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THE
WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT,
TWO
SERMONS,

BY THE LATE
REV. JOHN WESLEY, A. M.
Bishop of the Methodist Church.

the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we
are the children of God.

ROMANS viii. 16.

ALSO,

The Witness of our own Spirit,
A SERMON
BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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SERMON 1.

THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT.

-DISCOURSE I.

ROMANS viii. 16.

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our Spirit, that we are the Children of God.

1. **H**OW many vain men, not understanding what they spake, neither whereof they affirmed, have wrested this scripture, to the great loss, if not the destruction, of their souls? How many have mistaken the voice of their own imagination, for the witness of the Spirit of God? And thence idly presumed, they were the children of God, while they were doing the works of the devil? These are truly and properly Enthusiasts; and indeed in the worst sense of the word. But with what difficulty are they convinced thereof? Especially, if they have drank deep into that spirit of error. All endeavours to bring them to the knowledge of themselves, they will then account fighting against God. And that vehemence and impetuosity of spirit, which they call contending earnestly for the faith, sets them so far above all the usual methods of conviction, that we may well say, With men it is impossible.

2. Who can they be surprised, if many reasonable men, seeing the dreadful effects of this delusion, and labouring to keep at the utmost distance from it, should sometimes lean toward another extreme? — If they are not forward to believe any who speak of having this witness, concerning which others have so grievously erred? If they are almost ready, to set all down for enthusiasts, who use the expressions which have been so terribly abused. Yea, if they should question, whether the witness or testimony here spoken of, be the privilege of ordinary Christians, and not rather, one of those extraordinary gifts, which they suppose belonged only to the apostolic age.

3. But is there any necessity laid upon us, of running either into one extreme or the other? May we not steer

a middle course? Keep a sufficient distance from that spirit of error and enthusiasm, without denying the gift of God, and giving up the great privilege of his children? Surely we may. In order thereto, let us consider, in the presence and fear of God,

First, What is this witness or testimony of our Spirit? What is the testimony of God's Spirit? And how does he bear witness with our Spirit, that we are the children of God?

Secondly, How is this joint testimony of God's Spirit and our own, clearly and solidly distinguished, from the presumption of a natural mind? and from the delusion of the devil?

I. 1. Let us first consider, what is the witness or testimony of our spirit. But here I cannot but desire all those who are for swallowing up the testimony of the Spirit of God, in the rational testimony of our own spirit, to observe, that in this text the apostle is so far from speaking of the testimony of our own spirit only, that it may be questioned whether he speaks of it at all. Whether he does not speak only of the testimony of God's Spirit? It does not appear but the original text may be fairly understood thus: The apostle had just said, in the preceding verse, Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father! and immediately subjoins *Auto to pneuma* (some copies read *to auto pneuma*) *summarturei to pneumati emon, oti esmen teken Theou*. Which may be translated, The same spirit beareth witness to our spirit, that we are the children of God (the preposition *biu* only denoting, that he witnesses this at the same time that he enables us to cry Abba, Father!) But I contend not; seeing so many other texts, with the experience of all real Christians, sufficiently evince, that there is, in every believer, both the testimony of God's Spirit, and the testimony of his own, that he is a child of God.

2. With regard to the latter, the foundation thereof is laid in those numerous texts of scripture, which describe the marks of the children of God, and that so plain, that he which runneth may read them. These are also collected together, and placed in the strongest light, by many both

ancient and modern writers. If any need farther light, he may receive it by attending on the ministry of God's word; by meditating thereon before God in secret, and by conversing with those who have the knowledge of his ways. And by the reason or understanding that God has given him (which religion was designed not to extinguish, but to perfect; according to that of the apostle, "Brethren, be not children in understanding; in malice (or wickedness) be ye children; but in understanding be ye men." 1 Cor. xiv. 20.) Every man applying those scriptural marks to himself, may know, whether he is a child of God. Thus if he know, first, as many as are led by the Spirit of God, into all holy tempers and actions, they are the sons of God, (for which he has the infallible assurance of holy writ;) secondly, I am thus led by the Spirit of God: he may easily conclude, therefore, I am a son of God.

3. Agreeable to this are all those plain declaration of St. John in his first epistle, "Hereby we know, that we do know him, if we keep his commandments, chap. ii. ver. 3. Who-so keepeth his word, in him, verily, is the love of God perfected; hereby we know, that we are in him," that we are indeed the children of God, ver. 5. "If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doth righteousness is born of him, ver. 29. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren, ch. iii. ver. 4. Hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him, ver. 18. Namely, because we love one another, not in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. Hereby know we, that we dwell in him, because he hath given us of his (loving) Spirit, ch. iv. 13. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the (obedient) Spirit which he hath given us," chap. iii 24.

4. It is highly probable, there never were any children of God, from the beginning of the world unto this day, who were farther advanced in the grace of God, and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, than the apostle John at the time when he wrote these words, and the Fathers in Christ to whom he wrote. Notwithstanding which, it is evident, both the apostle himself, and all those pillars in God's temple, were very far from despising these marks of their being the children of God: and that they applied them to their own souls, for the confirmation of their faith. Yet

all this is no other than rational evidence; the witness of our spirit, our reason or understanding. It all resolves into this; those who have these marks, they are the children of God. But we have these marks: therefore, we are children of God.

5. But how does it appear, that we have these marks? This is a question which still remains. How does it appear, that we do love God and our neighbour? And that we keep his commandments? Observe, that the meaning of the question is, How does it appear to ourselves? (not to others.) I would ask him then that proposes this question, How does it appear to you, that you are alive? And that you are now in ease and not in pain? Are you not immediately conscious of it? By the same immediate consciousness you well knew, if your soul is alive to God: if you are saved from the pain of proud wrath, and have the ease of a meek and quiet spirit. By the same means you cannot but perceive, if you love, rejoice, and delight in God. By the same, you must be directly assured, if you love your neighbour as yourself; if you are kindly affectioned to all mankind, and full of gentleness and long-suffering. And with regard to the outward mark of the children of God, which is (according to St. John) the keeping his commandments, you undoubtedly know in your own breast, if, by the grace of God, it belongs to you. Your conscience informs you from day to day, if you do not take the name of God within your lips, unless with seriousness and devotion, with reverence and godly fear; if you remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy: if you honour your father and mother: if you do to all as you would they should do unto you: if you possess your body in sanctification and honour; and if whether you eat or drink, you are temperate therein, and do all to the glory of God.

6. Now this is properly the testimony of our own spirit; even the testimony of our conscience, that God hath given us to be holy of heart, and holy in outward conversation. It is a consciousness of our having received, in and by the spirit of adoption, the tempers mentioned in the word of God, as belonging to his adopted children; even, a loving heart toward God and toward all mankind, hanging with child-like confidence on God our Father, desiring nothing but him, casting all our cares upon him, and embracing ev-

every child of man, with earnest, tender affection: A consciousness that we are inwardly conformed by the Spirit of God to the image of his Son, and that we walk before him in justice, mercy, and truth, doing the things which are pleasing in his sight.

7. But what is that testimony of God's Spirit, which is superadded to, and conjoined with this? How does he "bear witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." It is hard to find words in the language of men, to explain the deep things of God. Indeed there are none that will adequately express, what the children of God experience. But perhaps one might say (desiring any who are taught of God, to correct or soften, or strengthen the expression) the testimony of the Spirit, is an inward impression on the Soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly "witnesses to my spirit that I am a child of God;" that Jesus Christ hath loved me, and given himself for me; that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God.

