

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE SINFUL MADE SINLESS.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MARCH 21ST, 1897,

DELIVERED BY

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“Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law : for sin is the transgression of the law. And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins ; and in him is no sin.”—1 John iii. 4, 5.

NOTE, beloved, the special character of believers,—their divine relationship, their heavenly privilege ; they are called “the children of God.” There is a foolish dream about the divine fatherhood toward all men ; but it is a figment, a fiction, a delusion, a deception. The fatherhood of God is toward as many as he hath begotten again unto a lively hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ; these are his children. As for the rest of mankind, they are heirs of wrath, even as others. It is the special manner of God’s love that we are bidden in this chapter to “behold” as a wonder, because he has bestowed this “manner of love” upon us “that we should be called the sons of God ;” and that he has not bestowed this love upon all men is evident, for it is added, “therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.”

So, you see, out of the special privilege of God’s children there grows a special position which they are called to occupy. They are not of the world, even as Christ is not of the world. They become a holy people, separated unto God. I say not that all who profess the Christian name are so ; that is what they ought to be, but it is to be feared that many of them have not yet reached this standard. But true believers, the twice-born, have been regenerated by the Spirit of God. These are not of the world, and the world does not understand them ; they are aliens and foreigners, their manners and customs, their modes of thought and their motives are all contrary to those of the ordinary sons of men ; and they have to force their way through the world as pilgrims through a Vanity Fair where there is nothing for them to purchase, and nothing worthy of their attention. May God

keep you, dear brethren, a separated people! May you obey that voice, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

Observe also, dear friends, as you read this chapter, what is the blessed hope of the children of God; they are looking for the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven. As they look back by faith, they see their Lord upon the cross, and then they see him in the tomb, and then they behold him risen from the grave. The last glimpse they catch of him is as a cloud receives him out of their sight. He has gone into the glory, but believers have not forgotten those angelic words to the disciples, "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." So we expect him to come; and when he comes, then is to be the time of our highest joy. Even though we are now called the sons of God, "it doth not yet appear what we shall be." Our glory, our full bliss, is as yet concealed; "but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." So, brethren, our hope is that, when Christ shall come, we shall be perfected, that then we shall be rid of every sin, and shall become holy even as he is holy, pure even as he is pure.

What is our occupation while we are waiting for our Lord's return? Standing on the door-step of the better dispensation, what are we doing? The third verse of this chapter tells us that "every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as he is pure." Casting off every sin, mourning that it should be within us, resolving that it shall not master us, determining to go from strength to strength in holiness and true righteousness, endeavouring to perfect holiness in the fear of God,—this is the present occupation of the sons of God who expect that, by-and-by, they shall be made like unto their risen and ascended Lord.

Now, in order that we may carry on this blessed work of purifying ourselves, I want you to think with me upon three matters suggested by our text. The first is, *the Christian's view of sin*: "Sin is the transgression of the law." The second is, *the Christian's hope of rescue from sin*. Where does that lie? "Ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins." And the third is, *the Christian's model, to which he hopes ere long to be conformed*: "In him is no sin;" and as we shall be like him when we shall see him as he is, so in us there shall be no sin.

"O glorious hope! O blest abode!
I shall be near and like my God;
And flesh and sin no more control,
The sacred pleasures of my soul."

I. First, then, I want you to consider for a few minutes, for I cannot go fully into such a great subject, what is THE CHRISTIAN'S VIEW OF SIN.

I know that there are some persons who understand by the word "sin" some offence against their fellow-men, or the outward neglect of religion. They regard sin as if it were the same thing as crime,—an

offence against the prosperity of the nation or the welfare of their fellow-men. I am inclined to think that even some of my brethren in Christ do not really understand what sin is when they say that they live without it. I fancy that they mean by sin, something very different from what the Scripture means by that word, otherwise they would hardly talk as they do.

