

THE
FIRST EPISTLE GENERAL
OF
J O H N.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS.

ALL antiquity have, with one consent, ascribed this lovely and loving Epistle to *John*, the Apostle and Evangelist, although he hath not put his name to it. There is a great sameness of stile, and manner in it, as well as in the doctrine, to the other writings of the beloved disciple. The *place* from whence written, and the *time* when, are not so generally agreed upon. But, certainly, it must have been towards the close of *John's* life, for he speaks of *the last time*; by which he meant the destruction of *Jerusalem*, which *JESUS* foretold, and which took place but a little while (as some think) after *John* wrote this Epistle: though some have dated it before. The term of *General* Epistle, is intended only to intimate, that it was not directed to any individual person or Church.

But the most material point to be regarded on this occasion is, the very plain and clear marks it bears with it of divine inspiration. Here we rest more than satisfied, and find occasion for thanksgiving and joy. One sweet feature runs through the whole of it, in relation to the Church, namely, the Apostle's testimony to the *FATHER's* love, the *SON's* grace, and the *HOLY GHOST's* fellowship. And, as *John* lived to behold the springing up of deadly heresies in the coming of Antichrist, and the denial of the *GODHEAD* of our *LORD*, we have reason to bless *GOD* for lengthening the Apostle's life, to give the evidence which we have in this Epistle upon record, to this glorious fundamental truth of our most holy faith.

I shall not detain the Reader with any further observations, but only beg of him to bend the knee with me in prayer, that the *LORD* the *SPIRIT*, who hath graciously given us the scripture, will give us with it the understanding to apprehend it, that *having an unction from the HOLY ONE, we may know all things!*

CHAPTER I.

CONTENTS.

The Apostle begins his Epistle with a glorious Account of CHRIST. And he assigns this Reason of his Writing to the Church, to bring them into Fellowship with his glorious Person, and the FATHER in Him. A blessed Testimony is given to the Blood of CHRIST cleansing from all Sin.

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;

2 (For the life was manifested, and we have seen *it*, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;

3 That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

4 And these things write we unto you, that our joy may be full.

It is impossible to enter upon this Epistle, where so much display of the glories of CHRIST's person meets us at the door, without being overwhelmed with the contemplation, if so be GOD the HOLY GHOST be our teacher. Reader! pause, before you go a step further. *That which was from the beginning.* Who, or what can GOD the HOLY GHOST be speaking of, but the LORD JESUS CHRIST; who is emphatically THAT, even that HOLY ONE, who is the sum and substance of all revelation; *by whom were all things created, and who is before all things, and by whom all things consist!* Coloss. i. 16, 17. Not THAT, in his divine nature and essence *only*. For then the words added would be unsuitable; *That which was from the beginning.* What beginning? Not eternity. For eternity hath no beginning. But the beginning of GOD's going forth in his three-fold character of persons, in those great events which concern CHRIST and his Church. Such as John relates in his Gospel. See John i. 1. and Commentary. And Paul, Ephes. i. 4. and Commentary.

That these words are so to be accepted is very plain from what follows; for the Apostle adds, which we have *heard* and *seen*. *No man hath seen GOD at any time.* But, *the only begotten SON, which is in the bosom of the FATHER, he hath declared him.* John i. 18. Hence this glorious THAT is CHRIST, the glorious GOD-Man Mediator; and which John opens his Epistle with speaking of, in this most blessed and sublime manner. I detain the Reader to observe with

me, the peculiar blessedness in which the HOLY GHOST hath influenced the beloved Disciple to speak of his LORD. *THAT*. Not his name; but in a more striking and descriptive way of blessedness: *THAT*. It is similar to the phrase used by the Angel sent to *Mary*, when he called CHRIST, *THAT HOLY THING!* Luke i. 35. As if (and which is in reality the case,) holiness is only in Him. He, and He alone is holy. He, and He only is *THAT*. Reader! do, I beseech you, ponder it well. It is at all times sweet. It hath been so in all ages of the Church. Multitudes now in glory have felt the sweetness of this expression, *THAT*. And, in the present CHRIST-despising generation, it becomes eminently so to the true believer in JESUS. See Isaiah xlix. 7.

But we must not stop here. The beloved Apostle having introduced his Epistle in the first word of it, with this glorious *That*, speaks with confidence and delight of his gracious familiarity with his people, in having allowed them to *hear* him, to *see* him, to *look* upon him; and that their hands have *handled* this word of life. Reader! here again, I beseech you, pause over this account. And when you have done it, ask your own heart this single question: Had *John* considered CHRIST simply as a man, (as some who call themselves Christians presume to do, and yet deny his GODHEAD,) would he have thought it necessary to have said, that he and his companions heard CHRIST, and saw him, looked upon him, and touched him? Would there have been any thing surprizing in those acts? But that he who was, and is GOD, should tabernacle among men, and should manifest his GODHEAD in a bodily substance, go in and out before them, and day by day make himself known to them, in all those wonderful transactions, of which *John* and his brethren the Apostles were ear and eye witnesses: these, indeed, were things to record, and which, while recording, their minds were overwhelmed with the contemplation of such astonishing manifestations!

The Apostle hath put the second verse of this wonderful relation, concerning the Person of CHRIST, in a parenthesis. Not as if it might be omitted, for it is too blessed for that purpose; but because his mind seemed to be, for the moment, lost in the marvellous subject, and he left speaking to the Church, to contemplate more immediately the LORD's Person. And how doth he express himself here? Truly, in the same delightful stile as might most fully shew his apprehensions of the GODHEAD of CHRIST, manifested in a body of flesh. *For the life was manifested, (saith he,) and we have seen it.* What life? He adds, *that eternal life which was with the FATHER, and was manifested to us.* What words can be more full to the purpose, in confirmation of CHRIST's GODHEAD? For who less than the Eternal God, can have Eternal life? And what can be more plain, in confirmation, that the SON of GOD became incarnate, than when the Apostle adds, that this eternal life was manifested, and *we* (he saith) *have seen it*; that is, seen GOD in CHRIST. Similar to what the same Apostle said, in the Gospel which bears his name. *For the WORD was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory: the glory as of the only begotten of the FATHER, full of grace and truth.* John i. 14.

The Apostle having thus introduced to the Church the glorious Person of CHRIST, God-Man Mediator, in this most exalted point of

view; he next proceeds to state the motives for which he sends this Epistle to the LORD's people; namely, that the whole body of CHRIST's Church might have partnership with them, in the knowledge and enjoyment of GOD in CHRIST, and the joy, both of Apostles and People, might be full. This, indeed, is the great object and design of all revelation. And, when GOD the HOLY GHOST hath regenerated the souls of CHRIST's people, and through his quickening and illuminating grace, the child of GOD is brought to see the love of GOD the FATHER, in the choice of the Church before the foundation of the world; and the love of GOD the SON, in having taken into union with himself his Church before time, and redeemed her in time for his glory and delight, to all eternity; then, every individual of CHRIST's mystical body, thus renewed, and thus taught of GOD the HOLY GHOST, is brought into this blessed fellowship and communion with the FATHER, and with his SON JESUS CHRIST.

Reader! pause over the glorious truths here made known. Then make the subject personal and practical. Then ask your own heart, what know you, in a real heart-felt knowledge and enjoyment of them? Recollect what JESUS himself said on the subject, to the FATHER. *That he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal; that they might know thee, the only true GOD, and JESUS CHRIST whom thou hast sent.* John xvii. 2, 3. Who can contemplate the unspeakable blessedness of this fellowship with the FATHER, and with his SON JESUS CHRIST, but with the most heartfelt joy! By reason of our union with CHRIST, we have communion with GOD in CHRIST. There is an union between CHRIST and the FATHER, in which we have no part. And, though this union of the FATHER and the SON becomes the cause of ours, yet is it perfectly distinct from, and unconnected with it. And JESUS himself sweetly, and blessedly marks this distinction, when he saith: *At that day ye shall know, that I am in my FATHER, and you in me, and I in you.* John xiv. 20. But our blessedness is the more, from having all in CHRIST, and from CHRIST, and by CHRIST. For all is softened and humanized, from coming to us in a nature like our own. See John xvii. and 1 John v. 7. and Commentary in both.

And how sweetly JESUS speaks of this fellowship which his people have with him, here in grace, and hereafter in glory, from their oneness with him. Thus JESUS speaks, in relation to the former. *And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it; that the love wherewith thou hast loved me, may be in them, and I in them.* John xvii. 26. And in relation to the latter; as it is JESUS's delight to give his people grace, so it is to give them glory. Hence he saith: *To him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with me in my throne; even as I also overcame, and am set with my FATHER in his throne.* Rev. iii. 21. In both which, let the Reader observe, that our fellowship is with CHRIST, and with GOD in CHRIST. His Church stands eternally safe and secure in him. And from the human nature in the Person of CHRIST united to the GODHEAD, CHRIST stands in union with the FATHER, and we in him; as he himself hath blessedly said: *That they all may be one, as thou FATHER art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.* Yea, JESUS adds, *that the world may know, that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me.* John xvii. 21—23. What words are these? who shall fully ex-

plain them; or what heart fully conceive the extent of blessedness in them! See John xvii. and Commentary.

5 ¶ 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.

6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.

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.

8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

By the *message* may, I think, be considered the whole sum and substance of the Gospel. For the Apostle having before so blessedly introduced the LORD JESUS CHRIST, next tells the Church the purport of the divine revelation he brought. And, by the general expression of *light*, to which God in his threefold character of Person is compared, is meant to say, that every thing of darkness, (which sin, in all its multiform shapes, may well be called,) must, of consequence, be directly opposed to God. Hence, here is an infallible mark to know the Church, and every individual of the Church, by. For, if any man remain in the dark, and blind, and ignorant state of nature in which he was born, unconscious of the plague of his own heart, ignorant of CHRIST's Person as God-Man, ignorant of his offices, characters, and relations, hath never been regenerated by the HOLY GHOST, and is still in the *Adam-state*, *dead in trespasses and sins*; for such an one to talk of having fellowship and communion with God, when he neither knows God nor himself; this shews him to be deceiving himself, with saying *peace, peace, when there is no peace!* Reader! pause over the account, for it is truly awful. And what makes it yet more so is, that it is much more general than is supposed. Our LORD hath given us the representation of a whole professing Church of this kind, in that of *Laodicea*. Rev. iii. 14—18. They thought themselves *rich, and increased with goods, and needed nothing*, whereas He, *whose eyes are as a flame of fire, searching the heart, and trying the reins*, discovered, that they were *wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked*. And that same Almighty LORD only knows, what multitudes there are of the same character in

the present hour, mingling up in what are called Gospel Churches, in a pharisaical righteousness of their own! Such I mean, as though they hold the blessed doctrines of God the FATHER's everlasting love, in having chosen the Church; God the SON's redeeming love, in working out salvation by his blood and righteousness; and God the SPIRIT's regenerating mercy for an entrance into the kingdom of heaven; yet consider these but only *part means*, or but *procuring causes*, to their best, and (as they call them) *sincere* endeavors. In all such instances it may be truly said, *darkness hath covered the earth, and gross darkness the people.* Isaiah lx. 2. For, for men to profess having fellowship with God, while walking thus in the vanity of their own minds, is the most awful of all self-deceptions!