8. That this testimony of the Spirit of God must needs, in the very nature of things, be antecedent to the testimony of our own spirit, may appear from this single consideration. We must be holy of heart and holy in life, before we can be conscious that we are so; before we can have the testimony of our spirit, that we are inwardly and outwardly holy. But we must love God, before we can be holy at all; this being the root of all holiness. Now we cannot love God, till we know he loves us. "We love him, because he first loved us." And we cannot know his pardoning love to us, till his Spirit witnesses it to our spirit.— Since therefore this testimony of his Spirit must precede the love of God and all holiness, of consequence it must precede our inward consciousness thereof, or, the testimony of our spirit concerning them.

9. Then, and not till then, when the Spirit of God beareth that witness to our spirit, "God hath loved thee, and given his own Son to be the propitiation for thy sins; the Son of God hath loved thee, and hath washed thee from thy sins in his blood?" We love God, because he first loved us, and for his sake we love our brother also. And of this we cannot but be conscious to ourselves; we know the things that are freely given to us of God. We know that

we love God and keep his commandments. And hereby also we know that we are of God. This is that testimony of our own spirit; which so long as we continue to love God and keep his commandments, continues joined with the testimony of God's Spirit, that we are the children of God.

10. Not that I would, by any means, be understood, by any thing which has been spoken concerning it, to exclude the operation of the Spirit of God, even from the testimony of our own spirit. In no wise. It is he that not only worketh in us every manner of thing that is good, but also shines upon his own work, and clearly shews what he has wrought. Accordingly this is spoken of by St. Paul, as one great end of our receiving the Spirit, that we may know the things which are really given to us of God: that he may strengthen the testimony of our conscience, touching our simplicity and godly sincerity, and give us to discern in a fuller and stronger light, that we now do the things which please him.

11. Should it still be enquired, How does the Spirit of God bear witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God, so as to exclude all doubt, and evince the reality of our sonship? The answer is clear from what has been observed above. And first, as to the witness of our spirit. The soul as intimately and evidently perceives, when it loves, delights, and rejoices in God, as when it loves and delights in any thing on earth. And it can no more doubt whether it loves, delights and rejoices, or no, than whether it exists, or no. If therefore this be just reasoning,

He that now loves God, that delights and rejoices in him, with an humble joy, and holy delight, and an obedient love, is a child of God:

But I thus love, delight, and rejoice in God;

Therefore I am a child of God:

Then a Christian can in no wise doubt of his being a child of God. Of the former proposition, he has as full an assurance, as he has that the scriptures are of God. And of his thus loving God, he has an inward proof, which is nothing short of self-evidence. Thus the testimony of our own spirit is with the most intimate conviction, manifested to our hearts; in such a manner, as beyond all reasonable doubt to evince the reality of our sonship.

12. The manner how the divine testimony is manifested to the heart, I do not take upon me to explain. Such knowledge is too wonderful and excellent for me; I cannot attain unto it. The wind bloweth; and I hear the sound thereof. But I cannot tell how it cometh, or whither it goeth. As no one knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of a man that is in him; so the manner of the things of God knoweth no one, save the Spirit of God. But the fact we know: namely, that the Spirit of God does give a believer such a testimony of his adoption, that while it is present to the soul, he can no more doubt the reality of his sonship, than he can doubt of the shining of the sun, while he stands in the full blaze of his beams.

II. 1. How this joint testimony of God's Spirit and our spirit may be clearly and solidly distinguished, from the presumption of a natural mind, and from the delusion of the devil, is the next thing to be considered. And it highly imports all who desire the salvation of God, to consider it with the deepest attention, as they would not deceive their own souls. An error in this is generally observed to have the most fatal consequences: the rather, because he that errs seldom discovers his mistake, till it is too late to remedy it.

2. And first, How is this testimony to be distinguished from the presumption of a natural mind? It is certain, one who was never convinced of sin, is always ready to flatter himself and to think of himself, especially in spiritual things, more highly than he ought to think. And hence, it is in no wise strange if one who is vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, when he hears of this privilege of true Christians, among whom he undoubtedly ranks himself, should soon work himself up into a persuasion, that he is already possessed thereof. Such instances now abound in the world, and have abounded in all ages. How then may the real testimony of the Spirit with our spirit, be distinguished from this damning presumption?

3. I answer, The holy scriptures abound with marks, whereby the one may be distinguished from the other.— They describe, in the plainest manner, the circumstances which go before, which accompany, and which follow, the true genuine testimony of the Spirit of God with the spirit

of a believer. Whoever carefully weighs and attends to these, will not need to put darkness for light. He will perceive so wide a difference with respect to all these, between the real and the pretended witness of the Spirit, that there will be no danger, I might say no possibility, of confounding the one with the other.

4. By these, one who vainly presumes on the gift of God, might surely know, if he really desired it, that he hath been hitherto given up to a strong delusion, and suffered to believe a lie. For the scriptures lay down those clear, obvious marks as preceding, accompanying, and following that gift, which a little reflection would convince him, beyond all doubt, were never found in his soul. For instance, the scripture describes repentance, or conviction of sin, as constantly going before this witness of pardon. So, Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand, Matt. iii. 2. Repent ye, and believe the gospel, Mark i. 15. Repent, and be baptized every one of you, for the remission of sins, Acts ii. 38. Repent ye therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, chap. iii. 19. In conformity whereto our church also continually places repentance, before pardon or the witness of it. "He pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe his holy gospel." "Almighty God—hath promised forgiveness of sins to all them, who with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto him." But he is a stranger even to this repentance. He hath never known a broken and a contrite heart. The remembrance of his sins was never grievous unto him, nor the burthen of them intolerable. In repeating those words, he never meant what he said; he merely paid a compliment to God. And were it not only for the want of this previous work of God, he had too great reason to believe, that he hath grasped a mere shadow, and never yet known the real privilege of the sons of God.

5. Again, the scriptures describe the being born of God, which must precede the witness that we are his children, as a vast and mighty change, a change from darkness to light as well as from the power of Satan unto God: As a passing from death unto life, a resurrection from the dead. Thus the apostle to the Ephesians; You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins, chap. ii. ver. 1.

And again, When we were dead in sins, he hath quickened us together with Christ; and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together, in heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, ver. 5. 6. But what knoweth he concerning whom we now speak, of any such change as this? He is altogether unacquainted with this whole matter. This is a language which he does not understand. He tells you, "He always was a Christian. He knows no time when he had need of such a change." By this also, if he give himself leave to think, may he know, that he is not born of the Spirit: That he has never yet known God; but has mistaken the voice of nature for the voice of God.

6. But waving the consideration of whatever he has or has not experienced in time past, by the present marks may we easily distinguish a child of God, from a presumptuous self-deceiver. The scriptures describe that joy in the Lord which accompanies the witness of his Spirit, as an humble joy, a joy that abases to the dust; that makes a pardoned sinner cry out, "I am vile! What am I, or my father's house? Now mine eye seeth thee, I abhor myself in dust and ashes!" And wherever lowliness is, there is meekness, patience, gentleness, long-suffering. There is a soft, yielding spirit; a mildness and sweetness; a tenderness of soul, which words cannot express. But do these fruits attend that supposed testimony of the Spirit, in a presumptuous man? Just the reverse. The more confident he is of the favour of God, the more is he lifted up. The more does he exalt himself; the more haughty and assuming is his whole behaviour. The stronger witness he imagines himself to have, the more overbearing is he to all around him; the more incapable of receiving any reproof, the more impatient of contradiction. Instead of being more meek, and gentle, and teachable, more swift to hear, and slow to speak, he is more slow to hear and swift to speak, more unready to learn of any one; more fiery and vehement in his temper, and eager in his conversation.—Yea, perhaps, there will sometimes appear a kind of fierceness in his air, his manner of speaking, his whole deportment, as if he were just going to take the matter out of God's hands, and himself to devour the adversaries.

