has never been realized, the answer is that the character which Christ sets before men, and which He Himself exhibited, is one which with us can have only its beginnings in the present life. He works and would have men work for the eternal and the infinite. The Kingdom of Heaven within us must ever be an ideal which is above our present efforts, pointing us on to another state where it will have its perfect work. Meanwhile it is not inoperative or destitute of results. If the world has not yet been transfigured by the teaching of our Lord, no other teaching has done so much to make its crooked ways straight and its rough places plain. If the teaching of Jesus Christ has not yet produced a perfect saint, it has planted in the lives of tens of thousands a principle which makes for perfection, and will attain it, as our faith assures us, in the day of the Lord's Return.

H. B. SWETE.

STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN.

II.

THE TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

And in this we know that we have come to know Him:
If we be keeping His commandments.
He who says, "I have come to know Him," and is not keeping His commandments,
Is a liar, and in him the truth is not;
But whosoever is keeping His commandments,
Verily in this man the love of God has been perfected.
In this we know that in Him we are:
He who says that he abides in Him,
Is bound, even as *He* walked, to walk also himself.

—1 *John* ii. 3–6.

FELLOWSHIP with God, St. John laid down at the outset (i. 3, 6), is the purpose of the Christian revelation. This "fellowship" now resolves itself into *knowledge* (ii. 3) of and

love to God (*v.* 5), with *commandment-keeping* for its test (*vv.* 3–5), and a fixed *abiding in God* for its result (*vv.* 5, 6), while *the earthly walk of Jesus* supplies its pattern and standard (*v.* 6).

The goal of Divine fellowship has been in view throughout; it preoccupies the mind of every reader who sympathetically follows the Apostle. So that when at this point the writer speaks of "having known Him," of "keeping His commands"[1] or "His word," of "being in Him," "abiding in Him," there should be no doubt that "God," or "the Father," is intended by the personal pronoun; although "Jesus Christ" (*vv.* 1, 2) supplies the nearest grammatical antecedent, and is therefore by some interpreters assumed under the *αὐτόν κ.τ.λ.* of *vv.* 3–6. But the predicates *παράκλητος* and *ἱλασμός* given to Christ in the foregoing verses, assign to Him a relatively subordinate and mediating position; "the Father," before whom the Advocate pleads and to whom "the propitiation" is offered, remains the supreme and commanding Presence of the entire context. Hence when at the close of this paragraph "Jesus Christ the righteous" has to be referred to again (in *v.* 6), a distinct pronoun is employed; He is brought in as *ἐκεῖνος*, *ille*, "that (other) one"; cf. iii. 3, 5, 7, iv. 17.[2]

Fellowship with God is the true end of our existence—"the life" for man. It "was manifested" in Jesus, God's Son (i. 2, 3), but manifested in contrast and conflict with its opposite, as "light" confronting and revealing "darkness" (*vv.* 5 ff.). *Sin* is "the darkness," even as "God is light"; it is the death of man's life of fellowship with God. Sin has severed mankind from God everywhere; and for any

[1] In the parallel passage, *vv.* 2, 3, *αἱ ἐντολαὶ αὐτοῦ* are God's "commands"; so *ὁ λόγος αὐτοῦ* in i. 10=*ὁ λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ* of ii. 14—never *τοῦ Χριστοῦ*, or the like, in these Epistles.

[2] Our English idiom, with only *He* to employ for *αὐτός* and *ἐκεῖνος* alike in these successive sentences, lends itself to ambiguity—a deficiency tha tembarrasses repeatedly the interpretation of this Epistle.

man in his own case to deny the fact, or the disabling effect, of sin is to become utterly false, giving the lie to God Himself (*vv.* 6, 8, 10). The barrier of sin Christ has removed for those who confess, its stain He has cleansed away by the sacrifice of His blood (i. 7, 9, ii. 2). But even in those once cleansed a new defilement is sometimes contracted, and the barrier is set up again; for which evil case resort is made to the intercession of our righteous Advocate, who provides in Himself an expiation for sin of perpetual and universal efficacy (ii. 1, 2). Verse 2 of the second chapter completes the circle of thought which set out from verse 5 of the first, since it brings "the whole world" under the scope of that "propitiation" which removes the bar put by man's sin against his communion with God, which restores the light of God to a world heretofore lying in darkness, a world estranged from God and ignorant of Him but now to be reinstated in His knowledge and His love.

