

HEAVENLY REALITIES AND DIVINE CERTAINTIES

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, on Lord's Day Morning, June, 11, 1865

"And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true. even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God. And eternal life." 1 John 5:20

There is a reality in true religion, and indeed, rightly viewed, a reality in nothing else; for every other thing passes away like a dream of the night, and comes to an end like a tale that is told. Now you cannot say of a thing that passes away and comes to an end that it is real. It may have the appearance of reality, of possessing a firm, enduring substance, when in fact it is but a shadow. Our very language, nay, the very laws of our land, embody this idea. We read or hear sometimes, for instance, that a man of wealth has died and left such or such an amount of real and personal property. What is meant by real property, and why is it called real, as thus distinguished from personal? By real property we understand land and houses. Money, jewels, pictures, books, furniture, securities, these are not called real but personal, and for this reason, that they belong to the individual, and are therefore moveable and transitory. Money may be spent, jewels be lost, books be burnt, furniture decay, pictures vanish by time and age, securities be stolen. But not so with land; that cannot be burnt, nor stolen by night, nor dropped down a sink-hole, nor decay with old age. Amidst all the changes of time there it remains in all its original firmness, and is handed down as a solid possession from father to son. The law, therefore, calls all such property "real."

Is there not some similarity between this and the things of eternity? Nothing is real but that which has an abiding substance. Health decays, strength diminishes, beauty flees the cheek, sight and hearing grow dim, the mind itself gets feeble, riches make to themselves wings and flee away, children die, friends depart, old age creeps on, and life itself comes to a close. These fugitive, transitory things are then mere shadows: there is no substance, enduring substance in them. They are for time, and are useful for a time state. Like our daily food and raiment, house and home, they support and solace us in our journey through life. But there they stop; when life ends they end with it. But real religion—and by this I understand the work of God upon the soul, abides in death and after death, goes with us through the dark valley, and lands us safe in a blessed eternity. It is, therefore, the only thing in this world of which we can say that it is real.

Is not this John's testimony? "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." (1 John 2:16, 17.) What a testimony is here given that everything in the world is passing away, and that only one man abides for ever. And who is that man, that blessed man, who lives when all dies, who abides for ever when all others pass away into the outer darkness? It is he who doeth the will of God. And how and when do we the will of God? When we believe in His dear Son by a living faith; for "this is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." "And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:40.) If, then, you have seen the Son and believed in Him, you have now everlasting life, and Jesus will raise you up in the last day.

Now wherever there is *reality*, there will be a measure, more or less, of *certainty*. If you are the possessor of a piece of land, it may be but a small field or half an acre of garden ground, you know for certain whether you are the possessor of that piece of property or not. When you walk up and down the length and breadth of it, even if a few yards be the full extent of your walk, you can stamp your foot upon the soil and say, "This is mine; this is my property." But we may observe that there is a distinction between the certainty of possession and the certainty of title. You might want to sell that piece of land, and I might want to buy it. But I should not be satisfied with your bare statement that you were its possessor; I should want to know your title, to examine your deeds, and see whether you have not only a certainty of possession but a certainty of right; that your title is good as well as your proprietorship. So in the things of God.

There is a certainty in the truths of revelation, and those who know something of the things of God in their own soul are resting upon them as divine certainties, of which the blessed Spirit has borne in their conscience His sure testimony. And even where this is not clearly the case, where this inward testimony is weak, the possession of the fear of God, as the beginning of wisdom, gives to its owner a possession of the kingdom of heaven. Thus every child of God may not have attained to the certainty of title, though he has the certainty of possession. His rifle may be good in itself beyond all doubt and question, as regards its reality; but if you ask him to produce it, he can scarcely find his deeds, or make out a title to satisfy himself, or fully to satisfy you. And yet if the Lord the Spirit has but begun the work of grace in his heart, he has the certainty of possession, and in due time he will have the certainty of title.

What leads me to make these remarks upon realities and certainties? The peculiar language of our text, the firm reality, the positive certainty which stamp its declarations. Do we find any uncertainties here? any "perhaps" or "peradventure; I think it may be," or "I cannot tell whether it may be so or not?" Does the Holy Ghost ever speak the language of uncertainty in revealing to us the truth of God? Mark how clearly, decisively, certainly the man of God speaks here: "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we *are* in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This **is** the true God, and eternal life." What a certain sound the gospel trumpet here gives; with what confidence the man of God speaks. And if he did not, how could we believe him? If a man profess to be my guide, say on some Swiss mountain, amidst rocks and snows and falling avalanches, he must know the way and every step that he takes on that perilous ground or I cannot follow him with any confidence. If I own a ship, and a pilot undertake to carry it down the channel, he must know every shoal, or my ship and cargo and many precious lives may be lost through his uncertain handling of the helm. Other instances will occur to your mind in which we want certainties, that we may clearly know where we are, what we are, what we are about, and whither we are going, in order to preserve us from being altogether wrong and going altogether wrong.

