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temptation in his path, but, as far as in us lies, to take sides with him in seeking to overcome it. If it is the passionate man's duty to pour water upon the gunpowder of his nature, it is none the less ours to avoid scattering idle sparks in his presence.

GEORGE JACKSON.

## STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN.

### VI.

#### CHRISTIAN HEART ASSURANCE.

Herein we shall know that we are of the truth,  
 And before Him [God] shall assure our hearts :  
 Because, if our heart condemn us—because God is greater than our  
 heart and knows all !  
 Beloved, if our heart do not condemn us, we have confidence toward  
 God,  
 And whatsoever we may ask we receive from Him ;  
 Because we keep His commands, and do the things pleasing in  
 His sight.  
 And this is His command :  
 That we believe the name of His Son Jesus Christ,  
 And love one another as He gave us command.  
 And he that keeps His commands, dwells in Him—and He in him.  
 And herein we know that He dwells in us,—from the Spirit that He  
 gave us.

—1 *John* iii. 19-24.

THIS section of the Epistle is separated from that which we examined in Paper V. (*vv.* 4-10 : on *The Inadmissibility of Sin*) by a digression on the contrasted cases of Cain and Jesus (*vv.* 11-18), the false and the true Son of Man, who supply the patterns of hate and of love respectively and represent the conflicting types of humanity, "the children of the Devil" and "the children of God" (*v.* 10). Sin, it had been shown, belonged to the world that is passing away, and took on in its prototype Cain, the two conspicuous features of unrighteousness and hate. This Satanic manifestation was confronted with its opposite in the self-devotion of Jesus, in whose sacrifice the readers are to find not only the means of their salvation from sin, but

the example of the sinless life they are pledged to pursue. The example of the Cross was copied on the great occasions of martyrdom occurring in Apostolic times, when a man was called upon "to lay down his life for the brethren" (v. 16), but it sustains no less the ordinary appeals to charity in matters of food and housing and the like (*ὁ βίος τοῦ κόσμου τούτου*), in which the necessities of fellow-Christians challenge the genuineness of our professed love to God and man and exercise our sympathetic care. By such tests it is shown whether our Christianity is matter of talk and sentiment, or of heart-reality (vv. 17, 18).

Having reached this point and set his readers on self-examination by the appeal, *τεκνία, μὴ ἀγαπῶμεν λόγῳ μηδὲ τῇ γλώσσῃ, ἀλλὰ ἐν ἔργῳ καὶ ἀληθείᾳ*, the Apostle knows that misgivings will arise in the minds of some of them—a suspicion as to the truth and depth of their life in Christ, that is not altogether ungrounded. He goes on to probe the uneasy conscience, framing his words in verses 19–24 in a manner calculated at once to encourage the sincere and self-distrustful, whose heart could not accuse them of callousness, and to alarm the self-complacent, who allowed themselves, like the Laodiceans so sternly rebuked in the Apocalypse, to be wrapped up in their wealth of knowledge or of material goods. *The grounds of Christian assurance* form, therefore, the topic of this section, which brings the third chapter of the Epistle, and with it this Series of Studies, to a close. While stating the grounds of assurance in the first and last clauses of the passage (vv. 19, 24b), St. John points out to the Christian man *the bearing and effect on his relations to God of the absence or presence of heart-assurance*, the former being intimated in verse 20 and the latter dwelt upon in verses 21–24a.

I. It is St. John's manner to strike the keynote at the outset, and to resume it in some altered and enriched form at the conclusion of each passage. The "Herein" (*ἐν*)

τούτῳ γνωσόμεθα, γνώσκομεν) of verse 24, accordingly, takes up the "Herein" of verse 19 (cf. the almost identical repetition in verses 3 and 5*b* of chap. ii.): here lies the double basis of the settled believer's confidence towards God, which is found (1) in *the consciousness of an unfeigned brotherly love* shown in generous self-forgetting acts—the former ἐν τούτῳ gathering up the sense of verses 16–18; and (2) in *the well-remembered and abiding gift of the Holy Spirit*—the latter ἐν τούτῳ being explained by the definition that follows, ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος οὗ ἡμῖν ἔδωκεν. Our Apostle thus affirms the essential two-fold fact of the Christian consciousness, that inner conviction of the child of God concerning his sonship which the Apostle Paul described in the familiar and classic words of Romans viii. 15: "The Spirit Himself beareth joint witness with our spirit, that we are children of God." Here St. John puts the two testimonies in the reverse order, proceeding from the outward to the inward, from the ethical to the spiritual, from effect to cause and fruit to seed (cf. the use of σπέρμα for πνεῦμα θεοῦ in verse 9 above): first the practical and human evidence of loving deeds; next there is discovered, lying behind this activity and operating in it, the mystical and Divine evidence of the inbreathed, indwelling, personal spirit of Jesus Christ.

