

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

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### CHAPTER IV. 14-18.

“And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father hath sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abideth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love which God hath among us. God is love; and he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God in him. Herein is love made perfect with us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, even so are we in this world. There is no fear in love: but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment; and he that feareth is not made perfect in love.”

VER. 14. Vers. 14-16a return to the thought of vers. 9 and 10, namely, to the revelation of God's love in Christ. They do so in order to establish the reality of this revelation by appealing to the fact that John and his fellow-apostles were eye-witnesses of it. This is not an interruption of the writer's line of thought. Having stated in vers. 9 and 10 that the sending of the only-begotten Son of God for our redemption and salvation was the revelation of the love of God, and therefore, at the same time, of love in general in all its truth and fulness, he proceeded at once in ver. 11 to build upon this fact an exhortation to brotherly love; this exhortation led him to the reflection in ver. 12, which again led to the reflection in ver. 13—two reflections which form merely secondary thoughts in his line of argument. The thought that really fills his mind throughout the whole passage (cf. ver. 19) is the thought that, through the sending of God's Son for our salvation, we know that God is love, and that in this knowledge we find a great impulse to brotherly love. So long as the former, the revelation, namely, of God's love in the sending of His Son for our salvation, was not fully established, the exhortation to brotherly love, which is built upon it, had no sufficient foundation. John, accordingly, when returning from the secondary reflections we have mentioned to his main line of thought, begins to prove his assertion that God's love has been revealed in the sending of His Son for our salvation. He does so by appealing to the fact that he and his fellow-apostles have been eye-witnesses of it (ver. 14). By “we” John is thinking specially of himself, but he also includes the rest of the apostles.

We see from this the great value which John attaches, as regards this fundamental doctrine of Christianity, to his own and his fellow-disciples' testimony. He proceeds upon the assumption that only he, who has actually beheld Christ

personally, can have an absolutely certain impression of the love of God in Christ; and he accordingly regards his own and his fellow-disciples' testimony as a guarantee, with which Christendom cannot dispense. He is wholly averse to the common procedure of simply reassuring oneself with the consideration that the sending and the sacrifice of the Son of God is the proof of the unconditional love of God to men. The abstract idea, “Son of God,” is not, in his opinion, sufficient to make this argument really convincing; but his thought is: only he who has seen this Son of God in the concrete manifestation of Christ can be absolutely certain of God's unconditional love. Accordingly, when we wish to form a right impression of the love of God in Christ, the apostle does not refer us to the dogma regarding Christ, but to the beholding of His historical person, as it is presented to us in what we are told by the apostles; and consequently the testimony of the immediate eye-witnesses must be of the greatest importance. For if they, face to face with the historical manifestation of Christ, could not avoid conceiving the thought of the unconditional love of God, a thought which was still altogether new to them; if they could not avoid doing so, while the purpose of the manifestation of Jesus was still hidden, and the fulness of the salvation, which He brought, could not be foreseen, there must have been something in this manifestation of Christ that compelled the human heart to have faith in God's unconditional love.

Ver. 15. But could even John and his fellow-apostles see that this Jesus, who had come from God as Saviour of the world, was *the Son of God*? Upon this everything depended; for it was in the sending of His Son that God's love was said to have been manifested. There was therefore special need of some further confirmation of the belief that Jesus was really the Son of God. John gives

this confirmation here. Everyone, he says, can be absolutely certain that Jesus is really the Son of God from his own experience, inasmuch as faith in Him as the Son of God has as its result fellowship with God. This must certainly be acknowledged to be an unmistakable proof of the Divine Sonship of Jesus. This abiding fellowship of man with God ("God abideth in him, and he in God") is just *salvation*; and the universality of this result ("whosoever shall confess") corresponds to the expression "Saviour of the world." "*Confessing*" is a way of denoting faith that is really made perfect (Rom. x. 9, 10). This is the ultimate and for each one absolutely evident proof of the Divine Sonship of Jesus; this, namely, that faith in Him, inasmuch as it puts us into fellowship with Him, at the same time thereby puts us also into fellowship with God. Whoever has not attained to such faith has as yet only a half faith; whereas he, who has experienced that life in fellowship with Jesus is a life with God, can no longer entertain any doubt as to the divinity of Jesus. But this is possible only to the man to whom the thought of a real fellowship with God is not foolishness.