7. Once more. The scriptures teach, this is the love of God (the sure mark thereof) that we keep his command-

ments, 1 John v. 3. And our Lord himself saith, He that keepeth my commandments, he it is that loveth me, John xiv. 21. Love rejoices to obey; to do in every point, whatever is acceptable to the Beloved. A true lover of God hastens to do his will on earth, as it is done in heaven. But is this the character of the presumptuous pretender to the love of God? Nay, but his love gives him a liberty to disobey, to break, not to keep, the commandments of God.— Perhaps when he is in fear of the wrath of God. He did labour to do his will. But now looking on himself as not under the law, he thinks he is no longer obliged to observe it. He is, therefore, less zealous of good works, less careful to abstain from evil; less watchful over his own heart, less jealous over his tongue; he is less earnest to deny himself, and to take up his cross daily. In a word, the whole form of his life is changed, since he has fancied himself to be at liberty. He is no longer exercising himself unto godliness; wrestling not only with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers, enduring hardships, agonizing to enter in at the strait gate. No; He has found an easier way to heaven; a broad, smooth, flowery path, in which he can say to his soul, “Soul, take thy ease; eat, drink, and be merry.” It follows, with undeniable evidence, that he has not the true testimony of his own Spirit. He cannot be conscious of having those marks which he hath not; that lowliness, meekness, and obedience. Nor yet can the Spirit of the God of truth bear witness to a lie; or testify that he is a child of God, when he is manifestly a child of the devil.

8. Discover thyself, thou poor self-deceiver! Thou who art confident of being a child of God; thou who sayest, “I have the witness in myself;” and therefore defiest all thy enemies. Thou art weighed in the balance, and found wanting; even in the balance of the sanctuary. The word of the Lord hath tried thy soul, and proved thee to be reprobate silver. Thou art not lowly of heart. Therefore thou hast not received the Spirit of Jesus unto this day.— Thou art not gentle and meek; therefore thy joy is nothing worth; it is not joy in the Lord. Thou dost not keep his commandments; therefore thou lovest him not, neither art thou partaker of the Holy Ghost. It is, consequently, as certain and as evident as the oracles of God can make it;

his Spirit doth not bear witness with thy spirit, that thou art a child of God. O cry unto him that the scales may fall off thine eyes, that thou mayest know thyself as thou art known: that thou mayest receive the sentence of death in thyself, till thou hear the voice that raises the dead, saying "Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven; thy faith hath made thee whole."

9. "But how may one, who has the real witness in himself, distinguish it from presumption?" How, I pray, do you distinguish day from night? How do you distinguish light from darkness? Or the light of a star, or glimmering taper, from the light of the noon-day sun? Is there not an inherent, obvious, essential difference between the one and the other? And do you not immediately and directly perceive that difference, provided your senses are rightly disposed? In like manner, there is an inherent, essential difference between spiritual light and spiritual darkness: and between the light wherewith the Sun of Righteousness shines upon our heart, and that glimmering light, which arises only from sparks of our own kindling. And this difference also is immediately and directly perceived, if our spiritual senses are rightly disposed.

10. To require a more minute and philosophical account of the manner whereby we distinguish these, and of the criteria, or intrinsic marks, whereby we know the voice of God, is to make a demand which can never be answered; no, not by one who has the deepest knowledge of God.—Suppose, when Paul answered before Agrippa, the wise Roman had said, "Thou talkest of hearing the voice of the Son of God. How dost thou know it was his voice? By what criteria, what intrinsic marks, dost thou know the voice of God? Explain to me, the manner of distinguishing this, from a human or angelic voice." Can you believe the apostle himself would have once attempted to answer so idle a demand? And yet doubtless the moment he heard that voice, he knew it was the voice of God. But how he knew this, who is able to explain? Perhaps neither man nor angel.

11. To come yet closer. Suppose God were now to speak to any soul, Thy sins are forgiven thee. He must be willing, that soul should know his voice; otherwise he would speak in vain. And he is able to effect this; for

whenever he wills, to do is present with him. And he does effect it. That soul is absolutely assured, This voice is the voice of God. But yet, he who hath that witness in himself, cannot explain it to one who hath not. Nor indeed is it to be expected that he should. Were there any natural medium to prove, or natural method to explain the things of God, to unexperienced men; then the natural man might discern and know the things of the Spirit of God. But this is utterly contrary to the assertion of the apostle, that he cannot know them; because they are spiritually discerned; even by spiritual senses, which the natural man hath not.

12. "But how shall I know, that my spiritual senses are rightly disposed?" This also is a question of vast importance. For if a man mistake in this, he may run on in endless error and delusion. And how am I assured that this is not my case; and that I do not mistake the voice of the Spirit. Even by the "testimony of your own spirit; by the answer of a good conscience toward God." By the fruits which he hath wrought in your spirit, you shall know the testimony of the Spirit of God. Hereby you shall know, that you are in no delusion, that you have not deceived your own soul. The immediate fruits of the Spirit, ruling in the heart, are love, joy, peace; bowels of mercies, humbleness of mind, meekness, gentleness, long-suffering. And the outward fruits are, the doing good to all men; the doing no evil to any; and the walking in the light; a zealous, uniform obedience to all the commandments of God.

13. By the same fruits shall you distinguish this voice of God, from any delusion of the devil. That proud spirit cannot humble thee before God. He neither can nor would soften thy heart, and melt it first into earnest mourning after God and then into filial love. It is not the adversary of God, and man, that enables thee to love thy neighbour; or to put on meekness, gentleness, patience, temperance, and the whole armour of God. He is not divided against himself, or a destroyer of sin, his own work. No; it is none but the Son of God who cometh to destroy the works of the devil. As surely, therefore, as holiness is of God, and as sin is the work of the devil, so surely the witness thou hast in thyself is not of Satan but of God.

14. Well then mayst thou say, Thanks be unto *God* for his unspeakable gift! Thanks be unto *God*, who giveth me to know in whom I have believed; who hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son, into my heart, crying, Abba, Father, and even now bearing witne. with my spirit, that I am a child of *God*! And see, that it not only thy lips, but thy life shew forth his praise. He hath marked thee for his own; glorify him then in thy body and thy spirit which are his. Beloved, if thou hast this hope in thyself, purify thyself as he is pure. While thou beholdest what manner of love the Father hath given thee, that thou shouldst be called a child of *God*; cleanse thyself from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of *God*: and let all thy thoughts, words, and works be a spiritual sacrifice, holy, acceptable to *God* through Jesus Christ!

SERMON 2.

THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT.

DISCOURSE II.

ROMANS viii. 16.

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our Spirit, that we are the Children of God.

1. **N**ONE who believe the scriptures to be the word of *God*, can doubt the importance of such a truth as this: a truth revealed therein, not once only, not obscurely, nor incidentally; but frequently, and that in express terms; but solemnly and of set purpose, as denoting one of the peculiar privileges of the children of *God*.