Sin is any want of conformity to the perfect mind of God; or, according to our text, "sin is the transgression of the law," and every transgression of the law is sin. Therefore, we say that, first, *every sin breaks God's law*. It does not matter what sin is committed, it breaks the law at some one point. There are ten great commandments of God; and it may be that you think you have never broken No. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6, but if you have broken No. 7, 8, 9, or 10, you have snapped the chain asunder as really as if you had broken all its links. It little matters to miners in a pit, if the chain be broken, at what particular link it came asunder. So, any offence against the law of God breaks the whole law, and spoils any hope of the sinner being saved by keeping it. Every sin is an offence against the law, as you will see if you look at the law in another aspect. You remember that great command, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself;" now, if in anything we come short of that command, or if we do anything contrary to it, we have violated the law. This is what every kind of sin does; either by falling short of the command of God, or going beyond it, the law is broken. This being the case, is there one among us who has not broken the law of God?

Then take the other side of this truth. *Every breach of the law is a sin*. If thou dost not do what God commands thee, fully, heartily, always, without fail, thou hast sinned; and if thou dost at any moment that which God commands thee not to do, thou hast therein sinned against him. And let it never be forgotten that what I am now saying about actions applies also to words; our Lord told his disciples that for every idle word anyone utters he must give an account in the day of judgment. And remember, too, that this rule applies to thoughts and imaginations and desires, and to those secret motives which hide away within the soul, and never actually come into deeds. God shall bring these hidden things to judgment; and every thought, or word, or deed, that is not in perfect conformity with the law and will of God, is a sin. Who among us can stand before the Lord in his own righteousness if this be true? If God shall "lay judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet," who among us shall not be overwhelmed when "the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place?"

Let me further say that *sin is mainly sin because it is a transgression of the law*. Many a person will say, "I did no harm to anyone." That is not the point; if you break the law of God, you thereby sin. We must never judge sin merely by its consequences, or we may make great mistakes. A pointsman on the railway does not turn the switch aright, and one train dashes into another, and a hundred lives are lost. He may say to himself, "What a crime I committed by my

carelessness," and everybody denounces him for it. But suppose he forgot to turn the switch, and by a sort of miracle the two trains escaped coming into collision. If by some extraordinary coincidence the two mighty masses of matter rushing onward were stopped in their progress, and no hurt came of it, the pointsman would be just as guilty in that case as in the other. It is not the amount of damage that results from it that makes the sin; it is the thing itself. If you are doing wrong, even though you should feed a nation by your wrongdoing, I say that you would still be committing sin. If you get rich by an unholy trick, it is none the less trickery and deception, and there is a curse upon your wealth. Some sins men can see at once are sins because they bring upon the one who commits them disease of body, or they leave him in rags, or cover him with shame; then men say, "This course of conduct is wrong, for see what comes of it." But that is a very imperfect way of looking at the matter; the wrong of a thing consists in this, that it is a breach of God's law; yet how few ever think of this! To break the Queen's law is bad, but to break God's law is far worse. I would like to look every unconverted man in the face, and say to him, "I do not accuse you of this or that particular sin, but I lay the axe nearer the root than that, and tell you that your great sin is that you do not serve God, you do not give to your Maker the homage which is his due. Your heart never bows itself in obedience to him, you are a born rebel, you are at enmity against the Most High, and you will not yield to him, your Lord and Sovereign." This is the very essence and virus of the worst possible sin. I know that some will not think much of this view of the matter; that is because they do not think much of God; and herein is a clear proof of man's enmity against God, in that he does not think it any great evil that he should trifle with the law of God, and live according to his own will and way.

Now let me show you that *it is a great sin to break the law of God*; for the man who habitually breaks the law of God is a traitor to his Sovereign, he impugns God's right to reign. He practically says, "Who is Jehovah, that I should obey him?" As far as he can, he dashes the sceptre out of God's hand, takes the crown from his head, and makes himself to be his own king and his own lord. Is this, think you, a little evil?