1. There is, first, *a reassuring discernment of one's own state of heart*, the honest self-consciousness of a true Christian love. "Lord, thou knowest all things,—thou knowest that I love thee": thus the chastened and sore heart of Peter "assured" itself beneath the searching eye and under the testing challenge of his Lord. In some matters St. Peter's self-knowledge had been woefully at fault; but he was sure of this as of his own existence, that he loved Jesus Christ, and he was sure that the Lord knew it. There was comfort, there was restoration in the fact that Christ questioned him on this one thing, and not

on other points where his answer must have been that of silence or bitter shame. In like manner the Christian man who faithfully loves Christ and His people and lays himself out for their service, gathers, directly and indirectly, a store of arguments against doubt, a fund of cheerful confidence and satisfaction in his faith, which no intellectual furnishing will supply.

“Love never faileth”—never makes shipwreck of the faith that embarks on her adventures. When after years of Christian profession scepticism takes hold of a believer, it will commonly be found that his heart had grown cold to his brethren; he has forsaken their assemblings; he has turned his eyes away from their needs; he has been oblivious of the claims of his Church and his human fellows. If he “loveth not the brother whom he hath seen, he cannot love God whom he hath not seen”; and he has probably ceased to *love* God, before he ceased with assurance to believe in Him. When the reason is harassed with doubt, or the conscience troubled for old, forgiven sin, now seen in its darker meaning, it is time for the heart to go out afresh in works of pity toward the needy and “to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction.” Let it strengthen and draw closer the ties that link it to its kind, and the heart will come home to itself fraught with a new tender joy and peace in believing. Of many a difficulty of the Christian intellect it may be said, *Solvitur amando*. Yes, “we know that we are *of the truth*,” not because we have struck down in the sword-play of debate all the weapons of unbelief, or entrenched ourselves behind the artillery of a powerful dogmatism, or within the fortress of an infallible Church, but when we “love in deed and truth.” A true love will scarcely spring from a false faith. If faith *works* by love, it lives! There may be a degree of error, confusion of thought, defect of knowledge, infirmity of character attending such a faith; it may know little how to assert itself in

argument, how to conceive and express itself in terms of reason or forms of ritual, but if it loves much there is the core and heart of truth in it. The Church's martyrdoms and charities have been all through the ages and all over the world the practical evidence of her Divine character and the mark of her unity underlying so many deep divisions; and they supply a legitimate and needed reassurance to herself. The Apostle writes, "*We shall know,*" thinking, as it seems, not of the present un-settlement alone, but of future assaults of doubt in the continued fight of faith.

This line of evidence was calculated to bring comfort to many of St. John's readers. False prophets were abroad amongst them, men who carried the credentials of a greater knowledge and a finer religious insight than themselves. They raised subtle questions of religious philosophy, baffling to simple-minded men. They threw doubt on the ordinary assumptions of faith; they insinuated distrust of the Apostle's competence to guide the advancing movements and deeper researches of Christian thought (see iv. 6, 2 John 9), on which the Church was called to enter by the progress of the times. It required, they said, profounder reasoning and a larger intellectual grasp than most Christians had imagined to reach the truth about God and the world, and to "know" indeed that one is "of the truth." New prophets had been raised up for the new age; "knowledge," and not "faith," must be the watchword of the coming era; the simple gospel of Peter and John must be wedded to the philosophy of the great thinkers and restated in terms of pure reason, if it was to satisfy man's higher nature and to command universal homage.

All this, pronounced with an air of grave conviction by men of philosophic garb and prestige, who yet named the name of Christ and posed as interpreters of His doctrine and mission, was calculated to make a power-

ful impression upon Greek Christianity. By the end of the first century Gnosticism had penetrated Graeco-Asian religious circles in all directions. Already rival communities were in existence outside the Apostolic Church (ii. 19), but claiming to hold the rational theory of Christianity and to represent the true mind of Christ. The prophets of this movement found their hearers amongst Catholic believers and strove incessantly to "draw away the disciples after them."

