Œcumenius, “in the fact of our loving  
not with word, but in deed and in truth:  
because he who one thing and does  
another, not in his deed being consonant  
to his profession, is a liar and not true.”  
But, true as this is, and self-evident, it  
does not reach the depth of the meaning  
of, have our source from. To be in **the  
truth**, is a different matter from to be  
truthful or true men, Estius *approaches*  
the meaning, understanding **the truth** to  
be the truth of God in His promises, and  
so are **of the truth** to mean “are of the  
number of the elect.” Bede’s interpretation,   
“**of the truth**, which is **God**,” in  
which Calvin and others agree, is nearer  
still: but had the Apostle intended this,  
he surely would have written *“of God.”*  
The Lutheran commentators have come  
nearer still, making **the truth** to be *the  
word of truth* by which we are begotten  
anew unto God. But why stop at that  
which after all is *itself of* the truth? why  
not mount up to the Truth itself, that  
pure and objective Truth which is the  
common substratum and essential quality  
of the Spirit Himself, of the Word, of  
those who are born of the Word by the  
Spirit ?), **and shall persuade our hearts  
before him** (i.e. and in and by this same  
sign, shall still the questionings of our  
hearts before God, by the assurance that  
we are His true children. St. John uses  
**the heart** for the innermost seat of our  
feelings and passions: of alarm [John xiv.  
1, 27], of mourning [xvi. 6], of joy [xvi.  
22]. It was into the *heart* of Judas that  
the devil put the intent of betraying the  
Lord [xiii. 2]: and the *heart* here is the  
inward judge of the man,—whose office is,  
so to say, promoted by the conscience,  
accusing or else excusing [Rom. ii, 15].  
Then, as to **shall persuade**, there is no  
need to give to the verb any unusual  
meaning. It does not mean “quiet” or  
“assure,” except in so far as its ordinary  
import, “persuade,” takes this tinge from  
the context.

It must be plain from what has been  
said, that the future, **shall persuade**, is  
not, on account of the words “**before**  
**Him,**” to be taken as referring to the  
future day of judgment, as some have  
done. In ch. iv, 17, which is in some  
respects parallel with this, that day is  
expressly named: whereas in our passage,  
an equally clear indication is given, by the  
parallelism of the two future verbs, *“shall  
know”* and *“shall persuade,”* that no  
such reference is intended. **before Him**  
is not, at His appearing, but, *in His  
sight*, as placed before His all-seeing eye.

**20.**] *takes up this matter of the persuading   
our hearts before God,* and *shews  
its true importance* and rationale. This is  
carried on in the following verses, but is  
here and in ver, 21 placed as its ground.  
If our heart, *before Him,* judges us unfavourably—we   
favourably still: if our  
heart condemn us not, again *before Him*,  
judging and seeing in the light of His  
countenance, then we know that we are  
at one with Him, and those consequences  
follow, which are set forth in ver. 22.  
The many difficulties which occur in  
*rendering* this verse cannot be presented  
to the mere English reader. They will be  
found discussed in my Greek Test. The  
context appears to stand thus. The Apostle  
in ver. 19 has said that by the presence of  
genuine love we shall know that we are of  
the truth, and shall persuade our hearts in  
God’s presence. He then proceeds to enlarge   
on this *persuading* our hearts *in  
general*. If our heart condemn us, what  
does it import? If our heart acquit us,  
what? The *condemnation*, and *acquittal*,  
are plainly and necessarily *opposed*, both  
in hypothesis and in result. If the consolatory   
view of ver. 20 is taken,—as  
softening our self-condemnation by the  
comforting thought of God’s greatness and  
infinite mercy,—then the general result of  
vv. 20, 21 will be, whether our heart condemn   
us or not, we have comfort and assurance:   
and then what would be the  
import of our *persuading* our hearts at  
all? But on the other interpretation, the  
condemnatory sense of ver. 20—as intensifying   
our self-condemnation by the thought  
that the cause of it is God, knowing more  
of our sin than we do—then, taken with  
some modifications, all will be clear, I say,  
taken with some modifications : because the  
sense has been much obscured by the mistake   
of introducing the particular case  
treated in ver. 18 into the general statements   
of vv. 20, 21. It is not, If our  
heart condemn us *for want of brotherly  
love:* but this test is dropped, and the