2. And it is the more necessary to explain and defend this truth, because there is a danger on the right hand and on the left. If we deny it, there is a danger lest our religion degenerate into mere formality: lest, having a form of godliness, we neglect, if not deny the power of it. If we

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allow it, but do not understand what we allow, we are liable to run into all the wildness of enthusiasm. It is therefore needful, in the highest degree, to guard those who fear *God* from both these dangers, by a scriptural and rational illustration and confirmation of this momentous truth.

3. It may seem, something of this kind is the more needful, because so little has been wrote on the subject with any clearness; unless some discourses on the wrong side of the question, which explain it quite away. And it cannot be doubted, but these were occasioned, at least in great measure, by the crude, unscriptural, irrational explication of others, who knew not what they spoke, nor whereof they affirmed.

4. It more nearly concerns the Methodists, so called, clearly to understand, explain, and defend this doctrine, because it is one grand part of the testimony, which *God* has given them to bear to all mankind. It is by his peculiar blessing upon them in searching the scriptures, confirmed by the experience of his children, that this great evangelical truth has been recovered, which had been for many years well nigh lost and forgotten.

II. 1. But what is the witness of the Spirit? The original word *marturia*, may be rendered either (as it is in several places) the witness, or less ambiguously the testimony, or the record: so it is rendered in our translation, 1 John v. 11. This is the record (the testimony, the sum of what *God* testifies in all the inspired writings) that *God* hath given unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. The testimony now under consideration is given by the Spirit of *God*, to and with our spirit. He is the person testifying. What he testifies to us is, that we are the children of *God*. The immediate result of this testimony is, the fruit of the Spirit; namely, love, joy, peace; long-suffering, gentleness, goodness. And without these, the testimony itself cannot continue. For it is inevitably destroyed, not only by the commission of any outward sin, or the omission of known duty, but by giving way to any inward sin: in a word, by whatever grieves the Holy Spirit of *God*.

2. I observed, many years ago, "It is hard to find words in the language of men, to explain the deep things of *God*. Indeed there are none that will adequately express what

the Spirit of *God* works in his children. But perhaps one might say (desiring any who are taught of *God*, to correct, soften, or strengthen the expression) By the testimony of the Spirit, I mean an inward impression of the soul, whereby the Spirit of *God* immediately and directly witnesses to my spirit, that I am a child of *God*, that Jesus Christ hath loved me, and given himself for me. That all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to *God*."

3. After twenty years further consideration, I see no cause to retract any part of this. Neither do I conceive how any of these expressions may be altered, so as to make them more intelligible. I can only add, that if any of the children of *God* will point out any other expressions, which are more clear, or more agreeable to the word of *God*, I will readily lay these aside.

4. Meantime let it be observed, I do not mean hereby, that the Spirit of *God* testifies this by an outward voice: no, nor always by an inward voice, although he may do this sometimes. Neither do I suppose that he always applies to the heart, (though he often may) one or more texts of the scripture. But he so works upon the soul by his immediate influence, and by a strong, though inexplicable operation, that the stormy wind and troubled waves subside, and there is a sweet calm: the heart resting as in the arms of Jesus, and the sinner being clearly satisfied, that *God* is reconciled, that all his iniquities are forgiven, and his sins covered.

5. Now, what is the matter of dispute concerning this? Not, whether there be a witness or testimony of the Spirit? Not, whether the Spirit does testify with our spirit, that we are the children of *God*? None can deny this, without flatly contradicting the scripture, and charging a lie upon the *God* of truth. Therefore, that there is a testimony of the Spirit, is acknowledged by all parties.

6. Neither is it questioned, whether there is an indirect witness or testimony, that we are the children of *God*. This is nearly if not exactly, the same with the testimony of a good conscience towards *God*; and is the result of reason or reflection, on what we feel in our own souls. Strictly speaking, it is a conclusion drawn partly from the word of *God*, and partly from our own experience. The word of

God says, every one who has the fruit of the Spirit is a child of God. Experience, or inward consciousness, tells me that I have the fruit of the Spirit. And hence I rationally conclude, therefore, I am a child of God. This is likewise allowed on all hands, and so is no matter of controversy.

7. Nor do we assert, that there can be any real testimony of the Spirit, without the fruit of the Spirit. We assert, on the contrary, that the fruit of the Spirit immediately springs from this testimony: not always indeed in the same degree, even when the testimony is first given. And much less afterwards; neither joy nor peace are always at one stay. No, nor love; as neither is the testimony itself always equally strong and clear.

8. But the point in question is, Whether there be any direct testimony of the Spirit at all? Whether there be any other testimony of the Spirit, than that which arises from a consciousness of the fruit?

III. 1. I believe there is, because that is the plain, natural meaning of the text, *The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.* It is manifest, here are two witnesses mentioned, who together testify the same thing, the Spirit of God, and our own spirit. The late Bishop of London, in his sermon on this text, seems astonished that any one can doubt of this, which appears upon the very face of the words. Now, "The testimony of our own Spirit," says the Bishop, "is one, which is the consciousness of our own sincerity:" or, to express the same thing a little more clearly, the consciousness of the fruit of the Spirit. When our spirit is conscious of this, of love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, it easily infers from these premises, that we are the children of God.

2. It is true, that great man supposes the other witness to be "The consciousness of our own good works." This, he affirms, is the testimony of God's Spirit. But this is included in the testimony of our own spirit: Yea, and in sincerity, even according to the common sense of the word. So the apostle: Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity, and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world: where it is plain, since-

ity refers to our words and actions, at least, as much as to our inward dispositions. So that this is not another witness, but the very same that he mentioned before : the consciousness of our good works, being only one branch of the consciousness of our sincerity. Consequently here is only one witness still. If therefore the text speaks of two witnesses, one of these is not the consciousness of our good works, neither of our sincerity : all this being manifestly contained in the testimony of our spirit.

3. What then is the other witness? This might easily be learned, if the text itself were not sufficiently clear, from the verse immediately preceding. 'Ye have received, not the Spirit of bondage, but the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. It follows, The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.

4. This is farther explained by the parallel text, Gal. iv. 6. Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Is not this something immediate and direct, not the result of reflection or argumentation? Does not this Spirit cry, Abba, Father, in our hearts, the moment it is given? Antecedent to any reflection upon our sincerity, yea, to any reasoning whatsoever? And is not this the plain, natural sense of the words which strikes any one as soon as he hears them? All these texts then, in their most obvious meaning, describe a direct testimony of the Spirit.

5. That the testimony of the Spirit of God, must, in the very nature of things, be antecedent to the testimony of our own spirit, may appear from this single consideration. We must be holy in heart and life, before we can be conscious that we are so. But we must love God before we can be holy at all, this being the root of all holiness. Now we cannot love God, till we know he loves us : we love him, because he first loved us. And we cannot know his love to us, till his Spirit witnesses it to our spirit. Till then we cannot believe it : we only say, the life which I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

B a

Then—only then we feel
 Our interest in his blood,
 And cry with joy unspeakable,
 Thou art my Lord—my God.

Since, therefore, the testimony of his Spirit must precede the love of God and all holiness, of consequence it must precede our consciousness thereof.

6. And here properly comes in, to confirm this scriptural doctrine, the experience of the children of God: the experience not of two or three, not of a few, but of a great multitude, which no man can number. It has been confirmed, both in this and in all ages, by a cloud of living and dying witnesses. It is confirmed by your experience and mine. The Spirit itself bore witness to my spirit, that I was a child of God, gave me an evidence thereof, and I immediately cried, Abba, Father! And this I did, (and so did you) before I reflected on, or was conscious of any fruit of the Spirit. It was from this testimony received, that love, joy, peace, and the whole fruit of the Spirit flowed. First I heard,

Thy sins are forgiven!
 Accepted thou art!
 I listened, and heaven
 Sprung up in my heart.

