

FATHERS IN CHRIST NO. 1751

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 18, 1883,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“I write unto you, fathers, because you have known Him that is from the beginning.” . . . “I have written unto you, fathers, because you have known Him that is from the beginning.”
1 John 2:13, 14.

OBSERVE the difference in the two verses, John first says, “I write,” and then, “I have written.” When in two former discourses I preached upon the beloved apostle’s address to the young men and the children [Sermon #1711—*A Sermon to the Lord’s Little Children* and Sermon #1715—*A Description of Young Men in Christ*], I gave you as full an interpretation of this difference as I could command, and I need not now repeat it. Certain additional thoughts occur to me, which I will give you, that the matter may be still clearer. The apostle John says, “I write,” and by and by, “I have written,” this shows, I think, *the importance of his subject*. If he has already written upon it, he must think it to be a very necessary and valuable truth if he writes upon it yet again. A man does not discourse repeatedly upon the same subject if he is a man full of matter, as this inspired writer was, unless he feels that it is necessary that he return again and again to his subject until he has impressed it upon the minds of his audience. Hence the apostle is not ashamed to say in effect—“I write this, though you need not remind me that I have written it before, for I feel it to be wise so long as I am in this tabernacle to put you in remembrance of what I have said unto you.” Nails which are important to a structure must be driven in with diligence. Foundation stones should be laid with scrupulous care, and truth, which is fundamental, should be repeated by the teacher till the disciple has learned it beyond all fear of ever forgetting it.

This form of speech also reveals *the unchanging conviction of the writer*, who, having written once is glad to write the same things again. This shows a mind made up and decided, from which proceeds consistent testimony. In these fickle times certain of our public teachers must feel unable to say of any one subject, “I write,” and “I have written,” for before the ink is dry they have need to blot out what they have put on paper, and to write an amended version of their religious ideas. Scarcely for a month at a stretch do these loose thinkers abide in one place; they, are such wandering stars that no chart could ever mark their position for three weeks together. They might say, “I write, but bless you, dear people, I do not know what I wrote six months ago. Very probably my former opinion is not now true, for all things are flowing on, and my head is swimming with the rest. I am a man of progress, forever learning, and never coming to the knowledge of the truth. Blot out what I wrote a year ago, and read with care what I write today.” To which we reply—“Dear sir, we cannot take much notice of what you write now, because in all probability in another week or two you will retract it all, or improve it from off the face of the earth. Neither shall we pay much attention to you then, for you will probably be on the move as soon as ever you have said your say. We decline to learn what we shall have to unlearn. We will wait in our present knowledge until you have reached something certain for yourself. Perhaps in 20 years’ time, when you have pitched your gypsy tent, it may be worth our while to hear where it is, but we do not commit ourselves even to that promise, for as the progress you are now making is into deeper darkness, you will probably end in sevenfold night.”

I rejoice, dear friends, in the solidness of the Christian’s faith. I know nothing of improvements and growths in the gospel of the Lord Jesus, which are summed up in these words, “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever.” I believe that God the Holy Spirit has given us in the Scriptures a perfect and entire revelation which is to be received by all Christians without addition or diminution. I do not believe that apostles, martyrs, confessors, and teachers have been living for these 1,900 years upon lies. I prefer the faith of saints in glory to the daydreams of those whippersnappers who nowadays

claim to lead us by their “thought.” Our mind is that of David when he said, “I hate vain thoughts.” Well says the Scripture, “The Lord knows the thoughts of man that they are vanity.” If it is a question of thinking we can think as well as they can, and our thoughts about the modern theology are full of sorrowful contempt. Perhaps the doctrine is new, though even this we doubt. But if it is new it is not true, for the truth must necessarily be as old as the everlasting hills. We observe that the word “meditation” is now seldom used, and “thought” is the modern idol. Just so, we meditate on revealed truth, but this notion of *thought* sets aside truth, and sets up mere fancy. We refuse to be of this vagrant party of thinkers. We are of the settled race of believers. We can say—what we have written, we still write, what we have preached, we still preach, for inasmuch as we have preached that which is revealed in Holy Scripture, to that truth we stand and shall stand, God helping us. If we live a thousand years, at the close of life we shall have nothing more, nor less to say than the fixed, immutable, eternal truth of God. We hope to understand the truth better, but we shall never discover better truth.

