor sinners, except it come through his sides first, and no sentence can pass against them, unless he succumb in his righteous cause in heaven.

The strength of Christ's advocacy for believers consists partly in his qualification for the office, partly in the ground and foundation of his cause. His qualification we have in this verse, the ground and foundation of his pleading in the next verse, in that "he is a propitiation for our sins;" and upon this very ground his advocacy is both just and effectual.

Every word holds out some fitness, and therefore every word drops out consolation to a troubled soul. "With the Father," speaks out the relation he and we stand in to the judge. He hath not to do with an austere and rigid judge, that is implacable and unsatisfiable, who will needs adhere peremptorily to the letter of the law, for then we should be all undone. If there were not some paternal affection, and fatherly clemency and moderation in the judge; if he were not so disposed, as to make some candid interpretation upon it, and in some manner to relax the sentence, as to our personal suffering, we could never stand before him, nor needed any advocate appear for us. But here is the great comfort,—he is Christ's Father and our Father, so himself told us, John 20:17, "I go to my Father and your Father, and my God and your God." And therefore we may be persuaded that he will not take advantage, even that which he hath in justice, of us. And though we be apprehensive of his anger, in our failings and offences, and this makes us often to be both afraid and ashamed to come to him, measuring him after the manner of men, who are soon angry, and often implacably angry; though we imagine that he cannot but repel and put back our petitions, and therefore we have not the boldness to offer them; yet he ceaseth not to be our Father and Christ's Father." And if ye would have the character of a father, look Jer. 31:18, how he stands affected towards ashamed and confounded Ephraim, "how his bowels move, and his compassions yearn towards him, as his pleasant child." The truth is, in such a case, in which we are captives against our will, and stumble against our purpose, "he pities us as a father doth his children," knowing that we are but dust and grass, Psal. 103:13–17. See the excellent and sweet application of this relation by the Psalmist—if it stir him, it stirs up rather the affection of pity, than the passion of anger: he pities his poor child, when he cries out of violence and oppression; and therefore, there are great hopes that our advocate Jesus Christ shall prevail in his suits for us, because he, with whom he deals,—the Father,—loves him, and loves us, and will not stand upon strict terms of justice, but rather attemper all with mercy and love. He will certainly hear his "well-beloved Son, for in him he is well pleased; his soul rests and takes complacency in him;" and for his sake he adopts us to be his

children; and therefore he will both hear him in our behalf, and our prayers too, for his name's sake.

But this is superadded to qualify our advocate,—“he is the Christ of God,” anointed for this very purpose, and so hath a fair and lawful calling to this office. “He takes not this honour to himself, but was called thereto of his Father,” Heb. 5:4. As he did not make himself a priest, so he did not intrude upon the advocateship, “but he that said, Thou art my Son,” called him to it. If a man had never so great ability to plead in the law, yet, except he be licentiate and graduate, he may not take upon him to plead a cause. But our Lord Jesus hath both skill and authority; he hath both the ability and the office; was not a self-intruder or usurper, but the council of Heaven did licentiate him, and graduate him for the whole office of mediatorship: in which there is the greatest stay and support for a sinking soul, to know that all this frame and fabric of the gospel was contrived by God the Father, and that he is master-builder in it. Since it is so, there can nothing control it or shake it, since it is the very will of God, “with whom we have to do,” that a mediator should stand between him and us; and since he hath such a mind to clear poor souls, that he freely chooseth and giveth them an able Advocate, it is a great token that he hath a mind to save as many as come and submit to him, and that he is ready to pardon, when he prepares so fit an Advocate for us, and hath not left us alone to plead our own cause.

But the anointing of Christ for it, implies both *δυναμιν* and *ἐξουσιαν* potentiam et potestatem, the gifts for it as well as the authority, and the ability as well as the office; for God hath singularly qualified him for it,—“given him the Spirit above measure,” Isa. 61:1. He received gifts not only to distribute to men, but to exercise for men, and their advantage,” Psal. 68:18. And therefore the Father seems to interest himself in the cause as it were his own. He furnisheth our Advocate, as if it were to plead the cause of his own justice against us; “he upholds and strengthens Christ in our cause, as really as if it were his own,” Isa. 42:1, 6, which expresseth to us the admirable harmony and consent of heaven to the salvation of as many as make Christ

their refuge, and desire not to live in sin. Though they be often foiled, yet there is no hazard of the failing of their cause above, because our Advocate hath both excellent skill, and undoubtable authority.

Yea, he is so fully qualified for this, that he is called Jesus the Saviour; he is such an Advocate that he saves all he pleads for. The best advocate may lose the cause, either through the weakness of itself, or the iniquity of the judge; but he is the Advocate and the Saviour, that never succumbed in his undertaking for any soul. Be their sins never so heinous—their accusation never so just and true—their accuser never so powerful, yet they who put their cause in his hand; who flee in hither for refuge, being wearied of the bondage of sin and Satan, he hath such a prevalency with the Father, that their cause cannot miscarry. Even when justice itself seems to be the opposite party, yet he hath such marvellous success in his office, "that justice shall rather meet amicably with mercy and peace, and salute them kindly," Psal. 85:10, 11, as being satisfied by him, than He come short in his undertaking.