Ver. 16. For John's purpose, however, it was not sufficient to have established, upon his own and his fellow-apostles' testimony, the fact that in Jesus Christ God had sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world. If this fact was to be regarded as a revelation of the love of God, it was of supreme importance that those witnesses should actually have been so impressed by that fact that it became to themselves a definite revelation of God's love. John, accordingly, now expressly asserts that such had been the case. "*And we,*" he says, have really known and believed the love of God to us in the sending of His Son to be the Saviour of the world; we have actually seen in it the revelation of God's love to us. To see that the Father has sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world is not *per se* sufficient; the question remains, whether they that beheld this sending of the Son by the Father also actually beheld in it the love of God to men. This verse is consequently by no means a continuation of the thought of ver. 15, which merely contains a subordinate digression. It is rather the continuation of ver. 14, as the similar beginning of both verses plainly shows. If ver. 15 is removed in thought, they are seen to hang together very closely.

*We have known and believed:* neither of these

two expressions is meaningless; and even the order in which they stand is not accidental (cf. John vi. 69). Here the real stress lies upon the *knowing*, i.e. upon the circumstance that the apostles received *such* an impression from the fact mentioned (ver. 14), that it reflected the love of God to men in their self-consciousness. For this reason, knowing is spoken of first. It was important, however, to know whether this original impression abode with them; and in order to state this, the mention of *believing* is absolutely necessary. The more that original impression was afterwards retained by the apostles, so much the stronger and more certain must it have been. Notice also the expression, "*have believed.*" It asserts that in the case of the apostles this believing, this trusting that impression, was an already absolutely complete act. The two together, the knowing and the believing, form full, perfect conviction.

"*Which God has among us*" (not "toward us") indicates the circle, wherein God manifests His love (cf. ver. 9). Here John sets forth the absolute certainty of the love of God, which the sending of Christ as the Son of God has produced in them, the immediate eye-witnesses. This certainty of the love of God was the first and also the abiding impression. When the visible presence of Christ was withdrawn from them, and when they, in consequence of their faith in Him, found themselves in an increasingly hostile world, with which they had to fight; when, in their own external life, they had experiences of the most bitter nature, and when it became increasingly difficult for them to anticipate the further progress of the great work that had been begun,—these mysterious providences were not able to weaken the impression of the love of God which the beholding of Christ had made upon them. An impression that stands such a test must be a cogent testimony to us. If we are to believe in human testimony at all, we must allow the validity of the testimony of such men.

A new verse should begin with "God is love"; for in these words the apostle's line of thought takes a fresh start. He returns to the assertion made in ver. 8 that God is love, in order to derive from it, in a new way, an exhortation to brotherly love. If God is love, then to abide in love is substantially at once an abiding of the loving one in God, and of God in him, i.e. an abiding

in fellowship with God. This abiding in fellowship with God is the perfecting of love in us; and love, as being freedom from all fear, is a condition of transcendent blessedness. The author develops these thoughts on to the end of ver. 18. Here, in the last clause of ver. 16, he merely repeats his fundamental principle, that God is love, and argues from it that he that abides in love abides in fellowship with God. The conclusion itself is one that cannot be logically denied. The essentially divine nature of love is widely admitted; God is declared to be essentially love, and the life of love in man to be essentially divine life; and yet there is a general reluctance to draw the inference that the true life of love is essentially a life in actual fellowship with God. Here, again, we have the surprising and yet thoroughly intelligible fear of the thought of a real fellowship with God. It is certainly intelligible that this thought should cause fear, when we consider what we are. We are afraid that God must refuse to have an actual fellowship with us; for along with fellowship with God we would fain retain somewhat of sin. In that case, however, our love is no genuine love; for only a love that is divine can be genuine love.

Ver. 17. Abiding fellowship with God is the perfecting of love in us; and the latter includes in itself perfect confidence towards God even in respect of the account to be rendered by us before His judgment-seat. "Herein," namely, in the abiding of God in the one that loves and of the latter in God—*i.e.* in this abiding fellowship between us and God. "Love is made perfect with us," namely, the love of God, as ver. 16 most naturally suggests. The expression is certainly harsh; but it is found elsewhere (2 John, vers. 2 f.; 2 Cor. xiii. 14; Luke i. 58). "That we may have confidence" assigns the purpose which God has in view, when by means of His abiding fellowship with us He causes His love to be made perfect with us. He seeks thereby to make us have perfect confidence in the day of (divine) judgment. Why we have this confidence, so far as the love of God is made perfect with us, and indeed only on this assumption, is stated immediately in the clause "because as He is, even so are we in this world." Because we, if the perfect love of God dwells in us, are already constituted in the same manner as Christ, our Judge. For that which is peculiarly characteristic of Him is just this, that the love of God dwells in Him in an absolute

