

1 John - Handfuls of Purpose - James Smith

Handfuls on Purpose - by James Smith, 1943

1 JOHN

This Epistle, written about A.D. 90, was produced for a fourfold purpose, as John himself declares: First, that they might be happy (1:4); second, that they might be holy (2:1); third, that they might be safe (2:26, R.V.). Finally, that they might be sure—"know" Its key-words are "know" and "fellowship."

THE JOYFUL LIFE. 1 John 1:4

"These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full."

I. The Joy of Forgiveness is the Beginning of Joy. We can know we are forgiven (2:12). Observe "are" forgiven."

II. The Joy of Fellowship is the Fullness of Joy. John points out that the fullness of joy is the outcome of fellowship with the Father, with the Lord Jesus Christ, and with our fellow-believers. This fullness of joy, because of close and blessed fellowship, follows:

1. Walking in the light.
2. Confession of sin.
3. Forgiveness of sin.
4. Cleansing from sin.

THE VICTORIOUS LIFE. 1 John 2:1

"My little children, these things write I unto you that you may not sin."

1. This is a message to "My dear children," to those who had become so through Christ Jesus.
2. Being God's children through faith in Christ Jesus, the victorious life should be their own possession and enjoyment. "I write. . . because you have overcome the wicked one" (2:13).
3. Alas, we do sin. For sinners there is an Advocate.
4. "Advocacy is that work of Jesus Christ for sinning saints which He carries on with the Father whereby, because of the eternal efficacy of His Own Sacrifice, He restores them to fellowship" (Scofield).
5. The late Dr. Griffith Thomas has a nice and helpful word on this subject: "There is a perfect atoning sacrifice provided: 'If any man sin, we have an Advocate.' There is no allowance for sin, but a perfect provision in case we do sin: no need to sin, no right to sin, no compromise with sin, no license, but a provision in case we, do. On board ship the provision of life-belts is not associated with any intention to have a shipwreck, but they are there in case of need. When it is said, 'If any man sin, we have an Advocate,' it is the provision in case of need. As you know, there are two Advocates. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Advocate with the Father; and the same word is used of the Holy Spirit in John's Gospel—He is the Advocate within. There is Christ's perfect provision for us, and there is the Holy Spirit's perfect provision in us."

THE SAFE LIFE. 1 John 2:26

"These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you," or, "would lead you astray" (R.V.).

1. Heresy already at work (2:18, 19). "We know that it is the last hour" is R.V. rendering. These had gone astray doctrinally.
2. Yet believers are safe—guarded by the Holy Anointing (2:20-27).
3. That unction illuminates our minds, conveying knowledge (2:20).

THE KNOWING LIFE. 1 John 5:13

"These things have I written unto you that believe. . . that you may know." "Know" is one of the key-words of this Epistle. Let us examine some of them.

1. How can we be sure that "we know Him?" "If we keep His commandments" (2:3, 5).

2. A constantly growing knowledge of God, His ways, and Word, is one sign of spiritual maturity (2:13).

3. The Holy Spirit so teaches us that "you know all things" (2:20).

4. "We know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him" (3:2).

5. We are certain "we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (3:14).

6. The Holy Spirit with us advises us as to abiding in Him (3:24; 4:13).

7. One infallible test of knowledge (4:1-3).

8. The consciousness that we have eternal life comes through belief in God's Word (5:13).

LOVES FOUR PREPOSITIONS. 1 John 4:16, 9,12, 17

I. "Toward us"—the Direction of love (4:9).

II. "To us"—the Intention of love (4:16).

III. "In us"—the Habitation of love (2:15; 3:17; 4:12).

IV. "With us"—the Perfection of love (4:17, margin). "Herein has love been perfected with us" (A. V., margin). Suggesting a greater measure of the love of God dwelling within us, and a greater realization, by mind and heart, of the greatness of His love.

THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF LOVE. 1 John 4:8, 9, 17; 2:5

I. The Essence of His Love—God Himself—"God is Love" (4:8).

II. The Cause of His Love—not in us. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us" (4:10).

III. The Activity of His Love—Sending His Son to die for us (4:8,9).

IV. The Manner of His Love. The outcome of that love is our adoption as children (3:1,2).

V. The Perfecting of His Love. That is, the increasing discovery on our part of the assurance and perfection of His love. This gives us boldness (4:17).

6. The Maturing of His Love. That is, what we must do in order to liberate the love of God shed abroad in our hearts and lives in holy action (2:5).

LOVE. 1 John 4:7-9, 11

I. Love's Home.

1. "Love is of God" (4:7).

2. Love is God, or better: "God is Love" (4:8).

II. Love's Apprehension. "We have known and believed the love" (4:16). Knowledge following faith.

III. Love's Manifestation. The proof of God's love was the sending of His Son (4:9).

IV. Love's Overflowing. Leads us to love one another (4:7, 11). Surely 4:7 teaches that there is no Divine love in the heart of any unregenerate person. Divine love is a far higher thing than mere natural affection.