But there is another personal qualification needful, or all should be in vain,—"Jesus the righteous." If he were not righteous in himself, he had need of an advocate for himself, and might not plead for sinners; but he is "righteous and holy, no guile found in his mouth; without sin, an unblameable and unspotted High Priest, else he could not mediate for others, and such an Advocate too, else he could not plead for others," Heb. 7:26. As this perfected his sacrifice, that he offered not for his own sins, neither needed he, so this completes his advocateship, and gives it a mighty influence for his poor clients, that he needs not plead for himself. If, then, the law cannot attach our Lord and Saviour; can lay no claim to him, or charge against him, then certainly, all that he did behoved to be for others; and so he stands in a good capacity to plead for us before the Father, and to sue out a pardon to us, though guilty; "for if the just was delivered for the unjust, and the righteous suffered for the unrighteous," much more is it consistent with the justice of the Father, to deliver and save the unrighteous and unjust sinner for the righteous Advocate's sake. "If

ye seek me, then let these go free," saith he, John 18:8. So he in effect pleads with God his Father, O Father, if thou deal with me, the righteous One, as with an unrighteous man, then, in all reason and justice, thou must deal with my poor clients, though unrighteous, as with righteous men. If justice thought she did me no wrong to punish me, the righteous, then let it not be thought a wrong to justice to pardon, absolve, and justify the unrighteous.

Now, if he be so righteous a person, it follows necessarily, that he hath a righteous cause, for an honest man will not advocate an unjust cause. But how can the cause of believers be said to be righteous, when justice itself, and the law, indicts the accusation against them? Can they plead not guilty; or he for them? There is a twofold righteousness, in relation to a twofold rule; a righteousness of strict justice, in relation to the first covenant; and this cannot be pleaded, that our cause is exactly conformable to the covenant of works. We cannot, nor Christ in our name, plead any thing from that, which holds forth nothing but personal obedience, or else personal satisfaction. But yet our cause may be found to be righteous, in relation to the second covenant, and the rule and terms of it, in as far as God hath revealed his acceptance of a surety in our stead, and hath dispensed with the rigour of the law, according to that new law of grace and righteousness contempered together. The cause of a desperate lost sinner may thus sustain before the righteous Judge; and it is upon this new account that he pleads for us, because he hath satisfied in our stead; and now it is as righteous and equitable with God, to shew mercy and forgiveness to believing sinners, as it is to reveal wrath and anger against impenitent sinners.

I know there will be some secret whisperings in your hearts upon the hearing of this. Oh! it is true; it is a most comfortable thing for them whose advocate he is. There is no fear of the miscarrying of their cause above; but as for me, I know not if he be an advocate for me, whether I may come into that sentence, "We have an advocate," &c. I confess it is true, he is not an advocate for every one, for while he was here, "he prayed not for the world, but them that were given him out

of the world," John 17; much more will he not plead for the world, when he is above. He is rather witnessing against the unbelieving world. But yet, I believe his advocacy is not restrained only to those who actually believe, as neither his supplication was, John 17. But as he prayed for those who should hereafter believe, so he still pleads for all the elect, not only to procure remission to the penitent, but repentance to the impenitent. There is one notable effect of the advocacy and intercession of Christ, which indeed is common to the world, but particularly intended for the elect, that is, the present suspension of the execution of the curse of the law, by virtue whereof there is liberty to offer the gospel, and call sinners to repentance. No question, the sparing of the world, the forbearance and long-suffering of God toward sinners, is the result and fruit of our Lord's intercession and advocacy in heaven; and so, even the elect have the benefit of it before they believe; but it is so provided, that they shall never sensibly know this, nor have any special comfort from it, till they believe, and so Christ doth not plead for pardon to their sins till they repent. He pleads even before we repent, but we cannot know it; yet he pleads not that pardon be bestowed before they repent, and so the saving efficacy of his advocacy is peculiar and proper in the application to believing souls.

Now consider, I say, whether or not thou be one that finds the power of that persuasion,—"My little children, I write to you that ye sin not," &c. Canst thou unfeignedly say, that it is the desire and endeavour of thy soul not to sin; and that thou art persuaded to this, not only from the fear and terror of God, but especially from his mercy and goodness in the gospel? This is one part of the character of such as Christ's advocacy is actually extended to. Moreover, being surprised with sin, and overcome beside thy purpose, and against thy desire, dost thou apprehend sin as thy greatest misery, and arraign thyself before the tribunal of God; or art thou attached in thy own conscience, and the law pleaded against thee, before the bar of thy own conscience; then, I say, according to this Scripture, thou art the soul unto whom this comfort belongs; thou art called of God to decide the controversy in thy own conscience. By flying up, and

appealing to that higher tribunal, where Christ is advocate, thou mayest safely give over, and trust thy cause to him.

