

The Sunday School.

INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

LESSON XLV.

Nov. 9. } THE PERFECT SAVIOUR. } John i.
1879. } 1-10.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin."—1 John i. 7.

HOME STUDIES.

M. John i. 1-14. The Word made flesh.
L. 2 Pet. i. 12-21. We beheld His glory.
W. John xii. 25-41. The children of light.
Th. 1 John i. 1-10. The perfect Saviour.
F. Zech. xiii. 1-9. The fountain opened.
S. Acts iv. 1-12. None other name.
Sab. Ps. cxxx. 1-7. Plenteous redemption.

HELPS TO STUDY.

There is no doubt whatever as to the identification of the writer of the epistle which contains this lesson. Only one John appears as a writer in the New Testament. He wrote the Gospel and the three epistles which take their names from him, and he also wrote the Book of Revelation. It was the apostle John, one of the twelve disciples, the brother of James and son of Zebedee, sometimes called "John the beloved," and, in the title of the Book of Revelation, "John the divine."

This fact has been ascertained, not only from the unanimous testimony of "the fathers," but from internal evidence. No one who carefully compares the language, style, and tone of these writings can avoid coming to the conclusion that they are all the work of one and the same hand.

For example: The Gospel according to John opens with "In the beginning was the Word," and the First Epistle of John with "That which was from the beginning." In the second verse of the Gospel we find, "The Word was with God," and in the second verse of the Epistle, "Which was with the Father." The Gospel says (verse 4) "In Him was life," and the Epistle (verse 1) calls Christ "the Word of Life." In the Gospel we are told that "the life was the light of men," and the Epistle states that "God is light." In the Gospel John affirms his personal acquaintance with Christ in the flesh in the words "We beheld His glory" (verse 14), and in the epistle he refers to the same fact in the words "which we have seen with our eyes."

There is nothing to show that the First Epistle of John was written to any church or to any nationality in particular. It seems to be quite as "general" as the Epistle of James, although it is not so headed.

The main object of the letter is to enforce the Christian grace of love; but by way of introduction the opening verses, which form our lesson, are occupied with an exhibition of the foundations of Christianity: (1) *Christ our Life*, (2) *Christ our Light*, (3) *Christ our Saviour*.

I. CHRIST OUR LIFE.—VERS. 1-4.

We have here the testimony of John to the divinity of Christ and to His personal appearance on earth, as man, to give spiritual life and eternal happiness to those who believe in Him—to be their life. The testimony may be considered as to (1) its subject, (2) its certainty, (3) its purpose.

1. *The Testimony of John—its subject.* That which was from the beginning. This means Christ, spoken of in verse 2 as that eternal life which was with the Father, and in John i. 1 referred to in the words, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Christ is divine, uncreated, has existed from all eternity, is alive now, and is the source of life to His people, the "Prince of Life" (Acts iii. 15).

2. *The Testimony of John—its certainty.* John is as certain of Christ's divinity as he is of the fact that Christ had appeared on earth in human form; and on this he insists with emphatic repetition. Not hear-say, not vague tradition, not "old wives' fables," but that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you. The expression in the first verse is still more emphatic: that . . . which we have seen with our eyes—a strong term of expression, still in common use. The words "with our eyes" serve no purpose but that of emphasis. The next clause is not a mere repetition; it is more expressive of activity than the foregoing clause; which we have looked upon indicates gazing intently for the purpose of investigation. That which . . . our hands have handled: the testimony of three senses—sight, hearing and touch—ordinarily considered quite sufficient to satisfy us as to the existence of any material object. John was not deceived; neither were the other evangelists. Their writings are the writings of men possessing at least the ordinary share of shrewdness and intelligence. This all critics admit.

John did not testify to the truth of a falsehood; neither did the other New Testament writers. All critics admit that their writings could be the work only of men habitually living in the highest ranks of morality. Then, why not accept their testimony? Why disbelieve the evidence of John when he affirms the divinity, the incarnation, and the resurrection of Christ, and accept the same John as a teacher of morality? Why regard Christ himself as the brightest example ever given to the world of all that is best and highest, and noblest, and most intelligent in humanity, and at the same time treat Him either as a deliberate liar or a mistaken fanatic when He asserts His divinity and His equality with the Father?

3. *The testimony of John—its purpose.*—John declares Christ as the life of believers in order that they may be encouraged to draw out of His fulness and live by union to Him

as the branches live by union to the vine; and in order that they might realize their privilege as Christ's brethren.

That ye may have fellowship with us: John and others who were equally advanced in the Christian life realized their fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ, and John wished all Christians to do so. All real believers have fellowship with Christ whether they know it or not—fellowship in humiliation and suffering, fellowship in work, and a prospective fellowship in exaltation; but John was anxious that believers should realize this fact, that it should be ever present to their minds, and that their joy might be full.

II. CHRIST OUR LIGHT.—VERS. 5-7. In ordinary books as well as in common conversation, light is often put for knowledge, and darkness for ignorance. In the Bible, light is very frequently, as is the case in this passage, put for spiritual knowledge or discernment, with its accompanying purity or holiness; and darkness is put for ignorance of God, of Christ and His salvation, with its accompanying impurity or sinfulness.

In John viii. 12; xii. 25, Christ calls Himself "the light" and His disciples "the children of the light."

In regeneration, the sinner is enlightened by the Holy Spirit, so as to perceive his own condition, the extremely dangerous position which he occupies, and the way of salvation through Christ. The believer is enlightened to perceive what is good and what is evil, to know the path of duty. The more light he has the holier he will be, and the holier he is the more light he will have. These are mutually helpful, and they are both conducive to happiness.

