

## **SUNDAY MORNING NO. 5**

1 John 3. We are reminded, in this chapter, of the relationship which we sustain as believers of the truth—a relationship which we ought never to forget, but should continually strive to realise in the strongest manner. It is a relationship that is sure to become enfeebled and destroyed by our intercourse with the world, if that intercourse be not set off and counteracted by our own reading of the scriptures—our own intercourse with the divine mind. I refer to the statement of John, that we are now the sons of God: —

*“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.”*

Now, although it is true that the state of the world at the present time presents a favourable contrast, in many respects, to that which existed in the days of John, —our forms of life are more civilised, and, perhaps, the institutions that regulate society are of a more rational kind, yet, so far as this fact stated by John is concerned, the truth remains the same, viz., that the world does not know the sons of God. It does not know what a son of God is; it laughs when such an idea is seriously propounded. I can safely appeal to every brother and sister, in whatever walk of life their lot may happen to be cast, whether it is no true, in the society in which they are thrown, that there is no comprehension of what is meant by a “son of God?” Well, we cannot expect the world to comprehend it; it must ever continue to be true what John here declares, that they know not and understand not the sons of God. But we should comprehend it; we should understand and realise the position those men occupy who are sons of God. It is a subject requiring a clear and tranquil mind for the apprehension of it—the state of mind which the truth, fully laid hold of, is calculated to induce, and, without which, the truth cannot be realised; for there are many senses in which *“the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.”* A distempered state of mind, an eager, anxious, excited, jealous or angry mood, is not the frame of mind in which divine things can be apprehended. The things that are divine are subtle and cool and eternal, working invisibly, from generation to generation, outwearing the puny impulse of man, and silently circumventing his mad schemes. They are always true, like the light which nobody can see, but which everybody can perceive in its effects. We now approach one of those divine things. A son of God, by the very phrase, is one who is subject to the mind and will of God. You cannot have a dutiful son or a real son, without submission. Now, this is just the point at which the education of the truth begins, and to which it is intended to bring us ultimately, in a perfect form, namely, submission to the will of God. The will of God is the ultimate standard of all perfection. We make its acquaintance in a bitter form now, because, in the present state, we are on the wrong side of it, as it were. We are familiar with evil because sin abounds; it is not His will that sin should bring forth sweetness. When we are on the other side of his will—when instead of ignorance, insubordination, and rebellion, knowledge and righteousness, and perfect obedience are triumphantly established in the universal throne of the earth, in the persons of all who, in ages gone by, have submitted themselves to his law, we shall then experience those *“exceeding riches of his grace,”* which Paul says will be *“shown to us in the ages to come, in His kindness towards us, through Christ Jesus.”*—(Eph. 2:7.) The sunshine of eternal favour will be ours—and what heart can conceive what this means? —if we safely weather the storms of this sin-period. We are now in training for submission to God, that we may be sons of God. The truth begins the work in a palpable shape, and in a shape that most human beings are able to conform to, in so far as it requires them to believe and be baptised. This is the first act in the story, as it were, of divine submission. It may be said to be but the crude and gross and easy form of submission; the real submission to the divine will comes