“I write,” and “I have written,” also indicate *the abiding need of men*. They require the same teaching from time to time. I suppose that John alludes to his gospel when he says, “I have written,” and now, a little later, he writes his Epistle and says, “I write”—giving in each case the same teaching. Men’s natures are still the same, men’s spiritual conflicts and dangers are still the same, and therefore the same truth is suitable, not only from day to day, but from century to century. There is but one food for soul hunger, and but one help in spiritual danger. The true teacher always comes to men with the same truth, because men continue to have the same dangers, necessities, sorrows, and hopes. The fathers who needed that John should previously write to them, still needed that he should write to them the selfsame thing. Though they may have grown more fatherly, they have not outgrown apostolic teaching. The former truth is good for our latter days. Many years ago, when some of us were mere boys, we listened to the gospel of Jesus, and our heart leaped as we embraced it. It was the life and joy of our spirit, and now today, after having advanced far in the divine life, if we hear one of those simple sermons that first brought us to Christ, concerning the precious blood of Jesus and child-like faith in Him, it suits us quite as well as in those early days. I have noticed with regard to well-grown Christian people, that when I have given a purely evangelical discourse, meant only for sinners, and not at all designed for the edifying and comforting of full-aged saints, they have sucked it in with as much delight as if they were themselves newly converted. After all, though you and I are not now fed upon milk, yet a drink of milk is still most refreshing. Though we can now digest the solid meat of the kingdom, yet the children’s bread has lost none of its relish in our esteem. The elementary truths are still sweet to our hearts, yes, sweeter than they ever were. Though we have advanced to the higher courses of the edifice of holy knowledge, yet we never cease to look with intense delight upon those foundation truths which concern our Lord Jesus. We cleave with full purpose of heart to Him of whom the Lord God has said, “Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation.” Jesus remains to us “elect, precious,” and we know it will be so with us till life’s last hour.

From this text I am to preach principally to the fathers, but as the church has not many fathers, I may be supposed to have a slender audience, but yet this is hardly so, since I hope and trust that the area of the sermon’s influence will include young men, for you, my brethren, aspire to reach the front rank, and to be numbered among the fathers. Even to you who are little children, the text has its word of instruction, for you will be glad to hear what the fathers know, since you hope before long to know the same. The life of God is so much the same in all stages that the word which is profitable to fathers has a use for babies, and that which is spoken to little children has a voice in it for young men. May God the Holy Spirit bless this word to the hearts of all His people!

Concerning the fathers, I am going to inquire three things this morning. First, *who are they?*—“You fathers.” Secondly, *what is their peculiar characteristic?*—“You have known Him that is from the beginning.” And thirdly, *what is the message to them?*—“I have written unto you, fathers.” What is it that John has written to fathers in the church of God?

I. First, WHO ARE THE FATHERS?

We usually associate that idea somewhat with age, but we must take care that we do not make a mistake here, because age in grace, albeit that it may run parallel with age in nature in many cases, does not always do so. In the church of God there are children who are seventy years old. Yes, little children dis-