But what a blessed relief is it, to the soul of a poor self-condemned and self-loathing sinner, to be so graciously taught by God the SPIRIT, in this divine scripture, that *if walking in the light, as he is in the light*; that is, being enlightened by God the SPIRIT to see, as God sees, *sin to be exceeding sinful*; to lay low in the dust before God, under the condemnation of our own mind, convinced that in us, *that is, in our flesh, dwelleth no good thing*; to be daily, hourly, coming to CHRIST, as the CHRIST of God; and to Him, as a remedy, full and complete, and of God's own providing for sin; this proves the partnership, fellowship, and interest we have, in all that belongs to CHRIST, and in which all his redeemed have alike fellowship with God, and with one another; and *the blood of JESUS CHRIST his SON cleanseth us from all sin.* Reader! pause over these wonderful words, and ponder them well. The blood of JESUS CHRIST his SON cleanseth from all sin. Not the blood of bulls, or goats, or lambs, or sacrifices upon a thousand altars! Not the ordinances, means of grace, services, sacraments, prayers, tears, reforms, repentance, or the whole world of offerings, commutations, or charities, even though men would give the fruit of their body for the sin of the soul! Not these. For so far are they, any of them, or all of them put together, from recommending to the favor of God, that they are offensive to God, unless themselves are cleansed, and perfumed in that blood of CHRIST, which hath perfumed all heaven! Oh! the preciousness of this scripture. *The blood of JESUS CHRIST his SON cleanseth us from all sin!* Every word is bigger with importance than all the world! The blood of JESUS CHRIST. Nothing less than CHRIST's blood, can take away sin. And no blood but the blood of JESUS CHRIST, God's SON, can take away sin. And none but the SON of God, one with God, and equal with God, can be competent to this vast work. And not only cleanseth from sin, but *all sin*. Original sin, actual sin, natural sin, spiritual sin, universal sin, yea, all sin. And it cleanseth from all sin, by the infinite dignity of his Person who offered it, the infinite preciousness of the blood he shed for it, and the infinite merit, efficacy, and everlasting power of it, in that, in its cleansing, it cleanseth so as to prevent all future defilements. Oh! the glory of this perfect, full, and finished salvation! It is a *peace-speaking blood*; Heb. xii. 24. a soul-cleansing, sweet smelling blood; Ephes. v. 2. a full redeeming blood, for in it *we have redemption of sins according to the riches of his grace.* Ephes. i. 7. And neither the powers of hell, nor the remains of sin in our own nature, can bring any thing to counteract its efficacy, in the souls that have been cleansed by it. And the Church here

on earth, which, through the leadings of God the HOLY GHOST, are come to the blood of sprinkling; as well as the Church in heaven, have all the same divine cleansing. The company *John* saw around the throne, were samples of the whole Church; *who had washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the LAMB.* Rev. vii. 14. Reader! write down this blessed scripture for hourly use. Yea, beg of God the HOLY GHOST to indent it with his living engraving signet, in the tablet of thine heart: *The blood of JESUS CHRIST his SON cleanseth us from all sin!*

I will not detain the Reader longer than is absolutely necessary, in observations on what follows. But the verses are too important to be hastily passed by. *John*, under the authority of the HOLY GHOST, having told the Church, that *the blood of CHRIST cleanseth from all sin*; though he knew the Church is thereby cleansed from all sin, so that its guilt and filth shall no longer condemn; yet, by what he immediately adds, he plainly shews us, that the bodies of the saints are still the subjects of sin; neither will they be ever free from sin, until they drop into the grave, and return to corruption. *If we say (saith John) that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* Now here is opened to us an interesting subject, which, if duly studied, under God the SPIRIT'S teaching, explains to every child of God the blessedness of being cleansed from all sin in CHRIST; while yet the best of men still groan under the consciousness of indwelling corruption.

When a child of God is first awakened from sin, and regenerated by the HOLY GHOST, and under his divine teachings, and quickening influences, he is brought to a sense of his lost estate by nature, and to a heartfelt knowledge of the LORD JESUS CHRIST by grace; he feels a blessedness in what the Apostle here saith, under the authority of the HOLY GHOST, that he hath fellowship with God in CHRIST, and that the blood of CHRIST cleanseth from all sin. But, in the midst of this soul-reviving truth, he feels, and groans under the daily workings of sin in his body, which he discovers to be virtually all sin. He would do good, but he finds evil present with him. He *delights* in the law of God, after the inward man; but he sees another law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin, which is in his members. The child of God ponders these things with the most poignant distress of soul; and, until they are explained to him by God the HOLY GHOST himself, he never can discover a full, and satisfying account.

As an humble means in the LORD'S hand, I have, in several parts of this *Poor Man's Commentary*, (see particularly 2 Thess. ii. 13.) endeavored, and wholly on scriptural grounds, to shew, that grace, when renewing the soul, makes no alteration upon the body. The body is wholly a mass of flesh and blood, and bones and arteries. It remains, therefore still carnal. All its pursuits, and desires, and affections, and appetites, are suited to its nature, which is daily tending to corruption. So that grace makes no change in this part of our nature, neither was it ever intended. The original sentence at the fall must be executed. *Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.* Gen. iii. 19. Hence it is to be sown at death a natural body, as it was first formed in the Adam-nature of our creation; but by virtue of our redemption by CHRIST, it will be raised, at the resurrection, a spiritual body. This

is to form the triumphs of CHRIST, in raising our *vile* bodies, to be then fashioned like unto his *glorious* body. This is what the Apostle calls *the redemption of our body*, and which they *who have the first fruits of the SPIRIT, wait for*. Rom. viii. 23. But in the mean time, a corrupt, sinful body, whose whole tendencies are corrupt, cannot but be in opposition to the renewed part of the child of God, who by regeneration is wholly spiritual, being quickened, which was before dead in trespasses and sins. It is no wonder, therefore, that in a constant daily warfare between such opposite principles, the child of God should go mourning. How shall it otherwise be, when a man's own body is everlastingly opposing his own soul? *the flesh lusting against the spirit, and the spirit lusting against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would*. Gal. v. 17.

Reader! if this subject be well studied, under the teachings of the HOLY GHOST, and in the lessons practically taken from *the plague of a man's own heart*; it would tend to clear up the point upon true scriptural evidence, and, under grace, enable a child of God to extract much good from the seeming evil. It would shew him, more and more, his own unworthiness before God, hide all pharisaical pride from his eyes, keep open a constant spring of true sorrow for sin, in making him loathe himself in his own sight; and, above all, endear CHRIST in the glories of his Person, blood, and righteousness, as the sole cause of salvation. But if men unauthorized by scripture, untaught of God, will presume to be wise above what is written, and contend, that regeneration renews but in part, and that it is a work wrought alike in soul and body; that there is a progressive holiness and sanctification in the whole man; (though if the advocates for this doctrine would honestly confess, what their daily experience cannot but teach them, that they themselves are living witnesses against what they advance;) I say, it is not to be wondered at, that persons of this complexion are always hanging at an uncertainty, as to the condition of their spiritual state before God. For they are building up, in their own strength, a supposed holiness of their own, which is like erecting an house upon the mud, where there can be no foundation. And, as their whole life is at the best but a peradventure; at a peradventure they live and die.

I must beg the Reader's attention to another very sweet, and interesting point, which the HOLY GHOST hath here dwelt upon, by his servant John. *If we confess our sins, (saith John,) he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*. Is God's faithfulness and justice concerned to forgive the sins of his people on their confession of them? Yes! for having received an equivalent payment, yea, more than an equivalent, in the death of CHRIST; the faithfulness and justice of God are both engaged, in Covenant-engagements, to discharge the Principal Debtor, now the Surety hath made him free. And in the pardon of all CHRIST's redeemed ones, the Lord remembers, and fulfils his everlasting Covenant. Isa. xlix. 9. Zech. ix. 11. And the confession of sins in the pardoned, is not the *cause* of pardon, but the *effect*. This will always follow, where the grace of God brings salvation.

Moreover:—It is among the precious testimonies of our enjoying communion with God, that we confess our sins before him. He that

bath most communion and fellowship with God, will be most open and communicative. It is with God's friendship in this particular, as it is with man's: the more we love a man, the more we delight to unbosom ourselves to him. So with God in CHRIST, the more the LORD hath our confidence, the more we shall find grace to unfold to him, what we feel by reason of sin. Nay, as our sins and transgressions are all against God, the more sensibly we shall feel our love to him, the more we shall feel hurt at offending him. And, therefore, none will be so ready to rip open the soul before God, as that soul who loves God most, and dreads to do any thing so as to be shy before him. And, as we know, that the LORD knows all our secret sins, which are in the light of his countenance, before we can inform him: so we also know, that so gracious is our God, that he hath pardoned them before we have confessed them, and before we called for mercy, he hath answered. Isaiah lxxv. 24. Oh! what a thought to comfort us. None but God's friendship could admit a friendship like ours! His love, not our deservings, becomes the standard of his favor. Hence, our communion with him, is kept up on our part, in confessing our sins. And on his part, in pardoning them in JESUS.

I will not dwell upon the last verse in this Chapter, though I must not wholly pass it by. *If we say that we have not sinned!* Who among the sons of Adam will, or can say this? Original sin, actual sin, sins of omission and commission; all sin, and come short of the glory of God. To deny this, must argue a state of blindness indeed, which no truly regenerated child of God can be in! But I add no more.

REFLECTIONS.

READER! You and I may well enter upon this blessed portion of God with prayer. And surely, under divine teaching, we shall end it in praise. Oh! who can contemplate Him whom *John* saw, heard, and handled, even THAT which was from the beginning, but with holy rapture and delight. Oh! that the object for which *John* declared these things, may be in my instance fully answered; and that I may truly have *fellowship with the FATHER, and with his SON JESUS CHRIST!*

Blessed GOD and FATHER! grant that light to thy redeemed, which may enable them to walk in thy light; and to know, by heartfelt experience, that *the blood of JESUS CHRIST thy SON cleanseth us from all sin.* And, LORD! let thy faithfulness and justice, as well as thy mercy and grace, be my everlasting comfort. *God can be just, and the Justifier of him that believeth in JESUS.* And God, for CHRIST's sake, will cleanse his redeemed from all unrighteousness.

CHAP. II.

CONTENTS.

The Apostle is here affectionately addressing the Church. He speaks sweetly of CHRIST, in his Advocacy, and in his Propitiation. He calls upon little Children, young Men, and Fathers, in speaking to them of the great Subject of Salvation.

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, Jesus Christ the righteous :

2 And he is the propitiation for our sins : and not for our's only, but also for *the sins* of the whole world.

I cannot sufficiently admire the blessedness of the subject *John* here enters upon; neither the tenderness to the Church, with which he doth it. *Little children!* is a sweet appellation, well suited for the beloved Apostle to use in his now advanced years, and the Church to receive. It is well, when faithful servants of the LORD so exercise their pastoral charge!

But what I would yet more particularly beg the Reader to keep in view, is the subject, with which he opens this Chapter. He warns the Church against sin. But, aware what a body of sin and death the best of men carry about with them, he bids them, under all sin, and all discouragements, to look to CHRIST. And how blessedly he speaks. *If any man sin.* And who is there of the LORD's people; which sins not? *We have* (saith he) *an Advocate with the FATHER, JESUS CHRIST the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins.* Observe. *We*, that is, the Church have this Advocate. We have not now to look out for an advocate. We have One, yea, an Almighty One. And he is both an Advocate, and a Propitiation; that is, he hath both paid our debt as a Propitiation, and now takes up our persons and our causes, as an Advocate, to see our sins all cancelled, and done away in his blood. And, observe yet further. This Advocate which we have, is with the FATHER. He who hath set forth CHRIST, as a Propitiation in his blood. So that God, who hath given CHRIST, and set forth CHRIST as a Propitiation, is He, with whom CHRIST hath to do, as our Advocate. And I pray the Reader yet further to observe. The Apostle doth not say, we have an Advocate with *our* FATHER: for though he is our FATHER in CHRIST JESUS, and very blessed it is to know him as such, in numberless instances and occasions; yet here, CHRIST is said to be an Advocate with *the* FATHER. Not only CHRIST's FATHER, and *our* FATHER, but *the* FATHER. What! is there more in the expression *the* FATHER, than *our* FATHER, or CHRIST's FATHER? Yes! upon the present occasion for which *John* writes. For let it be observed, that as *John* is holding forth this encouragement to the Church of CHRIST, that CHRIST is an Advocate and Propitiation for his people under the infirmities of sin; he is dealing with us as on the footing of God's justice. He considers the FATHER, therefore, as God, holy and just; and One that *will not clear the guilty.* Exod. xxxiv. 7. Hence he tells the Church, that CHRIST is with the FATHER, both as a Propitiation for sin, having fully paid down on the judgment-seat, the compleat price for our redemption; and also while there, (which he ever is,) he is an Advocate, to plead, and see that his Church is accepted, pardoned, justified, sanctified, and glorified, according to the agreement in Covenant-settlements.