Now if religion be of all matters most important, if a mistake in it, at least a very serious mistake, be fatal, how desirable, how absolutely necessary is it to have certainties in our own case. The word of God in the hands of the Spirit is our guide; how needful therefore it is that it should be a certain guide; and may I not add that the interpretation of it by a professed servant of Christ should be as clear and certain as the word itself? God help me then this morning to be this faithful

interpreter of His word. Our text is clear and certain. If in my interpretation of it then there be anything dark, confused, or uncertain, to me must the fault belong. Still I hope that the Lord may enable me so rightly to divide the word of truth, so to dive into the treasures of our text, and lay them bare to your view, that you may with God's help and blessing, gather up from what I may bring before you something that may enrich, feed, comfort, and instruct your soul. I shall draw your attention to three points connected with our text.

I.—*First, the positive declaration, " This is the true God, and eternal life."*

II.—*Secondly, the knowledge which the believer possesses that "the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true."*

III.—*Thirdly, the positive assertion, that "we are in him that is true."*

God give the needed blessing!

I.—*"This is the true God, and eternal life."*

1. Whilst we are in nature's darkness and death, we have no knowledge, and we want to have no knowledge of the true God. We are, as the Scripture emphatically declares, "without God in the world;" and we love to have it so. If we have any thought about God—and where is the conscience that has not at times some thoughts about Him?—we view Him for the most part as our enemy. We are told indeed that we ought to love Him. and in His holy Law He has bidden us to do so with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. But this we cannot do: for if we make the attempt we soon find and feel the springing up of that enmity of the carnal mind against

Him of which Paul speaks. And indeed the law provokes it; for it "worketh wrath." and by stirring up the wretched enmity of our carnal mind baffles every attempt at love.

Besides this wretched enmity of our heart, we have an instinctive feeling that God must be our enemy as long as we are living in wicked works; for even our natural conscience testifies to His holiness, and that holiness we see and feel firmly and unalterably directed against the sins and idols which we hug to our breast. Viewing Him, then, as our enemy, we shun His presence, and escape as far as we can out of His sight. Under this feeling Jonah went down from the presence of the Lord to Joppa; and the prodigal son took his journey into a far country. So we get away as far as we can from anything which testifies of the presence and power of God. Any person, any place, any book, any conversation, and I may add, any thoughts which would remind us of the presence of God we get away from as fast and as far as we can, for we cannot bear the condemnation which His presence brings.

There is another reason why we wish to have nothing to do with God, and for God to have nothing to do with us. There is an inward conviction in our mind, that if we have to do with God and God has to do with us, we must give up that which our nature loves almost more dearly than our life blood. We must part with our sins, pluck our idols from our breast, abandon loved pursuits, relinquish dear friends, offend affectionate relatives, sacrifice cherished prospects, and, as the world says, ruin ourselves for life. Now no man can look this prospect steadily in the face, this utter crushing of our inmost heart, until he has the fear of God deeply planted in his soul. This was just the case with me. I had often wanted to be religious and sometimes tried to be so; but I never could bear the thought of what I must give up if I truly

became so. The sacrifice was too great; and I could not make it. Thousands are held here who never proceed any further. Here they live, here they die, here they perish.

But God will not let His own dear children thus perish. He therefore arrests us in our ignorance or our indecision, in our unbelief and in our enmity, by His all-subduing work of grace upon our soul, which He Himself begins, carries on, and finishes. Now, no sooner does a ray of light shine out of His fulness into our heart and divine life quicken our soul, than so far from seeking to escape the eye of this God whom we have thus far continually shunned, there is raised up in the bosom a deep-seated, abiding, and almost continual feeling, that wherever we go that eye follows us. Thence springs the fullest conviction that there is no escaping out of His hand. or withdrawing ourselves from His heart-searching eye. We are also made to feel that if we live and die His enemies, under His wrath we must perish for evermore. This deep conviction at once puts an end to all our false conceptions of God, and to all the vain imaginations that we have formed concerning Him. It detects our false worship of Him, and how satisfied we have been with addressing Him with our lips when our heart was far from Him. It shows us that our strict morality, all our, as we thought, decided piety, all our religious thoughts, connections, and associations were but a form of godliness, whilst we really denied the power thereof.