WHY BELIEVERS SHOULD LOVE ONE ANOTHER. 1 John 4:19

I. Because He First Loved Us (4:19, R.V.).

In the R.V. it reads: "We love because He first loved us." This dropped word means that we love not only God, but also one another.

II. Because He Still Loves Us (4:11).

III. Because He Commands Us (3:23).

IV. Because He has Come to Dwell Within Us (4:12).

V. Because We have Passed from Death to Life (3:14).

6. Because We are no Longer Children of the Devil as Formerly (3:10).

GOD. John 4:24; 1 John 1:5; 4:8, 16

How simple is the language of the Book. Some of the greatest possible Biblical truths God has written in monosyllables. The simplicity of Holy Writ is so appealing and satisfying. On the mysteries connected with the Being of God we have three profound monosyllables. These contain more information about God than all the sacred books of the East put together.

I. "God is a Spirit." The Spirituality of His Being (John 4:24).

1. This is one of the most sublime revelations in the Bible of the nature of God.

2. It really could be written: "God is Spirit," not a, nor the, but Spirit.

II. "God is Light." The Brilliancy of His Being (1 John 1:5).

1. Not a light, nor even the light, but Light.

2. Strictly speaking, white is no color, but combination of all colors. When the Apostle wrote, "God is Light," he meant that God is not a hue, nor a color, not a tone, nor a shade. He is the combination of all colors, all shades, all hues.

III. "God is Love." The Warmth and Attractiveness of His Being (1 John 4:8, 16).

1. Not "God loves," though of course He does. Not that He shows love, but that He is love.

2. We usually say that Love is one of the Divine attributes. Strictly speaking, this is hardly correct. He is Love. Love is His very Being.

3. He is Love to us because He is essentially and eternally Love in Himself.

SIN.

I. Its Definition. John gives two of the seven definitions of sin in the Bible, viz:

1. Transgression. Stepping over the Law., that is, lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness, that is, the absence of all authority, and the denial of all obligation to God.

2. Unrighteousness. Not coming up to the Law (3:4; 5:17).

II. Its Universality (1:8, 10). What plain language.

III. Its Destruction. Why the Lord Jesus came? To "take away" sin (2:2; 3:5; 4:10). This means more than to cover sin—it is putting it away, taking it away, blotting it out.

IV. Its Confession (1:9).

V. Its Cleansing (1:7).

VI. Its Victory (2:1; 3:8, 9). "My little children, these things write I unto you, that you may not sin" (R.V.) "In order that you may not sin" (Wey). 1 John 3:8-9 have troubled many of the Lord's dear children. But observe the following rendering: "He who is habitually guilty of sin is a child of the Devil". "Whoever is born of God does not practice sin," that is, does not continue sinning. It is God's good will that we be daily more than conquerors over sin, over the world, the flesh, and the Devil.

VII. Its Secret. The secret of constant victory over sin is abiding in Christ (3:6), and "being kept" (5:18, R.V.).

THE NEW BIRTH: ITS EVIDENCES AND RESULTS.

The Apostle John does not point out in this Epistle how regeneration can take place, because that he had already done in his Gospel, particularly John 1:12-13, and the whole of chapter 3. Here in his Epistle he points out the proofs whereby we may know we are born from above.

I. Faith is both the condition and the proof of regeneration. "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (5:1).

II. Love. "Every one that loves is born of God" (4:7).

III. Life. "Whoever is born of God does not commit (margin, "practice") sin; or as W., "No one who is a child of God is habitually guilty of sin" (3:9). This is to say, one of the clearest proofs of the new birth is to be found in the fact that a new life is begun. Not a

life of sin as before, but a life of victory—there may be, there usually is, especially in the early days, lapses into sin, but not a life of sin. By and by we learn the secret of full victory.

IV. Overcomes. "For whoever is born of God overcomes the world" (5:4).

V. Kept. "We know that whoever is born of God sins not, but He who was begotten of God (that is, the Lord Jesus) keeps him" (5:18, R.V.). The begotten one is kept by the only Begotten of the Father. And the result?

VI. Holiness. Personal holiness. "Every one that does righteousness is born of Him" (2:29).

ABIDING IN CHRIST.

I. Conditions.

1. Abiding in Christ follows the Word of God abiding in us (2:14,24).

2. Abiding in Christ follows the anointing of the Holy Spirit (2:27).

3. Abiding in Christ follows obedience to Christ (3:24).

II. Knowledge. We know that He abides in us and we in Him "by the Spirit which He has given us" (3:24).

III. Results.

1. Walk becomes wonderfully different (2:6).

2. We love others (2:10).

3. Fearlessness in the day of the Lord's Coming, when we shall be ushered before Him (2:28).

4. A life of victory (3:6).

ETERNAL LIFE.