Again, the man who prefers sin to holiness practically contradicts God's Word. He says, "It is better not to do God's will. God commands me to do this or that, but I prefer to do the other, judging it to be to my advantage so to do." I say to thee, sinner, that thou makest out that God is a fool, and that thou art a wise man; thou sayest, "My course of worldliness, my course of sinful pleasure, is the better way, and God does not know what is best for me." Dost thou think that thy Maker will permit thee thus, as it were, to give a slap in the face to his infinite wisdom?

The breaking of God's law is also a questioning of his goodness. The man seems to think that God has denied him something which it would be for his gain to have. If he did not think so, he would not desire the forbidden thing. It is the case with all of us as with mother Eve, we come to think that there is some mysterious gain to

be gotten by plucking the forbidden fruit, and the dragon whispers, "God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." And so, preferring our own folly to the wisdom and goodness of the great and glorious God, we conclude that he does not wish our highest good, and that our highest good is to be found in going contrary to his will. What is this but a direct insult in the face of infinite love, and saying to God, "Thou dost not love me, after all"?

And, once more, he who dares to break God's law, seeing that he cannot do it except in the immediate presence of God, for God is everywhere, he that acts contrary to God's law before God's own face does, as it were, fling down the gauntlet to his God, and defy his power. By such action as that, he either means to declare that God is not almighty, or that Jehovah will not exercise his omnipotence to defend his honour, or that he himself does not care what God does, so he will leave him to do his worst. Every sin has this venom within its bowels, it is a defiance of the mighty majesty of God; and, O my unpardoned hearer, this is how you have acted thousands of times, yet the Lord hath forborne to strike, and in mercy hath borne with you, even to this day!

So, in the first place, that is what the Christian thinks sin to be, it is a breach of the law of God, and that breach of the law is full of unnumbered ills, and mischiefs, and sins against God.

II. Now, secondly, let us consider what is THE CHRISTIAN'S HOPE OF RESCUE FROM SIN. It is revealed in this portion of our text: "We know that he was manifested to take away our sins."

When I have been pondering upon the sin of men,—and who among us has not that painful matter continually thrust before us for our consideration?—I have found no comfort except in this glorious fact, that Christ Jesus was manifested to take away our sins. This is the source of the Christian's hope, *God's appearance in human form*. If it be so that the great God himself deigned to come to earth, and to take upon him the form of man;—if it be so that the ever-blessed Second Person of the Divine Trinity was actually born of the Virgin, that he might become man like ourselves;—if it be so that he came here to fight the evil, and that he has put his foot down against the advance of the enemy, then I have hope for mankind, I have hope for myself, I have hope that sin may be overcome; and as we know and are sure that God has come down among us, and has taken upon himself our nature, since this is the very fundamental truth of our holy faith, therefore we see how sin can be put away. If thou, great God, dost undertake to put it away, it can be done; but it can be done by none else. If all the angels in heaven had promised to cleanse this Augean stable, it would have remained as foul as ever; and if all the sons of men had resolved to purify with fire this foul and loathsome world, it would have remained still a very Gehenna. But if thou dost undertake it, O thou blessed Son of God,—without whom was not anything made that was made, and by whom all things consist, upholding all things as thou dost, by the word of thy power,—if thou dost undertake the tremendous work, then it will be done!

So, next, our hope lies in *Christ's death*. Our sin needed to be

removed in two ways. First, as to the guilt of sin; we have already sinned, and by reason of our sin we have incurred the righteous anger of God, and his just displeasure. God must punish sin. If a man stands in the track of an avalanche, he must be buried beneath it; and if a man stands in the way of the laws of God, those laws must crush him. There was but one way of deliverance from the guilt of sin, and that was for God himself, in human form, to take the consequences of human sin upon himself. Would he ever think of doing such a thing? Could he ever condescend to do it? He has done it; in infinite compassion, he that possessed the royalties of heaven has doffed his kingly mantle, and laid aside his crown, and he has come down here to dwell among us in human clay; and being here, he has suffered, he has bled, he has died, "the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." Brothers and sisters, if he that died on Calvary's cross was indeed the Son of God, if he died there to make an expiation for sin, then I can see how human guilt can be put away. Think of some of the crimes of which it is scarcely lawful for us to speak; how could such crimson stains ever be washed out except with the blood of the Son of God? Think of your own sins, dear friend; even if they have not been so glaring as those of others, yet their turpitude is great. How could they ever be washed away except by the blood of the Son of God? But if thou, O Christ, hast bowed thy head, and given up the ghost,—if thy dear body has been laid in the silent tomb, bearing in it the marks of thy anguish;—if thou hast said, "It is finished," who shall contradict thee? "It *is* finished." The great sacrifice is accomplished, and thou hast, by thy one offering, for ever put away the sin of thy people. "We know that he was manifested to take away our sins." Do you know it, dear hearer? If you do not, I am very sorry for you, and I pray the Lord to teach you to believe it even now, that you may see your sin put away by Christ's death.