Reader! what a blessed subject is here? Oh! what confidence might the faith of it produce, if grace was always in lively exercise, to come with it before God? Who would ever feel deadness, fears, doubts, mis-givings, or even heart-straitenings in prayer, if he beheld the throne of grace, the pardon office, the mercy-seat of the LORD, thus encircled with mercy; JESUS, both the Propitiation for sin, and the Advocate for the cause of his people? What shall stop or silence the plea of JESUS CHRIST the *righteous*, with the *righteous* FATHER? This was our LORD's own plea, when upon earth. *O righteous FATHER!* John xvii. 25. And it is his people's plea, taught by him, and offered up in him, now he is in heaven. And there is a great degree of blessedness in it, when rightly considered. For, when we thus plead, we plead upon the right and footing of God's justice. When we look up to God, simply as we are in ourselves; we can only look up for pardon and grace, as helpless sinners. But, when we look up in the interest of CHRIST, from an union with CHRIST; we then plead on the score of *justice*. And hence, upon this account it was, that *Paul* called the crown, which he knew was laid up for him, a crown of *righteousness*; because it was the just earnings of CHRIST's blood and righteousness. And *Paul* declared, that when it was given to him, it would be by the *righteous* Judge. 2 Tim. iv. 8. Reader! what know you of these things? Are you so looking to the throne? Can you hear the awful threatenings of God's holy law against sin; and yet look undismayed, under the consciousness of a broken law, to the LORD's righteous judgment against every single breach of it, because you behold the whole law fulfilled, in the Person of your Almighty Surety, and know your security in Him? If so, then will you enter into a blessed personal enjoyment of this sweet scripture, in stedfastly beholding and resting upon him, who is your Advocate, and with the FATHER, JESUS CHRIST the *righteous*; and who is the propitiation for your sins! See Rom. iii. 25. and Commentary.

I only detain the Reader for the moment, to observe how blessedly the Apostle includes the whole Church of CHRIST, as interested alike in this propitiation; when he saith, and not the propitiation for our sins only, the Apostles, and that Church to whom he was immediately writing; but also for the sins of the whole elect world. 'Blessed comprehensive mercy!

3 ¶ And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected, hereby know we that we are in him.

6 He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk even as he walked.

It should seem, that it is CHRIST that is here spoken of as knowing him, because the Apostle had been speaking of CHRIST, in the preceding verses, as our Advocate and Propitiation; and as such, the way he saith by which we know CHRIST, both in his Person, and in those blessed offices, is manifested in keeping his commandments. All which may be gathered from the Gospel, and which relate to his ordinances: and, as *John* dwells so particularly in this whole Epistle on the grace of love, as the fruit, and effect of God's love to the Church in CHRIST; it is possible, that he might have an eye to what the LORD JESUS had said in the days of his flesh, of a new commandment he gave them, to love one another. See John xiii. 34. But if the Apostle had a more general reference to the commandments of God, they are all comprized in that one comprehensive obedience, which our LORD, in his Commentary, gave the Jews. John vi. 28, 29.

7 Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment. which ye had from the beginning, the old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning.

8 Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you; because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.

9 He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.

10 He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.

11 But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.

The new commandment and the old commandment the Apostle here speaks of, are well explained on Gospel principles. And the evidences of obedience he sums up in the fruits of obedience, as manifested in brotherly love. Not what the world seems so fond to inculcate, *universal love*, but the special love of *brethren*; and this on CHRIST's account. Loving them as brethren, and as members of CHRIST's body.

12 I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.

13 I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him *that is* from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father.

14 I have written unto you, fathers,* because ye have known him *that is* from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.

Those different ages, in the members of CHRIST's body are distinctly spoken to, not as if their interest and union with CHRIST were not all the same, and the claims upon them the same, to live to CHRIST, and to walk with CHRIST; but, as those different ages furnish out occasion for promoting the LORD's glory in the earth, by their several graces, arising from that different age, brought into exercise. A babe in CHRIST is as truly part of CHRIST as the oldest saint of God. The single leaf on a tree, is as truly part of that tree, as the largest and loftiest branch belonging to it. And in both, it is the root gives support and nourishment, and not the leaf or the branch the tree. So is it in relation to CHRIST's body. The weakest, humblest, and most inconsiderable of CHRIST's members, is as much the FATHER's gift, CHRIST's purchase, and the SPIRIT's work of regeneration, as a Prophet or an Apostle. *Paul*, under the HOLY GHOST, blessedly explains this. Ephes. iv. 4—13. I beg the Reader to notice how sweetly the Apostle speaks to *little children*, and what a comprehensiveness of expression he folds up in one, *Your sins are forgiven you, for his name's sake*. Hence, here is a compleat justification of their persons, though but children, yea, *little children*; for CHRIST's name sake. I would recommend those who would presume to call in question the finished salvation of CHRIST, to consider this declaration of the HOLY GHOST by *John*; and let them shew the Church, if they can, what is wanting to make this compleat? By regeneration, these little children, babes as they are yet in CHRIST, are *made partakers of the divine nature*, and *have all things that pertain to life and godliness*; and, therefore, *they are washed, they are sanctified, they are justified, in the name of the LORD JESUS, and by the SPIRIT of our GOD*. Compare 2 Pet. i. 3, 4. with 1 Cor. vi. 11. Isaiah lxxv. 20.

The fathers *John* writes to are considered as having long known the LORD, and as such, long proved his faithfulness; and, therefore, can well speak of it, to his glory and the Church's comfort. The LORD (if we may so presume to speak,) delights to be known and acknowledged in his faithfulness, Deut. vii. 9. And holy men of old, when a-dying, took pleasure to recount to the by-standers, of God's faithfulness and truth. We have beautiful instances to this amount in scripture record. *Jacob*, Gen. xlviii. 15 to the end. *Joseph*, Gen. l. 24. *Moses*, Deut. xxxiii. 26 to the end. *Joshua*, Josh. xxiii. 1—10. And, in more modern times, the Church of God hath not wanted testimonies of old saints, when dying out of time, and going into eternity, faithfully recording the righteous acts of the LORD, as a covenant God in CHRIST. Indeed, what can be more suitable and proper?

Young men come in for a portion of the Apostle's address, because, by regeneration, they are made strong in the LORD; the devil hath thereby received his deadly wound, and the sweet communications of grace give a withering to the fleshly lusts which war against the soul. But, Reader! do not overlook in all these, that little children,

and old men, and young men, yea, every age in the Church of whatever standing, all derive their being, and well-being in grace, not from themselves or their attainments, but from the LORD. *All these worketh that one and the self-same SPIRIT, dividing to every man severally as he will.* 1 Cor. xii. 11.

15 Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

Very sweet as these verses are, yet, so very plain are they as to need no comment. The Apostle contrasts the world, with all its pursuits and pleasures, to CHRIST; and, within the compass of a few lines, shews how little to be considered, by souls regenerated, and made new creatures in CHRIST, are all that the world hath to propose, in comparison of the *durable riches and righteousness* which is in JESUS; yea, which is JESUS himself. One view of Him fades the whole. Prov. viii. 18—21.

18 ¶ Little children, it is the last time; and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists: whereby we know that it is the last time.

19 They went out from us, but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would *no doubt* have continued with us: but *they went out*, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

20 ¶ But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.

21 I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth: but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth;

22 Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? he is antichrist that denieth the Father and the Son.

23 Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath

not the Father: [*but*] *he that acknowledgeth the Son, hath the Father also.*

24 Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning, if that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son and in the Father.

25 And this is the promise that he hath promised us, *even* eternal life.

26 These *things* have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.

27 But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie; and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

28 And now, little children, abide in him; that when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.

29 If ye know that he is righteousness, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.

By the *last time*, whether the Apostle meant the age of the Apostles, he himself being the only survivor, or the destruction of *Jerusalem*, I do not determine; but that it could have no reference to the end of the world is certain, for the period in the Church which was to succeed the Apostolic age was but just begun. Heresies were to arise, according to what God the HOLY GHOST had said by *Paul*, and the last time of the Gospel state was not to come before there had been a falling away, and the man of sin revealed. See 2 Thess. ii. 3—10. and 1 Tim. iv. 1. I desire the Reader to be very attentive to these scriptures. If they are taken in one mass of particulars, they evidently amount to this conclusion: God the HOLY GHOST, by the ministry of *John*, the last then living Apostle, was summing up the canon of scripture. And God the HOLY GHOST, having given every evidence and testimony by the inspired writings of his servants the Apostles, to the truth as it is in *JESUS*, tells the Church expressly, that heresies shall come, the chief feature of whose character would be to deny the GODHEAD of *CHRIST*. Heresies now at the close of *John's* life, began to appear, which, under various shapes and forms, soon swarmed in the Church, that is, the *nominal* Church. And this *John* shews, is a plain testimony of being the last time.

He then draws the feature of their character. *They went out from us*, that is, they joined our assemblies, called themselves Christians,

and, as far as outward appearances carried them, they seemed to be of the Church of CHRIST. But, *they were not of us*. Never had the tokens of regeneration, and therefore no features of the true sonship in CHRIST. Reader! do not overlook this. There is but one mark, and that is an infallible one, of a real Christian; namely, the new-birth, or regeneration. Where this is, the proof is unquestionable of a child of God. Where this is not, the highest flaming profession is what *Jude* calls, *clouds without water*. Jude 12. I beg the Reader to remark with me, the grace of the LORD, in thus giving his children the sure testimony of a believer, in being born of God.

And, let not the Reader overlook what makes every thing blessed in knowledge, namely, having the unction of the SPIRIT, by which we know all things. This is an infallible teacher; and the figure is beautiful. The unction of the SPIRIT, gives light to the spiritual eyes, softens the heart, searcheth the understanding, mollifies the corrupt affections, and becometh the oil of joy and gladness, in imparting a knowledge of all things necessary to salvation.

It appears that *John*, the beloved Apostle, lived long enough to see many of the early heresies. And it is our mercy that he did. For, by reason of it, he hath armed the Church, under the HOLY GHOST, against them. If they dared to creep in, with the denial of the GODHEAD of CHRIST, (which, for the most part, is the foundation of all other heresies,) while *John* was yet alive, who lay in the bosom of CHRIST, what might not be expected from the latter-day apostacy?

I admire the remedy which the Apostle, under GOD the HOLY GHOST, proposeth, for the stability of the faith. *Abide in Him*. A close adherence to JESUS, becomes the sure way of comfort in the faith of JESUS. Our safety in CHRIST, indeed, hath nothing to make it so from any act of our's. It is the LORD's holding *us*, and not *our* holding him, which forms the everlasting security of the Church. Nevertheless, our confidence in Him will, more or less, bring comfort, and prevent us from being ashamed before him, at his coming. There is an *abiding* in CHRIST, which means somewhat more than our merely *believing* in CHRIST. A child of GOD, once savingly regenerated, may be said always to abide in CHRIST, though he is not always found in a lively exercise of the actings of faith upon CHRIST. He is still in the root, but it is winter with him, and there are no marks of life, in buddings, or blossoms, or fruit. It is plain that the Apostle meant somewhat more than merely confessing CHRIST, when he saith, *Little children abide in him, that when he shall appear ye may have confidence before him*. He certainly meant to say, that by abiding in CHRIST, the child of GOD should constantly have CHRIST in view, be always living upon him, and living to him. He is supposed, by this abiding, to undertake nothing but in CHRIST's strength, and to aim at nothing but CHRIST's glory. And where this abiding in CHRIST is, there will be an increasing desire after him, and an increasing delight in him. So that *when CHRIST, who is thus the life of his redeemed shall appear, we shall appear with him in glory*.