But, on the other hand, O how deplorable and remediless is the condition of those souls who have no cause of this kind stated within their own conscience; who are not pursued by Satan and sin, but rather at peace with them, amicably agreeing with them, acting their lusts and will! You who have no bonds upon you, to restrain you from sin, "neither the terror of the Lord persuadeth you, nor the love of Christ constrains you;" you can be kept from no beloved sin, nor pressed to any serious and spiritual labour in God's service; and then when you sin, you have no accuser within, or such an one as you suppress, and suffer not to plead it out against you, or cite you before God's tribunal. I say unto you, (and, alas! many of you are such,) you do not, you cannot know, that you have an interest in this advocate. You can have no benefit nor saving advantage from Christ's pleading, while you remain thus in your sins. Alas! poor souls, what will ye do? Can you manage your own cause alone? Though you defraud and deceive your own consciences now; though ye offer violence to them, do ye think so to carry it above? Nay, persuade yourselves you must one day appear, and none to speak for you; God your judge; your conscience your accuser; and Satan, your tormentor, standing by; and then woe to him that is alone, when the advocate becomes judge. In that day blessed are all those that have trusted in him, and used him formerly as an advocate against sin and Satan; but woe to those for ever, who would never suffer this cause to be pleaded, while there was an advocate!

## XXVII

1 John 2:2—And he is the propitiation, &c.

Here is the strength of Christ's plea, and ground of his advocacy, "that he is the propitiation." The advocate is the priest, and the priest is the sacrifice; and such efficacy this sacrifice hath, that the propitiatory sacrifice may be called the very propitiation and pacification for sin. Here is the marrow of the gospel, and these are the breasts of consolation which any poor sinner might draw by faith, and bring out soul refreshment. But truly, it comes not out but by drawing, and there is nothing fit for that but the heart, that alone can suck out of these breasts the milk of consolation. The well of salvation in the word is deep, and many of you have nothing to draw with; you want the bucket that should be let down, that is, the affectionate meditation and consideration of the heart; and therefore you go away empty. You come full of other cares, and desires, and delights, no empty room in your hearts for this, no soul longings and thirstings after the righteousness of God; and therefore you return as you came, empty of all solid and true refreshment. Oh, that we could draw it forth to you, and then drop it into your hearts, and make it descend into your consciences!

In these words you may consider more distinctly, who this is, and then, for whom he is made a sacrifice, and withal, the efficacy of this sacrifice, and the sufficiency. Who this is, is pointed out as with the finger, (He is) that is, "Jesus Christ the righteous." The apostle demonstrates him as a remarkable person, as in his evangel the Baptist doth. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world." And the church, Isa. 63:1, taketh a special notice of this person, "Who is this that cometh from Edom?" And that which maketh him so remarkable, is his strange habit, "after the treading the wine-press of wrath alone," that he was made a bloody sacrifice to pacify God; and to shew you how notable a person he is, he is signally and eminently pointed out by the Father, Isa. 42:1, "Behold my servant," &c., as if he would have the eyes of all men fixed upon him, with wonder and admiration. And for this end, he singled him out from the multitude, by a voice from heaven, which testified unto him particularly, "this is my well-beloved Son; hear him." Therefore the apostle had reason to say, 2 Cor. 5:14, that he is "one for all," so

notable an one, that he may serve for all. He stands in more value in the count of God than all mankind. All creatures are cyphers, which being never so much multiplied, come to nothing, amount not beyond nothing; but set him before them, put Christ on the head of them, and he signifies more than they all do, and gives them all some estimation in the count. And so they stand in Paul's calculation, Phil. 3 which he makes with very great assurance and confidence, "yea, doubtless I count all dung, but the super-excellent knowledge of Christ,"—Christ is only the figure that hath signification, and gives signification to other things.

But in this business, the consideration of the persons interested, he and us, maketh us behold a great emphasis in the gospel. "He a propitiation, and that for our sins," is a strange combination of wonders. If it had been some other person less distant from us, that were thus given for us, and standing in our room, then we should have better understood the exchange. Things of like worth, to be thus shuffled together, and stand in one another's place, is not so strange. But between the persons mentioned, "him" and "us," there is such an infinite distance, that it is wonderful, how the one descends to the room of the other, to become a sacrifice for us. O that we could express this to our own hearts, with all the emphasis that it hath! "He the Lord," and "we" the servants; "he the king," and "we" the poor beggars; "he the brightness of his Father's glory," and "we" the shame and ignominy of the whole creation; "he counting it no robbery to be equal with God, and being in the form of God," and "we" not equal to the worst of creatures, because of sin, and being in the form of devils. Had it been a holy and righteous man for sinners, it had been a strange enough exchange; but "he" is not only "holy" and "harmless" but "higher than the heavens." O what a vast descent was this, from heaven to earth, from a lord to a servant, from an eternal Spirit to mortal flesh, from God to creatures! and to descend thus far for such persons, not only unworthy in themselves, such as could not conciliate any liking, but such as might procure loathing, as is described, Ezek. 16 and Rom. 5:6 and 1 Pet. 3:18, "while we were enemies," and might have expected a commissioner from heaven,