after, and extends to every hour of a man's existence, and every act of his life, and every thought of his mind. Paul says the object of the truth is to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ, that is, that from our conceptions of God and His purposes, down to the motives of our trivial actions, our minds must be brought into slavish bondage to Christ, who is the expression of the divine will, in a living, speaking, loving, but firm and exacting Master and Teacher. This can only be done by intently "*hearing*" his sayings, and "*doing*" them—making them the law of our life. We shall thus be his real disciples and his true brethren, and therefore sons of God; for he is the Son of God, whose meat and drink it was to do the will of Him who sent him. To attain truly to this position of sonship, we must be in this mental condition, that the will of God, the law of the Almighty, is the highest law of our minds, the thing that guides us, that works from within, the thing that constitutes the mainspring of our operations. This cannot be come at all at once. There are many things to prevent us getting to it instantaneously. There is, to begin with, the natural ignorance and wilfulness of the fleshly mind, which besets us all at the outset—that has to be overcome; and it can only be overcome in one way. The progress of subjection begins with a comprehension of the truth; but to be completed, it must be carried into that degree of familiarity with the divine intention, and likings, and desires, and will, which can only come with the habitual study of His word. Day by day, as years go on, the mind becomes leavened as it were, by ideas that in days of our ignorance, were both foreign to us and above us. In the days of ignorance, no divine idea has any relish. Our law is our liking. Our liking forms a very blind and erroneous law; our law in that respect is the law of the beasts of the fields. They are guided simply by their likings—by their blind instinctive impulses, and in these things the world resembles them. They are prompted by their selfish instincts and impulses. But it is not so with the sons of God. On this point God has made known His distinct will; and we can only make that will the law of our being, by putting it into our being in the way appointed, viz: by studying continually those scriptures in which it is communicated to us. When it is so implanted, there is a chance of its being carried out. There is a very great difference between the man who works from the secret implanting of the will of God, and the man who simply works from impulse—the man who works from his own liking, and the man who works from a sense of duty. The one is fickle and uncertain; he may be found in the way of duty if circumstances are agreeable, but he never goes out of his way to do it. If it comes in course, and all things are convenient, he will be found in the way of God's commandments; but you never find him making an effort, or sacrificing a point. With the other it is different; he does not work by attraction or accident. He is not at the meetings because he is entertained or because he likes them—although there is always a liking connected with duty—but because it is his duty to be so. He works as in the sight of Christ, whom he recognises as his law-giver, to whom his being is wholly consecrated and given over. All those who are the sons of God are of this sort; they are those who work from the inside. Mankind, especially that portion of mankind professing the truth, may be divided into two classes; —those who work from the inside, and those who work from without; those who are the mere creatures of chance, whose action depends upon external circumstances; and those who are masters of circumstances to this extent, that they determine what to do, and do it as in the sight of God, and not as in the sight of man. All true men are those who work from within; these are self-acting men, and it is a very refreshing thing to see self-acting men and women in the truth. There is no more delightful spectacle than to see men and women who can keep going of themselves, from an individual sense of their subordination to Deity, and an individual appreciation of the greatness of the truth, and of the destiny to which they are called by it. At the same time, there always comes this reflection, that we must not look for a perfect refreshment until the times of refreshing comes from the presence of the Lord, when he shall send Jesus Christ. — (Acts 3:21.) Then indeed we shall be refreshed. The topmost man of the whole community

which will then spring into visible and glorified existence, will be the most self acting man of all, even he who said on earth *"My meat and my drink is to do the will of Him who sent me,"* and every one of the community that will surround him will be self-acting, for he will choose none that are not dutiful, that do not work from an appreciation of himself, that do not work from a motive that is independent of the men and women by whom they may be surrounded. Then we shall be refreshed indeed to see and mingle in a great community, each individual of which is a man of understanding and appreciation, and who is like God, in that he is not selfish, but filled with that love which John here asserts to be characteristic of those who are God's. We must always keep our minds upon that time. Let us never fix them upon the present, or we shall be continually faltering; if you lean upon a broken staff it will surely give way. We are obliged occasionally to use a stick that will break, but we do not put our whole weight upon it; we lean just a little and with a sufficient muscular reserve to hold ourselves again in case of accident. So in these things we must never put our whole weight upon anybody, or any number of "boddies." We must lean upon the rock that David leaned upon—the rock that is higher than ourselves. Then if all the broken sticks fail, it doesn't matter. It makes no difference to our position, because we are planted upon a rock. If every one took this position, we should help each other most gloriously, because there would be no staggering anywhere, no breaking. We should move forward in an unbroken phalanx. The man who is leaning upon the staff that is eternal will always be upright, always at his post, never failing, never changing, but keeping steadily to the one purpose to which we are called in Christ. *"But,"* as Paul says of another matter—

*"There is not in every man this knowledge."*

We are, therefore, to some extent a broken army, and there is laid upon each man the obligation to assist his neighbour, to—

*"Comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, and be patient toward all men."*