REFLECTIONS.

READER! let us behold, with holy joy, the gracious provision which GOD, who is rich in mercy, hath made for sin, in the person,

blood, and righteousness of our LORD JESUS CHRIST. It is GOD who hath set CHRIST forth a Propitiation. And it is GOD who hath sworn him into the office of our Advocate. Blessed therefore with such a Propitiation, and such an Advocate, in One and the same Person, and of GOD our FATHER's own providing, with what confidence may we draw nigh the mercy-seat, under all the discouragements and infirmities of our poor fallen nature?

And, dearest JESUS! may not all thy redeemed behold thee, waiting with delight for employment in that high character of thine, our Advocate, for all thy people, since thou hast already acted as their propitiation, and made compleat satisfaction for them in thy blood? Do thou, LORD, then, take up every cause, and plead in thine own infinite merits, and death, for every one of thine, against all the accusations of Satan, the demands of GOD's law and justice, and all the fears and misgivings of unbelief, and our own guilty consciences! Oh! the blessedness of the assurance, JESUS can and will save to the uttermost all that come to GOD by him, *seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them!*

Hail! no less thou HOLY and Eternal SPIRIT! It is from thee cometh that unction, by which thy people know all things. Oh! for grace from GOD, to believe in GOD, and to continue in the FATHER, and in the SON, in the full assurance of the promise of eternal life!

CHAP. III.

CONTENTS.

The Apostle breaks out in the Opening of this Chapter, into a devout Strain of Admiration and Praise, in the Contemplation of the Love of GOD. He draws a Line of Discrimination between the Children of GOD, and the Children of the Devil. Some very sweet Proofs are given of the Character of GOD's Children.

BEHOLD, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of GOD, therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

Every word is a sermon. Every expression riseth with increasing glory, in this sweet verse. The mind of *John* appears to have been overwhelmed in the contemplation, and he knew not how to express himself, when calling into view the love of GOD the FATHER. Behold! saith he, mark the astonishing mercy, both in the love of GOD, as it is in itself, and the manner of it, as it is shewn to us; that we, poor creatures, born in the *Adam*-nature of sin, should be called the sons of GOD! From everlasting having chosen us, and chosen us in CHRIST, his dear SON, given us to JESUS, predestinated us to the adoption of children to himself in JESUS, called us by his grace in JESUS, and accepted us in JESUS, and called us sons of GOD in JESUS! Oh! what love, yea, what manner of love is here?

And the subject is still heightened, from contemplating the discriminating nature of it; *Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.* There is nothing which, under grace, tends to bring home the love of God to the soul, in an overwhelming tide of special manifestation, as when that love is marked to our view in the high flood of distinguishing mercy. The election of grace, shewn in our effectual calling, and that at a time when the whole world lieth in wickedness, gives it the full conviction of God's sovereignty. The world looks on. The world hears the account. The world stands in a state of consternation at what is related. But, all the while, the world is as ignorant of the children of the covenant, as they are of the Lord's design in the covenant. Oh! how striking are the words of JESUS to this effect. *Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; but to them it is not given.* Matt. xii. 11. And hence the Prophet, *Ah! LORD GOD, they say of me, doth he not speak parables?* Ezek. xx. 49.

2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is,

I beg to detain the Reader at this verse also, just to observe a little of the blessedness of it. *Now are we the sons of God.* Yes! For though carrying about with us a body of sin and death, as we do, yet, by regeneration, being quickened in our spiritual part, we are made *partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.* 2 Pet. i. 4. Hence, therefore, we are now, to all intents and purposes, sons of God. But of the glory, yea, that eternal glory, to which we are begotten and called by CHRIST JESUS, there are no images or similitudes with which we are acquainted here below, by which we can explain it. Nay, *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of men to conceive,* of the nature or extent of that glory which shall be revealed. But this we know, that amidst all that want of conformity we now have to the person and image of our LORD, there will be then a likeness, *for we shall see him as he is.* See 2 Cor. iii. 18.

Reader! do pause over this most precious Scripture, for it is indeed most precious. When the holiest child of God takes a view of himself, and dissects the anatomy of his own heart, what an humbling prospect is before him? And when he contemplates the life of Him, of whom it is said, *he was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;* what a striking dissimilarity instantly appears between the Head and the body? And when, under these humbling circumstances, the heart goeth forth sometimes, as it must go in distresses at the view, is it possible the child of God will say, as the question ariseth in the heart, that where there is so little conformity, yea, so much opposition, there ever will be a likeness and agreement? Reader! when questions of these, and the like nature, arise in the soul, I know no part of scripture more sweet and consolatory to silence fears, and strengthen faith and hope, than this very blessed verse of our God.

And, indeed, I cannot but suppose, that GOD the HOLY GHOST, plainly, and evidently designed it for the comfort of the LORD's people, in whose soul a saving change hath been wrought by regeneration, for their constant support under such exercises. A few plain observations on this point will set the matter abundantly clear.

And, *first*. When CHRIST betrothed the Church to himself, he saw her in all that loveliness and beauty in which his FATHER presented her to him. For, as *the King's daughter*, she was, (in the mind of JEHOVAH;) *all glorious within*. And *she is said to have been brought to the King in raiment of needle work*. Psm. xlv. 13, 14.

Secondly. When in the after-state in which JESUS saw her in the Adam-nature of her fall, as a loving Husband, JESUS could not but love her the same, and, indeed, he came purposely to raise her up. For it is both his delight and his glory, to *sanctify and cleanse her with his blood, that he might present her to himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but to be holy, and without blemish*. Ephes. v. 26, 27.

Thirdly. JESUS knows and considers, in the mean time, all that loathsomeness, by reason of sin, in which she is during the present time-state of her being. He hath redeemed her from the everlasting evil of it by his blood. And, in testimony of it, he hath renewed her spiritual part by his HOLY SPIRIT. And by his own resurrection from the dead, he hath given her an earnest, and pledge, that as he arose, so shall she arise at the last day. For he will change her vile body, that it shall be like to his glorious body. But, during the present state, she shall learn, by the daily workings of sin, in a corrupt and fallen nature, how great the departure of her Adam-state hath been, and how great his love is in redeeming her out of it. By both which, the grave shall become welcome, and CHRIST shall be exalted in her view, and more and more endeared every day of her life to her heart.

Fourthly. JESUS watches over his Church for good, and keeps her night and day, lest any hurt her. And how offensive soever she is to herself, by reason of her present unlikeness to her LORD, JESUS still loaths not her person, though he hates her sins. She is part of himself. *And no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth it, and cherisheth it, even as CHRIST the Church*. Ephes. v. 29. He knows the hour is coming when he will take her home, and neither sin, nor sorrow, nor the leprosy of sin, or uncleanness, shall beset her any more for ever.

Reader! what think you of the love of GOD the HOLY GHOST, in giving this sweet verse to the Church? *First*, to tell the Church, and every individual of the Church, that amidst all that passeth, in the daily course of their warfare, to distress the soul, from the in-workings, and out-breakings of the body of sin, still the adoption character and sonship is not lost? *Beloved! now are we the sons of God!* And, *secondly*, notwithstanding the great unlikeness there is, too often at present, by reason of this sinful body of ours, between CHRIST our holy Head, and we his unholy members; yet the time is hastening when this unholiness of ours, will all be done away. *For we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is*. These bodies of ours, which at death, are sown in dishonor, will be raised in glory. *I shall behold thy face in righteousness*, (said

one of old, and every regenerated child of God may say the same,) *I shall be satisfied, when I awake with thy likeness!* Psm. xvii. 18.

3 ¶ And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

The purity here spoken of must be wholly derived. No man can purify himself. Much less make himself pure, as CHRIST is pure. But the sense is, that being by regeneration quickened into a new and spiritual life, the child of God that hath this hope in him, beholds himself pure, as CHRIST is pure in CHRIST's purity. He considers himself accepted before God in the Beloved. And he pleads on this well-grounded and assured hope, for a compleat justification before God, and a compleat sanctification of himself in CHRIST on this footing. *Being justified,* (saith the Apostle,) *freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in CHRIST JESUS.* Rom. iii. 24.

4 Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law; for sin is the transgression of the law.

5 And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.

6 Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not; whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.

7 Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous:

8 He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil.

9 Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin because he is born of God.

10 In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

11 ¶ For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, That we should love one another:

12 Not as Cain, *who* was of that wicked one, and slew his brother, and wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.

I include the whole of these verses under one reading, because the whole subject is but one and the same; though several and various observations arise out of it. I will beg the Reader's attention to them in order. And *first* of sin. *Whosoever committeth sin, transgresseth also the law, for sin is the transgression of the law.* As well as I recollect, this is the fullest account we have of sin, in all the Bible. And yet, all we gather from hence concerning it, is, that sin is the transgression of the law; and that transgression is of the devil. It is defined so far, as to understand the malignity of its nature, and the malignity of its origin. Both bad enough you will say, and very dreadful to consider. But neither of these make discoveries what sin itself is. That it is an infinite evil, because committed against an infinite Being; and, because nothing less than an infinite sacrifice, could do away its baleful effects. Here is bounded our knowledge of it. Unless, indeed, we add to it this further discovery, that, in all creatures, its nature is the same. Where sin is found, whether in men or Angels, the damned in hell, or bad men upon earth, sin is sin wherever it is. And this latter view serves to set forth and magnify the distinguishing riches of grace, wheresoever the LORD recovers his people from the evil of it, and blessedly proves that sweet scripture, that *as sin hath reigned unto death, so it is grace alone that reigneth through righteousness unto eternal life, by JESUS CHRIST our LORD.* Rom. v. 21.

Secondly. Though we cannot any further define sin, yet, as the source and origin of it is traced to the devil, it is our mercy to discover from scripture, as here set forth, that the productions of sin, on the different characters in whom it appears, though all brought about by the agency of the devil, is nevertheless induced very differently, in the different characters of the children of the devil, and the children of GOD. In GOD's children, he acts upon them by temptation. In his own children, by the natural tendency of their heart. GOD's children may, and GOD's children will, by the devil's artifice and seduction, fall into sin; but the children of the devil follow sin by the natural bias of their nature. In the one, they are wrought upon by bondage, fears and servitude, *for whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin,* *JESUS saith.* John viii. 34. GOD's children are the devil's servants and drudges, and wear his livery, and delight in his work, while in a state of unrenewed nature; but they are not his sons; neither is there any relationship between them. Whereas in the other, there is an affinity between the serpent and his seed; so that their actions cannot but correspond. Hence, CHRIST said to the *Pharisees*; *Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.* John viii. 44.

This different feature of character, forms an eternal line of distinction between the two; and is, as this scripture states, a decided manifestation between the children of GOD, and the children of the devil.

Thirdly. But there is another, and, if possible, yet more clear mark of discrimination, to form the different seeds. For, as they are acted upon differently, so their very nature from the first, is different. The seed of CHRIST are said by CHRIST to be *the children of the kingdom.* The seed of the Serpent, by Him also declared to be *the children of the wicked one.* Our LORD himself hath beautifully explained this, in his parable of the Good Seed and the Tares, See Matt. xiii. 36—40. And although the both are born in the

Adam-nature of sin, and involved alike in the ruin of it, yet, by virtue of this relationship to the two distinct heads, the *one* is brought out of the death of sin, by the quickening and regenerating influence of the HOLY SPIRIT; while the *other* remains unquickened, and for ever dead in trespasses and sins. Ephes. ii. 1.