playing all the infirmities of declining years. It is not a pleasant sight to see grey-headed babies, yet I must confess I have seen such, and I have even been glad that I could dare to go the length of hoping that they were babies in Christ. One would not like to say of a man of eighty that he had scarcely cut his wisdom teeth, and yet there are such, scarcely out of the nurse's arms at sixty years of age, needing just as much care and comfort as sucklings at the breast. On the other hand, there are fathers in the church of God, wise, stable, instructed, who, are comparatively young men. The Lord can cause His people to grow rapidly, and far outstrip their years. David as a lad was more of a father in God than Eli in his old age. Growth in grace is not a time growth. In eternal matters, years count for little. The Lord gives subtlety to the simple, and to the young men knowledge and discretion. Solomon was wise while yet young, in some respects wiser than when he was old. Some youths have been like Joseph, men with God before they were men among men. Joseph, we are told in our translation, was more loved by Jacob than any of his brethren, "because he was the son of his old age." This can hardly be a correct rendering, for Benjamin, who was born 16 years later, was far more entitled to be called so. Another interpretation, which seems to me more correct, signifies that he was *a son of the elders*, and implies that while he was a child he was an associate of elderly persons, and was himself as thoughtful, serious, and well-instructed as to be an elderly child, a child-man, full of unusual wisdom and prudence. Josephs are still sent into the church now and then, and the Lord greatly blesses His people by their means. Oh, for more of them! From their early youth they have a discernment of God's Word, and a quickness of apprehension wonderful to notice. More than that, I have even observed a depth of experience within a very short time granted to certain young believers, so that though they were but youths in age they were fathers in piety. Nevertheless, as a usual thing, it is to be expected that advancement in grace should be accompanied with advancement in years. And it is so often so that we are known to call those who are fit to look after the souls of others "the elders of the church," not necessarily because they are old men, but because they are instructed in the things of God. These are the fathers, then, men who have aged in grace, have come to the full development of their spiritual manhood, and have been confirmed in that development by the test of time and trials. Believers when they have in the course of years shown themselves able both to labor and to suffer are fitly ranked among fathers. Why do we call the early writers the fathers of the church? Not, I think, because we owe more to their teaching than to those of a later period, but because they were the first men, the pioneers, the vanguard, and so the fathers of the church. The first and earliest members of a church will become fathers in due time if they continue in the faith, grounded and settled. Their years of persevering holiness entitle them to respect. Paul mentions with honor certain persons, saying, "Who also were in Christ before me." There is an honor in having been a soldier of Christ for a long time. It was no small praise of His disciples when Jesus said of them, "You have been with Me from the beginning." With the idea of fathers we so far associate that of age that we hope and expect that believers who have been in Christ long have well learned their lesson, and have come to a fullness of growth in the things of God. Judge, Christian brethren, whether you can rank yourselves among the fathers, and if you are not able to do so, yet press onward towards it. I boldly say that in this church there is a larger proportion of this class of Christians than I have ever seen elsewhere, and for this I thank God with all my heart, for they are of the utmost service to our host.

"Fathers," again, are *persons of maturity*, men who are not raw and green, not fresh recruits, unaccustomed to march or fight, but old legionaries who have used their swords on others, and are themselves scarred with wounds received in conflict. These men know what they know, for they have thought over the gospel, studied it, considered it, and having so considered it have embraced it with full intensity of conviction. Usually we mean by "fathers" men who have become developed in grace, mature in character, decided in conviction, clear in statement, and accurate in judgment. These can discern between things that differ, and are not deceived by the philosophies which allure the ignorant. They know the voice of the Shepherd, and a stranger they will not follow. The younger folk may be bewitched so that they do not obey the truth, but these are not fascinated by error. New converts in their difficulties resort to these fathers, for doubts which bewilder the beginner are simplicity itself to those who are taught of the Lord. These are the watchmen on the walls who detect where insidious doubt is creeping in, where deadly error under the guise of the truth is slyly undermining the faith of the church. To that end the Lord has instructed them and given them to have their senses exercised to discern between good and

evil. Among them are men who have understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do. If you are such fathers, dear brethren, I rejoice in you. If you are not such as yet, aspire to this eminence, and pray the Lord that you may not be long before you arrive at the ripeness and sweetness which belong to mellow Christians who are prepared for the great ingathering.

“Fathers,” again, are *men of stability and strength*. If burglars are planning to attack a house they care little about the children, and make small account of the boys. But if fatherly men are about, the thieves are not eager for an encounter. Even thus the arch-deceiver has hope of injuring the church by deceiving the little children and the young men, but the stalwart men of God, who walk in the midst of the household, looked up to by everybody, are not so readily blown to and fro. As the Spartans pointed to their citizens as the real walls of Sparta, so do we point to these substantial men, as under God the bronze walls and bulwarks of the church. Men, who are well taught, confirmed, experienced, and trained by the Spirit of God are pillars in the house of our God. It may be said of each of them, “He keeps himself so that the evil one touches him not.” These are men at arms, who know how to wear the armor which God has provided, and to use the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. These are men of strong faith and firm convictions, men of decision and courage, men of prudent action, in no hurry through fear, and under no excitement through false hope. These are not men that retract, or shuffle, or evade, but witnesses who are faithful and true, imparting confidence to the feebler sort by their calm defiance of the foe. Oh, that all Christians would grow into such solid saints. Many light, frothy, chaffy minds come into the church, and give us untold trouble to keep them right, and infinitely more trouble because they will not be kept right. Oh, for more men of such a sort that if the whole world went wrong they would still abide by the right. Men, who cannot be carried away by superstition, let it adorn itself with all the beauties of art. Men, who cannot be borne down by skepticism either, let it flaunt all the pomp of its pretended culture and wisdom. These fathers know and are sure, and have learned to be on their own accounts determined and unyielding, for they will not stir beyond “It is written,” nor tempt eternal ruin by building upon the shifting quicksand of the hour. At this moment there is large need for an army of invincibles. Be you steadfast, unmovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord.