manner (John xvii. 21-24). If we are like Him, our Judge, why should we tremble before His judgment-seat? Wherever love is not yet made perfect, there is of course a lack of likeness to Christ, and consequently also occasion to be afraid of the divine judgment which awaits us. "In this world:" we being in this present world as compared with Christ who is in heaven (Phil. iii. 20 f.; Col. iii. 1-4; John xvii. 11, 15, 18). There is little reason for assuming that there is in these words an allusion to iii. 2. It might be supposed that John feels that he had made a statement there which contradicts what he asserts here. There he had said that only in the future, only at the future manifestation of the Redeemer, should we be like Him; while here he assumes the possibility of our being like Him even here and now. And therefore he immediately adds that the likeness to Christ, of which he speaks here, can be realised even now, even in this world. If this, however, were the meaning of the words "in this world," he would certainly have added "already" or "even."

John regards the perfecting of our love as the result of abiding fellowship with God. Love is no doubt the presupposition of this fellowship of God with us; but, on the other hand, it is abiding fellowship with God that makes us perfect in love. It is only in the experience of the love of God that our love can grow strong; in this experience it is ever purifying itself and kindling itself afresh. It is therefore vain to endeavour to attain to proficiency in loving if we look away from the religious side, namely, from love to God. If we confine ourselves to our relations with our fellowmen we do not get beyond the simplest elements in the school of love, and cannot learn the sweetness of love, its pure and bliss-giving power. Only divine love has this power. Now, love perfects itself in becoming absolute confidence and trust. It is a psychological impossibility for love and want of trust in its object to exist alongside of one another. Love is essentially an absolute surrender to its object; and it is a merely imaginary love that goes hand in hand with want of trust. Jealous love is an altogether unreal and impure love. The real power of such love is not that of self-denial, but that of selfish enjoyment. Accordingly, love to God demands for its perfect reality that absolute trust in Him from which all fear is excluded. From this we can perceive how much it signifies,

to love God, and how elementary our love of God still is. Our sin is always a hindrance to this love; for along with sin we have always the consciousness of an account that we have to give unto God. So long as, in respect of this sin and the account we have to give for it, we do not have perfect confidence in God, our love of Him is not yet made perfect. And this perfect confidence in God is exceedingly difficult of attainment; for love to God sets our sin in the blackest light, and hinders us from looking forward to the judgment with tranquillity. At least, it more and more expels all the false grounds of comfort that originate in an unholy, indulgent way of regarding our sin. God, however, desires to promote our love to Him to such an extent that we can even look forward to the future judgment with perfect confidence in Him; and in the Christian dispensation everything is disposed with an express view to this, that along with our love to God this confidence in Him should be equally developed. God is far from desiring to keep alive in us the fear of the day of His judgment; and to cultivate this fear in us is to misunderstand the gospel. So long as the fear of judgment predominates in us, we must put no confidence in the reality of our love of God. In proportion as genuine love is made perfect in us, we understand the greatness and holiness of the love of the future Judge, and become assured that our life is in sympathy with His; that, in spite of our weakness, we are even now of the same mind as He is; and therewith all dread of rendering an account to Him subsides.

Ver. 18. Here we have another argument in favour of the assertion just made, that perfect love gives confidence even in view of divine judgment. Love is from its very nature incompatible with fear, and consequently excludes it; when love is perfect, it, as a matter of course, excludes fear entirely. "There is no fear in love"—quite a general, abstract statement. What is spoken of is fear in general, not merely fear of the divine Judge; so also love in general, love in its essence and idea, not God's love to us, as in ver. 17. Love and fear are represented as being mutually opposed principles; and it is consequently maintained that in a mind filled with love in a perfect manner, fear can have no place whatever. How far these two, fear and love, exclude one another is explained in the clause "because fear hath torment." The argument is not fully stated, but the omission is easily supplied.