*"But it doth not yet appear what we shall be."*

There is nothing at all in the present situation of affairs to indicate that which is coming, and for that reason, the world does not believe it. The world has no understanding in this matter. It is like an ignorant child. It does believe in some things that it does not see. For instance, there is a certain chemical compound which, to look at it, is a dull, lustreless powder, but which, if you light it, will send forth a brilliant crimson light over all. The world looks at the powder and believes in the light, but a child, knowing nothing, is uninterested; its little, ignorant eyes only see the powder. It has no experience of the result that will follow ignition. Now, this is the position of the world, in reference to this higher matter. They see this book—the Bible—but they do not see the glory that is going to rise out of it. They know the facts under its eyes, but, have no comprehension of the future with which they are linked, and speak evil of the things they understand not. They see the ancient land of Assyria desolate, the towns in ruins, and robbers wandering about; and when they are told that in that contemptible corner of the world, beyond the pale of civilisation, is to be founded the city from which the earth will be regenerated and glorified, it says "How absurd." It only sees the powder; it does not see the great light. The world sees men and women, like ourselves, who, though citizens of so great a commonwealth to come, attend to their businesses like other people; it sees them behave themselves, let us hope, as well as other people do, though, to a certain extent, from different motives—for all depends upon a person's motives as to the nature of his acts; it sees a great many coming together Sunday after Sunday, but they laugh when we talk of the light that is to come of all this: that splendid glory we have been taught to look for—and the certainty of which is based upon an oath—laying hold of the very existence of the Almighty; for he says—

*"As surely as I live, all the earth shall be filled with my glory."*

That is part of the powder, but the world has no faith. It sees the words, but it cannot understand the light to come from them. It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we can see it although very faintly; we have a very feeble conception of what is coming. We do catch just a glimpse now and then. We can have some sort of a notion of what it must be to be incorruptible: free from every weakness and pain; possessed of great strength and great clearness of faculty, and great profundity of understanding. We can form some sort of idea what it must be to be in a community every man and woman of which is a source of wisdom, and a well-spring of blessing. We can have some sort of an idea what it must be to be moving among men and women, who are every one of them children of love, and every one of whom are free from frailty and blemish, or aught that would interfere with the free course of joy. We can have a faint idea of what it must be when the government of this world is in the hands of such a community, instead of the wretched fraternity of rulers who keep the kingdom of wickedness in order. We can imagine the joy that will fill our souls when the proprietor of all the earth will be He whom we commemorate this morning—our Lord and Master—and when there breathes not a soul upon earth, who will not bow the knee and move the tongue in his praise! We can have some idea of what it must be when the righteous are ruling—when righteousness is the order of the day—when mercy and truth and justice will cover the earth with glory. We can form some sort of idea what it must be to be planted down upon a basis of life, from which we can contemplate an unbroken futurity of perfect life—an azure prospect of unclouded and endless tranquillity and joy. But it is only a faint idea.

*“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;”* and as John adds, *“Whosoever hat this hope in him, purifies himself even as he (Christ) himself is pure—for in him is no sin.”*

This is the important consideration for us in the present time, viz., that if the hope we have has not the result of purifying us, even to the degree of zeal for God’s law, it fails; and that although we may be the sons of God in a legal sense now, we may never become the sons of God in the perfected sense, by rising to spiritual existence at the resurrection. To earn a good degree at the appearing of Christ, we must be content, in the present state, to be considered fanatics; and to be considered weak-minded, for confessing to scrupulosity with respect to the divine law. We must, when it comes to this, be content to be held in derision, to be rejected, to be cast out, to be thrown in the mud and beaten. We can purchase the opposite by faithfulness; we can hide our light, and be considered respectable; we can wink at dishonour, and be counted good fellows. We can carefully conceal it from knowledge that we expect Christ to come, and do great work upon the earth, and thus preserve our characters; but we must remember the other side of the picture.

*“He that saveth his life shall lose it,”*

And what applies to life, applies to everything: he that saveth his reputation shall lose it; he that saveth his pocket shall lose it; he that saveth his business shall lose it; he that saveth his comfort and respectability, by hiding the truth and by being ashamed of the cause of Christ, shall lose them, when the day comes that these things will be put upon a fresh and a right basis. But he that loses his reputation, and his business, and his respectability, and his life for Christ’s sake, the same shall find them.

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