

Exposition: 1 John 3:1-10

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

As dear Dr. Hawker said concerning this, there is a chapter in every word and a sermon in every letter. How it opens with a “Behold!” because it is such a striking portion of sacred Scripture, that the Holy Ghost would have us pay particular attention to it. “Behold!” says he, “read other Scriptures if you like, with a glance, but stop here. I have put up a way-mark to tell you there is something eminently worthy of attention buried beneath these words.” “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us.” Consider who we were, and who we are now; ay, and what we feel ourselves to be even when divine grace is powerful in us. And yet, beloved, we are called *“the sons of God.”* It is said that when one of the learned heathens was translating this, he stopped and said, “No; it cannot be; let it be written ‘Subjects,’ not ‘Sons,’ for it is impossible we should be called ‘the sons of God.’” What a high relationship is that of a son to his father! What privileges a son has from his father! What liberties a son may take with his father! and oh! what obedience the son owes to his father, and what love the father feels towards the son! But all *that*, and more than *that*, we now have through Christ. “Behold!” ye angels! stop, ye seraphs! here is a thing more wonderful than heaven with its walls of jasper. Behold, universe! open thine eyes, O world. “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God; therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.” Well, we are content to go with him in his humiliation, for we are to be exalted with him.

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God.” That is easy to read; but it is not so easy to feel. *“Now are we the sons of God.”* How is it with your heart this morning? Are you in the lowest depths of sorrow and suffering? *“Now are you a son of God.”* Does corruption rise within your spirit, and grace seem like a poor spark trampled under foot? *“Beloved, now are you a son of God.”* Does your faith almost fail you? and are your graces like a candle well nigh blown out by the wind! Fear not, beloved; it is not your graces, it is not your frames, it is not your feelings, on which you are to live: you must live simply by naked faith on Christ. *“Beloved, now are we the sons of God.”* With all these things against us, with the foot of the devil on our neck, and the sword in his hand ready to slay us—beloved *now* in the very depths of our sorrow, wherever we may be—*now*, as much in the valley as on the mountain, as much in the dungeon as in the palace, as much when broken on the wheel of suffering as when exalted on the wings of triumph—*“beloved, now are we the sons of God.”* “Ah!” but you say, “see how I am arrayed! my graces are not bright; my righteousness does not shine with apparent glory.” But read the next: *“It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but*

we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him." We are not so much like him now, but we have some more refining process to undergo, and death itself, that best of all friends, is yet to wash us clean. "We know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

"And every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law for sin is the transgression of the law.

"And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin."

Believer, read these words in two senses. He was manifested to take away thy sins that thou hast committed; and that he accomplished, when "the just for the unjust," he sustained the penalties of them. And he was manifested to take away the power of thy sins; that is to say, to conquer thy reigning lusts, to take away thine evil imaginations, to purify thee, and make thee like himself. Well, beloved, what a mercy it is that some one was manifested to take away our sins from us! for some of us have been striving a long, long while, to conquer our sins, and we cannot do it. We thought we had driven them out, but they had "chariots of iron," and we could not overcome them; they lived "in the hill country," and we could not get near them. As often as we worsted them in one battle, they came upon us thick and strong, like an army of locusts; when heaps and heaps had been destroyed they seemed as thick as ever. Ah! but there is a thought—they shall all be taken away. "Ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins;" and so he will. The time will come when you and I shall stand without spot or blemish before the throne of God: for they are "without fault before the throne of God" at this moment, and so shall we be ere long.

"Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him."

This plain, simple verse, has been twisted by some who believe in the doctrine of perfection, and they have made it declare that it is possible for some to abide in Christ, and therefore not to sin. But you will remark that it does not say, that *some* that abide in Christ do not sin; but it says that *none* who abide in Christ sin. "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not." Therefore this passage is not to be applied to a few who attain to what is called by our Arminian friends the fourth degree—perfection; but it appertains to all believers; and of every soul in Christ it may be said, that he sinneth not. In reading the Bible, we read it simply as we would read another book. We ought not to read it as a preacher his text, with the intention of making something out of every word; but we should read it as we find it written: "Whosoever abideth in Christ sinneth not." Now we are sure that cannot mean that he does not sin at all, but it means that sins not habitually, he sins not designedly, he sins not finally, so as to perish. The Bible often calls a man righteous; but that does not mean that he is perfectly righteous. It calls a man a sinner, but it does not imply that he may not have done some good deeds in his life; it means that that is the man's general character. So with the

man who abides in Christ: his general character is not that he is a sinner, but that he is a saint—he sinneth not openly wilfully before men. In his own heart, he has much to confess, but his life before his fellow creatures is such a one that it can be said of him: “Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not; but whosoever sinneth [the sins of this world. in which the multitude indulge] hath not seen him, neither known him.”

“Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.”

That is the sign of it. Works are the fruits of grace. “He is righteous,”—not in himself; for mark how graces come in here—“He is righteous, even as HE is righteous.” It will not allow our righteousness to be our own, but it brings us to Christ again. “He that doeth righteousness is righteous,” not according to his own works, but “even as HE is righteous.” Good works prove that I have perfect righteousness in Christ; they do not help the righteousness of Christ, nor yet in any way make me righteous. Good works are of no use whatever in the matter of justification: they only use they are, is, that they are for our comfort, for the benefit of others, and for the glory of God. “He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil.”

“He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

“Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

“In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil; whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.”

It were well if we always remembered that practical godliness is the soul of godliness; that it is not talking religion, but walking religion which proves a man to be sincere; it is not having a religious tongue, but a religious heart; it is not a religious mouth, but a religious foot. The best evidence is the salvation of the soul. Avaunt! talkative; go thy way, thou mere professing formalist! Your ways lead down to hell, and your end shall be destruction; for “He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.”