But then, we need *Christ's life in us by the gift of the Spirit*. Even if sin be pardoned, that is not enough for us; we want to have sin put right away from us, from the heart of us, and from the life of us. Do you not, my brethren and sisters, all agree that this is what you want? I think that; if we could be forgiven, and yet not wholly sanctified, we could never be happy while sin was still creeping and crawling over us. O thou venomous reptile, if thou dost coil thyself around my arm, or about my body anywhere, even if thy deadly poison shall be taken from thee, yet thou dost sicken me almost to death by thy loathsome touch! How is this foul thing, sin, to be taken away from us? Well, our Lord Jesus Christ was manifested in order that, after his death, when he had ascended up to heaven, the Holy Spirit might descend, and come and dwell in us, to conquer every evil passion, and to work in us all manner of holy desires, and so abide in us as to speak out of our mouths, to act through our lives, and to make us to live after God's manner of living, and not according to the way of the flesh, as once we did. Christ was manifested in order that, by his rising again from the dead, and going back into heaven, the Holy Spirit might come and dwell among the believing sons and daughters of men, that he might fashion us into newness of life. And now, this day, the

Christ who trod the soil of this poor earth, the Christ who on it died, the Christ who in it was buried, the Christ who from it ascended into glory,—I say that he, by a mighty, secret, and invisible power, is this day working among the guilty children of men, creating them anew, making them new creatures in Christ Jesus. A hoary-headed sinner once said, “I wish I was like that little child, so that I could begin life again.” It is this that Jesus does for thee, my aged friend; he makes thee to become a babe in grace. Dost thou ask, “Can a man be born when he is old?” It is even so, for Christ can make thee to be born again, and to begin to live quite a new life. For this purpose was he manifested, that he might thus take away our sins; and, every day, in those who believe in him, Christ is crucifying the flesh, with its affections and lusts. Every day, he is making the old man to die. Every day, Christ is being formed in us, the hope of glory. Every day, his resurrection-life is giving us the power to rise above the old dead world and its lusts. Every day, our ascended Lord is causing us also to ascend, that we may sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Every day, he is working in us by his blessed Spirit, that he may make us to be perfectly free from every sin, and so to be like himself. This, then, is our hope; is it not a blessed one? “We know that he was manifested to take away our sins.”

Oh, I wish, my dear friends, you who have never seriously thought about this matter, that you really would turn your whole attention to it! It is your only hope. But, perhaps, you have got entangled in some vice; or if not that, a cold lethargy of carelessness is upon you, or else you have grown very worldly. There is no getting out of this condition except through one power, and that power is in the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is but one way to something better, and safer, and more divine; and that way is Christ. Why do you not seek him? Surely, you cannot think that it would make you wretched if you became pure and holy. If you do imagine such a thing, I bear my willing testimony that, albeit I have tried to serve my Master with all my might, I have never found his service to be a servitude. There is no bondage connected with endeavouring to be like Christ. In fact, there is no joy that ever sparkles in the eye like the joy of a reconciled soul. If sin be pardoned,—if evil be conquered, then what is there for me to fear? Death has no sting for the believer in Jesus, and life with its burdens cannot overweight us: we are fit to live, and we are fit to die, if our sin be taken away. Grace has prepared us to suffer, or prepared us for enjoyment. Grace has made us ready for riches, or ready for poverty. Grace makes us ready for the silent chamber of sickness, or for the grave of bereavement, or for the social joy of the little children that clamber about our knee. He is fit for anything who is made like his Lord. If sin be but put away through the manifestation of Christ, it brings nothing that can unfit us for this life or the next, but everything that shall make us fit here and fit hereafter. If I were a secularist, I would wish to be a Christian. If there were no hereafter, yet were it better to have sin forgiven, even as a mortal man, so as to live at peace with the Eternal, and to feel a glow of gratitude to him impelling to self-sacrifice, and moving to intense love toward my guilty fellow-men. I am sure that it is so;

