

into the place of torment—the abode of the devil and his angels. But that is not the meaning of the words. As the saintly Archbishop Leighton remarks on the clause: “The conceit of the descent of Christ’s soul into the place of the damned, to say no more nor harder of it, can never be made the necessary sense of these words; nor is there any other ground in Scripture, or any due end of such a descent, either agreed on, or at all alleageable, to persuade the choosing of it as the best sense of them.” How, then, does the R.V. deal with the passage? Its translation is as follows: “He (David) foreseeing this spake of the resurrection of the Christ, that neither was he left in Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.” The word in the Greek is thus simply transliterated into English, and a means is in this way provided of distinguishing between it and another term *Gehenna* (γέεννα), which is more properly translated *hell* (Matt. v. 22, etc.). What we have to conceive of with respect to Christ is that He did in His disembodied state, that is between His death and His resurrection, go into the place of departed spirits, called Hades, and that He there revealed Himself both to the righteous and the wicked (see Luke xxiii. 43 on the one hand, and 1 Peter iii. 19 on the other). It is worthy of notice with respect to the very difficult passage in St. Peter’s first

Epistle just referred to, that the Syriac Peshito version, the earliest, and one of the best translations of the New Testament ever formed, substitutes for the words “in prison” (ἐν φυλακῇ) the phrase “in Sheol,” שְׁוֹל which exactly corresponds to the Greek *Hades*. In regard to the gain secured by the naturalising of this term in our language, it was well said by one who showed himself by no means blind to the many defects of the R.V.: “In employing ‘Hades’ to designate the place of the departed, the Revisers have ventured upon a bold experiment which deserves to succeed. We shall be spared the sense of incongruity when we read concerning Christ, ‘Thou didst not leave His soul in Hades,’ which formerly oppressed us on hearing the old version ‘in hell’; and in Rev. i. 18, ‘I have the keys of Death and of Hades,’ is more majestic and accurate than the old rendering, which invested the Lord of Life with the functions of the keeper of the dread prison-house in the apprehension of the unlearned” (*Edinburgh Review*, July 1881, p. 181). It is much to be desired, then, that this word *Hades* should find its way into common use instead of “hell,” in all the places in which it occurs in the R.V.; and it would soon become, like Paradise, and similar expressions, quite intelligible and familiar to English readers.

## Exposition of the First Epistle of St. John.

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### CHAPTER II. 24-29.

“Let that abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning abide in you, ye also shall abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise, which He Himself has promised us, even eternal life. This have I written unto you concerning those that lead you astray. And the anointing which ye have received of Him will abide in you, and ye need not that any one teach you; but even as the same anointing teacheth you concerning all things, and it is true and no lie, and even as it hath taught you, so will ye abide therein. And now, little children, abide in Him, in order that, when He shall be manifested, we may have joyousness and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. If ye know that He is righteous, know ye that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him.”

VER. 24. To this description of the false teachers John adds an exhortation to his readers to abide by the old original teaching. As for you, in contrast with those who deny the Son and the Father, hold ye fast by that *which ye have heard from the beginning*, i.e. from the beginning of your life as Christians. That which they heard from the beginning was in particular that Jesus is the Christ,

the fundamental truth of all gospel preaching. For experience teaches that deviation from this truth leads ultimately to the denial of Christ and God.

We need to remember this at all times. The further doctrine is developed in the Church, the greater does the danger become of deviating from that conception of the truth which forms the basis

of all later doctrinal developments, and with which these developments must remain in thorough continuity, if they are to remain healthy. We are far from meaning that the Church must simply stand by the first general fundamental elements of Christian truth. To advance beyond these is a demand from which the Church in its development has not been able to escape, and from which it should not seek to escape. But it must take care that these further developments of doctrine are really natural developments of what is contained in the original elements. John indicates clearly in ver. 27 that the abiding, of which he speaks, by that which has been heard from the beginning, necessarily leads to such a development. Whether these developments naturally cohere with the teaching of the apostles or not, can be discovered only by seeing whether they do not merely stand in contradiction with it, as it is presented to us in the New Testament, but whether they do not rather help us to understand it more perfectly. Abiding by that which was in the beginning is thus seen also to demand an unwearied investigation of divine truth; for the teaching of the apostles is not yet perfectly understood by us, and has still to be more and more fully disclosed to us.

With this abiding by the original proclamation of the gospel John connects continuing in fellowship with Christ and the Father. Here he is looking upon Christian teaching in its practical consequences. Every distortion or defacement of the historical image of Christ damages Christian piety in its deepest roots, and leads to its becoming sickly. The original teaching of the apostles consisted especially in the clear reproduction of the historical manifestation of Christ; and consequently abiding in that teaching conditioned the healthiness of the readers' Christian life and their fellowship with Christ and with God in Him.