with vengeance against us. Behold, how the mysterious design of love breaks up, and opens itself to the world, "in sending his own Son for us!" and this is exceedingly aggravated from the absolute freedom of it, that there was nothing to pre-engage him to it, but infinite impediments in the way to dissuade him; many impediments of his affection, and many difficulties to his power, and then, no gain nor advantage to be expected from such creatures, notwithstanding of such an undertaking for them.

Now, herein is the strongest support of faith, and the greatest incentive to love, and the mightiest persuasive to obedience that can be. I say, the strongest support of faith; for, a soul apprehending the greatness and heinousness of sins, and the inviolableness of God's righteousness, with the purity of his holiness, can hardly be persuaded, that any thing can compensate that infinite wrong that is done to his Majesty, though ordinarily the small and superficial apprehension of sin makes a kind of facility in this, or an empty credulity of the gospel. The reason why most men do not question and doubt of the gospel, and of their acceptance before God, is not because they are established in the faith, but rather because they do not so seriously and deeply believe, and ponder their own sins, and God's holiness; which, if many did, they would find it a greater difficulty to attain to a solid and quieting persuasion of the grounds of the gospel: they would find much ado to settle that point of the readiness of God, to pardon and accept sinners. But now, I say, all this difficulty, and these clouds of doubts will vanish at the bright appearance of this Sun of Righteousness, that is, at the solid consideration of the glorious excellency of him that was given a ransom for us. Herein the soul may be satisfied, that God is satisfied, when he considers what a person hath undertaken it, "even Jesus the righteous, the only Son of God, in whom his soul delighteth;" whose glorious divine majesty puts the stamp of infinite worth upon all his sufferings, and raiseth up the dignity of the sacrifice, beyond the sufferings of all creatures. For there are two things needful for the full satisfaction of a troubled soul, that apprehends the heinousness of sin, and height of wrath; nothing can calm and settle this storm,

but the appearance of two things; first, of God's willingness and readiness to pardon sin, and save sinners; next, of the answerableness of a ransom to his justice, that so there may be no impediment in his way to forgive. Now, let this once be established in thy heart, that such an one, so beloved of God, and so equal to God, is the propitiation for our sins, that "God hath sent his only begotten Son," for this very business, unrequired and unknown of us; then, there is the clearest demonstration of these two things, that can be,—"of the love of God, and of the worth of the ransom." What difficulty can be supposed in it, actually to pardon thy heinous sins, when his love hath overcome infinitely greater difficulties, "to send One, his own Son, to procure pardon," John 3. Certainly, it cannot but be the very delight of his heart to forgive sins, "since he spared not his Son" to purchase it; since he hath had such an everlasting design of love, which broke out in Christ's coming; and then, such a person he is, that the merit of his sufferings cannot but be a valuable and sufficient compensation to justice for our personal exemption, because he is "One above all, of infinite highness;" and therefore his lowness hath an infinite worth in it,—"of infinite fulness," and therefore his emptiness is of infinite price, "of infinite glory," and so his shame is equivalent to the shame and malediction of all mankind. So then, whatsoever thou apprehendest of thy own sins, or God's holiness, that seemeth to render thy pardon difficult, lay but in the balance with that, first, the free and rich expression of the infinite love of God, in sending such an One for a ransom; and sure, that speaks as much to his readiness and willingness, as if a voice spake it just now from heaven; and then, to take away all scruple, lay the infinite worth of his person, who is the propitiation, with thy sins, and it will certainly out-weigh them; so that thou mayest be fully quieted, and satisfied in that point, that it is as easy for him to pardon, as for thee to confess sin and ask pardon; nay, that he is more ready to give it thee, than thou to ask.

But, in the next place, I desire you to look upon this, as the greatest incentive of affection. O how should it inflame your hearts to consider, that such an one became a sacrifice for our sins; to think

that angels hath not such a word to comfort themselves withal! Those innumerable companies of angels, who left their station, and were once in dignity above us, have not such glad tidings to report one to another in their societies, as we have; they cannot say, "he is the propitiation for our sins." This is the wonderful mystery, "that blessed angels desire to look into." They gaze upon it, and fix the eyes of their admiration "upon God manifested in the flesh," wondering at the choice of mortal man, before immortal spirits, that he is a ransom for them, and not for their own brethren who left their station; how should this endear him to our souls, and his will to our hearts, "who hath so loved us, and given himself for us!" Hath he given himself for us, and should we deny ourselves to him, especially when we consider what an infinite disparity is between the worth, and difference in the advantage of it. He gave his blessed self a sacrifice, he offered himself to death for us, not to purchase anything to himself, but life to us. And what is it he requires but your base and unworthy self,—to offer up your lusts and sins in a sacrifice by mortification, and your hearts and affections in a thanksgiving offering, wherein your own greatest gain lies too. For this is truly to find and save yourselves, thus to quit yourselves to him.