7. But this is confirmed, not only by the experience of the children of God, thousands of whom can declare, that they never did know themselves to be in the favour of God, till it was directly witnessed to them by his Spirit: but by all those who are convinced of sin, who feel the wrath of God abiding on them. These cannot be satisfied with any thing less than a direct testimony from his Spirit, that he is merciful to their unrighteousness, and remembers their sins and iniquities no more. Tell any of these, "You are to know you are a child, by reflecting on what he has wrought in you, on your love, joy, and peace:" and will he not immediately reply, By all this I know I am a child of the devil. I have no more love to God than the devil has: my carnal mind is enmity against God. I have no joy in the Holy Ghost: my soul is sorrowful even unto death. I have

no peace: my heart is a troublesome sea: I am all storm and tempest. And which way can these souls possibly be comforted, but by a divine testimony, (not that they are good, or sincere, or conformable to the scripture in heart and life, but) that God justifieth the ungodly: him that till the moment he is justified, is all ungodly, void of all true holiness: Him that worketh not, that worketh nothing that is truly good, till he is conscious that he is accepted, not for any works of righteousness which he hath done, but by the mere, free mercy of God? Wholly and solely for what the Son of God hath done and suffered for him? And can it be any otherwise, if a man is justified by faith, without the works of the law? If so, what inward or outward goodness can he be conscious of, antecedent to his justification? Nay, is not the having nothing to pay, that is, the being conscious that there dwelleth in us no good thing, neither inward nor outward goodness, essentially, indispensably necessary, before we can be justified freely, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ? Was any man justified since his coming into the world, or can any man ever be justified, till he is brought to that point,

“ I give up every plea, beside
Lord, I am damned—But thou hast died!”

8. Every one, therefore, who denies the existence of such a testimony, does in effect deny justification by faith. It follows, that either he never experienced this, either he never was justified, or that he has forgotten, (as St. Peter speaks) *τὸ καθάρισμα τῶν παλαιᾶν ἀμαρτιῶν*, the purification from his former sins, the experience he then had himself, the manner wherein God wrought in his own soul when his former sins were blotted out.

9. And the experience even of the children of the world, here confirms that of the children of God. Many of these have a desire to please God: some of them take much pains to please him. But do they not, one and all, count it the highest absurdity, for any to talk of “knowing his sins are forgiven?” Which of them even pretends to any such thing? And yet many of them are conscious of their own sincerity. Many of them undoubtedly have, in a degree, the testimony of their own spirit, a consciousness of their

own uprightness. But this brings them no consciousness, that they are forgiven, no knowledge that they are the children of God. Yea, the more sincere they are, the more uneasy they generally are, for want of knowing it: plainly shewing that this cannot be known, in a satisfactory manner, by the bare testimony of our own spirit, without God's directly testifying, that we are his children.

IV. But abundance of objections have been made to this; the chief of which it may be well to consider:

1. It is objected, first, "Experience is not sufficient, to prove a doctrine which is not founded on scripture." This is undoubtedly true; and it is an important truth; but it does not affect the present question. For it has been shewn that this doctrine is founded on scripture. Therefore, experience is properly alledged to confirm it.

2. "But madmen, French prophets and enthusiasts of every kind have imagined they experienced this witness." They have so. And perhaps not a few of them did, altho' they did not retain it long. But if they did not, this is no proof at all, that others have not experienced it: as a madman's imagining himself a king, does not prove, that there are no real kings.

"Nay, many who plead strongly for this, have utterly decried the Bible." Perhaps so; but this was no necessary consequence; thousands plead for it, who have the highest esteem for the Bible.

"Yea, but many have fatally deceived themselves hereby, and got above all conviction."

And yet a scriptural doctrine is no worse, though men abuse it to their own destruction.

3. "But I lay it down as an undoubted truth, the fruit of the Spirit is the witness of the Spirit."

Not undoubted; thousands doubt of, yea, flatly deny it: but to let that pass. "If this witness be sufficient, there is no need of any other. But it is sufficient, unless in one of these cases, 1. The total absence of the fruit of the Spirit." And this is the case, when the direct witness is first given: 2. "The not perceiving it. But to contend for it in this case, is to contend for being in the favour of God, and not knowing it." True, not knowing it at that time any otherwise than by the testimony which is given for that

and. And this we do contend for: we contend that the direct witness may shine clear, even while the indirect one is under a cloud.

4. It is objected, secondly, "The design of the witness contended for, is to prove that the profession we make is genuine. But it does not prove this." I answer, the proving this, is not the design of it. It is antecedent to our making any profession at all, but that of being lost, undone, guilty, helpless sinners. It is designed to assure those to whom it is given, that they are the children of God; that they are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. And this does not suppose, that their preceding thoughts, words and actions, are conformable to the rule of scripture. It supposes quite the reverse, namely, That they are sinners all over, sinners both in heart and life. Were it otherwise, God would justify the godly; and their own works would be counted to them for righteousness. And I cannot but fear, that a supposition of our being justified by works, is at the root of all their objections. For whoever cordially believes, that God imputes to all that are justified, righteousness without works, will find no difficulty in allowing the witness of his Spirit, preceding the fruit of it.

5. It is objected, thirdly, "One evangelist says, your heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him. The other evangelist calls the same thing good gifts; abundantly demonstrating, that the Spirit's way of bearing witness, is by giving good gifts." Nay, here is nothing at all about bearing witness, either in one text or the other. Therefore, till this demonstration is better demonstrated, I let it stand as it is.

6. It is objected, fourthly, "The scripture says, the tree is known by its fruits. Prove all things. Try the spirits. Examine yourselves." Most true: therefore, let every man who believes he hath the witness in himself, try whether it be of God; if the fruit follow, it is, otherwise, it is not. For certainly the tree is known by its fruit: Hereby we prove, if it be of God. "But the direct witness is never referred to in the book of God." Not as standing alone, not as a single witness, but as connected with the other: As giving a joint testimony, testifying with our spirit, that we are children of God. And who is able to prove

that it is not thus referred to, in this very scripture, Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith: prove your own-selves. Know ye not yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? It is by no means clear, that they did not know this by a direct as well as a remote witness. How is it proved, that they did not know it, first, by an inward consciousness, and then by love, joy, and peace?

7. "But the testimony arising from the internal and external change, is constantly referred to in the Bible." It is so. And we constantly refer thereto, to confirm the testimony of the Spirit. "Nay, all the marks you have given, whereby to distinguish the operations of God's Spirit from delusion, referred to the change wrought in us and upon us." This likewise is undoubtedly true.

8. It is objected, fifthly, that "The direct witness of the Spirit, does not secure us from the greatest delusion. And is that a witness fit to be trusted, whose testimony cannot be depended on? That is forced to fly to something else, to prove what it asserts?" I answer. To secure us from all delusion, God gives us two witnesses that we are his children. And this they testify conjointly. Therefore, what God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. And while they are joined, we cannot be deluded: their testimony can be depended on. They are fit to be trusted in the highest degree, and need nothing else to prove what they assert.

"Nay, the direct witness only asserts, but does not prove any thing." By two witnesses shall every word be established. And when the Spirit witnesses with our spirit, as God designs it to do, then it fully proves that we are children of God.

9. It is objected, sixthly, "You own the change wrought is a sufficient testimony, unless in the case of severe trials, Such as that of our Saviour upon the cross. But none of us can be tried in that manner." But you or I may be tried in such a manner, and so may any other child of God, that it will be impossible for us to keep our filial confidence in God, without the direct witness of his Spirit.