But there is something more than this in Christian fatherhood. The fathers of the church are men of heart who *naturally care for the souls of others*. It is upon the father that the weight of the household falls, he goes forth in the morning to his daily labor, and he returns at night with the fruit of his toil for the support of the household. It is not for himself that he lives, but for that dear family which is gathered about him. He is not wholly comprised within his own personal self, for he lives in the entire house; he lives especially in his children. Their suffering or their need would be his suffering and his need. His heart has grown larger than when he was a child or a young man, for now his heart beats in that entire household, of which he is the life. It is a grand thing when Christian men and Christian women come to this, that they are not perpetually thinking of their own salvation, and of their own souls being fed under the ministry, but they care most of all for those who are weak and feeble in the church. During a service their thoughts go out for those assembled. They are anxious as to how that stranger may be impressed by the sermon, how yonder anxious spirit may be comforted, how a backsliding brother may be restored, how one who is growing somewhat cold may be revived. This paternal care betokens a true father in the church. May the Lord multiply among us those who feel it to be their lifework to feed the flock of Christ.

Having this care upon him the father *comes to be tender*. He partakes somewhat of the tenderness of a mother, and thus is called a nursing father. A true father, such as fathers should be, has a tender love for all the little ones. He would not hurt them. Nothing would be more painful to him than to grieve them; on the contrary, he studies to give them pleasure, and lays himself out for their good. It is a great blessing to the church when the leading spirits are loving, not rough and uncouth, domineering or hectoring, but gentle and Christ-like. Oh, my brothers, who take the lead, let us bear and forbear, and put up with a thousand trying things from our Master’s children whom He has committed to our care. Let us make ourselves the servants of all. Is not the father the laborer for the children? Does he not lay up for them? Is not his superiority best seen by his doing more for the family than anybody else? This is how Christians grow great, by making themselves greatly useful to others. If you are the slave of all, willing to do anything so that you can but help them, and make them happy and holy, this is to be a father in the

church of God. Sympathetic care and hearty tenderness are gifts of the Holy Spirit, and will bring you a happiness which will richly compensate you for your pains.

Not yet have I quite reached the full meaning of a father, for the father is *the author, under God, of the being of his children*, and happy is a church that has many in it who are spiritual parents in Zion, through having brought sinners to Christ. Happy are the men by whose words, and acts, and spirit, and prayers, and tears, men have been begotten unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. What an honor it is to be such a father! Some of us have been filled with this joy till it has well-nigh broken our hearts even to think of it, for the Lord has fulfilled to us the promise which He made to Abraham when He bade him lift up his eyes to the stars and said, "So shall your seed be." This cannot fall to the lot of all, but in the church of God every man should pray that he may not be barren or unfruitful. May we all be soul-winners, not the minister alone, not the Sunday school teachers alone, but each one without exception! Why should not each saint bring someone to the Lord Jesus? At least, by our united prayers and godly living, by our united testimony and fidelity, let us labor for the increase of Messiah's kingdom. I hardly think we can put anyone among the fathers until he has won some heart for Jesus.

Thus I have described the fathers. They are never very numerous—they are never as numerous as they ought to be. Paul says, "Yet have you not many fathers." But wherever they are, they are the strength of the church. I have seen in the army a number of veterans marching in front, an ornament and an honor to the whole company. Your short-service men come and go, but these tried men stick to the colors, and are the backbone of the regiment. If a tough bit of fighting has to be done, you must rely upon such as these. Like Napoleon's Old Guard, they cannot be shaken or driven back; the smell of gunpowder does not alarm them, or the whistling of the shot, nor the roar of the artillery, they have seen such things before. They can also bide their time and wait, which is a great thing in a soldier. And when at last they are bidden to charge, they leap like lions on their prey, and the enemy is driven before them. Such men we have in the church of God, and such we need, men that are not flattered by opposition, nor made to lose their heads by excitement. They believe in God, and if others doubt, they are not infected by their folly. They know; they are certain; they have put their feet down, and will not move from their persuasion. When the time comes for action, they are ready for it, and throw their whole weight so heartily into the war that every charge advances. God send us more regiments of these in this evil day and preserve to us such as we have!