With that former circle of thought rounded off (i. 5–ii. 2), St. John's mind according to its manner takes a second and wider concentric circuit (ii. 3–17), setting out again from the original point. In the first movement of this new flight the idea is repeated, with a change of accent and expression, that furnished the primary theme of the Epistle, viz. the opposition of light and darkness raised by the Gospel message. Verses 3–5 in this section are parallel to verses 6 and 7 of the first chapter; but alike on the positive and negative side of the antithesis the second representation is less ideal and more explicit and matter-of-fact than the first: "fellowship" has opened out into "knowledge" and "love"; "walking in the light" is translated into "keeping God's commands"; of the man who in the former instance "lies" and "does not the truth," it is now said that "he is a liar and the truth is not in him"—the act of falsehood growing into a fixed character and state. The "walk" of Jesus Christ (*v.* 6) gives to the conception of the true life as

"walking in the light" (i. 7) a concrete expression by means of which the ideal is crystallized into historical fact and reveals in clearest outline its loftiness and beauty.

The general connexion of thought is unmistakable. Verses 3–6 do not continue the strain of verses 1, 2, which form indeed a kind of appendix to chapter i. and reach their climax in *περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου*; the *καί* of verse 3 looks beyond the foregoing context to the great fundamental saying of i. 5, *ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς φῶς ἐστιν*, of which the writer has to make further and very practical and searching application. But the links of association in St. John's writings are curiously crossed and interlaced. The more simple his language and obvious the grammatical relation of his sentences, so much the more recondite, and difficult to trace, in its finer movements, is the interplay of his thought. We must always bear in mind that there are *two* parties to a letter. An epistle is a dialogue. We have to put ourselves in the place of writer and readers alternately, to imagine what the latter would think or say while we listen to what the former is saying, at each step of the argument or appeal that is going on, to read their rejoinders and possible misunderstandings between the lines and to see how the writer anticipates and deals with them as he proceeds. From the side of this other party to the Letter there is apparent, after all, a line of connexion between verses 1, 2 and 3–6, which is wrought in with the main and substantial association binding this paragraph to chapter i. The Apostle has just admitted the occurrence of sin amongst Christian men, the possibility of a lapse from grace in one or other of his "little children"; he has shown that for this lamentable case relief is afforded by the intercession of Christ. But this is a provision of which the Antinomianism of the human heart may take a base advantage. The Christian, hitherto faithful, hearing what St. John has just written (in *vv.* 1, 2), might be tempted to say in his own mind:

"There is hope for the backslider; then I am not lost, even if I backslide! God is a merciful Father; Christ has died to expiate all sin and is my Intercessor. If under this overwhelming pressure I give way, His hand will be stretched out to save me. I may stumble, but I shall not utterly fall." We can understand how natural and how perilous such a reflexion would be; this identical inference, drawn from his doctrine of grace, St. Paul had to combat amongst the first Gentile disciples (Rom. vi. 1): "Let us continue in sin, that grace may abound"; God delights in forgiveness, since the full and grand propitiation for sin has been made by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ—*a little more to forgive* can make no difference to Him! It was this danger attaching to the gospel of free pardon for sinners, a liability especially great in the case of half-trained converts from heathenism, which led the early Church to surround with so much terror and to prevent by the strongest fences and precautions of discipline the contingency of relapse after baptism. The possibility of such abuse of his message of sin-cleansing through the blood of Jesus was not absent from St. John's mind.

For this reason his doctrine of obedience and practical holiness follows immediately, with keen insistence, upon that of the atonement and remission of sin. As St. Paul makes sanctification the concomitant of justification and works of love the proof of a sound and saving faith, so with St. John commandment-keeping becomes the test of real knowledge of a sin-pardoning God. A penitent backslider like Peter will be forgiven; but Peter was not a *calculating* backslider. He did not argue to himself, "Jesus is very kind; God is an indulgent Father, who will not be implacable toward a weak man so fearfully tried; I may risk the sin,"—and then rap out the denial and the shameful oath. Such an offence would have been immeasurably worse than that committed, and quite un-

likely to be followed by a speedy and sincere repentance. A deliberate transgression on the part of a Christian professor, presuming on God's mercy and discounting the guilt of sin by the value of the atonement, is an act that shows the man to be ignorant of God, and to have no true will to keep His commands. He has a heart secretly set upon sin, and ready to go as far in it as he dare. There is more hope of a reckless, prodigal transgressor than of him.