It is true that even "he that feareth the Lord" and "obeyeth the voice of His servant" sometimes "walketh in darkness and hath no light," but even in that condition he is directed to "trust in the name of the Lord, and stay himself upon his God;" and if he does so his darkness will soon pass away. If the Christian is in the darkness it is owing to some fault or infirmity in himself, and his only remedy is to be found in seeking nearer to God, for God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.

But the more the believer is enlightened and taught by the Holy Spirit, the more he perceives his own sinfulness. Before his conversion, while living in sin, he thought he was pretty good. He "was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came sin revived and he "died." Now, as the light from above streams into the recesses of his heart, it seems to him to be a very charnel house, in which he finds all sorts of abominations—the better he really is the worse he appears in his own eyes—and he is ready, with Paul, to cry out "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death" (Rom. vii. 24).

III. CHRIST OUR SAVIOUR.—VERS. 7-10.

When the Spirit of God throws light upon sin and reveals it, either in the case of the unconverted sinner or in that of the believer, it is not for the purpose of injuring or grieving them, but in order that the sin may be removed; and in either case the remedy is the same, the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.

In the act of justification the believer was cleansed from the guilt of sin by the "blood of Jesus Christ," Christ being regarded as the believer's substitute, and His sufferings and death accepted as the punishment of the believer's sins.

In the work of sanctification also "the blood of Jesus Christ" is the means used by the Holy Spirit. This is true not only because sanctification would be impossible without the removal of guilt, but because the Holy Spirit takes the fact or record of Christ's sufferings and death in the room of sinners, and presents that record to the mind of the believer in such a way as to exercise a most powerful influence in deterring him from sin and in urging him to a holy life. It is when the believer, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, apprehends and feels the full significance of the fact that when God's own Son stood before God's justice bearing the guilt of sin, He spared Him not—it is then that the believer begins to understand the terrible evil of sin; and he turns away, with his whole heart, from that which the God whom he worships regards with such an uncompromising hatred, and to atone for which the Saviour whom he loves endured such agony.

But though the love of sin is thus rooted out of the believer's heart; though he hates it and loathes it with an unutterable loathing; still it clings to him more or less in one form or another all the days of his life in this world.

"Sinless perfection" is not attainable in this life. To the truth of this doctrine we have in this passage the testimony of perhaps one of the most advanced Christians that ever left a written testimony, speaking for himself and for all other Christians, and moreover, inspired by the Spirit of God to set down the truth for our instruction: If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

As long as sin dwelleth in us it is necessary to keep coming to God, acknowledging our sins and seeking forgiveness, and if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Not only the believer but the sinner in search of salvation may close with this offer; and he has two of the strongest possible guarantees that his pardon will be granted—these are God's faithfulness and His justice. Is the sinner afraid that God will not pardon his sins? God has promised to pardon the sins of all who come to Him through Christ; and will He be unfaithful to His promise? Will He break His word? Such an idea is most dishonouring to God.

Ah, but it is God's justice that the sinner is afraid of; he has found out that God is just—inflexibly just—and he thinks there must be some mistake about the promise or that it does

not apply to such as he, for he is a sinner, and a just God must punish sin.

But, says John to the sinner, if you come to God through Christ, pleading His sufferings and death as your only plea, then the very justice of God is enlisted in your behalf, and He will pardon your sins, not in despite of His justice, but because He is just; for the Saviour having already stood in your stead and suffered the punishment of your sins, justice demands that you go free; if it would be unjust to let sin go unpunished, it would be equally unjust to punish the same sins twice.

From the context it is evident that the confession of sin spoken of here is confession to God and to Him alone. It is only to God and to the person whom we have injured that we are directed in the Bible to confess, and that is to be done directly, and not through a priest or any other mere human medium.

CONSUMPTION CURED.

An old physician, retired from practice, having had placed in his hands by an East India missionary the formula of a simple vegetable remedy for the speedy and permanent cure for Consumption, Bronchitis, Catarrh, Asthma, and all Throat and Lung Affections, also a positive and radical cure for Nervous Debility and all Nervous Complaints, after having tested its wonderful curative powers in thousands of cases, has felt it his duty to make it known to his suffering fellows. Actuated by this motive and a desire to relieve human suffering, I will send free of charge to all who desire it, this recipe, in German, French, or English, with full directions for preparing and using. Sent by mail by addressing with stamp, naming this paper, W. W. SHERAR, 149 Powers' Block, Rochester, N. Y.

Around the Table.

SCRIPTURE BIOGRAPHY.

A MAN of God. He was of the inhabitants of Gilead. He dwelt by Cherith. He was there fed by ravens. He left Cherith, and went to Zarephath. A widow woman sustained him. He raised the widow's son to life. He repaired the altar of the Lord, that was broken down. He consecrated the altar to the Lord. He slew the prophets of Baal. He sat under a Juniper tree. The hand of the Lord was upon him. He went forty days without food. He prophesied before Ahab, king of Israel. He dwelt in a cave. He stood upon a mount before the Lord. He divided the waters of the Jordan. He wrapped his face in his mantle. The Lord sent him to Bethel. Who was he?

HOW BEARS HELP EACH OTHER.

I WILL tell you how they entrap bears in Russia. A pit is dug several feet deep. This is covered over with turf and leaves, and some food is placed on top. The bear, if tempted by the bait, easily falls into the snare. But if four or five fall in together, they all get out again.

"How do they do that?" you will ask. I will tell you. They form a sort of ladder by stepping on one another's shoulders, and thus make their escape.

"But how does the bottom bear get out?" Ah! these bears do not leave the bottom bear to perish. Scampering off, they bring the branch of a tree, which they let down to their poor brother. He soon climbs up and is free along with the rest.

Bears, you see, behave better than some selfish boys we hear about, who receive help and then forget the helper.

PRAYER will make us leave off sinning, or sinning will make us leave off praying.