Ver. 25. The exhortation we have just considered is strengthened by referring to the consequences of its observance or non-observance. The Lord has promised nothing less than *eternal life* as the consequence of abiding in Him; and He Himself, the Redeemer, has promised it, so that we may surely count upon it. In point of fact this is also the Redeemer's own promise (John xvii. 3, xii. 50). The circumstance that the apostle looks upon eternal life, not as a life to be lived merely in the future, but to be lived already in the present, does

not forbid his speaking of it here as a promise. For what is spoken of is the disclosure which the Saviour made to those to whom He first brought the gospel. Now to them eternal life was still, at that time, something future; and therefore to them our Lord's announcement of eternal life was still but a promise. If the gospel is to be the means of imparting eternal life to us, we must be very careful as to the way in which we handle Christian doctrine. For such a gospel must surely be planned with the highest divine wisdom; it must be, as it were, a divine work of art, to distort which in any way according to man's pleasure must seem to us as sacrilege. Only when we leave it undefaced dare we look for its being accompanied with blessing.

Ver. 26. John now breaks off his instruction regarding the false teachers with the express remark that he leaves this subject. "*They that lead you astray,*" i.e. who aim at leading you astray. It is not implied that their attempts had succeeded in the case of his readers.

Ver. 27. The thought is as follows. I, for my part, am satisfied with having written these few words to you upon this subject; you don't require anything further, seeing that in your anointing you already possess, and have from the beginning of your conversion to Christianity possessed, sufficient instruction; and you may implicitly trust the teaching which the anointing gives you, seeing it is nothing else than the pure truth. "*You will abide therein,*" viz. in that which the anointing teaches and has taught you. John seeks to prevent the misconception that the abiding, of which he speaks, in the true Christian teaching, is something merely external; that it is something in which man is spiritually unfree. He declares, on the contrary, that he assumes on the part of his readers an enlightened condition of their consciousness, in virtue of which they were able, in an independent manner, to recognise Christian truth, and did not require a teacher. They had received an enlightenment through the Holy Spirit; this had become abiding in them; and everything which was disclosed to them with inner necessity from this enlightenment, they might gladly trust, and receive as truth free from all error. If they faithfully followed this anointing which enlightened them, they could not fall away from the teaching originally communicated to them. That which John here calls the anointing received from Christ

is substantially what we in modern times call the pious Christian consciousness; and John has here frankly recognised its rights over against all historical developments of doctrine in the Church. He also regards it as the source of the ever new and more perfect forms assumed by Christian conviction; and he also lays down for it the law, that it must maintain itself in agreement with the original Christian teaching, yea, that it must endeavour to make this agreement more and more perfect. Upon this rests the common knowledge of divine things possessed by all Christians, to which John here expressly gives prominence, and upon which our evangelical Church must set a high value. The evangelical Church is not possible without the sharp distinction between this anointing from Christ, which is common to all Christians, and the various attempts to give expression in doctrinal statements to this common fundamental Christian consciousness.

Ver. 28. This verse goes back again upon ver. 18; for all the verses that followed contained merely intermediate thoughts, which were prompted simply by the desire to confirm the assurance that it is the last hour. This return to ver. 18, however, is accompanied with an exhortation which joins on to what has immediately preceded. The manifestation of Christ must be understood, in accordance with the whole context, of His reappearing in His glory in the end of the days. The gladness spoken of is the joyous courage of a good conscience, as in iv. 17: in order that we may have assured, confident gladness, and may not, full of shame, draw back from Him at His coming. John thinks of this last hour as the time when Christ shall reappear in His glory; and in this thought he finds a very effective incentive to holiness and watchfulness on the part of Christians. He realises the moment when they that believe in Christ shall appear immediately before Him, He being then sensibly present. It must certainly be an object of intense longing on the part of Christians, actually to behold Him in whom they believe. But with this most joyous thought there is at the same time associated in the mind of Christians, not indeed dread, but holy reverence. To appear in the immediate presence of Christ—if this is to take place with joyousness, it presupposes such a purity of heart, such an uprightness of disposition, and such an earnestness of endeavour, as the Christian does not easily find in himself.

There is no other *vis-a-vis* before whom everything that is impure, everything that is still at all entangled in sin, finds it so utterly impossible to stand. And that, too, precisely because of the altogether unique blending of holiness and grace in this Christ. To appear before the wrathful Judge of the world may be terrible, but it is not so humbling as the sight of the holy, gracious Judge of the world; before the latter all appeal to human weakness is speechless. Before the former one might urge as an excuse that one was unable to acquire any delight in holiness; before the latter such an excuse is invalid. As regards the former, one may have the courage to complain of severity; the condemning judgment of the latter, one must acknowledge to be fair and just. What could seem to the Christian to be more terrible than the possibility of having to be afraid of the reappearing Christ; of not being able to rejoice in the glory which the Redeemer brings, but of being under the necessity of shrinking back from Him in terror, at the very moment in which the consummation of all Christian desires begins! What shame would be more intolerable to him than that with which he would have to hide himself in terror from before the glorified Redeemer who seeks to glorify him, and to shrink back from the ultimate object of all his hopes!