Christianity is the noblest of all ethics, even for the present day, and much more for the eternal world whither we are hastening.

III. Now I conclude with just a few brief remarks upon the third point,—THE CHRISTIAN'S MODEL, TO WHICH HE IS TO BE CONFORMED. You see what his hope is,—that the manifestation of Christ will take away his sin; what is his model?

First, it is, *Christ ever perfect*. My lips are unable fully to tell about my perfect Master, Christ Jesus, my Lord; but I may say this, his enemies have looked at him from every side, and they have never yet been able to find a joint in his harness through which to shoot their poisoned darts. Men who have flung aside the great truth of the inspiration of the Scriptures, and have been prepared even to make light of heaven and hell, have nevertheless gazed with astonishment upon the character of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is unrivalled among the sons of men, it is absolutely perfect. As one snow-white peak rises above its brother Alps, a crowned monarch, more than peer of all the highest of them, so does the life of Christ rise above that of all philanthropists, and all teachers, and the loftiest purity that is merely of earth. There is none like him, there is no defect in Christ, and there is no excess. He is the joy of God's own heart; he is the delight of all the saints above; he is your joy and mine, beloved, to us he is the Altogether-lovely.

Mark, next, that *every saint as far as he is in Christ is perfect, too*. That part of me that is still my own, oh, how imperfect it is! That part of me that does not yet abide in him,—that old nature that struggles and sometimes breaks loose,—oh, how much I grieve over it! But in so far as Christ comes into contact with us, and we yield ourselves to him, we are affected by his divine purity, so that we become pure even as he is pure. They say sometimes of a Christian man who does something that is not right, "He did so-and-so; *that is your religion!*" No, it is not; that is the point where, as yet, his religion has not thoroughly saturated him; that is his defect and failing. Pray God that he may be forgiven for the wrong-doing, and ask that the grace of God may sanctify him wholly, spirit, soul, and body.

With this point I close; this is the resolve, the intent, the prayer, the hope, the assurance, of every believer,—that, *one day, he shall be perfectly in Christ, and then he will be perfect as Christ*. O blessed, blessed hope! There is not a sin within us but must die. Out with thee, sin, out with thee! Thou must die. There is not a Canaanite in the land, though he be a prince, but must be hanged up before the face of the sun. You know how these iniquities try to hide themselves away within our souls, as the five kings hid in the cave at Makkedah; and we have, like Joshua, to roll great stones before the mouth of the cave,—some self-denials that cost us a great effort,—so as to keep them from coming out. But that is not enough, we cannot be satisfied with having sins hidden away as in a cave; we want to slay them as Joshua slew the five kings. So, before the sun goes down, we cry, "Come out with you! Come out with you! You must die, every one of you." There is not to be any wrong thought, or wrong desire, or wrong action spared; we must put all to death if we would become as perfect and pure as Christ is. "That is a hard lesson," say you.

“It is a blessed hope,” say I. “It is very difficult,” you say. I confess that it is impossible to us, but it is not impossible to him who undertakes it for us. He was manifested to take away our sins; and since the manifestation included the incarnation, and the bloody sweat, and the death upon the cross, what is there that it cannot accomplish? Believe, dear friend, that every sin in you will yet be slain, and that you shall stand before God, “without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.” “This would be my heaven,” say you. Indeed, you cannot have a better heaven than that. Washed completely from all defilement, delivered from every trace of past sin, and from every tendency to future sin, perfectly in Christ Jesus, and perfect in Christ Jesus,—oh, this is heaven indeed!