10. It is objected, lastly, "The greatest contenders for it, are some of the proudest and most uncharitable of men." Perhaps some of the hottest contenders for it are both proud and uncharitable. But many of the firmest contenders for

it, are eminently meek and lowly in heart: and indeed in all other respects also,

True followers of their lamb-like Lord.

The preceding objections are the most considerable that I have heard, and I believe contain the strength of the cause. Yet I apprehend whoever calmly and impartially considers those objections and the answers together, will easily see, that they do not destroy, no, nor weaken the evidence of that great truth, that the Spirit of God does directly, as well as indirectly testify, that we are children of God.

V. 1. The sum of all is this. The testimony of the Spirit is an inward impression on the souls of believers, whereby the Spirit of God directly testifies to their spirit, that they are children of God. And it is not questioned, whether there is a testimony of the Spirit? But whether there is any direct testimony? Whether there is any other than that which arises from a consciousness of the fruit of the Spirit? We believe there is; because this is the plain natural meaning of the text, illustrated both by the preceding words, and by the parallel passage in the epistle to the Galatians: because, in the nature of the thing, the testimony must precede the fruit which springs from it, and because this plain meaning of the word of God is confirmed by the experience of innumerable children of God; yea, and by the experience of all who are convinced of sin, who can never rest, till they have a direct witness: and even of the children of the world, who not having the witness in themselves, one and all declare, none can know his sins forgiven.

2. And whereas it is objected, that experience is not sufficient to prove a doctrine unsupported by scripture: that madmen and enthusiasts of every kind, have imagined such a witness: that the design of that witness is to prove our profession genuine, which design it does not answer: that the scripture says, The tree is known by its fruit; examine yourselves; prove your own selves; and mean time the direct witness is never referred to in the book of God: that it does not secure us from the greatest delusions: and, last-

ly, that the change wrought in us is a sufficient testimony, unless in such trials as Christ alone suffered. We answer, 1. Experience is sufficient to confirm a doctrine which is grounded on scripture: 2. Though many fancy they experience what they do not, this is no prejudice to real experience: 3. The design of that witness is, to assure us we are children of God. And this design it does answer. 4. The true witness of the Spirit is known by its fruit, love, peace, joy; not indeed preceding, but following it: 5. It cannot be proved, that the direct, as well as the indirect witness, is not referred to in that very text, Know ye not your own-selves that Jesus Christ is in you? 6. The Spirit of God witnessing with our spirit does secure us from all delusion: And, lastly, We are all liable to trials, wherein the testimony of our own spirit is not sufficient; wherein nothing less than the direct testimony of God's Spirit can assure us that we are his children.

3. Two inferences may be drawn from the whole. The first, Let none ever presume to rest, in any supposed testimony of the Spirit, which is separate from the fruit of it. If the Spirit of God does really testify that we are children of God, the immediate consequence will be the fruit of the Spirit, even love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, temperance. And however this fruit may be clouded for a while, during the time of strong temptation, so that it does not appear to the tempted person, while Satan is sifting him as wheat, yet the substantial part of it remains, even under the thickest cloud. It is true, joy in the Holy Ghost may be withdrawn, during the hour of trial. Yea, the soul may be exceeding sorrowful, while the hour and power of darkness continue. But even this is generally restored with increase, till we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

4. The second inference is, Let none rest in any supposed fruit of the Spirit without the witness. There may be foretastes of joy, of peace, of love, and those not delusive, but really from God, long before we have the witness in ourselves, before the Spirit of God witnesses with our spirits, that we have redemption in the blood of Jesus, even the forgiveness of sins. Yea, there may be a degree of long-suffering, of gentleness, of fidelity, of meekness, temperance, (not a shadow thereof, but a real degree, by the

preventing grace of God) before we are accepted in the Beloved, and consequently before we have a testimony of our acceptance. But it is by no means adviseable to rest here; it is at the peril of our souls if we do. If we are wise we shall be continually crying to God, until his Spirit cry in our heart, Abba, Father! This is the privilege of all the children of God, and without this we can never be assured that we are his children. Without this we cannot retain a steady peace, nor avoid perplexing doubts and fears. But when we have once received this Spirit of adoption, this peace which passes all understanding, and which expels all painful doubt and fear, will keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. And when this has brought forth its genuine fruit, all inward and outward holiness, it is undoubtedly the will of him that calleth us, to give us always what he has once given. So that there is no need, that we should ever more be deprived of either the testimony of God's Spirit, or the testimony of our own, the consciousness of our walking in all righteousness and true holiness.

NEWBY, April 4, 1767.

SERMON 3.

THE WITNESS OF OUR OWN SPIRIT.

2 COR. i. 12.

This is our rejoicing, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world.

1. **SUCH** is the voice of every true believer in Christ, so long as he abides in faith and love. He that followeth me, saith our Lord, walketh not in darkness: And while he hath the light, he rejoiceth therein. As he hath received the Lord Jesus Christ, so he walketh in him.— And while he walketh in him, the exhortation of the apostle takes place in his soul day by day, Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice.

2. But that we may not build our house upon the sand, (lest when the rains descend, and the winds blow, and the floods arise and beat upon it, it fall, and great be the fall thereof) I intend, in the following discourse, to shew, what is the nature and ground of a Christian's joy. We know, in general, It is that happy peace, that calm satisfaction of spirit, which arises from such a testimony of his conscience, as is here described by the apostle. But in order to understand this the more thoroughly, it will be requisite to weigh all his words: Whence will easily appear, both what we are to understand by conscience, and what, by the testimony thereof; and also, how he that hath this testimony rejoiceth evermore.

3. And, first, What are we to understand by conscience? What is the meaning of this word that is in every one's mouth? One would imagine it was an exceeding difficult thing to discover this, when we consider, how large and numerous volumes have been from time to time wrote on this

subject: and how all the treasures of ancient and modern learning have been ransacked, in order to explain it. And yet it is to be feared, it has not received much light from all those elaborate inquiries. Rather, have not most of those writers puzzled the cause, darkening counsel by words without knowledge; perplexing a subject plain in itself, and easy to be understood? For, set aside but hard words, and every man of an honest heart will soon understand the thing.

4. God has made us thinking beings, capable of perceiving what is present, and of reflecting or looking back on what is past. In particular, we are capable of perceiving, whatsoever passes in our own hearts or lives; of knowing whatsoever we feel or do; and that either while it passes, or when it is past. This we mean when we say, Man is a conscious being: he hath a consciousness or inward perception, both of things present and past, relating to himself, of his own tempers and outward behaviour. But what we usually term conscience, implies somewhat more than this. It is not barely, the knowledge of our present, or the remembrance of our preceding life. To remember, to bear witness either of past or present things, is only one, and the least office of conscience. Its main business is to excuse or accuse, to approve or disapprove, to acquit or condemn.

5. Some late writers indeed have given a new name to this, and have chose to stile it, a moral sense. But the old word seems preferable to the new, were it only on this account, That it is more common and familiar among men, and therefore easier to be understood. And to Christians it is undeniably preferable, on another account also; namely, because it is scriptural; because it is the word which the wisdom of God hath chose to use in the inspired writings.

And according to the meaning wherein it is generally used there, particularly in the epistles of St. Paul, we may understand by conscience, A faculty or power, implanted by God in every soul that comes into the world, of perceiving what is right or wrong in his own heart or life, in his tempers, thoughts, words, and actions.