II. Secondly. WHAT IS THE PROMINENT CHARACTERISTIC OF A FATHER IN CHRIST? Read the text. "I write unto you, fathers, because *you have known Him that is from the beginning.*" He repeats the expression without alteration.

Observe, here, *the concentration of their knowledge.* Twice he says "You have known Him that is from the beginning." Now, a babe in grace knows twenty things, a young man in Christ knows 10 things, but a father in Christ knows one thing, and that one thing he knows thoroughly. It is very natural for us at first to divide our little stream into many rivulets, but as we grow grey in grace, we pour it all into one channel, and then it runs with a force efficient for our lifework. I trust I know many doctrines, many precepts and many teachings, but more and more my knowledge gathers about my Lord, even as the bees swarm around their queen. May it come to this with us all—"I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." May all our knowledge be focused as with a burning glass upon this one point. May the adorable person of Him, which was from the beginning, fill the entire horizon of our thought. Oh, to have one heart, one eye, for our one Lord and for Him alone.

Note, next, *the peculiarity of their knowledge as to its objective*, they know "Him that was from the beginning." Do not the babes in Christ know the Lord Jesus? Yes, they do, but they do not know Him in His full character. They know Him as having forgiven their sins and that is much, but it is not all. Yonder is the blessed Christ, and I, a poor sinner, look to Him just as He comes to me, and I am lightened, and become one of His little children. Yes, and as I grow and become a young man, I approach nearer to Jesus, and get another view of Him, for I overcome the Wicked One even as He did. And thus I stand side by side with Him in the conflict. But if I come to be a father, I enter into fellowship with the great Father Himself, for it is union with God the Father that makes a man a father in God. Then we do, as it were, not only look toward Jesus as coming to save, but we look on Christ from the Father's point of view. The sinner sees Jesus coming to him, but the Father sees Jesus as sent from Him. When we grow

in grace we, in our measure, see Jesus from God's point of view, that is to say, we see Him as "Him that was from the beginning," and in due time was manifested to take away sin. "These are ancient things," says one. Just so, but fathers are also, ancient men and the deep things of God are suitable to them. Believers see Christ in a fashion similar to their own. I scarcely need allude to that which I have often mentioned to you, that every man in the Old Testament who saw the Lord saw Him in a character like his own. Abraham, the pilgrim, saw Christ as a pilgrim. Jacob, the struggler, saw the covenant angel wrestling with him through the night. Moses, the representative of a people tried as by fire and yet continuing, saw the Lord as a burning bush. Joshua, the valiant warrior, saw the captain of the Lord's host as a man with a sword drawn in His hand. The three holy children saw the Son of God in the burning, fiery, furnace, even as they were themselves. When you become a father in Christ, you see Christ from the Father's point of view, not as newly come to save, but as "from the beginning" the Savior of men.

The father in grace rejoices to behold the Lord Jesus as God. He beholds the glory of His adorable person as forever with the Father before the earth was. He knows that without Him was not anything made that was made, and therefore beholds Him as fashioning everything upon the anvil of His power. He knows that "His goings forth was of old, from everlasting," and he delights to see Him planning the salvation of His chosen in the beginning. A glorious sight it is. The grown believer meditates upon the covenant—the settlements of grace in the old eternity. Poor babes in Christ are frequently stumbled by the mysterious truths of God—high doctrine they call it. But when a man grows to be a father, he loves covenant truth, and feeds on it. It is one mark of advanced grace that the sublime truths which concern eternity are increasingly valued. In gracious maturity the Christian sees the blessed persons of the Divine Trinity entering into a compact for the salvation of men. And he sees the Son of God Himself from the beginning acting as the representative of His elect, and taking upon Himself to answer on their behalf to the Father. He sees the Eternal Son then and there becoming the sponsor and the surety for His chosen, engaging to pay their debt and make recompense to the injured justice of God on account of their sins. He sees that covenant even from of old ordered in all things and sure in the hands of Him that was from the beginning.