I speak thus, for it may have been the case with some of you not to have been abandoned to any course of immorality, but on the contrary, to have been preserved in the greatest strictness of life and conduct, and yet by being varnished over with a false religion, to have stretched your limbs upon a bed too short, and wrapped yourself up in a covering too narrow. Whether then we lived in open sin, or were strict moralists, or false religionists, however it might affect our

character and reputation, it made little difference when spiritual convictions entered into and laid hold of our awakened conscience. When God searches Jerusalem with candles, He lays bare every secret imagination of the mind; when He lays judgment to the line and righteousness to the plummet, He sweeps away every refuge of lies and His waters overflow every hiding-place. When the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, pierces even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, it is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. The word of God thus finds us out, piercing and penetrating every veil and covering, and brings us out naked and bare in all our natural and hideous deformity before His heart-searching eye.

Under this work of grace, under these teachings of the blessed Spirit, as a Spirit of conviction, we begin to have some acquaintance with the true God; learn to worship Him in spirit and in truth; and to have some right apprehension of His character, of His holiness, justice, majesty, and power. In all this we see the first budding, fruit, and effects of that godly tear which He gives by His grace, and which He has promised to put into the hearts of those with whom He makes an everlasting covenant that He will not turn away from them to do them good. (Jer. 32:40.) It is in this way that we come to a knowledge of the only true God in His justice and holiness.

2. But after a time, as the Lord is pleased to work by His Spirit and grace, we come to a knowledge of the only true God *as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ*. This we do not see at first. We read that "it is the glory of God to conceal things." (Prov. 25:2.) Thus it is for His own glory that for a time He conceals from His people that which afterwards He reveals unto them. For the most part, therefore, He exercises them well and long with guilty apprehensions and

fears of His great and terrible Majesty, that He may strip them thoroughly of all the rags of creature righteousness and bring them down to that spot where He means to reveal in them and unto them His dear Son. and make Him precious to their souls.

Now no man can bring into his own heart a spiritual, saving knowledge of the Son of God, or give himself faith to embrace Him as the Christ of God. so as to have any assurance that He died for him. He may long to do so, and even attempt to raise up faith in his own bosom; but till the time comes when God is pleased to give some discovery and manifestation of His dear Son to his soul, he cannot see Him; for He hides Himself in the thick darkness: nor can he believe in Him so as to find rest and peace from an assurance of pardoned sin and acceptance in the Beloved. Men may question and cavil at these strong assertions, but I am very sure that I speak in the fullest harmony with the experience of every living soul in thus speaking; for all such well know that the faith that brings peace is not in their own power, but is the pure, sovereign gift of God.

When, then, any whom the Lord the Spirit is inwardly teaching has been exercised, some for a longer and others for a shorter period, with such apprehensions of the character of the only true God as to bring him down into the dust of death, this gracious Teacher in some most unexpected moment will bring some discovery to his soul of the Son of God as a Saviour, suitable to his lost case and condition, and raise up faith in his heart to embrace Him as the Son of God. I cannot now stay to work this point clearly out in the experience of the Lord's disciples, as we see in the New Testament; but take it all in the words of Peter: "Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." (John

6:68, 69.) It is in this way that we are brought to see who the true God is, not merely in His character as holy, just, and righteous, inflexible against sin and determined to punish the guilty, but obtain the gracious view of His mercy, goodness, and love in the face of Jesus Christ. This is what the apostle means when he says, "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Cor. 4:6.)

You will observe that our text says, "This is the true God." There is no other God but this. All others are false gods, the vain and vague conceptions of men's minds—not the true God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of all grace, of all mercy, and of all truth, as manifesting Himself in the Person and work of His dear Son. This revelation and discovery of the glory of God in the face, or, as it might be rendered, in the Person of Jesus Christ, changes the whole scene, brings the soul out of darkness into light, gives it a sweet deliverance into the mercy of God, makes Christ precious, fills the heart, according to the measure of the revelation given, with all joy and peace in believing. Then we can say, "This is the true God"—God in Christ, God revealing Himself in the Person of His dear Son, as pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin.

3. Now connected with this true God is "eternal life," for our text combines them as one: "This is the true God and eternal life." O the blessedness, which eternity itself can never exhaust, of possessing eternal life. There is something to my mind so singularly blessed in the expression "eternal life," that I cannot help dwelling upon it. How the thought, the feeling of it expands the breast! Compared with it, how poor, mean, and low is our temporal life and all its concerns—the short span which God has allotted to us here below!