The efficacy of this is holden out in the word, "propitiation for our sins." The virtue of Christ's sacrifice is to pacify justice, and make God propitious, that is, favourable and merciful to sinners. In which there are three considerable things imported. One is, that sin is the cause of enmity between God and man, and sets us at an infinite distance,—that sin is a heinous provocation of his wrath. Another is expressed, that "Christ is the propitiation,"—in opposition to that provocation, he pacifies wrath, and then conciliates favour, by the sacrifice of himself. All the expressions of the gospel import the damnable and deplorable estate that sin puts man into; "reconciliation" imports the standing enmity and feud between God and man; "propitiation" imports the provocation of the holy and just indignation of God against man, the fuel whereof is our sins; "justification" implies the lost and condemned estate of a sinner, under the sentence and curse of the law; all that is in the gospel

minds us of our original, of the forlorn estate in which he found us, none pitying us, nor able to help us. I would desire that this might first take impression on your hearts,—that sin sets God and man at infinite distance; and not only distance, but disaffection and enmity. It hath sown the seeds of that woful discord, and kindled that contention, which, if it be not quenched by the blood of Christ, will burn to everlasting, so that none can dwell with it and yet sinners must dwell in it. There is a provoking quality in it, fit to alienate the holy heart of God, and to incense his indignation, which, when once it is kindled, "who can stand before it?" Do but consider what you conceive of wrongs done to you, how they stir your passions, and provoke your patience, so that there is much ado to get you pacified; and what heinousness must then be in your offences against God, both in regard of number and kind? O, that you could but impartially weigh this matter, you would find, that in the view of God, all wrongs and injuries between men evanish!—"Against thee, thee only, have I sinned." That relation and respect of sin to God, exhaust all other respects of injuries towards men. It is true, that his Majesty is free from passion, and is not commoved and troubled as your spirits are. Yet such is the provoking nature of sin, that it cries for vengeance, and brings a sinner under the dreadful sentence of divine wrath, which he both pronounceth, and can execute without any inward commotion or disturbance of spirit: but, because we conceive of him after our manner, therefore he speaks in such terms to us. But that which he would signify by it, is, that the sinner is in as dreadful and damnable a condition by sin, as if the Lord were mightily inflamed with anger and rage. The just punishment is as due and certain, as if he were subject to such passions as we are; and so much the more certain, that he is not. Now, I desire you to consider, how mightily the heinousness of sin is aggravated, partly by the quality of the persons, and partly by the consideration of his benefits to us. A great man resents a light wrong heavily, because his person makes the wrong heavier. O! what do you think the Most High should do, considering his infinite distance from us, his glorious Majesty and greatness, his pure holiness, his absolute power and supremacy? What vile and abominable characters of presumption and rebellion

do all these imprint upon disobedience! Shall he suffer himself to be despised and neglected of men, when there is no petty creature above another, but he will be jealous of his credit, and vindicate himself from contempt? And then, when ingratitude is mingled in with rebellion, it makes sin exceeding sinful; and sinful sin exceeding provoking, to proclaim open war against the holy and righteous will of him to whom we owe ourselves, and all that we are or have; to do evil, because he is good, and be unthankful, because he is kind to take all his own members, faculties, creatures, and employ them as instruments of dishonour against himself, there is here fuel for feeding everlasting indignation; there is no indignity, no vileness, no wickedness to this. All the provocations of men, how just soever, are in the sight of this groundless and vain, like a child's indignation. All are but imaginary injuries, consisting but in opinion, in regard of that which sin hath in the bosom of it against God.

But how shall any satisfaction be made for the injury of sin? What shall pacify his justly deserved anger? Here is the question indeed, that would have driven the whole world to a nonplus, if once the majesty and holiness of God had been seen. But the ignorance of God's greatness, and men's sinfulness, made the world to fancy some expiations of sin, and satisfactions to God, partly by sacrifices of beasts, partly by prayer, and repentance for sins.