St. John's apologetic, his vindication in this Epistle of the Apostolic position against Gnostical heresy, runs upon the lines of St. Paul's retort to the intellectualists of Corinth: "You say, 'We have knowledge'? Very possibly: knowledge puffs up; it is *love* that builds up. If any man presumes on his *knowledge* in the things of God, he shows his ignorance; he has everything to learn. But if he *loves God*, God knows him for His own" (1 Cor. viii. 1-3). From the same standpoint St. John writes: "Every one that loves is begotten of God, and knows God . . . He that abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (iv. 7, 16). The emphasis with which the Apostle applies this criterion, and the manner in which from beginning to end he rings the changes upon this one idea, in the light of the polemical and defensive aim of the Letter, can only be understood on the assumption that the class of teachers whom he opposes were wanting in Christian qualities of heart, while they abounded in dialectical ability and theosophical speculation. It was an alien spirit and ethos that they would have brought into the Church; their temper vitiated equally their doctrine and their life. This St. John will proceed to show in the subsequent section of the Epistle, chap. iv. 1-6.

The expression "that we are *of the truth*" (*ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας*), St. John had used in chap. ii. 20, 21, saying that those who "have the anointing (the *chrism* that makes

Christians) from the Holy One" and "know the truth," know also that "no lie is of the truth." *Truth*—not lies—is the offspring of truth. Real love to God and man in us—for "*in this* we know that we are of the truth"—is the product of its reality in God; its genuineness of character proves its legitimacy of birth. Behind this wondrous widespread new creation of human kindness and tenderness, of unbounded self-surrender and unwearied service to humanity, which the Apostolic Churches exhibited, there is a *vera causa*. Only the recognition of a true Father-God, so loving men and making sacrifice for them as the Gospel declares, could account for the moral phenomenon to which the Apostle points and of which the readers themselves formed a living part. The love that had awakened and sustained in human hearts—once cold, selfish, impure—a response so powerful, was no illusion; and this response might prove, even to those who had not directly heard the summons of the Gospel, the existence of the Voice of grace to which it made reply.

The grand example of this phrase is the declaration of Jesus before Pilate: "Every one that is *of the truth* heareth My voice"! As much as to say, "The true heart knows its King when He speaks." There was a trace of something deep in the heart of Pilate, though he stifled it, that answered to this challenge; it would hardly have been given to a man wholly insensible. The two tests of true-heartedness—John's test and his Master's—coincide; to love our brethren and to honour and trust the Lord Jesus Christ are things that go together: nowhere is such love to men found as in the circle of Christ's obedience. Behind both lies *the truth*—the true being of the Father who sent His Son to win our faith, and who gives the Spirit of whom souls are born into the love of God and man. "This," St. John writes at the end, to crown all his witness,—"*this is the true God and eternal life*" (v. 20).



The Christian certainty, as it faces hostile speculation, is a conviction of the truth of God revealed in the message and person of Jesus Christ; but it has another, interior aspect confronting conscience and the accusations of past sin. Turning this way, St. John adds: "And we shall assure our hearts before Him (before God)"—*καὶ ἔμπροσθεν αὐτοῦ πείσομεν τὰς καρδίας ἡμῶν*. The rendering of this sentence has been much disputed; but the conflict of interpretation is now fairly decided. The verb *πείθω* has usually for its object some clause stating the fact, or belief, of which one is persuaded. Such an object is wanting here; for the assertion "that God is greater than our hearts" (*ὅτι . . . ὅτι μείζων ἐστὶν κ.τ.λ.*), which follows in verse 20, is not a truth of which we are or can be in any special way convinced "herein," viz. by loving our brethren and relieving their wants (*vv.* 16–18). There is nothing in this to prove God's superiority to "our heart,"—nor is it a fact that needs proof. The *ὅτι* of verse 20 is the *ὅτι* of *reason*, not of *statement*, and is not complementary to *πείσομεν*. The words "we shall persuade our heart" in this connexion, contain a complete sense in themselves, or, to put the same thing in other words, the object of *the thing* required by *πείσομεν* is implicit and goes without saying—it is suggested by the clause *ἔμπροσθεν αὐτοῦ*, which brings the soul trembling into the presence of the Searcher of hearts: "We shall, on each occasion when the heart is assailed by accusing thoughts, convince ourselves on this ground that we are approved in His sight; we shall overcome our fears, and approach God with the lowly confidence of children accepted in His Son." Thus the *παρρησία* with which faithful and loving Christians will meet Christ at His future coming (see *ii.* 28, *iv.* 17), is to be entertained now before God the ever-present Judge; this confidence is to be cherished on the same ground as the other, and is in fact identical with it. Such a "persuasion" the Apostle

Paul argues in Rom. v. 1, 2, viii. 14-17, and Eph. iii. 12, where he seeks to inspire Christian believers with filial trust toward God and urges them to "boldness of access" in coming to His presence.