Fourthly. Though the scripture hath not explained, (perhaps it is impossible to explain it to our present unripe faculties,) how the seed of CHRIST is communicated to the *Adam-nature*, by which that nature in the instance of the Church, is *preserved in* JESUS CHRIST, and called, Jude 1. while in the instance of all others, the deadly seed of the serpent, in every generation to the same nature, brings forth the spawn of sin; yet the fact itself, that it is so, is all that we are interested to prove, and know. And God's promises to his people most fully confirm and establish the truth of the *one*, and, both his word and the nature of them, determine the *other*. To the *one*, the Lord saith, *I will pour my SPIRIT upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring.* Isaiah xlv. 3. see also Isaiah lix. 21. To the *other*, we hear CHRIST speaking, *Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell.* Matt. xxiii. 33.

Fifthly. The everlasting war, which hath been through all time, and must be through all eternity kept up, between the children of the kingdom, and the children of the wicked one, draws a yet further line of discrimination. For the enmity is on this sole account, according to God's sentence at the fall, which he then pronounced on the serpent, and his venomous brood; *I will put enmity between thee and the Woman, and between thy seed and her seed.* Gen. iii. 15. By which seed of CHRIST is meant all the children given to him, before the foundation of the world, and all as seed, included in the Covenant of Grace. And by the seed of the serpent is meant, all the race of ungodly men, of whom Cain as one, is given as an example in this scripture. He is expressly said to be *of that wicked one*. That the seed of the serpent means men, is evident from another consideration, namely, that Angels do not beget Angels. We nowhere read of the propagation of spirits by spirits. And we know that the whole crew of the rebellious angels, namely, the devil and his angels which are now in hell, were once in heaven. Rev. xii. 9. Jude 6. So that by the children of the devil are meant men, and not angels or spirits!

Lastly, to add no more. What is here said of the seed of CHRIST, and their inability to commit sin, is wholly in reference to their spiritual nature. For thus the words express it. *Whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin.* The new-birth, or the being born of God, which is the same thing, is wholly spiritual. For the body of flesh remains the same in the *Adam-nature* of a fallen state. And as it is corrupt and sinful, so its daily tendencies are to corruption. At the last day it will arise a glorified body; and though sown in dishonor at death, it will be raised in glory at the resurrection. Whereas the spiritual part of every child of God, when new born in God from the *Adam-nature*, induced by the fall, being dead in trespasses and sins, is quickened to a new and spiritual life. And, as this scripture blessedly saith, *it cannot sin, because it is born of God, and his seed remaineth in him.* It is born not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, which liveth and abideth for ever. 1 Pet. i. 23.

It hath all things given to it according to his divine power, which pertain to life and godliness. And it is made a partaker of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.
2 Pet. i. 3, 4.

Reader! after those many observations, I must not trespass any longer than just to say, seeing GOD the HOLY GHOST hath here laid the foundation, so deep and so sure in the privileges of GOD's children; let every child of GOD see to it, that they never lose sight of GOD's mercies, and their interest in him. The seed of CHRIST, chosen in CHRIST, preserved in CHRIST, made holy in CHRIST, accepted in CHRIST, are begotten to all blessedness. Well might the Apostle, under the impression, cry out! *Behold! what manner of love the FATHER hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called sons of GOD.*

13 Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.

14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren, he that loveth not *his* brother abideth in death.

15 Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

16 Hereby perceive we the love of *God*, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren.

17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of *compassion* from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed, and in truth.

19 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

20 For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

21 Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, *then* have we confidence toward God.

22 And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight;

23 And this is his commandment, That we

should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment,

24 And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us by the Spirit which he hath given us.

The exhortation of the Apostle, to feel no astonishment at the hatred of the world, follows very suitedly, after what he had been before observing, on the distinguishing love of God in CHRIST. If the hatred of the world, be solely on account of our attachment to CHRIST, so far from becoming a subject of marvel, it ought to be a subject of great joy. JESUS saith, *Behold I, and the children whom the LORD hath given me, are for signs and for wonders in Israel!* Isaiah viii. 18. As CHRIST himself was despised, so are his people. And it is blessed to observe, that as the Person of CHRIST was despised, so were all his offices. Isaiah liii. 2. His preaching. John vii. 12. His miracles. Matt. xii. 24. His conduct. Matt. xi. 19. And his followers, as the off-scouring of the earth. John vii. 48. 2 Cor. vi. 4—10.

I have often thought, that to a child of God under temptations and fears, and doubts and misgivings, this testimony of the new-birth, in the love of the brethren when higher ones are for a time wanting, becomes very refreshing. There may be with some precious souls, seasons, when former views of CHRIST's Person, and suitableness, and fulness, and all sufficiency, are not so bright and shining as heretofore. But there are no seasons, in the life of a regenerated believer in CHRIST, when the love of the brethren, as brethren in CHRIST JESUS, is done away. Try a child of God in the darkest hours, and this remains. And if I love a child of God, because he is a child of God, I must certainly love him, on whose account I feel that love. So that it is a sweet testimony, in the absence of higher tokens, of our love to the LORD JESUS, when we love the brethren for JESUS's sake.

But when we have carried our love to the brethren of the LORD JESUS's, on his account, to the highest possible pitch of affection, how infinitely short the whole falls, compared to what the Apostle, in the following verse, speaks of CHRIST's love to his people. *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us.* The name of God is not in the original; but it is very properly supplied. And that it is CHRIST who is meant by the name is evident, because it was neither the Person of the FATHER, nor the HOLY GHOST; but God the SON who laid down his life for his people. And it is a sweet scripture on another account, for it is proposed as the highest testimony of his love. It is similar to a verse in the next chapter, iv. 10. *Herein is love.* As if this demonstration of love, outweighed every other. It was love unparalleled, both in greatness and condescension, for CHRIST the SON of God to take upon him our nature, and for God to give us to CHRIST, and CHRIST to us; to bless us in all the departments of nature, and of providence, and

of grace, and of eternal glory. But all these lessen to the view, when we rise to this highest, and best of all demonstrations of love, JESUS laying down his life for us; and offering himself an offering and a sacrifice to GOD, for a sweet smelling savor. Ephes. v. 2. How our love to the brethren, with all the warmth of affection, sinks in our esteem, when we contemplate this *love of CHRIST, which passeth knowledge!* And in those cases, where men profess both a love to CHRIST and his people, who possess from the bounties of a gracious GOD, much of the good things of this life as they are called, (because when rightly used, they minister to good in the LORD's glory,) but yet distribute them not to the necessities of the saints; how is it possible to interpret such a profession, by actions so totally dissimilar? Reader! depend upon it, if such men have real faith, with such unsuitable practice, it is a very weak faith at the best. He can never be said to trust GOD with his soul, who is over anxious in providing for the body. And very sure I am, that he is really lean in spiritual things, who is fattening on temporal things.

I will detain the Reader no longer in this Chapter, than just to observe, that when the Apostle saith, concerning the condemnation of a man's own heart, that if self accusation becomes painful, the consciousness of the greatness of GOD, and his knowledge of our heart, may excite yet more alarming apprehensions. This is the sense in which the passage may be taken. But there is another sense, and which, if well-founded, ministers to the reverse, and in a way of comfort. If our hearts condemn us, what a blessed relief to a soul under heart reproaches, to look off self to CHRIST. There is more in CHRIST to uphold, more to bless, more to justify, than all the sin of the LORD's people to condemn. And, when a child of GOD is born again, (and it is to such *John* is writing,) this life in CHRIST sin cannot destroy, neither can death or Satan reach it. *Your life is hid with CHRIST in GOD.* Coloss. iii. 3. And when the Apostle adds, *Beloved, if our hearts condemn us not;* that is, he doth not mean a cold, insensible, unfeeling heart, (for he is all along writing to the regenerate,) but it is that heart, which, while laying low in the dust before GOD, beholds more in CHRIST to save, than sin unpardoned to condemn; *then* (saith he) *have we confidence towards GOD.* Here again, he doth not mean that it is our strength of faith which gives this confidence, but the full and finished salvation of CHRIST, which gives strength to our faith. Reader! you and I shall do well, (if so be the LORD hath wrought a work of grace upon our hearts,) to apprehend rightly, that our foundation for holy triumphs, doth not rest upon our faith, or the exercise of faith, or any other of the graces and gifts of GOD the HOLY GHOST. Not in these; or any of them, or all of them put together, but the sure resting place of the redeemed soul is in the compleatness of CHRIST's finished salvation, and GOD the FATHER's perfect approbation, and acceptance of the Church in it. This is what the HOLY GHOST so blessedly said, by the Apostle, and what every child of GOD, taught of the LORD, knows to be true; *If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself.* 2 Tim. ii. 13.

REFLECTIONS.

Who can contemplate the love of God, as set forth in this Chapter, in adopting sinners into his family, and calling them sons of God, without being overwhelmed in the view. To behold some of the Lord's family, indigent and poor in all the worldly accommodations of this life; and yet by regeneration, to know them kings and priests to God and the FATHER? They are indeed unnoticed, unregarded, yea, often despised by the great ones of the earth; and yet, considered in CHRIST it may be said of them; *of whom the world is not worthy!* And though overlooked and disowned now, what will be the consternation of the ungodly at that great day, when they shall behold them in the likeness of Him, in whose image they will arise.

My soul, I charge it upon thee, to mark well the characters so accurately drawn in this scripture, between the children of God, and the children of the devil. Oh! how gracious hath God the HOLY GHOST shewn himself, in those striking discriminations of character, that God's little children may not be deceived. Blessed and eternal SPIRIT! grant to me thy gracious teachings. So shall I learn the precious tokens of JESUS's love, in laying down his life for his people! Give me grace in the view of it, for his sake to be always alive to testify my love to the brethren. LORD keep my poor soul from the errors of the present day, in high professions mixed with low apprehensions of JESUS. Dearest LORD JESUS! cause me to dwell, by faith, in thee; whilst thou art everlastingly abiding in my heart. And let my daily testimony, that I am thine, be always uppermost in my heart, by the sweet teachings of thy SPIRIT, which thou hast given me.

CHAP. IV.

CONTENTS.

Here are contained Commands to try the Spirits, and Rules given for discovering of them. Some blessed Things are spoken of CHRIST. The Chapter concludes with an Account of God's Love.

BELOVED, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh *is* of God.

3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God, and this is that *spirit* of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come, and even now already is it in the world.

4 Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

5 They are of the world; therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.

6 We are of God, he that knoweth God, heareth us: he that is not of God, heareth not us, hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

This is a very blessed direction of GOD the HOLY GHOST, by *John*. The Reader should recollect, as he reads it, that the LORD the SPIRIT is about to close the sacred canon of scripture. And as the latter-day heresies, of which the SPIRIT had spoken expressly by *Paul*, (1 Tim. iv. 1.) were now beginning to appear in a more daring and open manner in the world, the HOLY GHOST here gives one infallible mark, by which the child of God may try all. I pray the Reader to attend to it with that diligence it demands. There never was a day that needed it more. Never more false spirits coming forward with an impudent face, under the pretence of converting the whole earth, while multitudes of them openly deny the GODHEAD of CHRIST, and disown the person and work of GOD the HOLY GHOST.

Let the Reader attend to what GOD the SPIRIT here saith, of the method whereby the Church is to try the truth from error. *Every spirit that confesseth that JESUS CHRIST is come in the flesh, is of GOD. And, on the contrary, every spirit that confesseth not that JESUS CHRIST is come in the flesh, is not of GOD.* Surely, a volume could not have decided the point more plainly. And what is the confession of JESUS CHRIST's being come in the flesh, but the conviction wrought in the soul, by the regenerating power of GOD the HOLY GHOST, that He, who in his divine nature is *One with the FATHER, over all GOD blessed for ever*, is, in his human nature, *One with his Church and people*, and in the fulness of time, hath come and tabernacled among them. Which expression corresponds to the whole purport of revelation on this point, and which the same beloved Apostle hath most sweetly declared, in a single verse of the Gospel which bears his name. *The Word (saith he) was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the FATHER,) full of grace and truth.* John i. 14.

