

## SUNDAY MORNING NO. 22

1 John 1. —The words just read were addressed to certain who had a standing in the truth in the days of John. They are, therefore, suitable to be read and considered upon an occasion like this, when brethren and sisters come together, to consider the position in which they stand. They are indeed, in a sense, as much an epistolary address to ourselves or any ecclesia, at any time existing, as to those who were the immediate recipients of the letter. The things said apply equally to all who occupy the same position, no matter where or when. Let us look at some of these things. John rehearses certain leading features of the truth with the purpose thus expressed: “*that your joy may be full.*” Now, if the contemplation of the truth was calculated to fill believers with joy in the first century, it need not be less powerful in this respect in our own day. It is much calculated to impart joy. It is indeed “glad tidings of great joy.” It is a delight, a solace, a glory. Yet, like everything else, it must be realised to have effect. It must be kept before the mind. We must remember it. One reason why joy does not always reign where the truth dwells, is that memory is treacherous. Our minds are weak and often want refreshing. Things lose their vividness in our recollection. That is the reason many of the apostolic letters were written, and a reason why we should read them constantly. Thus, Peter says:

*“I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, **THOUGH YE KNOW THEM** . . . Yea, I think it meet, so long as I am in this tabernacle to stir you up, by **PUTTING YOU IN REMEMBRANCE.**”*—  
(2 Pet. 1:12-13).

He also says:

*“This second epistle I now write unto you, **in both which I stir up you pure minds BY WAY OF REMEMBRANCE,** that ye may be mindful of the words,” &c.*

The very object of this weekly assembly, instituted by Christ, is to bring to our remembrance the things concerning himself, and that we may be refreshed again by the truth, which is always refreshing, but which, being forgotten, loses its power. The truth relates to great things—things greater and more precious than matters of ordinary acquaintance, or than the majority of mankind can appreciate. There is much in present aspiration we can never realise. We are in an abnormal state. We are, as it were, fallen from the standard of our being. The image in which we were created is but faintly represented in our weak and disfigured organizations, and the state in which we live is entirely unnatural, when considered in the light of what we were designed for. We are, as it were, cut off from the source of our being, having no visible connection with God—no actual intercourse with Him, except that one-sided sort of communion that is to be found in prayer—and we are surrounded with a state of society in which this causes no grief. The world lieth in wickedness. The earth is in the hands of those who have no fear or love of God before their eyes.

*“The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God; God is not in all his thoughts.”*—  
(Psalm 10:4.)

*“The wicked live, become old, yea are mighty in power. Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them . . . They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ. They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave. Therefore, they say unto God, ‘depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways. ‘What is the Almighty that we should serve Him, and what profit should we have if we pray unto Him?’”*—(Job 21:7-15.)

This is the desolating state of society that prevails on the face of the globe at the present time. Rich and poor alike are far away from God. The world is a wilderness in which brambles tear the feet of the pilgrim, but this is not always to be so. God never intended that the fine sensibilities which appertain to the creature formed after the type of the Elohim, should for ever be violated. It is no plan of His that hearts shall always be torn and souls always withered by the hot breath of the desert. It was never intended that the world should always be the scene of that “inhumanity to man,” which “makes countless thousands mourn,” or that the meek of the earth, seeking after God, should always go