6. But what is the rule whereby men are to judge of right and wrong? Whereby their conscience is to be di-

rected? The rule of Heathens (as the apostle teaches elsewhere) is the law written in our hearts. These saith he, not having the (outward) law, are a law unto themselves: Who shew the work of the law (that which the outward law prescribes) written in their heart, by the finger of God: their conscience also bearing witness, whether they walk by this rule or not; and their thoughts the mean while acquitting, defending them, (*ekhi apologoumenou*) Rom. ii. 14 15. But the Christian rule of right and wrong is the word of God, the writings of the Old and New Testament: All that the prophets and holy men of old wrote, as they were moved by the Holy Ghost: all that scripture which was given by inspiration of God, and which is indeed profitable for doctrine, or teaching the whole will of God: for reproof of what is contrary thereto; for correction of error, and for instruction, or training us up, in righteousness, 2 Tim. iii. 16.

This is a lantern unto a Christian's feet, and a light in all his paths. This alone he receives as his rule of right or wrong, of whatever is really good or evil. He esteems nothing good, but what is here enjoined, either directly or by plain consequence. He accounts nothing evil but what is here forbidden, either in terms, or by undeniable inference. Whatever the scripture neither forbids nor enjoins (either directly, or by plain consequence) he believes to be of an indifferent nature, to be in itself neither good nor evil: This being the whole and sole outward rule, whereby his conscience is to be directed in all things.

7. And if it be directed thereby in fact, then hath he the answer of a good conscience toward God. A good conscience is what is elsewhere termed by the apostle, a conscience void of offence. So, what he at one time expresses thus, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day, Acts xxiii. 1. he denotes at another, by that expression, Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man, chap. xxiv. 16. Now in order to this, there is absolutely required, First, A right understanding of the word of God, of his holy, and acceptable, and perfect will concerning us, as it is revealed therein. For it is impossible we should walk by a rule, if we do not know what it means. There is, Secondly, required, which how few have attained? A

true knowledge of ourselves, a knowledge both of our hearts and lives, of our inward tempers and outward conversation: seeing if we know them not, it is not possible that we should compare them with our rule. There is required, Thirdly, an agreement of our hearts and lives, of our tempers and conversation, of our thoughts, and words, and works with that rule, with the written word of God. For without this, if we have any conscience at all, it can be only an evil conscience. There is, Fourthly, required, an inward perception, of this agreement with our rule. And this habitual perception, this inward consciousness itself, is properly a good conscience; or, in the other phrase of the apostle, A conscience void of offence, toward God and toward man.

8. But whoever desires to have a conscience thus void of offence, let him see that he lay the right foundation. — Let him remember, other foundation of this can no man lay, than that which is laid, even Jesus Christ. And let him also be mindful, that no man buildeth on him but by a living faith; that no man is a partaker of Christ, until he can clearly testify, The life which I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God; in him who is now revealed in my heart; who loved me, and gave himself for me. Faith alone is that evidence, that conviction, that demonstration of things invisible, whereby the eyes of our understanding being opened, and divine light poured in upon them, we see the wondrous things of God's law, the excellency and purity of it; the height, and depth, and length, and breadth thereof, and of every commandment contained therein. It is by faith, that beholding the light of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ, we perceive, as in a glass, all that is in ourselves, yea, the inmost motions of our souls. And by this alone can that blessed love of God be shed abroad in our hearts, which enables us, so to love one another as Christ loved us. By this, is that gracious promise fulfilled unto all the Israel of God, I will put my laws into their minds, and write (or engrave) them in their hearts, Heb. viii. 10. Hereby producing in their souls, an entire agreement with his holy and perfect law; and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. And as an evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit, so a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit. As the heart there-

fore of a believer, so likewise his life is thoroughly conformed to the rule of God's commandments. In a consciousness whereof, he can give glory to God, and say with the Apostle, This is our rejoicing, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world.

9. We have had our conversation. The Apostle, in the original, expresses this by one single word (*anestrappemen.*) But the meaning thereof is exceeding broad, taking in our whole deportment, yea, every inward as well as outward circumstance, whether relating to our soul or body. It includes every motion of our heart, of our tongue, of our hands and bodily members. It extends to all our actions and words; to the employment of all our powers and faculties; to the manner of using every talent we have received, with respect either to God or man.

10. We have had our conversation in the world; even in the world of the ungodly: Not only among the children of God, (that were, comparatively, a little thing) but among the children of the devil, among those that lie in wickedness, *en to ponero*, in the wicked one. What a world is this! How thoroughly impregnated with the spirit it continually breathes! as our God is good and doth good, so the god of this world, and all his children are evil, and do evil, (so far as they are suffered) to all the children of God. Like their father, they are always lying in wait, or walking about, seeking whom they may devour: Using fraud or force, secret wiles or open violence, to destroy those who are not of the world: Continually warring against our souls, and by old or new weapons and devices of every kind, labouring to bring them back into the snare of the devil, into the broad road that leadeth to destruction.

11. We have had our conversation in such a world, in simplicity and godly sincerity. First, in simplicity. This is what our Lord recommends, under the name of a single eye. The light of the body, saith he, is the eye. If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. The meaning whereof is this. What the eye is to the body, that the intention is, to all the words and actions. If therefore this eye of thy soul be single, all thy actions and

conversation shall be full of light, of the light of heaven; of love, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

We are then simple of heart, when the eye of our mind is singly fixt on God: When in all things we aim at God alone, as our God, our portion, our strength, our happiness, our exceeding great reward, our all in time and eternity. This is simplicity; when a steady view, a single intention of promoting his glory, of doing and suffering his blessed will, runs through our whole soul, fills all our heart, and is the constant spring of all our thoughts, desires and purposes.

12. We have had our conversation in the world, Secondly, in godly sincerity. The difference between simplicity and sincerity seems to be chiefly this: Simplicity regards the intention itself, sincerity the execution of it. And this sincerity relates not barely to our words, but to our whole conversation, as described above. It is not here to be understood in that narrow sense, wherein St. Paul himself sometimes uses it, for speaking the truth, or abstaining from guile, from craft and dissimulation. But in a more extensive meaning, as actually hitting the mark which we aim at by simplicity. Accordingly it implies in this place, that we do in fact speak and do all to the glory of God: that all our words are not only pointed at this, but actually conducive thereto; that all our actions flow on in an even stream, uniformly subservient to this great end: And that in our whole lives we are moving straight toward God, and that continually; walking steadily on in the highway of holiness, in the paths of justice, mercy, and truth.

13. This sincerity is termed by the apostle, godly sincerity, or the sincerity of God, (*eilikrineia Theou*) to prevent our mistaking or confounding it with the sincerity of the heathens: (For they had also a kind of sincerity among them, for which they professed no small veneration) likewise to denote the object and end of this, as of every Christian virtue; seeing whatever does not ultimately tend to God, sinks among the beggarly elements of the world. By styling it the sincerity of God, he also points out the author of it, the Father of light, from whom every good and perfect gift descendeth: Which is still more clearly declared in the following words, Not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God.

14. Not with fleshly wisdom. As if he had said, We cannot thus converse in the world, by any natural strength or understanding, neither by any naturally-acquired knowledge or wisdom. We cannot gain this simplicity, or practise this sincerity, by the force either of good sense, good nature, or good breeding. It overshoots all our native courage and resolution, as well as all our precepts of philosophy. The power of custom is not able to train us up to this, nor the most exquisite rules of human education.— Neither could I, Paul, ever attain hereto, notwithstanding all the advantages I enjoyed, so long as I was in the flesh, in my natural state, and pursued it only by fleshly, natural wisdom.

