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Introduction

The testimony of the apostle concerning the reality of the person and doctrine of Christ; and the end for which he bears this testimony, 1 John 1:1-4. God is light, and none can have fellowship with him who do not walk in the light; those who walk in the light are cleansed from all unrighteousness by the blood of Christ, 1 John 1:5-7. No man can say that he has not sinned; but God is faithful and just to cleanse from all unrighteousness them who confess their sins, 1 John 1:8-10.

Verse 1

That which was from the beginning - That glorious personage, Jesus Christ the Lord, Who was from eternity; him, being manifested in the flesh, we have heard proclaim the doctrine of eternal life; with our own eyes have we seen him, not transiently, for we have looked upon him frequently; and our hands have handled - frequently touched, his person; and we have had every proof of the identity and reality of this glorious being that our senses of hearing, $\frac{1}{2}$ of the things which we have heard, seeing, $\frac{1}{2}$ of the things which we have seen, and feeling, $\frac{1}{2}$ of the things which we have felt, could possibly require.

Verse 2

For the Life was manifested - The Lord Jesus, who is the creator of all things, and the fountain of life to all sentient and intellectual beings, and from whom eternal life and happiness come, was manifested in the flesh, and we have seen him, and in consequence bear witness to him as the fountain and author of eternal life; for he who was from eternity with the Father was manifested unto us his apostles, and to the whole of the Jewish nation, and preached that doctrine of eternal life which I have before delivered to the world in my gospel, and which I now farther confirm by this epistle.

Verse 3

That which we have seen and heard - We deliver nothing by hearsay, nothing by tradition, nothing from conjecture; we have had the fullest certainty of all that we write and preach.

That ye also may have fellowship with us - That ye may be preserved from all false doctrine, and have a real participation with us apostles of the grace, peace, love, and life of God, which communion we have with God the Father, who hath loved us, and given his Son Jesus Christ to redeem us; and with his Son Jesus Christ, who laid down his life for the life of the world and through whom, being God manifested in the flesh, we have union with God, are made partakers of the Divine nature and dwell in God, and God in us.

Verse 4

That your joy may be full - Ye have already tasted that the Lord is good; but I am now going to show you the height of your Christian calling, that your happiness may be complete, being thoroughly cleansed from all sin, and filled with the fullness of God.

Verse 5

This then is the message - This is the grand principle on which all depends, which we have heard of the Father from him; for neither Moses nor the prophets ever gave that full instruction concerning God and communion with him which Jesus Christ has given, for the only-begotten Son, who was in the bosom of the Father, has alone declared the fullness of the truth, and the extent of the blessings, which believers on him are to receive. See John 1:18.

God is light - The source of wisdom, knowledge, holiness, and happiness; and in him is no darkness at all - no ignorance, no imperfection, no sinfulness, no misery. And from him wisdom, knowledge, holiness, and happiness are received by every believing soul. This is the grand message of the Gospel, the great principle on which the happiness of man depends. Light implies every essential excellence, especially wisdom, holiness, and happiness. Darkness implies all imperfection, and principally ignorance, sinfulness, and misery. Light is the purest, the most subtle, the most useful, and the most diffusive of all God's creatures; it is, therefore, a very proper emblem of the purity, perfection, and goodness of the Divine nature. God is to human soul, what the light is to the world; without the latter all would be dismal and uncomfortable, and terror and death would universally prevail: and without an indwelling God what is religion? Without his all-penetrating and diffusive light, what is the soul of man? Religion would be an empty science, a dead letter, a system unauthoritaded and uninfluencing, and the soul a trackless wilderness, a howling waste, full of evil, of terror and dismay, and ever racked with realizing anticipations of future, successive, permanent, substantial, and endless misery. No wonder the apostle lays this down as a first and grand principle, stating it to be the essential message which he

had received from Christ to deliver to the world.

Verse 6

If we say that we have fellowship - Having fellowship, communion, with God, necessarily implies a partaking of the Divine nature. Now if a man profess to have such communion, and walk in darkness - live an irreligious and sinful life, he lies, in the profession which he makes, and does not the truth - does not walk according to the directions of the Gospel, on the grace of which he holds his relation to God, and his communion with him.

The Gnostics, against whose errors it is supposed this epistle was written, were great pretenders to knowledge, to the highest degrees of the Divine illumination, and the nearest communion with the fountain of holiness, while their manners were excessively corrupt.