There is one point that the father in Christ delights to think upon, namely, that the coming of Christ into the world was not an expedient adopted after an unavoidable and unforeseen disaster in order to retrieve the honor of God. But he understands that the whole scheme of events was planned in the purpose of divine wisdom for the glorifying of Christ, so that from the beginning it was part of Jehovah's plan that Jesus should take upon Himself human nature, and should manifest in that nature all the attributes of the Father. It was the original plan that the incarnate God should reveal infinite grace and boundless love by laying down His life for sinners, "the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." The Only-begotten Son is not introduced into the divine economy as an afterthought, but the whole arrangement is shaped with an eye to Him who was before all things, and for whom all things were created. It pleased the Father that He should lift up creation by uniting the creature and the Creator in one person, and that He should ennoble our nature, which is a combination of the spiritual and the material, by assuming a body, and bearing that body to the throne of God. O matchless plan, by which the redeemed are ennobled and God Himself is glorified! Oh, fathers, if you have ever seen this, I know that you will say, "The preacher does not describe the half of it." No, he does not, he wishes that he could, but neither time nor ability is present with him. Still, I delight in the everlasting glories of the Lord Jesus, who was from the beginning. Greatly dear to my own heart are the "chief things of the ancient mountains, and for the precious things of the lasting hills." I believe in my Lord Jesus Christ as second to none, but as the King and Lord from the beginning, who, though He was despised and rejected of men, yet still is God over all blessed forever, and will be so forever and ever. Though "the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing," Jehovah has set His Son as King upon His holy hill of Zion, and God's decree shall stand. He that is Alpha shall be Omega; He that is from the beginning shall be to the end King of kings and Lord of lords. My heart cries, "Hallelujah." Oh, you fathers, cry "Hallelujah" with me!

Yes, but I want to notice again, that *this knowledge is in itself special*. The knowledge itself is remarkable as well as the object of the knowledge. "You have *known* Him." A dear servant of Christ on this platform the other evening sat beside me. He belonged to quite another part of the church of Christ, but he said to me of such-and-such a person, "You know, dear brother, he is one that knows the Lord.

He is not merely a Christian, but he knows our Lord. You and I know what that means; do we not?" I could only look at him with a deep look of loving appreciation. Yes, we do know the Lord as a living, bright reality, a daily friend, counselor and companion. True fathers in grace meditate upon Christ. They feed upon Scripture, press the juice of it, and inwardly enjoy the flavor of it. People say they have a sweet tooth. It is a good thing to have a sweet tooth for the Lord Jesus Christ. They not only know the Lord by much meditation upon Him, but they know Him by actual communion, they walk with Him, they talk with Him. Such saints are more with Christ than with anyone else, to no one do they tell so much as they have told Him, and no one has ever told them as much as Jesus tells them, for "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; and He will show them His covenant." Ask them, "Who is your nearest friend?" and they will reply, "The Well-beloved is my next of kin, my dearest companion." They know the Lord by communion, and they have come to know Him now by having an intense sympathy with Him. They feel as Jesus does about matters, and so they know Him. His tender pity for sinners stirs their hearts, not in the same degree, but yet in like manner according to their measure. They often feel as if they could die for sinners. One of these fathers said, "I could wish myself accursed from Christ, for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." They look upon matters not from man's standpoint, but from Christ's point of view, and therefore they understand much of the Lord's ways which before were dark to them. He who very deeply sympathizes with a man knows him well. Learning by faith to sit still and believingly wait on the event, these fathers calmly expect that all things will work together for good to them, and therefore they understand the unbroken serenity of the heart of Jesus, and know Him in His joys as well as in His sorrows. Such saints know what it is to weep over the city with Jesus, and to rejoice over returning sinners with the good Shepherd. Yes, they know what it is to sit down with Him on His throne, waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. They are calm with Jesus, for they have drunk in the meaning of the text, "He must reign." Yes, He must reign. He must reign till all His enemies shall be under His feet. This knowing Him that is from the beginning is the chief characteristic of the father in Christ.