## XXVIII

1 John 2:3—And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments

This age pretends to much knowledge, beyond former ages; knowledge, I say, not only in other natural arts and sciences, but especially in religion. Whether there be any great advancement in other knowledge, and improvement of that which was, to a further

extent and clearness, I cannot judge; but I believe, there is not much of it in this nation, nor do we so much pretend to it. But, we talk of the enlargements of divine knowledge, and the breaking up of a clearer light in the point of religion, in respect of which we look on former times, "as the times of ignorance and darkness, which God winked at." If it were so indeed, I should think the time happy, and bless the days we live in, for as many sour and sad accidents as they are mixed withal. Indeed, if the variety of books, and multiplicity of discourses upon religion; if the multitude of disputes about points of truth, and frequency of sermons, might be held for a sufficient proof of this pretension, we should not want store enough of knowledge and light. But, I fear that this is not the touchstone of the Holy Ghost, according to which we may try the truth of this assertion; that this is not the rule, by which to measure either the truth, or degrees of our knowledge; but for all that, we may be lying buried in Egyptian darkness; and while such a light seems to shine about us, our hearts may be a dungeon of darkness, of ignorance of God and unbelief, and our ways and walk full of stumblings in the darkness. I am led to entertain these sad thoughts of the present times from the words of the apostle, which give us the true designation of a true Christian, to be the knowledge of God, and the character of his knowledge, to be obedience to his commands. If, according to this level, we take the estimate of the proportion of our knowledge and light, I am afraid lest there be found as much ignorance of God, and darkness, as we do foolishly fancy that we have of light. However, to find it, will be some breaking up of light in our hearts; and to discover how little we know indeed upon a solid account, will be the first morning star of that "Sun of Righteousness, which will shine more and more to the perfect day." Therefore we should labour to bring our light to the lamp of this world, and our knowledge to this testimony of unquestionable authority, that having recourse "to the law and to the testimony," we may find if there be light in us, or so much light as men think they see. If we could but open our eyes to the shining light of this Scripture, I doubt not but we should be able to see that which few do see, that is, that much of the pretended light of this age is darkness and ignorance. I do not speak of errors only that come forth

in the garments of new light, but especially of the vulgar knowledge of the truth of religion, which is far adulterated from the true metal and stamp of divine knowledge, by the intermixture of the gross darkness of our affections and conversation, as that other is from the naked truth; and therefore both of them are found light in the balance of the sanctuary, and counterfeit by this touch-stone of obedience.

To make out this examination the better, I shall endeavour to open these three things unto you, which comprehend the words: 1st, That the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ, is the most proper designation of a Christian; "hereby we know that we know him," which is as much as to say, that we are true Christians;—2dly, That the proper character of true knowledge, is obedience, or conscionable practising of what we know;—and then, lastly, That the only estimate or trial of our estate before God, is made according to the appearance of his work in us, and not by immediate thrusting ourselves into the secrets of God's hidden decrees, "hereby we know," &c. Here then, in a narrow circle, we have all, the work and business of a Christian. His direct and principal duty is, to know God, and keep his commands, which are not two distinct duties, as they come in a religious consideration, but make up one complete work of Christianity, which consists in conformity to God. Then the reflex and secondary duty of a Christian, which makes much for his comfort, is, "to know that he knows God." "To know God, and keep his commands," is a thing of indispensable necessity to the being of a Christian; "to know that we know him is of great concernment to the comfort and well-being of a Christian. Without the first, a man is as miserable as he can be, without the sense and feeling of misery, because he wants the spring and fountain of all happiness; without the second, a Christian is unhappy, indeed, for the present, though he may not be called miserable, because he is more happy than he knows of, and only unhappy, because he knows not his happiness.

For the first, then, knowledge is a thing so natural to the spirit of a man, that the desire of it is restless and unsatiable. There is some

appetite of it in all men, though in the generality of people (because of immersedness in earthly things, and the predominancy of corrupt lusts and affections, which hinder most men's souls to wait upon that more noble inquiry after knowledge, in which only a man differs really from a beast) there be little or no stirring that way; yet some finer spirits there are, that are unquiet this way, and, with Solomon, give themselves, and apply their hearts to search out wisdom. But this is the curse of man's curiosity at first, in seeking after unnecessary knowledge, when he was happy enough already, and knew as much of God and his works, as might have been a most satisfying entertainment of his spirit; I say, for that wretched aim, we are to this day deprived of that knowledge which man once had, which was the ornament of his nature and the repast of his soul. As all other things are subdued under a curse for sin, so especially this which man had is lost, in seeking that which he needed not; and the tract of it is so obscured and perplexed, the footsteps of it are so indiscernible, and the way of it is like a bird in the air, or a ship in the sea, leaving us few helps to find it out, that most part of men lose themselves in seeking to find it; and therefore, in all the inquiries and searchings of men after the knowledge even of natural things that come under our view, there is at length nothing found out remarkable, but the increase of sorrow, and the discovery of ignorance, as Solomon saith, Eccles. 1:18. This is all the jewel that is brought up from the bottom of this sea, when men dive deepest into it; for the wisest of men could reach no more, though his bucket was as long as any man's, chap. 7:23. "I said, I will be wise, but it was far from me; that which is far off and exceeding deep, who can find it out?" Knowledge hath taken a far journey from man's nature, and hath not left any prints behind it to find it out again, but, as it were, hath flown away in an instant, and therefore we may ask, with Job, chap. 28 ver. 1, 12, "Surely, there is a vein for the silver, &c. But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding?" What Utopian isles is she transported unto, that mortal men, the more they seek her, they find more ignorance,—the further they pursue, they see themselves at the further distance? Thus it is in those things that are most obvious to our senses; but