Observe how our eye is directed by holy John to the true God as being Himself eternal life. He is not only the Giver, the Spring, the Subject, the Object of it; He Himself is it all. O if He has but quickened our souls by His Spirit and grace, we carry now, even now, eternal life in our breast; for this eternal life is the precious fruit on earth of that eternal life in heaven which was with the Father and was manifested unto us. (1 John 1:2.) We have no life in our own bosom independent of the Source and Fountain of life; for Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life." He is our life (Col. 3:14), and He has said, for our encouragement and consolation, "Because I live ye shall live also." (John 14:19.) If we have any light, any warmth, any fruitfulness, any motion, it comes from the Sun of righteousness; and so if we have any life, it comes from Him who is "the Fountain of life." (Psalm 36:9.)

4. How shall we *know* that we have eternal life, you may ask? How do we know that we have natural life? By an inward consciousness that we are alive; by the pulse which beats, the lungs which breathe, the eye which sees, the ear which hears, the tongue which speaks, the hands which feel; by the warm play of blood through our veins, by the thoughts which pass to and fro through our mind. Similarly we know the possession of spiritual life by an inward consciousness of it and by its inward actings. And as where there is spiritual there is eternal life, as we feel the bubblings, springings, risings, and varied movements of this spiritual life in our bosom, we have a testimony that we have also eternal life; that this eternal life is in the Son of God, and from the Son of God has been breathed into and communicated unto our souls.

II.—I now pass on to show the *knowledge* which the believing soul has that *the Son of God is come*.

1. You will observe the positive certainty wherewith John speaks; and you may perhaps ask yourself the question, Whence arose this positive certainty in John's breast? John himself shall tell us. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (*for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;*) that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you." (1 John 1:1-4.) He was not speaking at a peradventure; there were no perhapses, or ifs, or buts in his knowledge, as there are none in his declaration of it. He had seen with his eyes the Person of Jesus; he had heard with his ears the voice of Jesus; he had handled with his hands Jesus as the Word of life; and therefore knew by the witness of his eye, the witness of his ear, the witness of his hands, and the witness of his heart what he speaks of to us, and what he has by divine inspiration recorded in the word of truth, that we may have fellowship with him and all the saints of God.

You may say, "We cannot have that same certainty which he had. John saw our blessed Lord in the flesh; John could look upon Him with his natural eyes, John could hear His voice with his natural ears: and as John lay in His bosom he could almost feel the warm pulsations of the Lord's natural heart. But we cannot do this. We do not stand in the same position with John and the other disciples. How then can we have the same evidence and the same certainty?" All this is true; but did no others see the Lord with their bodily eye? Did no others hear the Lord with their bodily ear? Were there no other witnesses to his crucifixion? Were there no ears which

heard, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani" but those of John? Did no other eyes but his see the spear pierce the Redeemer's side when forthwith there came there out blood and water? Yes, but what did they see? A malefactor. And what did they hear? The cry of a dying man. And what did the Roman soldier behold before he raised his spear? One who was "dead already." And did not thousands see and hear Him in the days of His flesh who perished in their sins?

It was not then sufficient to see the Lord Jesus with the bodily eye and hear Him with the natural ear, unless there was the believing eye and the believing ear, springing out of a believing heart. Because then the Lord has left earth and is gone up to be where He was before and is now seated at the right hand of the Father, is there no eye to see Him now, no ear to hear Him now, no hands to handle Him now? Just as much as there were eyes to see, ears to hear, and hands to handle Him when upon earth; for those only then "beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father," "which were born. not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13, 14); and regeneration gives the same eyes now. Thus if we have not the same full amount of certainty we have a similar kind.

It was necessary that the apostles should have the fullest amount of certainty, and especially those of them who were inspired to write the Scriptures, to be the food of faith to the Church through all ages. They believed what they saw with their eyes and heard with their ears with the fullest certainty; and having given a testimony of this certain knowledge to us in the word of truth, we believe their testimony. Having thus a measure of the same divine teaching, divine witness, and divine revelation, we are made able to say, not perhaps to the amount of their full confidence, but still with a measure

of it, according to the strength of our faith, "We *know* that the Son of God is come."