And yet surely, if any man could, Paul himself might have attained thereto by that wisdom. For we can hardly conceive any, who was more highly favoured with all the gifts, both of nature and education. Besides his natural abilities, probably not inferior to those of any person then upon the earth, he had all the benefits of learning, studying at the University of Tarsus, afterwards brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, the person of the greatest account, both for knowledge and integrity, that was then in the whole Jewish nation. And he had all the possible advantages of religious education, being a Pharisee, trained up in the very strictest sect or profession, distinguished from all others by a more eminent strictness. And herein he had profited above many others, who were his equals in years, being more abundantly zealous of whatever he thought would please God, and as touching the righteousness of the law blameless. But it could not be, that he should hereby attain this simplicity and godly sincerity. It was all but lost labour; in a deep, piercing sense of which, he was at length constrained to cry out, The things which were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, Phil. iii. 7, 8.

15. It could not be that ever he should attain to this, but by the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ our Lord: Or by the grace of God; another expression of nearly the same import. By the grace of God is sometimes to be understood, that free love, that unmerited mercy, by which I, a sinner, through the merits of Christ, am now reconciled

to God. But in this place it rather means, that power of God the Holy Ghost, which worketh in us both to will and to do, of his good pleasure. As soon as ever the grace of God, in the former sense, his pardoning love is manifested to our soul; the grace of God, in the latter sense, the power of his Spirit, takes place therein. And now we can perform, through God, what to man was impossible. Now we can order our conversation aright. We can do all things in the light and power of that love, through Christ which strengtheneth us. We now have the testimony of our conscience, which we could never have by fleshly wisdom, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have our conversation in the world.

16. This is properly the ground of a Christian's joy. We may now therefore readily conceive, How he that hath this testimony in himself, rejoiceth evermore. My soul, may he say, doth magnify the Lord, and my Spirit rejoiceth in God my Saviour. I rejoice in him, who of his unmerited love, of his own free and tender mercy, hath called me into this state of salvation, wherein through his power I now stand. I rejoice, because his Spirit beareth witness to my spirit, that I am bought with the blood of the Lamb, and that believing in him, "I am a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." I rejoice, because the sense of God's love to me hath, by the same Spirit, wrought in me to love him, and to love, for his sake, every child of man, every soul that he hath made. I rejoice, because he gives me to feel in myself the mind that was in Christ: Simplicity, a single eye to him, in every motion of my heart; Power always to fix the loving eye of my soul on him who loved me, and gave himself for me, to aim at him alone, at his glorious will, in all I think or speak, or do: Purity, desiring nothing more but God, crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts, setting my affections on things above, not on things of the earth: Holiness, a recovery of the image of God, a renewal of soul after his likeness: And godly sincerity, directing all my words and works, so as to conduce to his glory. In this likewise rejoice, yea, and will rejoice, because my conscience beareth me witness in the Holy Ghost, by the light he continually pours in upon it, that I walk worthy of the vocation wherewith I am called: that I abstain from all ap-

pearance of evil, fleeing from sin as from the face of a serpent; that as I have opportunity, I do all possible good, in every kind to all men; that I follow my Lord in all my steps, and do what is acceptable in his sight. I rejoice because I both see and feel, through the inspiration of God's holy Spirit, that all my works are wrought in him, yea, and that it is he who worketh all my works in me. I rejoice in seeing, through the light of God which shines in my heart, that I have power to walk in his ways, and that through his grace, I turn not therefrom, to the right hand or to the left.

17. Such is the ground and the nature of that joy, whereby an adult Christian rejoiceth evermore. And from all this we may easily infer, First, That this is not a natural cause: Not from any sudden flow of spirits. This may give a transient start of joy. But the Christian rejoiceth always. It cannot be owing to bodily health or ease; to strength and soundness of constitution. For it is equally strong in sickness and pain; yea, perhaps far stronger than before. Many Christians have never experienced any joy, to be compared with that which then filled their soul, when the body was well nigh worn out with pain, or consumed away with pining sickness. Least of all can it be ascribed to outward prosperity, to the favour of men, or plenty of worldly goods. For then chiefly, when their faith has been tried as with fire, by all manner of outward afflictions, have the children of God rejoiced in him, whom unseen they loved, even with joy unspeakable. And never surely did men rejoice like those, who were used as the filth and off-scouring of the world; who wandered to and fro, being in want of all things; in hunger, in cold, in nakedness: Who had trials, not only of cruel mockings, but, moreover, of bonds and imprisonments: Yea, who at last counted not their lives dear unto themselves, so they might finish their course with joy.

18. From the preceding considerations, we may, Secondly, infer, That the joy of a Christian does not arise from any blindness of conscience, from his not being able to discern good from evil. So far from it, that he was an utter stranger to this joy, till the eyes of his understanding were opened! that he knew it not, until he had spiritual senses, fitted to discern spiritual good and evil. And now

the eye of his soul waxeth not dim. He was never so sharp-sighted before. He has so quick a perception of the smallest things, as is quite amazing to the natural man.— As a mote is visible in the sun-beam, so to him who is walking in the light, in the beams of the uncreated sun, every mote of sin is visible. Nor does he close the eyes of his conscience any more. That sleep is departed from him. His soul is always broad awake: No more slumber or folding of the hands to rest! He is always standing on the tower, and hearkening what his Lord will say concerning him: and always rejoicing in this very thing, in seeing him that is invisible.

19. Neither does the joy of a Christian arise, Thirdly, from any dullness or callousness of conscience. A kind of joy it is true, may arise from this, in those whose foolish hearts are darkened; whose heart is callous, unfeeling, dull of sense; and, consequently, without spiritual understanding. Because of their senseless, unfeeling hearts, they may rejoice even in committing sin: And this they may probably call liberty! Which is indeed mere drunkenness of soul: a fatal numbness of spirit, the stupid insensibility of a seared conscience. On the contrary, a Christian has the most exquisite sensibility; such as he could not have conceived before. He never had such a tenderness of conscience, as he has had since the love of God has reigned in his heart. And this also is his glory and joy; that God hath heard his daily prayer,

“ O that my tender soul might fly
The first abhorr'd approach of ill:
Quick as the apple of an eye,
The slightest touch of sin to feel.”

20. To conclude. Christian joy, is joy in obedience: Joy in loving God, and keeping his commandments. And yet not in keeping them, as if we were thereby to fulfil the terms of the covenant of works; as if by any works or righteousness of ours, we were to procure pardon and acceptance with God. Not so: We are already pardoned and accepted, through the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. Not as if we were by our own obedience to procure life from the death of sin. This also we have already through

the grace of God. Us hath he quickened, who were dead in sin. And now we are alive to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. But we rejoice in walking, according to the covenant of grace, in holy love and happy obedience. We rejoice in knowing, that being justified through his grace, we have not received that grace of God in vain; that God hath freely (not for the sake of our willing or running, but through the blood of the Lamb) reconciled us to himself, we run in the strength which he hath given us, the way of his commandments. He hath girded us with strength unto the war, and we gladly fight the good fight of faith. We rejoice, through him who liveth in our hearts by faith, to lay hold of eternal life. This is our rejoicing; that as our Father worketh hitherto, so (not by our own might or wisdom, but through the power of his Spirit, freely given in Christ Jesus) we also work the works of God. And only he work in us whatsoever is well-pleasing in his sight: to whom be the praise for ever and ever!

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