The above-defined elliptical use of *πείθω*, with the meaning "soothe" or "reassure," is rare but well-established in Greek literature; a parallel instance of it occurs in Matthew xxviii. 14, where the Jewish rulers say to the soldiers who had watched at the grave of Jesus and dreaded the consequences of His escape: "If this come to the Governor's ears, *we will persuade (satisfy) him (scil. that you are not to blame) and rid you of care.*" St. John's meaning here is similar. His mind is dwelling not on the last judgement, but on the constant scrutiny of the heart by the Omniscient (*ὁ Θεὸς . . . γινώσκει πάντα*), before whom our sin testifies against us; thinking of His perfect knowledge and unerring judgement, each man is compelled in shame to say, "My sin is ever before me." "Love out of a pure heart" makes reply to this accusing voice, and restores to us "a good conscience" in the sight of God. In this consciousness the Apostle Paul could write to the Philippians, living habitually as he did in the light of the Judgement-throne: "God is my witness, how I long after you all, in the yearnings of Christ Jesus." The man who could thus speak and who lived daily and hourly under the constraint of the love of Christ, needed no other proof that he was in Christ. The very life of God glowed in his breast. Doubt of this would never cross his mind, any more than one doubts from waking to sleeping whether one is alive.

2. But the confidence toward God cherished by the believer who walks in love, is not self-generated nor acquired, in the first instance, by any process of reflexion. The facts on which it rests had a beginning external to the soul. The "well of water springing up" within the Christian heart and in the Christian Church, and pouring

out in so many streams of mercy and good fruits, has a fountain and source of replenishment lying deeper than man's own nature. The Apostle completes the Christian assurance and traces it to its spring in the testimony of the Holy Spirit, when he adds: "And in this we know that He (God) dwells in us, *from the Spirit which He gave us.*" Since the Holy Spirit is of God, and is God indeed, to have Him in the heart is to have *God dwelling in us*—the Spirit is God immanent (*μένει ἐν ἡμῖν*); and to possess Him is, surely, to "*know that God dwells in us,*" forasmuch as "*the Spirit witnesseth,*" as the Apostles Paul and John both say (v. 6 f., Rom. viii. 15 f.). He is not an abstract influence or effluence from God, a voiceless Breath; but He "*searches the deeps of God*" (1 Cor. ii. 10), and the deeps of the heart that He visits; He "*teaches*"; He "*shows*" things present and to come—the things of Christ and the things of the conscience; He "*speaketh expressly*"; He "*testifies*" as He finds and knows. "*The Spirit that is of God*" knows whence He cometh, and whither He goes and He witnesseth of each to the other: He cries, sometimes (as St. Paul experienced) in groanings unspeakable but heard by the Heart-searcher, from the depths of the soul to God; but before that, by Himself entering and tenanting the heart He makes it known that God is there.

The abstract statement of the former ground of assurance, "*we are of the truth*"—a form of assertion common to all schools of thought claiming philosophic or religious certainty—is now exchanged for more specific and positive conception, by which *truth* translates itself into *life*: "*we know that God dwells in us.*" Thus intellectual conviction unfolds into a personal appropriation of the Divine by the human. The two are blended and identified in the recesses of the individual heart, where God finds man and man knows God; for the believer in Jesus Christ and lover of his kind "*dwells in God, and God in him*" (vv. 23, 24).

St. John affirms in this connexion once more the disciplinary element in Christian experience; he never allows us, for many paragraphs, to get away from the old, plain, matter-of-fact condition of fellowship with God: "he that keeps His commandments (*ὁ τηρῶν τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ*: cf. ii. 3-5, 7 ff., 29, iii. 4 ff., v. 2 f., 18), dwells in God and God in him." Union between God and the creature is possible only on terms of the latter's *obedience*; and the path of obedience is marked by the fence of "the commandments." St. John knew the perils of mysticism; his own temperament would put him on his guard against this. Here lay, to many minds, the fascination of Gnosticism; this system promised an absorption in the Divine to be gained and maintained otherwise than in the hard way of self-denial and practical service and by attention to the routine details of "the commandments." These were identified by the new teaching with a coarse Judaism, with the realm of perishing matter and "the carpenter God" of the Hebrew Scriptures and the superseded Covenant of Works. Men who held themselves, in the emancipation of knowledge and the freedom of the sons of God, above the level of commandment-keeping, fell far below it, into gross carnal sin; and the raptures of a mystic love were not unfrequently associated with wild Antinomian licence. Such symptoms were marks, to St. John's mind, not of the Spirit of truth that God gave His people through Jesus Christ, who is a "spirit of power and love and discipline" (2 Tim. i. 7), but of "the spirit of Antichrist" and "of error" (iv. 3, 6). This spirit he discerned already at work in the pseudo-prophecies and immoral propaganda of Gnosticism.