I. Its Definition. Eternal Life is a living relationship to a living Personality (5:11, 12).

II. Its Location. "This life is in His Son" (5:11).

III. Its Personification. At the Incarnation the life was manifested. It is personified in Christ (1:1,2).

Note. We only live; He is the Life.

IV. Its Pre-eminence. "He who has the Son has the life" (5:12, R.V.). There are lives and lives. But this is the life of all lives.

V. Its Possession.

1. Negative.

a. Those who have not the Son have not life (5:12).

b. We are by nature dead. "We pass from death unto life" (3:14). Wondrous journey!

c. One who hates his brethren has not Eternal Life (3:16).

2. Positive.

a. Eternal Life is a promise to be prized (2:25).

b. Eternal Life is a gift to be received (5:11).

c. In receiving the Lord Jesus we receive Eternal Life (5:11, 12).

d. We may know for a fact when we have Eternal Life (5:13).

e. Faith leads to possession of Eternal Life (5:10, 11).

MANIFESTED.

This is a great word. The Apostle John seems fond of it. Never a word so rich in meaning. "It condenses in a vocable the history of the long descent" of Jesus from the Glory, to the manger, the cross, and from the sepulcher to the Throne.

The Dictionary states that "to manifest" means to make plain to sight or understanding; and that "a manifest" is an invoice of a cargo for customhouse purposes. In and through Him is manifested:

I. Life Manifested (1:2). Life resides in the Lord Jesus, and by His Incarnation "was manifested unto us."

II. Love Manifested (4:9). By His Incarnation God's love was manifested and is being manifested today by the Holy Spirit, and through the lives of redeemed men and women.

III. Salvation: Purpose of His Manifestation (3:5). "To take away our sins." Wonderful fact! This is more than covering sin. The latter was all that could be done in the Old Testament.

IV. Reformation, or Sanctification. The result of His manifestation (3:8). "The devil sins from the beginning," that is, Satan is the original sinner. He was created perfect, but deliberately rebelled against God. Thus through him sin came into the world, and all its woe. But the Lord Jesus "was manifested that He might destroy (undo) the works of the Devil." This means in the long run, not only a new man, but a new Heaven and a new earth.

FEAR.

1 John 4:18

1. When, by God's gracious Holy Spirit, the love of God is made personal to me, and when that love comes sweeping into my heart by the Spirit, it casts out the fear that has torments, but deepens reverence!

2. "Godly fear is not a shrinking apprehension; it is love upon its knees" (late Dr. Moule).

"LIES IN THE WICKED ONE." 1 John 5:19 (R.V.)

In this passage there are two startling statements.

I. The Word "In." This is the same word used of the believer when he is said to be in Christ, as branches in the Vine. This is a staggering word. It teaches us that just as believers in Christ are united to Christ, drawing from Him life and blessing, so the ungodly are united to Satan, and are being energized by him.

II. The Word "Lies." Literally "Lies asleep," depicting a state of unconsciousness. The saved are in the Father's hand, and have beneath them the Everlasting Arms; but the great mass of humanity is in the arms of Satan, and by his subtlety lulled to sleep, therefore unconscious of their dread position.

THE FIRM FOUNDATION UPON WHICH RESTS THE DIVINE FORGIVENESS. 1 John 1:9

Introduction.

One of Wesley's preachers, who had seven children dependent upon him, was thrust into prison. One of his persecutors said in Court: "The man is well enough in other things, but the gentlemen cannot stand his impudence. Why, sirs, he says he knows that his sins are forgiven him!" What was considered impertinence in this case is our great privilege and birthright. It is our joy not only to ask for His forgiveness, but to enjoy the consciousness of His pardoning grace. With the Psalmist we may look up into His face and say, "With You there is forgiveness" (Psalm 130:4), and "You forgave the iniquity of my sin" (Psalm 32:5).

This is a word for all—the old saint as well as the young believer, because forgiveness is the grace to which more than all others, we have continually to appeal. Day by day we need to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses."

Is there any Danger of its Withdrawal? That God forgives is recognized. But is there any conceivable reason for its withdrawal? A woman had a long and bitter quarrel with a sister Christian. For months they had not spoken to each other. The injured woman was laid low by serious illness. She thought she was dying, and the thought of the estrangement through the quarrel made her afraid to die. She sent for her friend, and they sought each other's forgiveness, following which they had a pleasant time together.

Just as she was passing out of the room, the sick woman called her friend back, saying, "I have truly forgiven you, because I feel it is my duty to do so, and I could not die in peace otherwise. I do not expect to get well; but in case I should, I want it distinctly understood that this old matter remains just as it was before I sent for you."

When God forgives, is there any danger of its withdrawal? We feel for our peace we need the constant assurance of God's loving mercy to us all through our lives, and indeed right through Eternity.