how much more in spiritual and invisible things is our darkness increased, because of the dulness and earthiness of our spirits that are clogged with a lump of flesh! For God himself, that should be the *primum intelligibile* of the soul, the first and principal object, whose glorious light should first strike into our hearts, Job testifies "how little a portion is known of him." When we cannot so much as understand "the thunder of his power," that makes such a sensible impression on our ears, and makes all the world to stand and hearken to it; then how much less shall we conceive the invisible Majesty of God? In natural things, we have one vail of darkness in our minds to hinder us; but in the apprehension of God, we have a twofold darkness to break through, the darkness of ignorance in us, the darkness of too much light in him—*Caliginem nimiae lucis*, which makes him as inaccessible to us as the other; the over-proportion of that glorious majesty of God to our low spirits, being as the sun in its brightness to a night-owl, which is dark midnight to it. Hence it is, that those holy men who know most of God, think they know least, because they see more to be known, but infinitely surpassing knowledge. Pride is the daughter of ignorance only, "and he that thinketh he knoweth anything, knoweth nothing as he ought to know," saith the apostle, 1 Cor. 8:2. For he that knoweth not his own ignorance, if he know never so much, is the greatest ignorant; and it is a manifest evidence that a man hath but a superficial touch of things, and hath never broken the shell, or drawn by the vail of his own weakness and ignorance, that doth not apprehend deeply the unsearchableness of God, and his mysteries; but thinketh he hath in some measure compassed them, because he maketh a system of divinity, or setteth down so many conclusions of faith, and can debate them against adversaries, or because he hath a form and model of divinity, as of other sciences, in his mind. Nay, my beloved, holy Job attained to the deepest and fullest speculation of God, when he concluded thus, "because I see thee, I abhor myself;" and as Paul speaks, "If any man love God, he is known of God, and so knows God," 1 Cor. 8:3. From which two testimonies I conclude, that the true knowledge of God consists not so much in a comprehension of all points of divinity, as in such a serious apprehension and

conception of the divine Majesty as enkindles and inflames these two affections, love and hatred, towards their proper objects; such a knowledge as carries the torch before the affection; such "a light as shines into the heart," as Paul's phrase is, 2 Cor. 4:6, and so transmits heat and warmth into it, till it make the heart burn in the love of God, and loathing of himself. As long as a man doth but hear of God in sermons, or read of him in books, though he could determine all the questions and problems in divinity, he keeps a good conceit of himself; and "that knowledge puffeth up," and swells a man into a vain tumour; the venom of poison blows him up full of wind and self-confidence; and commonly they who doubt least, are not the freest of error and misapprehension. And truly, whoever seriously reflects upon the difficulty of knowledge, and darkness of men's minds, and the general curse of vanity and vexation that all things are under, so that what is wanting cannot be numbered, nor that which is crooked made straight,—he cannot but look upon too great confidence and peremptoriness in all points, as upon a race at full speed in the dark night, in a way full of pits and snares. Oftentimes our confidence flows not from evidence of truth, but the ignorance of our minds, and it is not so much built upon the strength of reason, as the strength of our passions, and weakness of our judgments.

But when once a man comes to see God, and know him in a lively manner, then he sees his own weakness and vileness in that light, and cries out with Isaiah, "Wo is me, I am a man of polluted lips;" and he discerns in that light, the amiableness and loveliness of God, that ravisheth his heart after it; and then, as Jeremiah saith, "he will not glory in riches, or strength, or beauty, or wisdom," but only in this, that he hath at length gotten some discovery of the only fountain of happiness. Then he will not think so much of tongues and languages, of prophesyings, of all knowledge of controversies, neither gifts of body nor of mind, nor external appendancies of providence will much affect him. He would be content to trample on all these, to go over them into a fuller discovery and enjoyment of God himself.

If we search the Scriptures, we shall find that they do not entertain us with many and subtile discourses of God's nature, and decrees, and properties, nor do they insist upon the many perplexed questions that are made concerning Christ and his offices, about which so many volumes are spun out, to the infinite distraction of the Christian world. They do not pretend to satisfy your curiosity, but to edify your souls; and therefore they hold out God in Christ, as clothed with all his relations to mankind, in all those plain and easy properties, that concern us everlastingly,—his justice, mercy, grace, patience, love, holiness, and such like. Now, hence I gather, that the true knowledge of God, consists not in the comprehension of all the conclusions that are deduced, and controversies that are discussed anent these things; but rather, in the serious and solid apprehension of God, as he hath relation to us, and consequently in order and reference to the moving of our hearts, to love, and adore, and reverence him, for he is holden out only in those garments that are fit to move and affect our hearts. A man may know all these things, and yet not know God himself: for to know him, cannot be abstracted from loving of him,—"They that know thy name will trust in thee, and so love thee, and so fear thee;" for it is impossible but that this will be the natural result, if he be but known indeed, because there is no object more amiable, more dreadful withal, and more eligible and worthy of choice; and therefore, seeing infinite beauty and goodness, and infinite power and greatness, and infinite sufficiency and fulness, are combined together with infinite truth, the soul that apprehends him indeed, cannot but apprehend him as the most ravishing object, and the most reverend too; and, if he do not find his heart suitably affected, it is an evident demonstration that he doth not indeed apprehend him, but an idol. The infinite light, and the infinite life, are simply one, and he that truly without a dream sees the one, cannot but be warmed and moved by the other.