"From the Spirit" (*ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος*) that God "gave us," rather than "by the Spirit" (*τῷ πνεύματι*: as in Rom. viii. 13 f., Gal. v. 16, 18) "we know" all this, as St. John puts it; for the assurance of the Christian believer rises from

this source, and begins from this time. Its origin was on the day of Pentecost. In the case of Christ's first disciples, the gift must be traced, more exactly, to the hour when, on His first appearance to His gathered Church after the resurrection the Lord Jesus "breathed on them, and said unto them, Receive ye the Holy Spirit" (John xx. 22). With this historical reference to the definitive bestowment of the Holy Spirit on the Church (cf. Luke xxiv. 49, Acts ii. 33, 38, xv. 8 f., xix. 2 ff., Gal. iii. 2 f., etc.)—the birth-hour of Christendom, which had its repetition in effect at the institution of each Christian community and the birth of each new Christian life—the Apostle writes *ἔδωκεν*, "He gave"—not *δίδωσιν*, as though defining of a continuous gift (cf. John iii. 34, 1 Thess. iv. 8). It was then that the exalted Christ "baptized" His people from heaven "in the Holy Spirit and fire." This was the nativity of the Christian consciousness; and it can have no repetition, since the life then originated can have no decease. It is rehearsed and reproduced, whenever any man, or people, or particular circle of men, is "baptized into Christ Jesus"; and the Lord Himself repeats, in despatching one or many on their life-mission, the benediction, "Receive the Holy Spirit: as my Father hath sent me, I also send you." Such a specific birth there has been, such a "giving" and "receiving" of the Holy Spirit, in every instance of spiritual life, whether the memory of it be distinct in recollection or otherwise. From this moment onwards "the Spirit witnesseth along with our spirit"—each witness living for and in the other. The Holy Spirit constitutes the universal consciousness of the sons of God. Our sense of the Divine indwelling, and all the assuring signs and works of grace, issue from Him who is the supreme gift of the Father, crowning the gift of His grace in the Son; and the Spirit's fruit is known in every gracious temper and kindly act and patient endurance of the Christian life.

II. The central part of the paragraph, verses 20–23, lying between the two grounds of assurance we have considered, remains to be discussed. It presents the contrasted cases arising under St. John's doctrine of assurance: ἐὰν καταγινώσκη ἡμῶν ἡ καρδία (v. 20), the contingency of *self-accusation*; and ἐὰν ἡ καρδία μὴ καταγινώσκη ἡμῶν (v. 21), the contingency of *self-acquittal*. The consequences of each condition are drawn out—in the former instance in broken and obscure words, by way of hint rather than clear statement (v. 20); on the other hand, the happy effects of a good conscience toward God are freely set forth in the language of verses 21–23.

1. The connexion of verses 19 and 20 affords one of the few grammatical ambiguities of this Epistle. It is an open question as to whether the first ὅτι of verse 20 is the ordinary conjunction, or is the relative pronoun, neuter of ὅστις (ὄ,τι), and complemented by ἐάν (for ἄν) of contingency<sup>1</sup>; and whether the verses should be accordingly divided by a full stop as in the Authorized Version, or by a comma as in the Revised. This as to the point of verbal form. In point of matter, the question is: Does the Apostle say, "God is greater than our heart and knows all," by way of *warning* to the over-confident and self-excusing, to those tempted to disregard their secret misgivings; or by way of *comfort* to the over-scrupulous and self-tormenting, to those tempted to brood over and magnify their misgivings? This is a nice problem of exegesis; and the displacement of the first of these alternatives by the second (R.V.), without a recognition of the other view in the margin, does not represent the balance of critical opinion. We retain the construction adopted by the older translators, without much hesitation. The stumbling-block of this interpretation is the second ὅτι, which is entirely superfluous (and is

<sup>1</sup> Cf. δ ἐὰν αὐτῶμεν in v. 22 below, and αὐτῶμεθα in 15; δ ἐὰν ἐργάσῃ in 3 John 5; ὅτι ἂν λέγῃ ὑμῖν, John ii. 5; ὅτι ἂν αὐτήσητε, xiv. 13, etc.

accordingly ignored by the A.V.); there is no occasion to repeat the particle after so short an interval.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, while other conjunctions are apt to be resumptively doubled in a complex sentence, no other example is forthcoming of such repetition in the case of *ὅτι* ("that" or "because"). If this has actually happened here, it must be supposed that the second *ὅτι* (*μείζων ἐστίν κ.τ.λ.*) is due either to a "primitive error" of the copyists lying behind the oldest text, or to an inadvertence of the author, who thus betrays the mental perturbation caused by the painful supposition he is making. Not unfrequently, in writing as in speaking, under the weight of some solemn or anxious thought, the pen will hesitate, and a word may be unintentionally duplicated in the pause and reluctance with which the sentence is delivered.