thirsting for comfort never to be found. Such a state of things is of itself the best proof that it is abnormal. The very spectacle of man everywhere SEEKING, SEEKING, SEEKING, and never finding, is a proof of something out of joint. With the Scriptures in our hands, we see what it is; with the Scriptures out of our hands, we cannot account for it; for, away from the source of information, there is no explanation of the mystery that the principal work of nature should be the greatest failure. The Scriptures explain everything. The Almighty ever-living One, who always has been, and whose wisdom, and power, and goodness, and justice are above the reach of our intellects, though not beyond the flight of our faith, is working out, on this little part of His unlimited dominion, a scheme or purpose marked with great wisdom, and pregnant with great goodness, and joy, and glory, to all connected with that purpose in its ultimate form. We see Adam placed in the Garden of Eden, under the law of obedience. We see him disobedient, and we see and feel the consequence. God exiled man from his society and friendship. He drove him out to do for himself, and the race is now in that driven-off state. We are not under the divine guardianship Adam enjoyed. We are outside of the state represented by the literal Garden of Eden. We are not in communion with the Almighty. We are not living under His shadow. Human society is not constituted in harmony with his deep, eternal, and perfect laws. We are on the dark mountains of peril and death; we are left to wander every man after his own way. Hence, the uprise of the governments of the world, in which the few rule the many to the detriment of all. These governments are fitly represented by beasts in the symbolical visions. Merciless beasts they are, wherever existing. The best of them are brutes, only a little less furious than their neighbours. Take our own country, where probably we have the best government practicable under the human regime. Take the workings of society, and you get at the real qualities of the much-vaunted British Lion. Snobbery instead of mercy; pride instead of compassion; grasping monopoly instead of justice. These are the sort of influences that, even in our country, cause the poor to groan, and grind their weary lives into the grave. Political arrangements are just what they are made by the chances of selfish intrigue. The “respectability” of the country is thoroughly selfish—the philanthropic hue and cry to the contrary notwithstanding. The philanthropy is skin-deep, showy, and conventional. The British Lion is a beast, though he has a king’s crown on his head. He cracks the bones of millions and fills his hole with raven, and his den with prey. He is a trifle more magnanimous than the hyenas of the Continent, but a wise and true, and fatherly ruler he is not. O, wretched state of things! Is it a wonder that we echo the words of the hymn we have sung? —(Hymn 52.) We know there is such a thing as the love of God; we painfully know that now it is hidden; but thanks be to His name, we look forward to the not far distant time, when that “hidden love of God” will break through the clouds of darkness, and fill the earth with glory. “Inly we sigh” for the “repose” we shall feel when resting under the shadow of God, and walking in the glorious light. “We see from far” its “beauteous light” reflected from the past, in the time when God was the shepherd of Israel; and, from the future, when the Great Shepherd of the sheep shall—

*“Gather the lambs in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.”*

We sigh in our inmost souls for that time of love, and comfort, and joy. True, we are not like the world in our sighing. It is not all vanity and vexation of spirit. We walk not in total darkness. We have light. This (Bible) is the little lantern by which we pick our way—a lamp to our feet and a light unto our path. Yet, who knows not that the flickering of a lamp on a dark night is a poor substitute for the glory of the sun, and that toilsome clambering on the dark hill sides by a lantern light, a very different thing from the delightful ramble over hill and dale, through pastures and woods, in the full blaze of the moon? Just so great a difference is there between the position we occupy in our struggles after eternal life now, and that in store for the faithful when the day of Christ shall dawn.

Meanwhile, we have to determine our position, and shape our course by the instruction left us by the apostles. Some part of these we have in this chapter. We are to walk in the light.

*“This,” says John, “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. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not speak the truth.”*

This is a very important item of knowledge. We know that God is light, in a visible sense, for He dwelleth in light no man can approach; but He is light in the sense opposed to the moral and intellectual darkness from which Jesus sent Paul to turn the Gentiles. —(Acts 26:18.) Besides having knowledge, He is holy, and just, and truthful, and merciful, gracious, long-suffering, and wise. This aspect of the light has come—

*“The true light now shineth.”*

John says that light has come by Jesus. It shines, as it were, in his face. —(2 Cor. 4:6.) In him is light, and the light is the life of men. What we have to do is to look at that light, and walk in it, that we may be children of the light. —(John 12:36.) If we walk in darkness, we are not in the light, whatever **knowledge** of the truth we may have as a theory.

*“If we say we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not speak the truth.”*