Ver. 29. With this verse there begins a new line of thought, and therefore it ought to be attached to the third chapter. Still it is closely connected with what immediately precedes. In ver. 28 it was said: Abide in Christ, that at His coming ye may have joyousness, and may not, full of shame, shrink back from Him. This very naturally leads John to reflect upon the character which we must have, if we are not to be under the necessity of shrinking back ashamed from Christ at His reappearing. He now indicates this character. We must be such, he says, as the returning Christ can acknowledge as His own; such as He can acknowledge to be new creatures begotten by His peculiar, characteristic principle of life. He can thus acknowledge us, however, only if we have in us His own peculiar, characteristic quality. Now this is righteousness, which quality John is naturally led to mention here, seeing he is speaking of Christ's Parousia, and therefore of His appearing as Judge of the world. Those who really belong to Christ, those who have really been begotten of Him as new creatures, can consequently only be those that live righteously, that do righteousness. Thus John

comes back again upon the great fundamental thought of his Epistle: fellowship with Christ and God (abiding in Christ and God) consists *in concreto* in walking in the light, in the keeping of the commandments of Christ (i. 6 ff., ii. 3 ff.). The main difficulty of our verse lies in this, that it is doubtful to whom "righteous" and "born of Him" refer. We must assume that both expressions refer to one and the same subject, if we are not to get into sheer arbitrariness. Now in the immediately preceding context Christ is the subject; and a comparison of iii. 3, 7 makes us still more disposed to look upon Him as subject here also. In what follows it is Christ's ideal, pattern righteousness that is mainly spoken of. On the other hand, the expression "born of Him" seems as strongly to recommend the reference to God. Seeing that the New Testament speaks only of a being born of God (iii. 10; John i. 13; Jas. i. 18), and nowhere else of a being born of Christ; seeing also it speaks always only of children of God and nowhere else of children of Christ, it seems as if the expression could not be understood otherwise than of a being begotten of God. This interpretation seems also demanded by iii. 1 ff. Thus we find ourselves drawn in both directions. We cannot conscientiously assume a change of subject, however much weight we attach to the unity of God and Christ in John's consciousness. Nevertheless we confidently decide in favour of the view which makes both expressions refer to Christ. Everything grammatical is in favour of taking Christ as the subject; whereas in the thought of a being born of Christ there is nothing positively un-Johannine or contradictory of Scripture, the two notions: "born of God" and "born of Christ" being by no means exclusive of one another. This thought fits admirably into the context of this passage. We therefore refer both expressions to the Redeemer.

"*Know ye,*" *i.e.* ye must also know; his readers should clearly apprehend all that is involved in the position that Christ is righteous. "He that doeth

righteousness"—and only he; said in contrast to the mere knowledge of righteousness and the mere speaking of it, no doubt also to the mere willing to do it.

"*If ye know*"—John does not mean to assert that his readers had no knowledge of Christ's righteousness; he, however, leaves it undecided whether their knowledge is clear, and in particular whether they lay sufficient stress upon the fact that in virtue of His ethical character and perfection (righteousness) Jesus is the Christ, the Redeemer. Neither is it with us by any means a matter of course that we attach due importance to this; even among believing Christians this is not enough the case. This is a thought to which special prominence is given in the Epistle to the Hebrews. When Jesus is looked at as our Redeemer, attention is frequently paid only to that which is set forth regarding Him doctrinally, *viz.* that He is God's Son, who, in our human nature, has brought about the mediation between God's forgiveness and our sin. That this mediation rests upon the ethical character of the Redeemer, and that it is only because of this His character that He can be the propitiation for sin—this is a thought which is not so frequently present to the mind of the believing Christian as it ought to be.

To him, however, who knows this, it must become at once clear that through Him he who does righteousness has become a new creature. John insists upon this, that in the Christian faith in Christ cannot possibly be separated from the absolute conviction that the believing relation to Christ is an essentially ethical fact, and must necessarily have a renewal of the ethical being as its consequence. And this by no means merely in the superficial manner of a new ethical view of life and perhaps also a new ethical will originating in us; but this renewal of the ethical consciousness must also pass over into the active life. There is no morality of the regenerate which is not also a doing; a mere willing would be an inner contradiction.