On the other hand it must be insisted, as against the construction of the Revisers, that the grammatical subordination of verse 20 to verse 19 makes up an involved complex sentence, which is awkward in itself and of a type unusual with the writer; a sentence, too, that despite its elaboration leaves much to be read between the lines in order to bring a connected sense out of its entanglements. The fact of God's superiority to the heart and His perfect knowledge thereof does not, on the face of it, explain why love to the brethren should reassure the anxious Christian against self-accusations. Westcott's paraphrase, in quoting which we will bracket the matter read into John's text (upon the Revised construction), shows how lamely the writer, thus understood, has expressed his meaning, and that he has left the essential points to be supplied by the interpreter: "The sense within us of a sincere love of the brethren, which is the sign of God's

<sup>1</sup> The case is different in 1 Thess. iv. 1, for example, where *ἵνα* (in the true text) is reinserted to pick up the thread of the main sentence, after the long parenthesis extending from the first *καθὼς* to *παρελάβετε*.

presence within us, will enable us to stay the accusations of our conscience, whatever they may be, because God [who gives us this love, and so blesses us with His fellowship], is greater than our heart; [and He], having perfect knowledge, [forgives all on which our heart sadly dwells].'

The above exposition is subtle, and contains a precious truth. But a great peril lies in the method of self-assurance which the Apostle is thus supposed to suggest,—the tendency to set sentiment against conscience. One may say: "I know I have done wrong. This act of deceit, this bitter temper or unholy imagination, my heart condemns. But I have many good and kind feelings, that, I am sure, come from God. My sin is but a drop in the ocean of His mercy, which I feel flowing into my heart. Charity covers a multitude of sins. Why should I vex myself about those faults of a weak nature, which God, who knows the worst, compassionates and abundantly pardons." The danger of extracting this anodyne from the text is one that, if it existed, St. John must have felt at once and would have been careful to guard against.

On the other view, identifying the two *δτι*'s, the grammatical construction becomes simple and obvious and the connexion of ideas sufficiently clear. The *ἐὰν καταγνώσκη* of verse 20 and the *ἐὰν μὴ καταγνώσκη* of verse 21 present, precisely in St. John's manner,<sup>1</sup> the two opposite hypotheses involved in the situation—that of *our heart condemning or not condemning* us in respect of love to the brethren. The former of these suppositions St. John is bound to make very seriously. The case he supposed in verses 17, 18, above, that of a pretender to the love of God wanting in human compassion, was not imaginary (see iv. 20; cf. i. 6, ii. 1). There is nothing of which he shows himself more apprehensive in his readers than a vain assurance reconciling the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the double *ἐάν* clauses of i. 6, 7, and again of vv. 8-10; also in John xv. 4, 6, 7, etc.



heart with sin, a light and superficial satisfying of the conscience. That any one should "persuade his heart" in *this* way, is the last thing the Apostle would desire. At each step he balances encouragement with caution; he cheers and humbles us at once. The condition of the Church indicated by the Epistle is a troubled one; we see love and hatred, light and darkness, in conflict even there. Real ground existed for self-condemnation on the part of some of St. John's little children, while there was ground for comfort and satisfaction in many others.

And when he supposes "our heart condemning us," the *tense* of the verb (*ἐὰν καταγινώσκη*) makes the hypothesis still more alarming: it is the Greek *present* of continuous action, and implies not a passing or occasional cloud over the soul's happiness, but a persistent shadow, a repeated or sustained protest of conscience. This is no mere misgiving of a sensitive nature jealous of itself, to be justly dispelled by the reassuring consciousness of a cordial love to the brethren. Rather it is the opposite of such assurance; it is condemnation upon the vital and testing point. The man aimed at in verse 20, if we read the passage aright, is one who does not "know" by St. John's token that he is "of the truth"; his heart cannot honestly give him such testimony, but "keeps accusing him" on this very account. He knows that he has "loved in word and tongue" more than "in deed and truth" (v. 18), that he has "shut up his compassions" from brethren in distress (v. 17), if he has not positively indulged the hate which brands men as murderers in the sight of God (v. 15). If his own ignorant and partial heart thus condemns him, let him consider what must be the verdict of the all-remembering and all-holy Judge. The argument is *a minori ad majus*, from the echo to the voice it reproduces, from the forebodings of conscience to the Supreme Tribunal and the sentence of the Great Day.