This is a test of comparatively easy application. Walking in darkness is living in opposition to the divine character. This may be done in various ways, ever remembering that disobedience in one line is as fatal as in all. A man who is in the habit of lying, which is an established habit in the world, walks in darkness, though he may “give much alms to the people.” A man who loves not, and is destitute of deeds of kindness, walks in darkness, though he may know all things; for God is love, and kind to the unthankful and the evil. A selfish man walks in darkness; so does the vindictive man, the quarrelsome man, and whoever else behaves in opposition to the mind of Christ. Such have no fellowship with the Father, however much they may know of the Father’s affairs. They walk not in the way He has made known for men to walk in, and are, therefore, none of His. He wants “*obedient children*.” He has no use for such as are not “*conformed to the image of His Son*.” How lamentable it would be if it were otherwise! What an ugly state of things it would be for the kingdom to be filled with ungodly theorists; men of “doctrinal” skill, but of selfish and unprincipled hearts. The ugliness of such a spectacle you can see anywhere now. On fine estates, well laid-out, with houses supplied with all that wealth can contrive to make life agreeable, you find people who know all the affairs of society, are well-up in politics, perhaps, and even science, but who walk after the course of this world, the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience. The very splendour of the surroundings is a mockery. The folly of sinners would be better set in the circumstances of poverty. The change that is coming by Christ, is the putting of clever diabolism down from high places, and the raising of his own children of light from the dust. The beauty of the kingdom of God will be its aspect as a state of society, founded in the love and fear of God, in which all wealth and power will be administered in righteousness, benevolence, truth, and holiness, and these things must be cultivated by us now, if that kingdom is ever to be attained by us. Without them, we shall have no part in that glorious state of things. To develop them in a certain class of believers is the end and aim of the present form of divine operations. Jesus has established a missionary enterprise in the world, which is still continued in a feeble form, and the object of that enterprise is ***to purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works***. We must never overlook this. Men in Christ, uncharacterised by righteous and holy works, are none of his. Christ will not accept mere knowledge of his affairs in the absence of the principles upon which he is developing his household, any more than we should in the little affair of choosing our society. He is at least as particular as we. What should we think of a person whose only claim to association was that he understood our family history, and was aware of the position of our business, what we were doing, and what we intended to do? We should, of course, prefer for associates those who knew something about us; but supposing a person, knowing all these particulars, were dishonourable, vulgar, and low, should we accept his acquaintance with our affairs as a sufficient qualification for our society? Should we not feel inclined to spurn him from our presence? Should we not rather that he knew nothing at all about us? Depend upon it, it will be not less so with Christ. Our very knowledge of his affairs will be an offence to him, if we are unpurified and unzealous of good works. Let us, therefore, give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, that our knowledge of the truth turn not to our condemnation instead of our salvation. At the same time, let us not forget another apostolic exhortation, and that is to strengthen the feeble knees and lift up the hands that hang down, and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way. —(Heb. 12:13.) That is, if anybody is halting, let them boldly attempt to “try again.” Forget the things which are behind, and reach forward unto those that are before. Let them not be overwhelmed by past failure, and say “it is of no use for me to try any more.” Better die trying than live after giving up. Take courage, and try again: the best have to act on this principle. John says—

*“If any say he has no sin, he deceiveth himself, and the truth is not in him.”*

If absolute sinlessness had been possible for **mere** man, there would have been no need for Christ. We must not continue in sin; but no man, having any adequate apprehension of the greatness and holiness of God, and the weakness and imperfection of human nature, will imagine that every act and thought

of his can be clean in the sight of the Holy One. Such an one—broken and contrite in heart—will feel that, even if ignorantly to himself, there must be much in his “walk and conversation” that is not well-pleasing in God’s sight, and for this he must come with a continual sacrifice, as it were, in the name of the Lamb who was slain. There is consolation in the fact that—

*“If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous.”—(1 John 2:2.)*

We are under a priesthood; and this fact indicates the existence of sin among those toward whom the priesthood is exercised, viz., the household of Christ; for Christ is “*priest over his own house,*” and not “over the outside world.” Jesus teaches this in teaching his disciples to pray—

*“Forgive us **our** trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.”*

The fact, however, does not interfere with the other apostolic principle, that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God; nor with the declaration of John that—

*“He that is born of God sinneth not.”*

As regards the libertinism which John writes to condemn, or the libertinism which taught that believers being justified were under no need to “*crucify the flesh,*” it is true that those truly born of God sin not, and cannot sin. They are dead to sin and alive to righteousness. They have turned from dead works and follow after holiness. If they stumble, it is not to fall, but to rise again, even seven times—(Prov. 24:16.) running with patience the race set before them in the gospel. There is no apostolic teaching that comes into collision with any other. There is a place for all; and the more we discern this, the more shall we be able to be instructed, and to walk in the light, in the hope that when the unveiled light of God shall be manifested in Christ, and fill all the earth with its glory, we may enter and rejoice in that light for evermore.

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