Reader! when you hear these very plain words of GOD the HOLY GHOST, concerning the person and coming of the SON of GOD, in substance of our flesh, and behold the whole body of scripture, in both Testaments, bearing testimony to the same; perhaps you are astonished how it is, that such men should arise, who deny CHRIST's GODHEAD, and the HOLY GHOST's Person and Ministry! So am not I! The word of GOD, in many parts, informs the Church of such heresies, and especially in the last times. And the same blessed word tells also of the heretics which shall bring them, *who were before of old ordained to this condemnation.* Jude 4. Hence, therefore, I am on the look out for them. And if such heresies were not to arise, I should

lose a blessed testimony in the Word of God, which hath foretold the Church *of them*, and armed the Church *against them*. And if such heretics were not to come forth among us, we should be at a loss to discover what false spirits they are, which the Church hath to expect, and to contend with.

But still perhaps you will say, by what specious arguments do such men support their wretched cause, so as to give even a plausibility to their system of infidelity? The answer is at hand. *The spirit* (which another Apostle elsewhere speaks of, Ephes. ii. 2.) *that now worketh in the children of disobedience*, can, and doth easily furnish them with weapons for the cause. By compliments to human reason, and by flattery to the pride of human learning, they work upon minds like their own, *to deny the LORD that bought them*; (2 Pet. ii. 1.) *and bring upon themselves swift destruction*. Hence, by giving *different interpretations* to those scriptures, which speak too plainly against them to the main points of truth, and by charging others with being *interpolations*, and the like; they give a covering to their heresy, and lull infidels, like themselves, asleep, to their eternal ruin.

But, while neither the heresies themselves, nor the heretics which bring them, ought to excite any surprize to the faithful, who are taught to expect *both*, it is, I confess, matter of astonishment with me, that any should be found, of the truly regenerated believers in CHRIST, which can manifest so little regard to the person and glory of the LORD JESUS CHRIST, as to mingle with those who openly condemn both, in the denial of his GODHEAD. This was a peculiarity of conduct reserved for the *nineteenth* century. And, whatever plausible reasons may be held forth for such a junction, certain it is, that it is in direct disobedience to the positive command of the LORD, on the subject of heresy; *I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues*. Rev. xviii. 4.

But, what is the great and infallible security against being led away by the heresies around, and the discovery of the false spirits which come forth to deceive? There is but one, and a sure one it is, which never hath failed, neither can fail, amidst all the present errors of the day, or all that may arise; namely, the regeneration of the heart, or the being born of GOD. Where GOD the SPIRIT hath quickened a sinner, which was before dead in trespasses and sins, this precious child of God hath in himself a full testimony to his sonship, in being born of God, and a confirmation also, that JESUS CHRIST is come in the flesh, being GOD and Man in One Person, the CHRIST of GOD.

Reader! look into your own heart, and see whether it be not a most firm and unquestionable security against this, and every other error, of either antient or modern heresy or heretics. If so be the LORD the HOLY GHOST hath regenerated you, and the SPIRIT witnesseth with your spirit, that you are born of God. For then hath he taught you *the plague of your own heart*. And what artifice of men, or devils, can bear up against this divine teaching, when you yourself also daily feel, and know how that heart is for ever interrupting your spiritual pursuits, and warring against your soul! So, in like manner, when God the HOLY GHOST hath taught you *who CHRIST is*, and *the efficacy of his blood and righteousness*; when you have felt the *sovereignty of his grace*, the compleatness and fulness of his *finished sal-*

vation; have known the love of God, the sweetness and suitableness of his *promises*, and been fed by them from day to day, can an host of heretics persuade you that these precious things are false, and that JESUS CHRIST, the SON of GOD is not come in the flesh? Oh! how gracious hath our God been, to provide such blessed securities for his people against all perilous times like the present!

7 ¶ Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

8 He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love.

9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him.

10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

12 No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us,

13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

14 And we have seen, and do testify that the Father sent the Son *to be* the Saviour of the world.

15 Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love: and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgement: because as he is, so are we in this world.

18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment; he that feareth is not made perfect in love.

19 We love him, because he first loved us.

20 If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

21 And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

I include all these under one reading, that in a *Poor Man's Commentary* I may not trespass. The *two* great points here dwelt upon are, *first*, the love of God to his people. And, *secondly*, our love to him, and to each other, the members of CHRIST's body the Church, as flowing from it. God's love the *cause*. Our love the *effect*. A word or two I would beg to offer upon each.

And, *first*. God's love to the Church in CHRIST. In which is included the love of the whole Persons of the GODHEAD. But as the source is in God, and wholly resulting from himself; it is impossible to trace it but in the effects. What the Apostle here saith, of our ignorance of God, is very highly in proof. *No man hath seen God at any time*. And how then shall he describe the source of God's love? Indeed, it is never attempted to be shewn, but by effects. *In this was manifested the love of God*. In what? *He gave his only begotten SON*. *Herein is love*. *Not that we loved him; but that he loved us*. So that the first thing laid down for our contemplation, is the love of God. *God is love*. And, from all eternity, he hath been giving out demonstrations of that love, in the streams and effects of it. CHRIST is the first edition of that love: and all the subsequent works are *with him*, and *in him*, and *through him*, and *by him*. Our *Adam-fall*, gave occasion for the greater display of that love. But CHRIST and his Church were one in the womb of God's love, before the *Adam-fall*, or even the foundation of the earth was laid.

There are *two* verses in scripture, *one* in the Old Testament, and the *other* in the New, which, if read together, will shew more of this love of God in its antiquity and eternity, and in all its bearings through time and eternity, than all the wisdom of men in all ages of the world can come up to in description, if they were to unite together, to furnish volumes for this purpose. The *first* is *Jeremiah xxxi. 3*. *The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting-love; therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee*: or as the margin renders it, *therefore have I extended loving kindness unto thee*. Here, we have God himself declaring, that his love to the Church hath been from everlasting; that is, as God himself. For his love, as is himself, is from everlasting. No space could have been before either; for in that case, it could not be said to have been from everlasting. So that God himself, and his love to the Church, are expressed by the same words, from everlasting. The *second* verse is in *Ephes. ii. 7*. *That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us through CHRIST JESUS*. Here we have declared, the ultimate object of that love; and which proves, that as it began from everlasting, so it hath ran through, and still continues to run through, the whole time-state

of the Church, to everlasting; like rivers, arising out of the ocean, and running back into it again, everlastingly connected, and for ever flowing. By uniting these glorious scriptures in one view, they form a compleat circle, to shew, that God's love to the Church in CHRIST from everlasting, hath been one and the same; and his first design, and last execution, is to shew forth that love, or, as it is here called, the *exceeding riches of his grace*, in that glory resulting from that love, into which the Church is to be brought, and continue in everlastingly. Well might the Apostle say: *Herein is love!* for all other, in comparison, is nothing!

Secondly. Our love to GOD in CHRIST, and to the Church on CHRIST's account. It is scarcely necessary to observe, that all that we can call love or affection in us, either to God or his people, are but the mere *effects* from him, and his love to us as the *cause*. *We love him*, (saith the Apostle in this very scripture,) *because he first loved us*. Yea, it is not simply because he loved us, that we love him; for this alone would never have made our stoney hearts susceptible of love; but the LORD accomplished it by his quickening grace, shedding abroad that love in our hearts, in taking away the heart of stone, and giving us a heart of flesh. Ezek. xxxvi. 26. It is by His warming our frozen affections, subduing, and absolutely conquering our natural enmity against him, and winning us over with the cords of love, and the bands of a man, that we are brought over to love him who hath first loved us; or we should have remained enemies to God, by wicked works, to all eternity. Reader! pause over the wonderful mercy and grace, yea, *the exceeding riches of his grace*; and mark in the whole, in the FATHER's everlasting purpose, counsel, will, and pleasure, the SON's love, in betrothing and redeeming mercy; and the HOLY GHOST's regenerating, renewing favor; how infinitely great must be *the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of that love of God, which passeth knowledge!*

REFLECTIONS.

WHAT a relief is it to the child of God, amidst all the antichrists, and false prophets and teachers, which the latter-day dispensation is to bring forth, that JESUS hath said, though if it were possible, they would deceive the very elect; yet this assurance confirms their safety in JESUS, they shall not. Whither but for this, might a believer be *tossed about, with every wind of doctrine, and the cunning craftiness of men, whereby they lie in wait to deceive?* Blessed God the SPIRIT! be thou everlastingly praised, and loved, and adored, for what thou hast taught the Church in this precious Chapter! Here from thee, thy regenerated people learn, that the knowledge of CHRIST being come in the flesh, having proclaimed redemption in his blood, and regenerating the souls of his redeemed, by his holy SPIRIT; becomes an infallible security, against all the awful heresies abounding in this CHRIST-despising generation. LORD! let thy children know, and especially thy little children, that we have overcome the whole enemies of our salvation in our new birth. *Greater is he that is in us, than all that is in the world.* And oh! for the LORD to shed abroad his love in our hearts, that we may love him who hath first loved us. And,

do thou grant, gracious God, that in thy strength we may have boldness, looking forward to that great day of our God, that when he shall appear, who is our life, our portion, our righteousness, and compleat justification; we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming. *For as he is, so are we in this world!*

CHAP. V.

CONTENTS.

The Apostle closeth his Epistle with this Chapter. He points out the Victory of the Regenerate. He most blessedly declares, of the three heavenly, and the three earthly Witnesses. And shews, that the Possession of CHRIST, by Union with him, is eternal Life.

WHOSOEVER believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him.

2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.

3 ¶ For this is the love of God, That we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.

We shall stumble at the very threshold of this Chapter, and have but very imperfect ideas of what the HOLY GHOST intended to teach the Church by this belief, unless we first consider the scriptural grounds of true faith. I have often thought, that if we were to calculate faith upon the standard of creeds, in prayer-books, and the rehearsal of them in the congregations, one after another, as horses in a team; we might suppose that the whole were believers. But, if we were to examine such persons, upon the principles of the doctrines they profess to believe, perhaps not one in a score could be able to give an answer to any enquiry of the hope that is in them.

It is not the mere lip-service of the acknowledgement of God, that implies a real belief in the existence of God, either in those that take up upon trust the scriptural testimony, that in this Being of God, there exists a plurality of persons; do we any more discover in them a knowledge of Him. So it will follow, that there may be a confession of all that those creeds drawn up by men declare; and yet the heart all the while remain perfectly unacquainted with any saving knowledge of God in CHRIST. Reader! remember what all the way through I have been observing, that the regeneration of the heart, or being born again, is the only security for the real knowledge of God, Until that the child of God is regenerated and made a new creature in CHRIST, he hath no real heartfelt knowledge of the Lord. An entrance into CHRIST'S kingdom in grace, as well as an entrance

hereafter into CHRIST's kingdom in glory, can be accomplished no other way. *Ye must be born again.* John iii. 7.

The HOLY GHOST by the Apostle opens this Chapter, in shewing the blessed effects which arise out of this new birth. He believeth that JESUS is the SON of GOD. And how is this wrought? *No man* (saith the Apostle *Paul*) *can say that JESUS is the LORD but by the HOLY GHOST.* 1 Cor. xii. 3. But, when the HOLY GHOST by regeneration hath opened the eyes of the understanding, in the knowledge *of the mystery of GOD, and of the FATHER, and of CHRIST*; he then sees, that *in CHRIST are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*; and that *in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the GODHEAD bodily*; and, like one of old, taught by the same Almighty Teacher, he crieth out to JESUS, *Rabbi! thou art the SON of GOD! thou art the King of Israel!* Coloss. ii. 2—10. John i. 49. Hence in this belief, arising from regeneration, and the teaching of GOD the HOLY GHOST, the knowledge of JESUS as the CHRIST, that is, the Sent, the Sealed, the Anointed of the FATHER; implies, all the precious and blessed things included in that high administration. I mean, the apprehension, according to scriptural testimony, of the glorious doctrine of the HOLY THREE IN ONE, which bear record in heaven; the union of GOD and Man in the Person of CHRIST; atonement by his blood; justification in his righteousness; the Person, work, and ministry of GOD the HOLY GHOST; together with all those great things connected with a life of grace here, for the Church of GOD, and the assurance of everlasting happiness in, and through CHRIST, in the life to come. Hence, whosoever hath these blessed views concerning CHRIST and his Church, and from the heart led by divine teaching is thus made acquainted with CHRIST, and believeth that JESUS is the CHRIST; this man hath the SPIRIT bearing witness with his spirit, that *he is born of God.* Reader! what say you to these things?