So then, by this account of the knowledge of God, we have a clear discovery that many are destitute of it, who pretend to it. I shall only apply it to two sorts of persons, one is, of those who have it only in their memories, another, of those who have it only in their minds or

heads. Religion was once the legitimate daughter of judgment and affection, but now, for the most part, it is only adopted by men's memories, or fancies. The greatest part of the people cannot go beyond the repetition of the catechism or creed. Not that I would have you not to know more: but you do not understand that, only ye repeat words, without the sensible knowledge of the meaning of them; so that if the same matter be disguised with any other form of words, you cannot know it, which sheweth, that you have no familiarity with the thing itself, but only with the letters and syllables that are the garments of it. And for others that are of greater capacity, yet alas! it comes not down to the heart, to the affecting, and moulding, and forming of it. A little light shines into the mind, but your hearts are shut up still, and no window in them. Corrupt affections keep that garrison against the power of the gospel, that light hath no heat of love, or warmness of affection with it, which sheweth that it is not a ray or beam of the Sun of Righteousness, which is both beautiful for light, and beneficial for influence, on the cold and dead frozen hearts of mankind, and by its approaching, makes a spring-time in the heart.

But all men pretend to know God. Such is the self-love of men's hearts, that it makes them blind in judging themselves: therefore the holy Ghost, as he designs a Christian by the knowledge of God, so he characteriseth knowledge by keeping the commandments. "Hereby we know," &c. So that religion is not defined by a number of opinions, or by such a collection of such articles of faith, but rather by practice and obedience to the known will of God; for, as I told you, knowledge is a relative duty, that is, instrumental to something else, and by anything I can see in Scripture, is not principally intended for itself, but rather for obedience. There are some sciences altogether speculative, that rest and are complete in the mere knowledge of such objects, as some natural sciences are. But others are practical, that make a further reference of all things they cognosce upon, to some practice and operation. Now, perhaps some may think that the Scripture, or divinity, is much of it merely contemplative, in regard of many mysteries infolded in it, that seem nothing to concern our

practice. I confess much of that, that is raised out of the Scriptures, is such, and therefore it seems a deviation and departure from the great scope and plain intent of the simplicity and easiness of the Scriptures, to draw forth with much industry and subtilty, many things of mere speculation and notion, dry and sapless to the affection, and unedifying to our practice, and to obtrude these upon other men's consciences, as points of religion. I rather think, that all that is in the Scriptures, either directly hath the practice of God's will for the object of it, or is finally intended for that end; either it is a thing that prescribeth our obedience, or else it tends principally to engage our affections, and secure our obedience; and so those strains of elevated discourses of God, his nature and properties of his works, and all the mysteries infolded in them, are directed towards this end, further than mere knowing of them, to engage the heart of a believer to more love, and reverence, and adoration of God, that so he may be brought more easily and steadily to a sweet compliance, and harmonious agreement to the will of God, in all his ways. Nay, to say a little more, there are sundry physical or natural contemplations of the works of God in Scripture, but all these are divinely considered, in reference to the ravishment of the heart of man, with the wisdom, and power, and goodness of God. And this shews us the notable art of religion, to extract affection and obedience to God, out of all natural contemplations; and thus true divinity engraven on the soul, is a kind of mistress science, architectonica scientia, that serves itself of all other disciplines, of all other points of knowledge. Be they never so remote from practice, in their proper sphere, and never so dry and barren, yet a religious and holy heart can apply them to those divine uses of engaging itself further to God and his obedience: as the Lord himself teacheth us—"Who would not fear thee, O King of nations," Jer. 10; and, "fear ye not me who have placed the sand," &c. Jer. 5:22. So "praise is extracted," Psal. 105; and "admiration," verse 1, 33. So submission and patience under God's hand is often pressed in Job. Therefore, if we only seek to know these things that we may know them, that we may discourse on them, we disappoint the great end and scope of the whole Scriptures; and we debase and degrade spiritual things, as far as religion exalts natural things in the

spiritual use. We transform it into a carnal, empty, and dead letter, as religion, where it is truly, spiritualizeth earthly and carnal things into a holy use, &c.

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ePub and .mobi Editions June 2021 Requests for information should be addressed to: Monergism Books, PO Box 491, West Linn, OR 97068