Blessed be His Name, there is no fickleness or change-ableness in Him. He has left on record in His blessed Book abundant assurance of His lasting forgiveness.

His forgiveness rests upon a threefold, impregnable, immovable basis.

I. Divine Justice. His forgiveness rests on a foundation of Divine justice.

A very young girl came one day, and throwing herself at the feet of Napoleon, exclaimed: "Mercy, sire; have mercy on my father!"

"Who is your father, my child?" the Emperor asked, graciously. "He is in prison," she replied; "he has been condemned to death." When Napoleon got from her an account of the crime, he said, "Poor child, this is the third time your father has conspired against the State. I must do justice!" "Ah, sir, O know it! But it is not justice I demand, but mercy!"

The lips of Napoleon trembled, and grasping the hands of the young girl, he said: "Rise up; I pardon your father for your sake!"

This story has often been quoted as an ideal one for us to copy in our approaches to God, and we have been asked and urged to ask Him for mercy, and not for justice. Yet the amazing and marvelous fact about the Divine forgiveness of sin is this, while it is granted for the sake of Another, the Lord Jesus, and in compassion, too, for it is written, "He being full of compassion forgave their iniquity" (Psalm 78:38), yet it is also granted on the solid foundation of Divine Justice! Observe, "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins."

There is such a thing as a forgiveness arising out of mere paternal love or a good natured indifference to sin. If God's forgiveness was of this nature, what would happen? Suppose that He should, without requisite satisfaction, pass over my offences, and forgive me for what my own conscience condemns me, what would be the consequences of this clemency? I could no longer reverence or esteem Him. Ceasing to be just (for remember the poet Cowper's phrase, "A God all mercy were a God unjust"), He would cease to be God in my eyes. The only kind of forgiveness that satisfies is one that proceeds not from love alone, but from law, not from pity alone, but from holiness and justice.

The Cross has made this seemingly impossible benefit gloriously simple. Because the penalty of sins had already been borne, to punish the penitent would be to punish a second time; to do that would be a breach of faith with the vicarious Sufferer, and an injustice to the sinner himself, who, in the person of his Substitute has met the penalty of the broken law—death. That God will never do, for He is just. "Faithful and just to forgive us our sins." Glory be to His Name!

II. Divine Faithfulness. His forgiveness rests also on a foundation of Divine faithfulness.

"Faithful and just to forgive us our sins." In the annals of warfare we have heard of a promise of pardon offered only to catch the offenders in hiding. Not so with the Lord. He means what He says. God is faithful to His promises, and to His covenant engagements.

III. Divine Supervision. His forgiveness rests also upon the foundation of Divine supervision.

What we mean by this sentence can best be explained by an incident from the life of Richard I, the favorite king of our childhood days. Coeur-de-Lion was not only a brave man, but was generous and able to forgive wrongs.

When he had reigned ten years, one of his French vassals rebelled. Richard at once marched his army and besieged the rebel in his castle. During the last and successful attack, a young man, Bertrand de Gurden, shot an arrow, which mortally wounded the king! The castle fell, and Bertrand was brought before the dying monarch. To the chagrin of his men, Richard said, "Youth, I forgive you my death," and turning to his officers commanded, "Let him go free, and give him a hundred shillings." Richard died, and Bertrand, having been recaptured, was executed. Richard was unable to see that his commands were carried out. The Lord Jesus died to set us free, and to enrich us. But He lives to see that His wishes and commands and covenant agreements are carried out. If He forgives, it is forever.

The proof of forgiveness is seen in a cleansed life: "And to cleanse us." Forgiveness and cleansing are inseparable. Sin is in the soul in two forms—in guilt, which requires forgiveness; and in pollution, which requires cleansing.

"If." The whole verse turns on this first word. There can be no forgiveness without confession. And confession implies forsaking (Proverbs 28:13).

PARDON AND FORGIVENESS.

Our English word Pardon is never found in the New Testament. In its place is its equivalent, the word Forgiveness. This is in perfect harmony with one of the chief messages of the New Testament. Pardon is the act of a Sovereign; Forgiveness is the act of the Father. The Fatherhood of God is one of the principal truths in the New Testament. An unsaved, yet penitent, sinner must, as a rebel, ask for pardon. When pardoned and regenerated, then he needs daily to ask of his Father in Christ, forgiveness.

I. God Alone can Pardon. Luke 5:21; Daniel 9:9.

II. God Loves to Pardon. For He is "a God of pardons" (Nehemiah 9:17, margin).

III. God Pardons Gloriously. "Ready to pardon" (Nehemiah 9:17). "He will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:7).

IV. God Only Pardons:

1. On Confession (Psalm 25:11).

2. On Believing (Acts 10:43).

3. On Receiving. Pardon is a gift to be received (Acts 5:31).