Believing this, let us struggle and fight to attain it, and let us never rest satisfied till we get it. “Then,” says one, “we shall never rest satisfied this side of heaven.” Of course you will not; as long as you are here, you will have to fight. As long as you are here, you will have to strive and struggle. If already you have gained the victory to a large degree, go on, and get more and more of it. Some time ago, I heard a man ask, “Can we be perfect in this life?” I smelt that he had been drinking, and I thought to myself, “Well now, you are something like a man who is covered with rags, and has not a penny in his pocket, who asks, “Do you think it is possible that every working-man can be a millionaire?” Had he not better ask first whether he could save five shillings? So, when a man says, “Can I be perfect?” I say, “My dear fellow, you need not bother your head about that matter at present; you are such a long way from it yet that you had better find out how you can even become moral first. There are some overt sins that you can get rid of, and ought to get rid of; but there is a long, long way between a soul that has just begun to perceive the guilt of sin, and to break off outward evil habits and vices, and that same soul being absolutely perfect like unto God himself. There is so great a distance that thou must have God to carry thee across it, or thou wilt never traverse it; and thou must cast thyself as a sinner at the feet of Jesus, or thou mayest never hope for it. Come, let all of us begin at the cross this very moment; let us begin by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, and then he will purify us even as he is pure; and, at the last, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

God bless you all, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

I JOHN III.

Verse 1. *Behold,*—

For there is no greater wonder out of heaven than this: “Behold,”—

1. *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.*

As we are called the sons of God, we are to be made like his only-begotten

Son; and here is the beginning of the likeness, that, as the world did not know him, and therefore crucified him, so it does not know the other sons of God, and therefore spends its malice upon them whenever it can. Yet what a marvellous thing is this,—what a wonder of divine condescension, that we who were the slaves of Satan, the children of disobedience, the heirs of wrath, should be called the sons of God! We can well accept the consequence of such a position without any very great sorrow: “Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.”

2. *Beloved, now are we the sons of God,—*

Not merely in heaven, or when we come to die, but now, in this place, in our pain, in our sorrow, ay, notwithstanding our imperfections and infirmities, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God,”—

2. *And it doth not yet appear what we shall be :*

We are made like unto Christ; but when he was here, it did not then appear what he should be. If you had seen the lowly Nazarene, who was “despised and rejected of men,” could you have guessed what he will be in his glory when it shall please God to judge the world by Jesus Christ? So, in like manner, “it doth not yet appear what we shall be.”

2. *But we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.*

Every spiritual sight of him is transforming. Our looking at him here makes us what we are, our looking at him at the last shall make us like what he is. Oh! what joy to know that the medicine for our souls is taken in at the eyes of faith, and by the sight of Christ we are healed!

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

The great object of the Christian’s hope is perfect purification. If we expect to be like Christ, we look for it in the putting away of sin, and in the girding on of all manner of excellence, and holiness, and loveliness, for therein will lie our likeness to Christ. Oh, that God would give us more and more of this Christ-likeness!

4, 5. *Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins;*

Not to let us live in them at ease, not to make sin become a pardonable matter, so that we might indulge in it, and yet hope to escape from its consequences. Oh, no! “He was manifested to take away our sins.”

5. *And in him is no sin.*

Whatever he does, it does not contribute to sin, but is the deadly antagonist of sin.

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

The man who dwells in Christ is the holy man; but the man who lives in sin is no child of God, for he proves by his evil conduct that he has no vital union with Christ. The fruit of Christianity is holiness; and if thy life be a sinful one, if that be the main run and tenor of thy life, thou art none of his.

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

He is practically righteous, he is truly righteous; but let no man talk about being righteous before God while he is wilfully indulging in sin. This cannot be; thou must be divorced from sin, or thou canst not be married to Christ. The gospel demands and also creates holiness of character; and

wherever it works effectively upon the heart and conscience, it produces purity in the life.