The HOLY GHOST is graciously pleased to add, by way of further evidence, that the child of GOD may have a further, collateral testimony, to the assurance of faith wherein he stands; that every one who loveth CHRIST, loveth also the people of CHRIST. And, as the love of the brethren, when that love is formed for CHRIST's sake, becomes another sweet testimony that we love the LORD of those brethren, when we love them because they are his; so, a desire of obedience, and conformity to what JESUS hath enjoined, on his account, will uniformly mark the people of GOD as his, whose they are, and whom they serve in the Gospel of GOD's dear SON. Reader! it is a sweet testimony, when, not from bondage-frames, but from real heartfelt affection, we follow *the commandments and ordinances of the LORD blameless.* Luke i. 6.

4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world; *even* our faith.

5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

6 This is he that came by water and blood, *even*

Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.

In these verses we here discover where the strength of the Church lies, and in whom alone she finds victory, even in CHRIST. The Apostle expresseth it by the word *our faith*. But by faith, is meant CHRIST, the great object of faith. *Seeing the SON*, our LORD calls it, and *believing on him*. John vi. 40. And this includes all the blessed properties connected with it. He that is born of God, seeth himself a needy, lost, and helpless creature. He beholds a glory in CHRIST, and a fulness and suitableness 'in CHRIST, for salvation. He discovers also, a warrant in God the FATHER, to come to CHRIST, as a remedy of God's own providing. He feels an hungering and a thirsting for CHRIST, excited by the HOLY GHOST in his soul. And thus he comes to CHRIST, and finds him to be wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. 1 Cor. i. 30. This is to overcome the world, and to have a real soul-enjoying faith, in the assured conviction, that *JESUS is the SON of God!*

I detain the Reader over the words of this verse, where it is said, that JESUS CHRIST came by water and blood; not by water only, but by water and blood. I have already in the Commentary, John iii. 8. very largely spoken to this subject, to which I refer. And in addition, shall only think it necessary to say, that when the coming of CHRIST is thus here so blessedly spoken of, we cannot be at a loss to apprehend, that as by his blood he hath redeemed his Church; so, by his SPIRIT he hath regenerated her; the HOLY GHOST bearing witness, as the SPIRIT of truth, to her adoption-character. To this purport, is the language of the HOLY GHOST, by the Apostle. *After that the kindness and love of God our SAVIOR toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the HOLY GHOST; which he shed on us abundantly, through JESUS CHRIST our SAVIOR; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.* Titus iii. 4—7.

7 For there are three that bear record in heaven; the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one.

We have here a most blessed scripture, and which, from its vast importance, merits our closest attention. And, as there have been enemies to our holy faith, among the CHRIST-despisers, who would wish to wrest it from us; we have the more reason to prize it highly, to bless God for it, and to beg of him to write it on the living tablets of our hearts.

The grand point those heavenly witnesses bear their joint testimony to, is that fundamental doctrine of our most holy faith, namely, that JESUS is the SON of GOD. For this glorious truth, which includes in it the certainty both of his divine, and human nature, brings with it, and confirms all the momentous doctrines of the Gospel. This leading principle, being written by God the SPIRIT in regeneration on

the heart; our lost estate by nature, and our recovery by grace, together with all the glorious events belonging to the Person, offices, character, and relations of the LORD JESUS CHRIST, blessedly follow, in the wonderful subject of redemption. Patriarchs, Prophets, and Apostles, have set to their seal, and a great part of them in blood, to *the truth as it is in JESUS*. And, to confirm all, these HOLY THREE in ONE from heaven, bear witness to the same, that GOD *hath given to the Church eternal life, and this life is in his SON*.

I admire the manner of expression, which the HOLY GHOST, by *John*, hath been pleased to adopt, in giving the Church those heavenly witnesses. He saith, the FATHER, the WORD, and the HOLY GHOST. He doth not say, the FATHER, the SON, and the HOLY GHOST: probably, because it is to the Sonship of JESUS the testimony is here given; and, therefore, the same Person is mentioned by another of his names; the Uncreated WORD. And there is a great beauty, as well as strength, in this. The *Pharisees*, the sworn foes of CHRIST, had objected to his bearing witness of himself. And, although the LORD refuted the weakness of their argument, in terms of the plainest, and most unanswerable nature; see John viii. 13—19. yet, when the HOLY GHOST was pleased, by *John*, to give the Church the relation of those heavenly witnesses; he put an end to all such objections, by calling CHRIST the WORD, and not the SON. It is the Sonship of JESUS, as including every other testimony to his Almightyness of character, which the LORD the SPIRIT here had in view; and there is, therefore, a great beauty and propriety in calling JESUS by his well-known name, the WORD.

I must not, in a work of this kind, gratify my wishes at the expense of the Reader's time and patience, by entering largely into a subject so great and extensive as these precious words would furnish. But I cannot but beg a short indulgence, to amplify my observations on them a little.

And, *first*. Here is said to be Three which bear record in heaven, that is, from heaven, to the Church upon earth, to this glorious truth, concerning the Person of CHRIST: and that these Three are One. Our first object, therefore, is concerned to establish, from scriptural testimony, the oneness and unity of the divine essence, existing as is here fully stated, in a threefold character of Person. A few observations will clearly prove this point. That there can be but One Infinite, and Eternal God, is evident, from the very nature of his Attributes and Perfections. For, as an infinite, and eternal Being, he inhabiteth infinity and eternity. Consequently, there can be no other, for he occupies, and fills all space. This alone is enough, in proof of the oneness, and unity of the divine essence. And hence, we find those glorious distinctions of character commanded to be ascribed to him. *Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God is one LORD*. Deut. vi. 4. So again, *Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know, that the LORD he is GOD, there is none else beside him*. Deut. iv. 35. And in a language infinitely sublime, and, as one might suppose, would distinguish the Almighty Speaker, we find GOD himself thus addressing the Church: *Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his Redeemer the LORD of hosts: I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me, there is no GOD.—Ye are even my witnesses. Is there a GOD beside me? Yea, there is no GOD; I*

know not any. Isaiah xlii. 6—8. Here is enough, without adding more, (though the Bible is full to the same amount, in confirmation of the unity and oneness of the divine essence. GOD is ONE. I will not detain the Reader with quoting at large some of the many passages in the Word of GOD, which prove, that these distinguishing perfections of character, constituting GODHEAD, are all equally ascribed to the whole three Persons of the GODHEAD. I shall content myself with referring to them. I only beg the Reader, however, before he proceeds further, that he will turn to those scriptures as I have marked them; for they not only confirm the one leading truth of our holy faith, of the unity and oneness in the divine essence; but establish what is here said: *that there are THREE which bear record in heaven, the FATHER, the WORD, and the HOLY GHOST: and these three are One.* See Isaiah ix. 6. Zech. xiii. Malachi iii. 1. John v. 17, 18. John x. 30. John viii. 51.—and Isaiah xlviii. 16, 17. Isaiah lxiii. 10. with Deut. xxxii. 12. Isaiah vi. 8. with Acts xxviii. 25, 26. and Luke i. 68. Numb. xii. 6. with 2 Peter i. 21. Levit. xxvi. 11, 12. with 2 Cor. vi. 16. and Rev. xxi. 3. 1 Cor. vi. 19. with 1 Cor. iii. 16, &c.

Secondly. The same holy scriptures which are thus express, in proof of the oneness and unity in the divine essence, are equally express, in revealing the existence of three distinct Persons in this One GODHEAD. Not only in this verse before us, but in a great variety of other places, throughout the Bible. Yea, we have distinct actions described, concerning each glorious Person, in which they are revealed as speaking to the Church in CHRIST, or to themselves, concerning the Church in CHRIST, or in glorifying each other. Thus at the creation of man, we find the words, *let us make man in our image, after our likeness:* Gen. i. 26. So again at the Tower of Babel; *let us go down and confound their language:* Gen. xi. 7. So again, at the vision Isaiah saw: *Also I heard the voice of the LORD saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?* Isaiah vi. 8. And, to add no more. At the baptism of CHRIST, there was given the fullest, and most compleat demonstration of this distinction of Person in the GODHEAD, when the voice from heaven came saying, *This is my beloved SON in whom I am well pleased:* the SON of GOD in our nature at the same time in Jordan; and the SPIRIT of GOD descending like a dove, and lighting upon him. Matt. iii. 16, 17. See the Commentary on those verses. In proof of the actions and speakings of the HOLY THREE; see Matt. xvii. 5. John xii. 28. Acts ix. 4, 5. Acts xxii. 17, 18. Acts x. 19, 20. Acts xiii. 2, 4.

Thirdly. We have these heavenly witnesses bearing express testimony to the Sonship of the LORD JESUS, in all the ministry of JESUS. To bring forward proofs on this point, would be little short of going over again the whole records of the four Evangelists. Every eyeless socket JESUS filled and gave sight to, confirmed his GODHEAD; because this was a compleat act of creation. And all the works which JESUS did in his FATHER's name, and every devil he cast out of the bodies of men, by the SPIRIT of GOD, bore a like testimony to the divinity of his Person. Hence, we may safely conclude, in full assurance to the truth of this precious verse of scripture, that as the Church is *baptized* in the joint names of the FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST; Matt. xxviii. 19. and the Church is *blessed* in the joint names, of the *grace*

of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, and the love of GOD, and the communion of the HOLY GHOST: 2 Cor. xiii. 14. so, there are three that bear record in heaven, to the Sonship of the LORD JESUS, the FATHER, the WORD, and the HOLY GHOST: and these Three are One!

And is it wonderful then, that a scripture so full in point of testimony to all the great and leading truths of the Church of GOD in CHRIST, should be nibbled at by the enemies of CHRIST and his GODHEAD? The greater wonder is, (and only to be explained, by ascribing it to the real source of all safety, GOD the HOLY GHOST, the author of it, watching over his own word,) that it had not been struck out of our Bibles, by the daring hand of infidelity. But, as the great enemy of souls, (who beguiles his children by his deceivings,) not unfrequently, betrays himself by his subtilty, so here, by tempting to the charge of calling this verse an *interpolation*, and being introduced by some other hand, and not written by *John*, shews the fallacy of the argument. For let any plain honest man, by way of trial, read the 6th and 8th verses of this Chapter, and leave out, (as those opposers of GOD's truth would tempt us to do,) the 7th verse; and let him say, supposing he had never seen, or heard the 7th verse, whether it would not strike him, that there was somewhat wanting? What connection could there be, between the last word of the *sixth* verse, and the beginning of the *eighth*? The *And*, which begins the *eighth*, is a conjunction copulative. And on the supposition, the *seventh* verse was omitted, what would there be to join? To such a miserable expedient are those men reduced, in order to support their wretched system!