2. Now let me unfold to you a little more fully and clearly *how* we are brought to know that the Son of God is come; and do you weigh in the balances of the sanctuary what I shall bring forward upon the point, and see whether, when you have weighed in them your own experience, you can say with your hand upon your heart and your eye to God that you know that the Son of God is come. In working out this point, I shall come down as low as I possibly can, that I may not make the heart of the righteous sad whom the Lord has not made sad. But I shall draw the line as straight as I can.

i. We know it, first, then, by the *testimony of the Scripture*, by the light which the Holy Ghost casts upon the Scripture, and the faith which He raises up in our bosom to believe the Scripture. This is very important; for it excludes everything visionary and fanatical, as well as all the traditions of men from every side and quarter. When, then, we read the Scripture with the light of God upon it, and that light shines from the Scripture into our heart, raising up a living faith to believe what we read, then from the testimony of the word in our conscience, and the light, life, and power of the Spirit resting upon it, we know that the Son of God is come.

Have you not sometimes as you read the Scripture felt the power of it drop into your soul? The truth of it, the certainty of it, the majesty of it, the authority of it, and the very voice of God clearly and distinctly speaking in it, so came into your heart as the word of the Lord, testifying of Christ, that you could say, "I know that the Son of God is come." "As I read the miracles which Jesus wrought when He went about doing good; as I read the words which dropped from His lips in His parables, and especially in His gracious discourse with His

disciples, my eyes are as if opened to see that this was no less than the Son of God. In His miracles I behold his Deity: in His eating, drinking, sleeping, groaning, agonizing, sweating blood, and dying on the cross I see His humanity; and I view Deity and humanity shining forth in His glorious Person. My enlightened understanding and my believing heart receive Him as the Son of God; and feeling myself a poor, lost, guilty sinner, I receive Him as able to save my soul to the uttermost; I cast the weight of my sins upon him; I look to Him to save me, and to Him alone: and I do this from the light that I have in my mind and the froth that I feel in my breast; and I thus embrace Him as a Redeemer and Saviour. altogether suitable to my case." Now if you can say all that. you can add with some measure of confidence. "I *know* that the Son of God is come."

ii. We will rise a little higher. When the Lord Jesus is pleased in some solemn hour to *reveal Himself to* our soul, when He graciously condescends to take the veil from off our heart that we may behold His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, when He kindly favours us with some manifestation and discovery of Himself as the Son of God, the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His Person, then we know, in fuller, larger measure that the Son of God is come.

How do you know that the sun rose this morning? By the light which rose with it. How do you know that it is not darkness now? By the light which even now streams in through the windows, and fills this place in which we are assembled. So we may say, spiritually, "How do you know that the Son of God is come?" By the Sun of righteousness arising upon you with healing in His wings and the shining light which He diffuses in your heart. So the Lord speaks to Zion: "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the

LORD is risen upon thee." That is the way in which the darkness is dispersed: for He adds. "Behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the LORD shall arise upon thee and His glory shall be seen upon thee." (Isai. 60:1, 2.) Did not our blessed Lord say: "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness?" (John 12:46.) And has He not promised, "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life?" (John 8:12.) So also testifies John in this epistle: "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5.) Now as God is light, when He is pleased to shine into the soul, we walk in the light as He is in the light, and then we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin. This is the best, this the surest, this the safest way to know that the Son of God is come.

iii. Again, we know that the Son of God is come by *the communion* with which He favours the soul *from off the mercy seat*. You know what it is to come to the mercy seat, there to behold by the eye of faith Jesus sitting as the great High Priest over the house of God; there to pour out your heart before Him to tell Him all your complaints, and to seek communion with Him. Now when He condescends to commune with you from off the mercy seat and speak a word to your heart, then you know that the Son of God is come— come from the bosom of the Father to save your soul; come out of heaven down to earth to bear our sins in His own body on the tree; come to do the work which the Father gave Him to do and to do it fully and wholly, so as to be able to say with expiring lips. "It is finished." before He gave up the ghost, rose from the dead and went up on high. How faith sees Him now on His throne of grace as the Mediator, the only Mediator, between God and us; how hope, a good hope

through grace, anchors in Him; and how love embraces Him as the Son of God. We thus know by faith and feeling, by an inward knowledge of Him, and by an experience of the power of his resurrection, that the Son of God is come, and come, we trust, into our hearts to draw up its sincere and warm affections unto Himself.

iv. We know also that the Son of God is come by His *presence*; by His **power** put forth on our behalf; by the **answers** which He gives to prayer; by the way in which He appears in dark and gloomy hours, making crooked things straight and rough things plain, discovering Himself to us as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, showing unto us that in Him there is rest and peace, solid, abiding happiness, and in no other. He thus draws and fixes our eyes upon Himself, where He sits as the right hand of the Father in the fulness of His grace, glory, and majesty. Thus we know that the Son of God is come. Every prayer, every petition, every sigh and cry, every longing look that you cast up to Him, and every word of His grace, every sweet promise, every glimpse or glance of the King in His beauty, which you receive out of His fulness, are all so many testimonies that the Son of God is come, and that you know that He is come.