III. Thirdly, dear friends, WHAT IS THE MESSAGE TO THE FATHERS? I would indicate that message very briefly, by referring you to the context. John has been saying to you, dear fathers, and indeed to all of us who are in Christ, that we should *love one another*. If you are truly fathers you cannot help loving all the family. The fatherly instinct is love, and fathers in Christ should be full to the brim with it. Little ones should be induced by our loving spirit to come around us, feeling that if nobody else loves them we do, if nobody else cares for them, we do. I have known a father in Christ to whom a convert would speak much more readily than he would to his own earthly father or mother. I suppose they see an invitation in the faces of these fathers. I do not quite know how they discover it, but somehow converts feel that such a one is a man whom they could address, or a woman whom they could talk with. These fathers and mothers in Israel are full of love, and their speech betrays the fact. I know some men who are like great harbors for ships, a soul tossed with tempest makes for them as for a harbor. Breaking hearts say, "Oh, that I could tell him my trouble, and get his prayers." May you and I be just such persons, and may the Holy Spirit use us for the good of our fellows.

The next message immediately succeeds the text, "*Love not the world*, neither the things that are in the world." Oh, dear fathers, you must not love the world, for it passes away, and this is especially true of you. If any Christian man might love the world, and I hope none will do so, certainly the fathers may not. You know so much of Christ that you may well despise the world, and you are so soon going home that you ought to set little store by these fleeting things. You have all the marks of what they call declining years—I call them ascending years. You will soon be gone from the world and its changing vanities, therefore do not set your love on earthly treasures. Hold wealth with a loose hand. Be ready to depart, for depart you soon will. Before the morning watch you may be gone to your Father's house on high. "Love not the world."

Another duty of fathers is also mentioned here. While they are not to love the world, they must take care that they *do not fall victims to any of the lusts of this present evil world*, such as the lust of the flesh. Can fathers ever fall that way? Ah me, we have to speak very solemnly and admit that the most advanced saint still needs to be warned against the lust of the flesh, the indulgence of appetites which so readily lead men to sin. Then there is the lust of the eye. David fell into that when he repined because of

the prosperity of the wicked, and was obliged to confess, “So foolish was I, and ignorant.” He looked at the prosperous wicked till he began to fret about them. That lust of the eyes, in desiring more for yourself and envying those that have more—never let it happen to a father. And the pride of life—that thirsting to be thought respectable, that emulation of others, that struggling after honor and such like—this must not be in a father. You are men, and must put away childish things. My dear and honored brethren, fall not prey to vanities, these toys are for the children of the world, not for you who are so near to the glory of the Lord. You are grown ripe in grace, and will soon enter heaven, live accordingly. Let all earthly things lay like babies’ baubles beneath your feet, while you rise to the manhood of your soul.

The next exhortation to the fathers is that they should *watch*, for, says the apostle, “You have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists.” Oh, valiant fathers, keep watch and ward. I marvel much that members of churches agree to the choice of ministers who are not sound in the faith, no, who do not seem to have any faith at all. How does this come about? We used to have in our Baptist churches substantial men who would as soon have stood against Satan at their own table as an unsound preacher in the pulpit. There used to be a company in the north of Scotland called “The Men.” Why, if heresy had been preached before them, they would have been as provoked as Jenny Geddes when she threw her folding stool at the head of the preacher. They would not have endured these modern heresies as the present effeminate generation is enduring them. Let the new theologians have liberty to preach what they like on their own ground, but not in our pulpits. Alas! The leading members in many churches are Christians without backbones; soft, spongy, snails I would call them, only they have not the consistency of a snail’s shell. They are ready to swallow any mortal thing if the preacher seems clever and eloquent. Cleverness and eloquence—away with them forever! If it is not the truth of God, the more cleverly and eloquently it is preached the more damnable it is. We must have the truth and nothing but the truth, and I charge the fathers in Christ all over England and America to see to this. Get to your watchtower and guard the flock, lest the sheep be destroyed while they are asleep.

Lastly, it is the duty of the fathers to *prepare for the coming of the Lord*. How beautifully it is put in the 28th verse, “Abide in Him; that when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.” It is addressed to you all, for you are all little children, but it is especially incumbent upon those of you who are fathers. Awaken all your faculties! Watch for the coming of the Lord, and keep your loins well girded. Jesus may come today; this Sabbath may be the last Sabbath of this dispensation. Yet He may not come for 10,000 years for anything I know. Therefore weary not if you wait through a long night. Say not that He delays His coming, for He will return at the day appointed. Only let us hold fast that which we have received, and stand waiting for the midnight cry. He will come, He will not tarry, therefore go forth to meet Him—

*“Hold the fort, for I am coming,
Jesus signals still!
Wave the answer back to heaven,
By Your grace we will.”*

Amen.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 JOHN 2.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—249, 217, 412.**

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