Reader! I shall detain you no longer, than just to put the question to your heart, whether you can join me in praises, and thanksgivings to GOD the HOLY GHOST, for the sweet and precious record of this verse; concerning those heavenly witnesses. Blessed be GOD the SPIRIT do I say, for such a record! And blessed be GOD the SPIRIT, for accompanying it with his seal in my heart to its truth! For what doth it record, when testifying to the SON-ship of JESUS the SON of GOD, but that GOD *hath sent his SON JESUS to bless his people, in turning away every one of them from their iniquities.* Acts iii. ~~23~~26. And are there any that would oppose this, and make light of his GODHEAD, his atoning blood and salvation? Yes? And do they call themselves christians after CHRIST? Yes! And is my Reader astonished at this? So am not I. There was a time, when the great enemy of souls professed christianity, when *the man of sin was revealed the son of perdition*, which the HOLY GHOST by *Paul* foretold, and we know it came to pass. 2 Thess. ii. 3—12. And what is there extraordinary in it, when we read, that such a master of subtilty he is, as it is written, *Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.* 2 Cor. xi. 14, 15. In the awful days in which we live, we are taught to expect such things. But there is this blessed assurance, from GOD our SAVIOR. *Though many shall come* (saith that watchful LORD. See Isaiah xxvii. 3.) *in my name, saying, I am CHRIST, and shall deceive many, and though, except the LORD had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved, yet JESUS saith, that for the elect's sake whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days.* Hence, though false christs, and false prophets rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect; yet the impossibility of the thing, is at the

same time confirmed, in what JESUS saith. Let the Reader consult, in further confirmation of this blessed truth. Mark xiii. 5—27. Luke xviii. 7, and Romans viii. 28 to the end, and Commentary in all.

8 And there are three that bear witness in earth; the spirit, and the water, and the blood; and these three agree in one.

9 ¶ If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son.

10 He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself; he that believeth not God hath made him a liar: because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.

11 And this is the record, That God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son.

12 He that hath the Son hath life; *and* he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God: that ye may know that ye have eternal life; and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

The truth to which those witnesses bear testimony, in earth, is the same to which those spoken of before, bear record in heaven; namely, that JESUS CHRIST is the SON of GOD, and in whom we have eternal life. And the witnesses themselves, it should seem, are the SPIRIT when witnessing to our spirits, of our being children of God, the water of regeneration, and the blood of CHRIST. And these all correspond to the same. I say, it should seem to be these, because it is added, that this is the witness of God, and which the child of God receives, and which he cannot receive but by regeneration. And hence the unregenerate who receive it not, neither accept it, give God the lie, by the rejection of God's record to his SON. And what an awful state are those men in, who by rejecting his GODHEAD, cannot but reject with it, the eternal life he brings. For who less than an Eternal Being, can have or bring Eternal life!

And here Reader, if you are a child of God, and by regeneration brought forth to the apprehension of CHRIST's Person, and the eternal life that is *in* him, and *by* him, I beg of you to pause, and for a moment to contemplate the vast mercy. The Apostle *Peter* was so wrapt up in the view, that unable to contain himself, he called God the Almighty Giver of it; *the God of all grace!* The God of all grace (said he) *that hath called us unto his eternal glory by CHRIST JESUS.* 1 Pet. v. 10. And here the beloved Apostle speaks to the same amount, *God hath given eternal life, and this life is in his*

SON! So that it is a free full gift. And it is impossible to be lost, or alienated, or taken away from the child of God, regenerated by the HOLY GHOST, being in CHRIST, and that child of God made part in CHRIST, by being quickened or made spiritually alive in him. And there are, among numberless, nameless blessings contained in it, and folded up in it, these *two* more especially striking. *First*. He that hath the SON, hath this eternal life begun in him; a glory begun in the soul, and to be enjoyed here by faith. The *other*, is, that at death, this life eternal in CHRIST, opens to the soul in all its glory, and is enjoyed by immediate sight. There are but these *two* ways of enjoying communion with God in CHRIST, either in the life that now is, or in that which is to come. And each is suited for the respective places of enjoyment. Allow me to offer a word or two more on each.

First. Eternal life in CHRIST begins to be enjoyed by faith, the moment of regeneration; when we are then said, to be *made partakers of the divine nature*, and to *have all things given to us, that pertain to life and godliness*. 2 Pet. i. 3, 4. Our LORD's authority on this point, is very sweet, and much to be regarded. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life*. John v. 24. And speaking of himself, as the resurrection in that sublime discourse, (which is enough to strike every infidel who denies his GODHEAD, dumb, with everlasting silence,) JESUS said; *I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live*. Now mark! *And whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die*. John xi. 25, 26. Words, as plain as language can express. The regenerated believer *hath* everlasting life. Right and title, in actual possession by faith. The day of our effectual calling, is the day in which we literally and truly enter upon this inheritance. We are passed from death to life. Die, the child of God can no more spiritually. Eternal life is begun in his soul. And this is the sure earnest of eternal glory.

Secondly. Whenever the life of faith ends, (which of course must end at death,) the spirits of just men made perfect, immediately enter upon this eternal life of glory. And this is evident from the very nature of the thing. For otherwise, there would be an interruption to this eternal life in CHRIST. And how in this sense, would the words of JESUS be fulfilled. *He that liveth and believeth in me shall never die*? If the soul ceased its communion with God in CHRIST, at the death of the body, neither enjoyed it more until the resurrection; the child of God, instead of being a gainer by death, would be an infinite loser. *Paul* could not then have said, *to die is gain*. Neither would his spirit so have longed, to be *absent from the body, that he might be present with the LORD*. Very evidently therefore it is, from this view of the subject, if there were no other, that that eternal life, which God hath given us in CHRIST, and to which he bears record as in CHRIST, and which, he that hath the SON, hath in CHRIST; is the beginning of glory, by faith here below, and on the departure of the soul, from the body at death, opens in full fruition of sight, in life eternal. Sweet considerations, *both* of faith on earth, and glory in heaven, from that eternal life we have in the SON of GOD! Reader! look to it, (if so be GOD the SPIRIT witnesseth to your spirit by regeneration,

that you are a child of God,) that you hold fast your faith and confidence; *let no man take your crown.* You are now in the womb of time, as the infant when in the womb of nature; living by the nourishment of faith, on the eternal life in the Son of God, as the child on the nourishment in the womb. And often now, so strong those principles of spiritual and eternal life in CHRIST, are communicated to your spirit, by God the SPIRIT, that, when, like *Elizabeth*, you hear the salutation of grace in CHRIST, your soul, like the babe in her womb, leapeth for joy. This is the utmost to be enjoyed by faith, before we leave the present state. But no sooner shall the life of faith cease, than the life of sight begins. Then you will come forth from the womb of nature, and enter into the joy of your LORD. And then, that eternal life, here begun in grace, and there consummated in glory, and all in and from CHRIST JESUS, will bring the whole Church to the highest state of felicity, and to the united praise of the HOLY, and undivided Three, which bear record in heaven, and these Three are One.

14 ¶ And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

15 And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

16 If any man see his brother sin a sin *which* is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death, there is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.

17 All unrighteousness is sin; and there is a sin not unto death.

18 We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not: but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.

19 And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.

20 And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, *even* in his son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

I shall be very brief, in what remains in this Chapter, having already exceeded my limits. Indeed, what follows are but as so many inferences arising out of what had been said. God's children, quickened, regenerated, and made partakers in CHRIST of eternal life, may well be supposed to have great interest, from their union with CHRIST, at the court of heaven. Hence they are here told, that from their confidence concerning JESUS, whatsoever they ask, according to his will, (and never can they wish any thing contrary to his will,) he heareth them. It is as if JESUS, threw the reins of government into their hands, agreeably to that scripture. Isaiah xlv. 11. And if the Reader remembers, the conversation of JESUS with his disciples before his departure, at his parting supper, and what followed, he will discover, that JESUS's whole heart is with his people. *Whatsoever, you shall ask the FATHER in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name, ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.* John xvi. 23, 24.

Let the Reader, as he passeth over the verse respecting the sin of his brother, observe, that this is spoken of a child of God. It is a brother in CHRIST. All sin is justly liable to death. *The soul that sinneth, it shall die.* And but for CHRIST, the surety, the whole race of men, both of the Church and out of it, must have died. But by virtue of CHRIST's redemption, the child of God, comes not into the condemnation, or even the commission, much less the guilt of the unpardonable sin. But how blessedly doth the Apostle comfort God's children, in the assurance, that by regeneration he that is born of God, falls not into the danger of it, but keeps himself, that is, *by faith is kept, through the power of God unto salvation.* So that Satan, though he hates him, and would do him evil, dares not.

I beg the Reader to remark, what the Apostle saith of God's children, knowing their sonship and interest in CHRIST, and at the same time, that they know the whole world lieth in wickedness. If there was not another passage in the Bible in proof of distinguishing grace, surely this would act in point, to shew there must be some great predisposing cause, to mark the Church of God, from a whole world, that lieth in wickedness.

And let the Reader further observe, the confidence with which John speaks of the Son of God being come. John knew that JESUS CHRIST of Nazareth was come; for he had been his disciple and followed him in his ministry. But he must have learnt from an higher teaching than common knowledge, that this JESUS CHRIST of Nazareth was the SON of GOD, or he could not have spoken with such confidence. Yes! God's children are all taught of God. Isaiah liv. 13. And sweet is this evidence. Reader! if you are taught of God, you have the same evidence as John had. He hath made you also sensible of your lost estate by nature. He hath taught you who CHRIST is, and what he is able to perform. He hath made you out of love with yourself, and in love with him. And you are coming up out of the wilderness of this world, leaning upon CHRIST. Is it so with you? Then hath he given you an understanding to know him that is true, and then are you in him that is true, even in God's dear SON JESUS CHRIST. And then will you subscribe, with full consent of soul and heart, that JESUS CHRIST is the true God, yea, the only visible JEHOVAH; for He, and He alone, is come forth from the divine essence, to make known the otherwise unknown God!

I have often been struck at the concluding verse of this Epistle. *Little children, keep yourselves from idols!* What could *John* mean? Here is his last verse, his last words, his concluding address to the Church. Did he foresee, that in a Church calling itself christian, idols would be put up? Was *John* looking so far on, as to many centuries after, when images and saints, and reliques would be worshipped? Dear LORD, I would say for the *true Church* of CHRIST, in the present hour, do thou keep thy people, (for no man can keep alive his own soul,) from the awful delusions all around! Men now may dare to call thy GODHEAD in question, no law of man preventing them. And others may arise, to introduce idols in the land. Precious JESUS watch over thy true Church, purchased so dearly by thy blood; and rendered so precious to thee, by thy FATHER's gift, and by the regenerating influence of GOD the SPIRIT! Methinks I hear my GOD and SAVIOR say; Yes, *In that day sing ye unto her, A vineyard of red wine! I the LORD do keep it; I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.* Isaiah xxvii. 2, 3. Oh! how safe and sure amidst all idols, which may desolate a nation abhorring JESUS, is the Church of JESUS! *The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* Isaiah xlix. 7. Matt. xvi. 11.

REFLECTIONS.

READER! how gracious was it in our GOD, to give his Church such tokens as are here marked down, in order that every child of GOD might know, his having been begotten, to the adoption of children in JESUS CHRIST. Yes! blessed GOD, we do know whose we are, and to whom we belong, by our being made believers in CHRIST JESUS. It is sweet, it is blessed, to know him, and to love him, and to delight in him, who came by water and blood, even JESUS CHRIST!

Glory be to the three heavenly witnesses, for their united testimony to the SON-ship of JESUS CHRIST! LORD! give all thy redeemed grace, to receive with holy joy, the record GOD hath given to his dear SON, and that eternal life which is in him. And oh! may every individual member of his mystical body, rejoice in CHRIST, and live by faith here, until he come to live in glory hereafter on JESUS, and eternal life in him.

Farewell, thou beloved disciple! we thank our GOD for his love to thee, and his employment of thee, and for all the benefit the Church hath derived under the HOLY GHOST, from thee, in thy ministry. Shortly JESUS will come, and take home his Church, and the LORD shall be then seen, surrounded by his saints, with the whole redeemed Church of GOD, and all the disciples whom JESUS hath loved.