Let me put this one point to your soul, that you may gather up from it some encouragement, if you are doubting and fearing through the power of unbelief. Take away the Son of God out of the word, off the throne of grace, and out of your heart, where are you? Where is your religion? Where is your hope? What is there before you but black despair? Thus, you know that the Son of God is come not only by your deep necessity, by your wants and woes, by your guilty conscience, by every cry, sigh, and desire of your bosom; but you know that the Son of God is come by the testimony which you have in your own breast of His presence and of His

power, which alone support you in seasons of darkness and distress.

3. Another blessed word is added: "*And hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true.*"

There is a point involved in these words, in which many both private Christians and ministers appear, in my judgment, confused or defective. They do not see—at least I have rarely seen the subject clearly handled by any man of God, they do not seem to see the difference between a gracious, enlightened understanding Of the truth of God which springs out of the teaching of the Spirit, and what is commonly called head knowledge. There is such a thing—and a most dangerous, delusive thing it is, as head knowledge, and faithful ministers do well to warn people against it; for it is in our day widely prevalent in the Calvinistic Churches. But then there is such a thing as an understanding heart in the things of God: "the eyes of your understanding being enlightened" (Eph. 1:18) a spiritual, saving knowledge of the only true God and of Jesus Christ whom He has sent: or what is so beautifully expressed here, "*hath given us an understanding. (God's own special gift,)* that we may know him that is true."

Do you not find and feel sometimes that God has given you an understanding heart?—that you are not, as you once were, in ignorance of God and His dear Son? Is not your mind enlightened to understand the meaning of the Scriptures as they are opened up from time to time to your heart by the power of God? Do you see no beauty or blessedness in the word of God? Is it not commended to your conscience as divine truth? Has it not a liberating, sanctifying power and influence upon your soul? Do you not see at times wonders in the word of God, depths of wisdom, heights of grace, blessings and favours revealed and made known in it

which seem to surpass all conception and all expression? Have you not seen sometimes "in one line of Scripture," to use an expression of Bunyan's, "more than you could well tell how to stand under?" Is all this understanding to be thrown away and trodden under foot as mere head knowledge? Is it not rather an understanding which God has given us, and by which we know Him that is true? Let us not then confound these two distinct things or despise one of God's best gifts, but ever desire to be "filled with all spiritual understanding;" yea, "unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God and of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (Col. 1:9; Col. 2:2, 3.)

You may say, "How am I to distinguish between mere head knowledge and this spiritual understanding?" I will tell you. When a special light is cast into your mind; when the word is opened up in its spiritual, experimental meaning; when the Holy Ghost seals it with sweetness and power upon your heart, and you not only understand what you read but receive it in faith, feel its savour, and enjoy its blessedness. Is not this a very different thing from lifeless, barren head knowledge? But view also its fruits; look at what this enlightened understanding has done for us! Until we had it, the veil of unbelief and ignorance was over our mind; we stumbled at noon as at night, groped for the wall like the blind, and could not find our way to the city. We read the Scriptures, it is true, but knew nothing of their spiritual meaning; and though we talked perhaps about God and Jesus Christ, and it may be prattled a little about the truth of God, we were really shut up in the grossest darkness.

Do we not see this now in others, if we cannot distinctly see the change grace has made in ourselves? What ignorance we find in them when they talk about the Scriptures; and how

we see through all their head knowledge even when they speak consistently with the truth. There is no power, life, or savour in anything they say. How highly favoured then are we if any of us can say, "We know that the Son of God hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true." Men think that we are fools, narrow-minded bigots, shut up in ignorance, or intoxicated with the fumes of fanaticism and enthusiasm, are walking in a false and delusive light. No; we are not fools; we are sober-minded men; we understand what we profess; we know what we believe; peradventures will not suit us. We do not sit down with folded hands and sleepy eyes, dreaming our time away in airy visions and speculative notions in a fool's paradise. Our soul is at stake; heaven and hell are trembling in the balance.