One premiss is wanting—namely, love is in its very nature blessedness. Fear necessarily implies a condition of the self-consciousness, that is full of anxiety and distress. The clause, "he that feareth is not made perfect in love," contains an answer to a natural but unuttered objection to the assertion that there is no fear in love. It might be objected that, as a matter of fact, there is frequently fear in love, and that, too, even in the case of Christians. The answer is that, wherever this is the case, it is simply a sign that love is not yet made perfect. Fear shuts us up within ourselves; it is selfish by nature, and regards the relation between us and the object of our fear as a relation of hostility. Love is, on the contrary, the complete abolition of all selfishness; it always presupposes a friendly fellowship between us and the object of our love. Accordingly, there cannot be fear in love. Not indeed that every kind and degree of love expels fear; but perfect love, which is free from selfishness, does so;—self-seeking love always fears. The last touch which love puts to its own work is wholly to banish fear. Nor is there anything else that can really do so. Even in relation to men we can be delivered from fear only by the full surrender of ourselves to them, which makes them no longer strangers to us. If we are closely united to them by love, how can we still fear them? Our relation to them is now a relation of mutual giving and taking. The most striking illustration of this is the relation of a child to its parents. Wherever true love exists, the feeling of another's superiority to us is far from filling us with fear; it rather inspires us with confidence in him. This is the case with the child in its relation to its parents; so is it with us also in our relation to God. There is only one way of being delivered from all dread of God, namely, by keeping in full fellowship with Him, by yielding ourselves entirely to Him, and experiencing in return His complete devotion to us. The thought of the absolute supremacy of God over us, when considered by itself, seems to make deliverance from the dread of God an impossibility; but everything that is terrifying in this thought vanishes at once for him who loves God, and knows himself to be at peace with Him.

"Fear hath torment." It is the selfishness, which lies at the root of all fear, that is the source of the torment which, according to all experience, goes along with fear. The condition of fear is fuller of torment than the experience of the

dreaded evil. And this anguish is inseparable from the selfish attitude. He who confines himself with his puny ego to himself, who hostilely separates himself from the great world round about him, and, instead of devoting himself to it, seeks rather to assert himself over against it and repels all its influence upon him; he, who acts thus, undertakes a work, of whose vanity he must become conscious. The disproportion of his own ability compared with the boundless power of this world must fill his soul with fearful anxiety. In this loneliness of his existence, surrounded by powers which he has made his enemies, his life can only be a life of unbroken fear. Love, on the contrary, is blessedness; for it stands in profound peace with the whole surrounding world. Since it lives in friendship with all things, all things work together with it; all other things share in its interests, just as it shares in the interests of all others. It stands in the midst of a fulness of life which pours in upon it from all quarters. It finds satisfaction for every need, whereas selfishness pines away in its weakness. Such being the blessedness of love, it cannot be thought of as having aught in it of the torment which is inseparable from fear.

But this perfect love has not yet been bestowed

upon us. We are imperfect in love, in proportion as we still complain of the burden of our existence, in proportion as life is still grievous to us. It is salutary to measure the degree of our love by this criterion. We are often of opinion that the feeling of a pressure upon our life is the symptom of a highly cultured mind; it is rather a symptom of the weakness of our love. Here John shows us the only way that leads with certainty to the goal. We must learn to love; we must labour at the continuous perfecting of our love. This is the testimony also of universal experience. There is no truly loving heart that is unhappy, nor is there any truly happy person that does not love. Love is the really bliss-giving boon of human existence. We, however, are only too ready to forget that the measure of our happiness can be no other than the measure of our love; and that we must not only merely learn to love, but that our loving really brings us peace and blessedness, only if we aim at the perfecting of love in us. Only pure, perfect love blesses purely and wholly; and on the whole we too seldom endeavour after such love. Hence men's belief, that there is no other blessedness than love, is so faltering. There are really only a few truly happy men.

## The Books of the Month.

### PART II.

A CONCORDANCE TO THE SEPTUAGINT. BY THE LATE EDWIN HATCH, D.D., and HENRY A. REDPATH, M.A. (Oxford: *At the Clarendon Press*. Large 4to, pp. 505-696.) With this third part Mr. Redpath has seen the half of his important work published. It is greatly to be hoped that both he and the delegates have been encouraged by a liberal sale. The price may seem high; it is really wonderfully low. For the mechanical labour is enormous; and what is it to the mental toil? Let it be said again that this is and will remain the Concordance to the Septuagint, and not to the Septuagint only, but to all the Greek versions of the Old Testament and the Apocrypha.

A HEBREW AND ENGLISH LEXICON OF THE OLD TESTAMENT. BY FRANCIS BROWN, D.D. (Oxford: *At the Clarendon Press*. 4to,

Part III. pp. 177-264.) The third part carries us from *נורה* to *נורה*. And on its way it encounters some great words, such as that far-darting Apollo *דָּבָר*. *דָּבָר* receives exactly two pages' space. But if the matter in these two pages had been printed as ordinary books are printed, it would have filled twenty pages easily. There never surely was a book written in which space was so economised. The labour of it, and the little show for the labour! And yet the one surprising thing that casts all other surprises into the shade is its accuracy.

SIN AND THE UNFOLDING OF SALVATION. BY THE LATE PROFESSOR DAVID GRACEY. (*Passmore & Alabaster*. 8vo, pp. xii, 291.) These are the lectures in theology which Professor Gracey delivered to his students at the Pastors' College. Now, theology is what we know