1. Here is the sign, then, of sin forgiven and cleansed away, and the manifestation of a changed heart dwelling in fellowship with God. *The keeping of His commandments is the test and pledge* of an abiding knowledge of the Father. "This is the love of God," the Apostle virtually writes in verse 3, "that we keep His commandments"; and this is the knowledge of God, "that we keep His commandments" (cf., for St. Paul, 1 Cor. vii. 19; Rom. ii. 13, viii. 4). A sentimental love and a theoretic knowledge are equally vain, being without obedience, like the "faith without works" which St. James rejected as "barren" and "dead in itself" (ii. 14-26). The equation of *knowledge, love, commandment-keeping* is completed when we add to the two propositions just quoted a third, which is found in chapter iv. 7, "Every one that loveth . . . knoweth God."

The "keeping" that is meant is the habit and rule of the man's life. This is indicated by the (continuous) present tense in the forms of *τηρέω* that are used (cf. iii. 24, v. 3, 18) —*τηρῶμεν, τηρῶν, τηρῇ*—in distinction from the *aorist, ἐάν τις ἁμάρτῃ*, of verse 1 above, which suggests a single and, as it may be, quite incidental act of sin. Thus, for example, confession of Christ was the bent of Peter's whole life, to which the denial in Caiaphas' hall was the lamentable and ever-lamented exception; and "*keeping* God's commandments" is presumed—not simply doing what they prescribe, as men will obey perforce rules with which they have no sympathy,

no conformity of will. To keep (τηρεῖν) is to watch with observant care, as one keeps a safe path and a cherished trust, as Christ kept "His Father's commandments, abiding in His love," as He kept in the Father's name His own which were in the world (John xv. 10, xvii. 12), as the Apostle Paul would have the Ephesians (iv. 3) "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Such heedful and willing observance pays honour to the command, holding it sacred for its own sake and for the Giver's, and "esteeming all His precepts concerning all things to be right." A rational fellowship with God of necessity includes harmony with His law; for this is no string of arbitrary enactments, but the expression of God's own nature as that bears on human conduct and looks to see itself reflected in the nature of men created in its image. It is impossible for the man who really *knows* God—His awful holiness, His all-encompassing presence and all-searching scrutiny, and His infinite bounty and tender fatherliness—to disregard His will and to behave as a command-breaker. A conscience so callous argues the destruction in the soul of all sensitiveness to the action of the spirit of God. "How can I do this great wickedness, and *sin against God?*" the tempted man exclaims, who has set the Lord always before him. Knowing God, men cannot at the same time practise sin, any more than with open eyes in the daylight a seeing man can stumble as if in darkness.

If it be asked what were the commandments of God whose keeping the Apostle insists upon as due from his disciples, these injunctions must be found in the moral law of Israel, as that was expounded by Jesus Christ and reduced to its spiritual principles. The great majority of the readers were converts from Paganism of the first or second generation, and had made acquaintance with Divine law through the Old Testament scriptures. The Apostles used the Ten Commandments as the basis of detailed

ethical instruction to catechumens, and to children (Rom. xiii. 9; Eph. vi. 2, etc.). So the Church has wisely done ever since. But the Ten Commandments of Moses were comprehended and glorified in the two precepts of Jesus (cf. Rom. xiii. 8–10), on which, He declared, "hang all the law and the prophets"; for in love to God and man they find their vital spring and quickening centre.

Such settled, steadfast obedience to God's rule in human life is evidence to the obedient man that he has gained a knowledge of God, and has tasted of eternal life: "Hereby," to use the language of chap. iii. 19, "we shall know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before God"; and so it stands in this passage: "Hereby we *know* that we know Him." The same evidence St. Paul states in his own way, when he writes, "If by the Spirit you are mortifying the deeds of the body, you shall live; for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are God's sons" (Rom. viii. 13, 14). The Christian obedience of love is a token to the world—to "all men" (John xiii. 34, 35)—of a true discipleship; but it is proof to the disciple himself first of all, and he has full right to the comfort afforded by this witness of the Spirit of Christ in him. "Hereby we know," says St. John in another place (iii. 24), "that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He gave us." The Lord Jesus alone possessed this assurance without defect or interruption; He could say, "I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in His love"; "I do always the things that please Him."