I must not live and die at an uncertainty whether there be a Christ or not, whether the Son of God is come or not come, whether I have an understanding to know Him that is true, or whether I live and die in darkness and ignorance. Such a religion won't do for me, or for any one in earnest about his soul; I must have realities, to know for myself that the Son of God is come, and to have an understanding in my very bosom to know Him that is true, by His own blessed manifestations, discoveries, and sweet visitations to my heart. And if I know that the Son of God is come and hath given me an understanding to know Him that is true, I shall speak that which I do know and my trumpet will give a certain sound. If I profess to be your guide, I must go boldly on as knowing every step of the way. If I am to pilot your ship down the channel, I must know the chart, that you and I may arrive at the harbour of safety.

Though men may speak against certainties in religion, the most important concern of all, yet will not men have

certainties in the things of this life? Who will buy an estate with an uncertain title? Who will even deal at a shop where he is uncertain whether the goods sold him are valuable or worthless, pure or adulterated? When you receive change, do you never look at your money whether it be right? Why you count the very pence, lest you be a halfpenny wrong. The children of this world are too wise in their generation to do with uncertainties. "Let the thing be as clear and as certain as it can be," says the man of business, the trader, the farmer, the dealer, the buyer, the seller, "or I will have nothing to do with it; I will not be deceived if I can help it to the fraction of a penny."

If then the men and women of this world can so speak, so act as regards those poor, perishing things which are passing away like shadows, shall you and I, who have immortal souls and feel that we have them and that they are hanging in the balance,—shall we rest upon uncertainties, not to know whether the Son of God is come or not; not to know whether or not He "hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true?" Why the certainty of these things is our very life. Not that all the children of God have the certainty in their own bosom. As I before said, a man may certainly be the possessor of a property, yet be dubious as to its title, and yet have a good title too. You with the fear of God in your breast are as certain of being in heaven as that Christ is there now; but you may not have the certainty in your own breast. You may have, as most of the people of God have, thousands of doubts and fears which may seem to rack you to the very centre, and yet there is a certainty in the things themselves, though your doubting soul may be at an uncertainty about them. Still, it is not good to be ever fluctuating upon a sea of uncertainty; it is good to find the ground solid under our feet, and to have a rock, the Rock of

ages, on which to firmly stand. This brings me to my last point.

III.—"And we are *in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ*. This is the true God, and eternal life."

Here the man of God points to the union and communion which the saints of God have with His dear Son. "We are *in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ*."

How are the saints of God "*in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ*?"

1. First, they are in Him by *covenant ties*, by solemn engagements, by eternal choice, as the Holy Ghost speaks by Paul. "According as he hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world." Men may quarrel with election, but it is the grand foundation of the union which the Church has with her covenant Head; for she was chosen in Him; not chosen in herself, or chosen out of Him; and being chosen in Him, she can never, so to speak, be lost out of Him. This will be very plain by a moment's consideration. If every member of the mystical body of Christ was chosen in Him before the foundation of the world, it is impossible that any member of that mystical body should be lost. The whole body would suffer, and the Head would suffer with it, if the smallest member of the mystical body of Christ could perish. It would not be a complete body if it lost the smallest member. If, therefore, you are in Christ by vital union, you were in Him by covenant ties before the foundation of the world. This is the grand security of the saints; this is that which kept the Church from being swamped and swallowed in the Adam fall, and held her up in the midst of that transgression which was attended with such fearful consequences.

2. There is another way in which we "are in him that is true;" and that is *by vital union*.

This vital union is of two kinds: a union of Him with us by His participation of our flesh, and a union of us with Him by our participation of His Spirit. There is thus, so to speak, a double union.

In order to make the Church wholly His, by becoming one with Himself, the Lord took her nature into union with His own divine Person. The apostle, therefore, says: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same." (Heb. 2:14.) We therefore read: "For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church: for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." (Eph. 5:29, 30.) Thus there is a union which the Church has with Christ by virtue of His partaking of her flesh and blood. As the wife has a union with her husband from being one flesh with him, so the Church has a union with Christ as being one flesh with Him. How beautifully does Paul unfold this mystery: "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church." (Eph. 5:31, 32.)

This union of Christ and the Church as one flesh, by virtue of His incarnation, is the ground and basis of that other union with Him, which I have already mentioned—a union with him by a participation of His Spirit; as we read, "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." (1 Cor. 6:17.) Thus our union with Christ is not only a union by covenant tie, which was the source, not only a union by His partaking of our flesh as the great mystery of godliness, but a union with Him in living experience, by oneness of Spirit. Now if you know anything