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.*

He did not come to make us easy while under the devil's sway, but to fetch us out from the tyrant's dominion, and lead us to live a godly, sober, righteous, pure life unto his praise and glory.

9. *Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin;*

That is to say, he does not live in it, it is not the tenor of his life. He is not outwardly so that others could convict him of it, or inwardly so that his own conscience could chide him with it, a man who loves sin.

9. *For his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin because he is born of God.*

Immortal principles forbid the child of God to sin; the new-born life within us keeps us holy. We have our imperfections and infirmities over which we mourn; but no child of God can live in sin, and love it. He hates it; he is like a sheep that may fall into the mire, but he will not wallow in it, as the swine do. As soon as possible, he is up again out of the mud and the filth. He goes sorrowing, with broken bones, when he perceives that he has grieved his God. His life as a whole is a holy life.

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.*

An unlovely spirit is also self-condemnatory as being an unholy spirit; in fact, want of love is want of righteousness. There are some who profess to be so righteous that they condemn everybody else, and they have no bowels of compassion for those who are suffering in consequence of their fault. But oh, beloved, it is one thing to hate sin, and it is another thing to hate the sinner! Let your indignation burn against everything that is evil; but still, towards him who has done the wrong have ever the gentle thought of pity, and for him present the prayer that he may leave his sin, and turn unto his gracious God. It may be difficult to reach this point; but there should always be just that happy mixture in the mind and heart of the child of God,—love to the sinner and hatred of his sin.

11, 12. *For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. 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.*

And there is no hate like that,—the hate of a bad man towards a good one, not for doing him any wrong, but simply for rebuking him by the silent eloquence of his holy life. Men who love sin cannot endure the sight of virtue; and if they cannot kill the good man, they will try to kill his reputation. They sneer, and say, "Ah, he is as bad as others, no doubt, if you could only find him out!" That is exactly the spirit of Cain, "who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother."

13—17. *Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. 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. 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?*

Perhaps he will do it on what he calls "principle." He thinks it is wrong

to help his needy brother, so he says; but however he may put it, the Holy Spirit asks this searching question, "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, 19. *My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.*

Full assurance comes very much this way, by a practical carrying out of the law of love.

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

Which we do not; and, therefore, our condemnation can never be so heavy as the condemnation which God will bring upon us. Let the man, whose own conscience accuses him, question himself as to how he will stand in the presence of the all-seeing God.

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

If we can feel in our own bosoms that, by divine grace, we have been led to be honest, and upright, and true, before the Lord, "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.*

Notice those conditions of answered prayer; we cannot expect God to grant us our wishes if we do not conform to his will. Holiness has a great deal to do with power in prayer. It is not every man who prays who shall have whatever he asks for; but it is put so here, and it is notable that it is so put, "Whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight." This is not mere legality, this is not a matter of work-mongering. When we become God's children, he treats us as a father treats his child. You know what you do with a boy who is disobedient; he asks you for something that he wants, and you say, "No, I cannot grant you that; your conduct is such that I cannot let you have the pleasures that otherwise I would be pleased to give you." But you have another boy, who is very careful in all things to do his father's will; and you have marked the anxiety of his heart to be obedient to you, and you say, "Yes, my dear child, you may have whatever you want. I know that you would not have asked for it if you had not thought that it would be agreeable to my mind; and as you have asked that which is suitable for me to give, you may have it, and I am glad to give it to you." So is it in the fatherly discipline of the house of God; if we do those things which are pleasing in his sight, we shall have power to prevail with him in prayer.

23, 24. *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. And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him.*

That is a great mystery, for us to dwell in God, and for God to dwell in us. It is even so, but only he who knows it can understand it. Experience alone can explain our dwelling in God and God dwelling in us.

24. *And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.*

Holy Spirit, dwell in me, and teach me the meaning of this precious Word, for Christ's sake! Amen.