The reader of the Greek will note the play upon the verb γινώσκω in verse 3, which has no exact parallel in the New Testament:[1] γινώσκομεν ὅτι ἐγνώκαμεν αὐτόν. The continuous, or inceptive, *present* in the governing verb (recurring in verse 5) is followed in the de-

[1] A doubling of οἶδα occurs in John xvi. 30, νῦν οἴδαμεν ὅτι οἶδας πάντα; but here there is no variation of the tense and the repetition has no special significance.

pendent sentence, as again in the fourth verse, by the *perfect* tense, signifying a knowledge won and abiding (*cognovimus*, Vulgate),—"a result of the past realized in the present" (Westcott; see his full note *ad loc.*; and cf. *vv.* 13, 14, iii. 6, 16; 2 John 1; John viii. 55, xiv. 9, xvii. 7, for this emphatic tense-form). The A.V. in rendering the sentence "We do know that we know Him," almost reverses the relation of the two tenses, while the R.V. leaves the difference unmarked and distinguishable only by the stress of the voice to be placed upon the second *know*. St. John's meaning is, "We perceive, we are finding out and getting to know, that we have known God, —that we exist in God" (*v.* 5). There is a growing discernment by the believer of his own estate, a recognition of the work of grace upon him and of the Divine knowledge imparted already to him through Christ, a sounding of the depths of God within himself and an *εἰδέναι τὰ ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ χαρισθέντα ἡμῖν* (1 Cor. ii. 12), far removed from self-righteousness and spiritual pride, which brings to the Christian man, as his faith ripens, a profound thankfulness and security. In this peace of God, whose tranquillity the Apostle knows, he would have his readers at rest and satisfied.

Doubtless St. John, in prescribing the above test for the professors of the knowledge of God, had in view the Gnostics of his day, the men of the *γνῶσις ψευδώνυμος* (1 Tim. vi. 20), who when he wrote had become numerous and formidable to Apostolic Christianity. These teachers resolved the knowledge of God into elaborate metaphysical ideas; they made communion with God a matter of abstract contemplation and methodized symbolic observances, while moral principles, and the authority of revealed truth were largely ignored or superseded in their systems. They claimed on the ground of their speculative insight, and the "mysteries" reserved for their initiates, to be

exclusive possessors of "the truth." They vaunted themselves as the enlightened, the emancipated, raised by their superior "knowledge" quite above the common simple Christian, who "walks by faith" and knows not "the deeps" (Rev. ii. 24) of Divine wisdom. With such pretenders confronting him and seeking to seduce his flock—the "antichrists" and "false prophets," as he afterwards bans them (*v.* 18, iv. 1)—the Apostle sets up this mark, no other than that which his Lord prescribed for the detection of their like: "By their fruits ye shall know them"; "He that says, I know God, and keeps not His commands, *is a liar*, and the truth is not in him." A low morale, due to the subtlety that confounds moral distinctions or the cleverness that plays and trifles with them, is one of the surest signs of a religion corrupted by intellectual pride.

ἐν τούτῳ ἡ ἀλήθεια οὐκ ἔστιν, "*in him* the truth is not"—in the man claiming acquaintance with God, but living in violation of His law. "The truth" lies far remote from those who "profess that they know God, but by their deeds deny Him" (Tit. i. 16). Truth consorts with men of lowly heart, such as make no boast of their knowledge but in love to God faithfully "keep His word" (*v.* 5). Of two sorts of men the Apostle declares that "the truth (of Christ, of the Gospel) is not in" them—the Pharisaic moralist who declines all confession of sin (i. 8, 9), and the immoral religionist who would fain make communion with God compatible with sin. These pretenders the Apostle of love passionately denounces, in language recalling that which our Lord used of the devil, as John relates in chap. viii. 44 of his Gospel. "In the truth he (*ὁ διάβολος*) standeth not, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh the lie, he speaketh out of his own; for he is a liar, and the father thereof." So near does this self-deceit lie to the source and beginning of all falsehood; so fatally does a religious profession without the ruling sense of right

and duty destroy the conscience and undermine the inmost truth of our being.

2. Passing from verse 4 to verse 5, we find knowledge transformed by a sudden turn into love. Since the latter verse is the formal antithesis of its predecessor, being introduced by the contrastive δέ, and ὃς δ' ἂν τηρῇ αὐτοῦ τὸν λόγον represents in the new protasis ὁ τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ τηρῶν, one expects the apodosis to run ἐν τούτῳ ἡ γνῶσις τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐστιν. But the writer is not content with this logical completion of the sentence, for γνῶσις he substitutes ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ, and the bare ἐστίν he replaces by the richer predicate τετελειωται. From this it appears that while commandment-keeping is the test of a genuine knowledge of God, *love is its characteristic mode.* The man who truly knows God, does not make much of his knowledge; he is not in the habit of saying, like the Gnostic, ἔγνωκα αὐτόν—"I have got to know Him," "I have found out God," "I know all mysteries and all knowledge," "I have fathomed the depths of Deity"; but he shows his love to God by stedfast obedience to command, and in practical obedience love has its full sway and reaches its mark.