Verse 7

But if we walk in the light - If, having received the principle of holiness from him, we live a holy and righteous life, deriving continual light, power, and life from him, then we have fellowship one with another; that is, we have communion with God, and God condescends to hold communion with us. This appears to be the intention of the apostle; and so he was understood by some versions and MSS., which, instead of ἡμεῖς ἀλλήλοις καὶ τῷ θεῷ, with each other, have ἡμεῖς ἀλλήλοις καὶ αὐτῷ, with him. Those who are deeply experienced in Divine things converse with God, and God with them. What John says is no figure; God and a holy heart are in continual correspondence.

The blood of Jesus Christ - The meritorious efficacy of his passion and death has purged our consciences from dead works, and cleanseth us, ἵνα ἁγιασθῶμεν ἵνα ἁγιασθῶμεν, continues to cleanse us, i.e., to keep clean what it has made clean, (for it requires the same merit and energy to preserve holiness in the soul of man, as to produce it), or, as several MSS. and some versions read, ἵνα ἁγιασθῶμεν and ἵνα ἁγιασθῶμεν, will cleanse; speaking of those who are already justified, and are expecting full redemption in his blood.

And being cleansed from all sin is what every believer should look for, what he has a right to expect, and what he must have in this life, in order to be prepared to meet his God. Christ is not a partial Savior, he saves to the uttermost, and he cleanses from All sin.

Verse 8

If we say that we have no sin - This is tantamount to 1 John 1:10: If we say that we have not sinned. All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; and therefore every man needs a Savior, such as Christ is. It is very likely that the heretics, against whose evil doctrines the apostle writes, denied that they had any sin, or needed any Savior. In deed, the Gnostics even denied that Christ suffered: the Aeon, or Divine Being that dwelt in the man Christ Jesus, according to them, left him when he was taken by the Jews; and he, being but a common man, his sufferings and death had neither merit nor efficacy.

We deceive ourselves - By supposing that we have no guilt, no sinfulness, and consequently have no need of the blood of Christ as an atoning sacrifice: this is the most dreadful of all deceptions, as it leaves the soul under all the guilt and pollution of sin, exposed to hell, and utterly unfit for heaven.

The truth is not in us - We have no knowledge of the Gospel of Jesus, the whole of which is founded on this most awful truth - all have sinned, all are guilty, all are unholy; and none can redeem himself. Hence it is as necessary that Jesus Christ should become incarnated, and suffer and die to bring men to God.

Verse 9

If we confess our sins - If, from a deep sense of our guilt, impurity, and helplessness, we humble ourselves before God, acknowledging our iniquity, his holiness, and our own utter helplessness, and implore mercy for his sake who has died for us; he is faithful, because to such he has promised mercy, Psalm 32:5; Proverbs 28:13; and just, for Christ has died for us, and thus made an atonement to the Divine justice; so that God can now be just, and yet the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus.

And to cleanse us from all unrighteousness - Not only to forgive the sin, but to purify the heart. Observe here.

1.Sin exists in the soul after two modes or forms:

- (1.) In guilt, which requires forgiveness or pardon.
(2.) In pollution, which requires cleansing.

2. Guilt, to be forgiven, must be confessed; and pollution, to be cleansed, must be also confessed. In order to find mercy, a man must know and feel himself to be a sinner, that he may fervently apply to God for pardon; in order to get a clean heart, a man must know and feel its depravity, acknowledge and deplore it before God, in order to be fully sanctified.

3. Few are pardoned, because they do not feel and confess their sins; and few are sanctified or cleansed from all sin, because they do not feel and confess their own sore, and the plague of their hearts.

4. As the blood of Jesus Christ, the merit of his passion and death, applied by faith, purges the conscience from all dead works, so the same cleanses the heart from all unrighteousness.

5. As all unrighteousness is sin, so he that is cleansed from all unrighteousness is cleansed from all sin. To attempt to evade this, and plead for the continuance of sin in the heart through life, is ungrateful, wicked, and even blasphemous; for as he who says he has not sinned, 1 John 1:10, makes God a liar, who has declared the contrary through every part of his revelation; so he that says the blood of Christ either cannot or will not cleanse us from all sin in this life, gives also the lie to his Maker, who has declared the contrary, and thus shows that the word - the doctrine of God is not in him.

Reader, it is the birthright of every child of God to be cleansed from all sin, to keep himself unspotted from the world, and so to live as never more to offend his Maker. All things are possible to him that believeth; because all things are possible to the infinitely meritorious blood and energetic Spirit of the Lord Jesus. See the notes on the parallel passages in the margin; and particularly in St. John's gospel, John 1 note.