Even when a man's heart absolves him, he may not for this reason presume on God's approval: "I know nothing against myself," writes St. Paul, "yet not on this ground am I justified. But He that trieth me is the Lord" (1 Cor. iv. 4). How much more must one fear, when the heart holds him guilty! Little or nothing is read into the passage when it is thus construed, and viewed in the light of the foregoing context. The stern discrimination of verses 15-18, between the lover of his brethren who has passed into life and the hater who abides in death, was bound to come to a head in some such conclusion as this, by which the latter is virtually cited to God's awful judgement-seat. The principle applied is that powerfully set forth by our Lord Himself in the great Judgement-scene of Matthew xxv.,—viz. that deeds of true human charity warrant a good hope of admittance into God's eternal kingdom, while the absence of them awakens the darkest fears.

2. The relief with which St. John passes from the supposition *ἐὰν καταγινώσκη ἡ καρδία ἡμῶν* to its opposite, is shown by the compellation *ἀγαπητοί* (used before in chaps. ii. 7, iii. 2: both passages of high feeling) with which he turns to address the body of his readers. The sentence "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not," marks the glad escape from the thought of condemnation clouding verse 20; we pass from shadow into sunlight. After the brief warning against a false peace—against soothing and doctoring the conscience when it warns us that our hearts are not right with our brethren—the Apostle returns with emphasis to the reassuring strain of verse 19, which he now expands into the exultant testimony of verses 21 and 22. In almost any other writer the transition would have been marked by the conjunction *δέ*; but to this Apostle the Hebrew idiom is natural, which simply opposes its contrasts without link-words. See e.g., chaps. i. 8-10, iii. 2, 13 f., iv. 4 ff., etc.; but *δέ* in i. 6 f.

If self-reproach for heartlessness toward men raises fear of God's displeasure, self-acquittal on this ground, if justified, reflects in the heart God's approving smile. This approval, the logical complement of *ἐὰν ἡ καρδία μὴ καταγινώσκη ἡμῶν*, is stated, not directly but by its two manifest consequences, in verses 21*b*, 22*a*: *παρησίαν ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν θεόν καὶ ὃ ἐὰν αἰτῶμεν λαμβάνομεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ*, "We have confidence (or freedom) toward God and whatsoever we ask we receive from Him." The reasons given for this confidence and experience of answered prayers, in verse 22*b*, recall us to the great condition of commandment-keeping, on which St. John loses no opportunity of insisting; they intimate that such obedience pleases God indeed, so that the heart's self-acquittal is warranted by the Divine approbation: "because we keep His commandments, and do the things pleasing in His sight." Once more, the commandments are summarized in brotherly love (*v.* 23, cf. ii. 4-11); but to this is prefixed the duty in the fulfilment of which love to one's brethren has its beginning and best incentive: "that we should believe the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another as He gave us commandment." We thus find a two-fold sign of God's favour toward the true Christian man (*vv.* 21*b*, 22*a*), and a two-fold ground for such continued favour in the man himself (*v.* 23).

There accrues (1) to the heart that loves its brethren an habitual *παρησία πρὸς τὸν Θεόν*,<sup>1</sup> the earnest of that which the faithful servant of Christ will realize at His glorious coming (ii. 28). This *confidence* is the light from within the soul of God's own peace (cf. Rom. v. 1 f.); it is the sunshine of the open heavens shining upon the Church; the *freedom* of happy children who bear an unclouded spirit and have access always to the Father, speaking to Him with a trustful heart and no longer checked and chided in His

<sup>1</sup> On *παρησία*, see the references in the fourth of these Papers (June 1904).

presence. Here lies the secret (2) of *successful prayer* (cf. v. 14 f.),<sup>1</sup> the same that was revealed by our Lord to His disciples (John xv. 7): "If you abide in me and my words abide in you, whatever you will, ask, and it will be done for you." The prayers are always heard of those who have the mind of Christ, who love the Lord's work and are one with Him in heart and will. They ask the things He means to give. The Spirit of Christ prays in them; they cannot ask amiss or fruitlessly. They plead truly in Christ's "name" (cf. John xv. 16)—in His character and on His behalf, who has no interests but those inspired by God's goodwill to men.