In this quiet exchange of ἀγάπη for γνῶσις St. John assumes all that St. Paul argued and unfolded with his vehement eloquence in 1 Corinthians viii. and xiii., concerning the emptiness of a loveless knowledge. γνῶσις must be steeped in ἀγάπη, the science of Divine things penetrated and transfused with charity, or it loses its own virtue of truth; it becomes one-eyed and purblind, stumbling itself and misguiding those who follow it. While the other Apostle habitually contrasts the two powers and in writing to the Corinthians who were affecters of philosophy, appears to belittle knowledge in magnifying love, St. John rises above this opposition and rather exalts knowledge as he identifies it with love; indeed he uses the rival terms as practically interchangeable. He can

conceive no knowledge of God in which His love is not chiefly recognized and grasped in its manifold relations (see iii. 1, iv. 7–16), and no love of God in man to compare with that awakened by the display of His love to man in Jesus His Son. To declare that one *knows* God—such a God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—and that one *loves* God is in effect one and the same thing; and the man who says the former without demonstrating the latter, betrays his own falsehood.

That *love* to God means keeping His commands goes almost without saying. For indeed the first and great commandment is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God." All other commands depend on this, and subserve and apply it; they presume in man this disposition of love to his Maker and Lawgiver. Love to God is the sum of religion, as the love of God is its source. This affection can, therefore, admit of no divided and partial sway—it demands "all the heart, and all the mind, and all the soul, and all the strength"; it cannot acquiesce in any arrested development, in any crooked or stunted growth of our moral nature. It makes for *perfection*, and it works to this end along the lines of obedience and loyalty in commandment-keeping. "Whosoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has been perfected"—is brought to its ripe growth and due accomplishment in character and life. "Truly"—verily and veritably—this is so with him who is loyal to God's word; while the disloyal man, the commandment-breaker, "is a liar" when he pretends to seek perfection, or professes any sort of communion with the God whom he neither loves nor serves.

St. John's bold τετελείωται is not to be evaded nor softened down, either in this place or in chap. iv. 12, ἡ ἀγάπη αὐτοῦ τετελειωμένη ἐστὶν ἐν ἡμῖν, "the love of Him is in us made perfect." He enunciates in some sort here, and in iv. 17, 18, a doctrine of "perfect love," of full sanctification—a devo-

tion to God that is complete as it covers the man's whole nature and brings him to the realization of his proper ends as a man, a love that is regnant in his soul and admits of no motive or temper opposed to itself, and yet that is progressive as his nature grows and his being attains a larger capacity for God. The statement, it should be observed, is hypothetical, and is one of principle; it stands clear of all defeats of experience and defects of love in the individual. The point of the Apostle's assertion is not that love to God "*has been* perfected" in this or that Christian saint, though in himself and in others like him an experience of this nature was, to all intents and purposes, attained; but that wherever "God's word" is verily "kept," is apprehended, cherished, and held fast in its reality and living import, there, and there only, "the love of God *is perfected.*" No love to God in any man can be imagined that is more perfect, that reaches a higher range and a richer development than that which comes of the true keeping of His word, than that which is fed on Scripture and finds its root and nourishment in the teachings of revelation.[1]

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[1] St. John's perfecting of love by obedience has an instructive parallel in St. James' perfecting of faith by works: *ἐκ τῶν ἔργων ἡ πίστις ἐτελειώθη*, ii. 22. The verb *τελειόω* in these instances has much the same force as when it is said, *ἡ γραφὴ ἐτελειώθη* (John xix. 28; more commonly, *ἐπληρώθη, πεπλήρωται*), in a case where some word of Scripture comes to its furthest realization, and attains the *ne plus ultra* of its significance. *τελειόω* has besides a further connotation, pointed out by Westcott, in this passage: "Both *τελειοῦν* and *ἐπιτελεῖν* are used of Christian action (Phil. iii. 12, Gal. iii. 3). But in *τελειοῦν* there is the idea of a continuous growth, a vital development, an advance to maturity (*τελειότης*, Heb. v. 14, vi. 1). In *ἐπιτελεῖν* the notion is rather that of attaining a definite end (*τέλος*): Contrast James ii. 22 (*ἐτελειώθη*) with 2 Cor. vii. 1, *ἐπιτελοῦντες ἁγιωσύνην*. and Acts xx. 24, *τελειῶσαι τὸν δρόμον*; with 2 Tim. iv. 7, *τὸν δρόμον τετέλεκα*."

(*To be continued.*)