of the grace, the presence, the power, and love of Christ; if you have been baptized with His Spirit and have ever felt anything experimentally of communion with Him, you are one spirit with Him. There is a oneness of spirit between you and the Son of God. You see with Him; you feel with Him; you sympathize with Him; you walk with Him; you talk with Him. And He feels with you; sympathizes with you; walks with you; talks with you; communicates of His grace to your soul, infuses His Spirit into your breast, and makes you a partaker of the divine nature, that you may escape the corruptions which are in the world through lust. Now it is only by this oneness of spirit with Christ, and by being able to realize it, that we can ever say without fear, "we are in him that is true." When you feel a oneness of spirit with Christ, then there is a testimony in your own bosom of your union with Him, which can never be described, and yet can be and is blessedly felt. To melt into His Spirit and His Spirit to melt into yours; to have the mind of Christ; to see with the eyes of Christ, to feel with the heart of Christ; to love what Christ loves, to hate what Christ hates; to be jealous of His honour, tender of His glory, mourn over Him and with Him, hate your sins because He suffered for them, abhor yourselves in dust and ashes on account of your unlikeness to Him: to be sighing continually that He would draw you nearer to His bosom, supply you out of His fulness, manifest His love to your soul and baptize you into His Spirit—this is oneness of spirit with Christ. and by this oneness of spirit you can clearly make out your union with Christ.

Let me illustrate this by something of a similar character. You talk with a child of God, say for the first time; but from some cause or other, you feel no union or communion with him. Why? Because there is no present oneness of spirit between you and him. But another day you meet him: he says something that drops into your spirit; you say something

which drops into his spirit: heart flows to heart, spirit melts into spirit; you are one with each other, know the same truths, believe the same things, feel the same power, can unfold to each other your mutual sorrows and your mutual joys, and love flows into each other's breast. This is oneness of spirit. So it is with us and the dear Redeemer. There is a oneness of spirit with Christ the Head, as there is oneness of spirit with the members of His mystical body; and thus as we are able to trace out this oneness of spirit with Him, we arrive at the sweet testimony that "we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ."

Then it is, so far as we are enabled to enter into the vital reality of these divine things, that we can say with holy John, *"This is the true God,"* lifting up heart and mouth for ourselves, and pointing out to others God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, as manifested and revealed in the Person of Christ. "This is the true God, and eternal life;" for I have a testimony in my own bosom that "this is the true God," from the experience I have of His truth and blessedness; and as I look up and see by faith eternal life in Him, I can add also that this, and this only, "is eternal life."

Some of you may not be able to speak with this blessed certainty of your interest in this only true God and this eternal life; and yet you may be certain that these things are true. Faith, I believe, has in it always a measure of assurance. For what is assurance? It is merely the larger growth and fuller development of faith. The nature of assurance is much misunderstood. It is often considered something distinct from faith. This is not the case. It is merely faith in a fuller, larger development. The word "assurance" in the original has a very simple yet beautiful meaning. It means literally "a full bearing;" and the word is

applied sometimes to a large crop of corn or fruit, and sometimes to the tide coming in with a fuller wave. Now it is the same corn which grows in the fields, whether the crop be much or little; it is the same tide that comes up the river whether in a scanty or full flow.

So it is with assurance and faith: it is the same faith, only increased, enlarged, bearing more abundant fruit, or flowing in a more abundant tide.

Assurance in Scripture is not confined to faith; there is "the full assurance of understanding" (Col. 2:2) that is, a fuller measure and amount, a greater enlargement of understanding to know the truth of God. The understanding is the same; but there is a larger measure of it. So there is the full assurance of hope, that is, a hope strengthened and enlarged, bearing more fruit and flowing in a fuller tide. But it is the same hope—the same in kind, though larger in degree; a stronger anchor and yet an anchor still. (Heb. 6:11.) Similarly there is the full assurance of faith (Heb. 10:22) that is, a larger, fuller measure of faith—a richer crop, a more abundant tide. Thus you have a measure of the assurance of faith if you have faith at all. In fact, if you have no assurance of the truth of these things, why do you follow after them? Why do you hang upon them, why do you hope in them? and why do you seek the power and experience of them in your soul?

Have you not arrived at this point yet? "we have not followed cunningly devised fables; these things that I am following after are realities; these objects set before me are certainties." I grant that you may be much exercised about your interest in them. Still, unless you know that they are certainties, why do you believe them? Why are you anxious to know your interest in them? Why do you sink in doubt and

fear for want of clearer evidences of an interest in them? And why do you spring up in peace and joy the moment that a little light from them beams upon your soul and a little sweetness out of them drops into your heart? Because you know that these things are realities. So far then you have an assurance that they are certainties, and in due time, as God is pleased, you will have the assurance in your own breast, not only that they are certainties, but that you have them in your own sure and certain possession.