"The secret of Jehovah," the Old Testament said, "is with them that fear Him." John had discovered that this secret also rests with those who love their brethren. No veil hides from them the Father's face. Their prayers are prophecies of what God will do; "for everyone that loveth is begotten of God, and *knoweth God*" (iv. 7). "Whatever we ask we receive of Him"—the holy Apostle is not formulating a theological principle but telling his actual experience—"because we keep His commands, and do the things *pleasing before Him*." Now there is nothing which better pleases God, who is love, than to see His children live in love toward each other. And nothing more quickly clouds our acceptance with the Father, and more effectually hinders our prayers, than churlishness and strife. When our hearts condemn us on this score, we have much to fear from God; when they condemn us not, we have everything to hope. "The Father Himself loveth you,"

<sup>1</sup> The immediate connexion, lying in the nature of things, and directly asserted in the parallel passage above cited between *confident address* to God and *successful petition*, is destroyed by the stop interposed by the English Version (A.V. or R.V.) to sunder these two clauses. The division of verses tends to create an artificial division of *sense*. The double *ετι* clause in the sequel goes to support *both* the above sentences together—*παρησιαν εχομεν προς τον Θεον και ο εαν αλιωμεν λαμβανομεν απ' αυτου*.

said Jesus once to His disciples, "because you have loved me and have believed that I came out from the Father" (John xvi. 27). The terms on which the Apostle guarantees to his readers God's abiding favour—faith in Christ's name, and mutual love—are tantamount to the above;—for true love to Christ and love to His own in the world, to the Bridegroom and to the Bride, are the same affection; He and His Church are one to the love born of faith, as they are one to the hate of unbelief (John xv. 18-25).

In laying down the *ἐντολαί* of God, the keeping of which keeps us in the way of His good pleasure, St. John gives to the idea of "commandment" a surprising turn, of which there is an anticipation in the unique saying of John vi. 29: "This is the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He sent." Can faith then be *commanded*? is it, after all, a *work* of law? The two conceptions of "faith" and "works," in St. Paul's theology, stand in radical opposition and represent the true and false ways of salvation respectively. Right and just "work" or "works," as he views the matter, are the fruit and consequence of faith and by no means identical with it (1 Thess. i. 3, 2 Thess. i. 11, Tit. iii. 8). For St. Paul's thought was ruled by the antithesis of the legalist controversy, in which "works" meant self-wrought and would-be meritorious human doings. For St. John this contention is past; and he never made it his own, as the Apostle of the Gentiles was compelled to do.

That God *requires* men to believe was a commonplace with both Apostles; and John's *ἐντολή* here is not essentially different from Paul's *κλήσις*, the summons that is sent out to mankind in the Gospel, demanding from all nations the "*obedience* of faith." It was in the imperative mood that the Lord Jesus opened His own commission, when He "came into Galilee preaching the good news of God, and saying, 'Repent and believe in the good news.'" Faith cannot be commanded as a mechanical

work, a thing of constraint; it can be and is commanded as the dutiful response of man's will to the appeal of God's truth and love. Hence "the commandments" resolve themselves into "the commandment" (*αἱ ἐντολαί* of verse 22=*ἡ ἐντολή*, verse 23)—two in one—"that we believe the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another." The phrase is not "believe in," or "on, the name" (*εἰς, ἐν, ἐπί*), as commonly, but "believe *the name*":<sup>1</sup> the Name has something to say; it speaks for the nature and claims of Him who bears it, and utters God's testimony concerning His Son. God asks our credence for the record that is affirmed when he designates Jesus Christ "My Son." He bids all men yield assent to the royal titles of Jesus and make that name high above every other in their estimate and purpose, the sovereign object of trust and obedience. This faith in Jesus as Lord and Christ always works by love, and carries with it the result already described—the specific matter of Christian law: "that we love one another, as He gave us command" (see John xiii. 34, etc.).

The verbs "believe" and "love" are here, according to the preferable reading<sup>2</sup> (*πιστεύσωμεν*), in different tenses—the former in the aorist pointing to an event, the latter in the present tense signifying a practice. As Westcott puts it, "The decisive act of faith is the foundation of the abiding work of love." The keeping of this double law, of faith and love, ensures that mutual indwelling of God and the soul which is the essence of religion, for "the man that keeps His command dwells in God, and God in him." Faith, as Christ and all His Apostles teach, is the channel of that intercourse; it forms the link of an eternal attachment between the soul and its Maker.

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<sup>1</sup> Πιστεύω takes a dative of the *person* believed; and τὸ θῶμα is virtually personified by the use of this construction.

<sup>2</sup> Πιστεύωμεν is, however, the reading of some good MSS. and leading editors.