

THE FELLOWSHIP

An Exposition of First John

by Guy H. King

Copyright @ 1954

CHRISTIAN LITERATURE CRUSADE Fort Washington, Pennsylvania

CHAPTER THREE -

THE PASSION OF THE FELLOWSHIP

I John 2:3-11

3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

6 He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

7 Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning.

8 Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him, and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.

9 He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.

10 He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.

11 But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.

THAT passion can be put into one word: Loyalty. Our very membership commits us to certain loyalties. When you come to think about it, belonging to any organisation involves standing by its regulations and constitution; and that is no less the case when we come to belong to the Christian fellowship. And when anyone is a really keen member, his loyalties begin to be something of a passion with him.

We had better note, in starting, that phrase, "**He that saith**", which comes three times over in this section - verses 4, 6, and 9; for it is around that phrase that the loyalties are discussed. It is our duty to say; but it is not enough to say.

Well now, let us consider, first, our pre-eminent obligation

LOYALTY TO THE HEAD OF THE FELLOWSHIP

What is it that is here said? - "**I know Him**" (4).

It is the fact that in our relationship with Him, as that between ourselves and others, there are degrees of acquaintance.

(a) Introduction - when we are first brought into touch with Him, as our Saviour and LORD: as was Peter when Andrew introduced them, John 1:42. Do you, my reader, know Him thus far? No question in life, on earth, could be of greater moment for an unconverted sinner. What, then, say you?

(b) Increase - when, day by day, we are brought into closer touch with Him, as our Master and Teacher: as was Peter when, as one of the Twelve, JESUS "**ordained twelve, that they should be with Him, and that He might send them forth. . .**" (Mark 3:14). For us, that growing acquaintance is acquired by the daily listening to His voice in His Word, by the habitual speaking to Him in prayer at His footstool, by the regular frequenting with Him at His table, by the consistent walking with Him in a life of plain, simple obedience.

(c) Intimacy - we are immensely privileged to live in closest fellowship with Him, as our greatest Friend: as was Peter, when, with other two, he was graciously allowed to accompany his LORD to the heights of revelation, in the Transfiguration, (Mark 9:2), to the heights of wonder, in the raising to New Life, (Mark 5:37), to the heights of privilege, in the Garden, (Mark 14:33). Let it be said that JESUS has no favourites, but He has intimates - and you, or I, can be one of them, if we are willing to pay the cost, the full implications of John 15:14's "**whatsoever**".

Well then, do you say, "**I know Him**"; and to what degree do you know Him?

Wherein, further, shall be found the token of your true loyalty to Him?

Obedience is the Test - "**He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him**" (4).

How scathing John can be - this apostle of love! Just like his Master - Whose gentle lips gave forth those scarifying utterances of Matthew 23, the Wrath of the Lamb; yet Who closed that terrible chapter with the poignantly pathetic words of the verse 37, "**O Jerusalem, Jerusalem... how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not.**" Conversely, as another indication of the two aspects of the Master's nature, you have the strange contrast, "**Behold, the Lion. . . and I beheld, and lo . . . a Lamb**", (Revelation 5:5-6).

John, too, could show that sterner side, when "**the truth**" required it. Indeed, it was that harder side that had previously predominated, as you can see by the nickname that our LORD gave him and his brother James, "**Boanerges... The sons of thunder**", (Mark 3:17).

But long since all that has changed, the HOLY SPIRIT, of Whom He spoke so much in chapters 14 and 16 of his Gospel, had done the transforming work in his own heart. He who once proposed to call down fire from heaven, Luke 9:54, was now concerned for the fire of the HOLY GHOST - to burn out the dross of sin, and to burn in the pattern of love. It is not for nothing that

Isaiah 4:4 describes Him as "**the Spirit of burning**". Day by Day obedience, then, is the Test of our real, sincere knowledge of Him.

Obedience is a Measure - "**whoso keepeth His word, in him verily is the love of GOD perfected**" (5).

If doing what He says is a test of whether we truly know Him, the same token is also a measure of how much we love Him. It is no use a little child saying that she loves mother very much if she doesn't do what mother tells her. A like attitude shall determine what degree of love we really have for our Heavenly FATHER - whether merely incipient; or whether expanding; or whether full-grown, or "perfect", as it is called here.

Fine-grade obedience, full-grown love: the two go together, hand and glove. We sometimes think of our LORD's words in John 14:15, "**If ye love me, keep my commandments**", as a command, - "If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments."

Of course you will! In the passage that we are studying, the word "**keepeth**" is a present tense, whose implication is, not just a single, big act of obedience, but a continuous activity of plain every-day obedience -

- in little things as well as in big things;
- in material things as well as in spiritual things;
- in secret things, as in open things.

"**Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it**", (John 2:5) - even though it be such a little insignificant thing as filling a jar with water - and His blessing shall be upon the obedience.

We Evangelicals have placed such emphasis upon the duty and efficacy of Trust - and we cannot stress this too much - that we have sometimes appeared to underline too little the paramount importance of Obedience. Yet, James, and Paul, and John, and even the MASTER Himself, all, in various ways, combine to teach us that the two go together

- the two legs on which we progress heavenwards,
- the two hands in which we receive Divine blessing,
- the two knees on which we practice effectual prayer,
- the two eyes with which we discern the unclouded vision of spiritual truth,
- the two ears which enable us clearly to hear the voice of GOD in His word,
- the two lips with which we may the more effectively declare the gospel of His grace.

Think those similes out, and see how truly they do indicate the dual office performed for us by Trust and Obedience in all spiritual experience and advance.

The old chorus was exactly right which said,

"Trust and obey,
for there's no other way,
To be happy in JESUS (to be anything in JESUS),

but to trust and obey".

All which we have appended to our consideration of the portion of Scripture now in our minds in order to sharpen in our spiritual perspective - the essential quality of Obedience - the Test of our Knowledge, the measure of our Love, the token of our Loyalty to the Divine Head of our Fellowship.

Next comes

LOYALTY TO THE RULE OF THE FELLOWSHIP

What is it that is here said? - "**He abideth in Him**" (6). As John records in chapter 15 of his Gospel, our LORD chose a very familiar process of nature in order to press home the fundamental necessity for a believer to "**abide**" in Him. So close is the relationship that He likens Himself to the Vine, and us to the Branches. Our sharing of the Sap of the HOLY SPIRIT, and our consequent bearing of the Fruit of the SPIRIT, Galatians 5:22-23, depend upon our abiding in the Vine - as He explained in verse 5, "**without me** [that is, apart from Me] **ye can do nothing**": nothing in the way of fruit, nor in the way of any Christian excellence.

As the token of our first loyalty was the law of obedience, so the mark here is the law of imitation - "**He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked**".

That is the rule, almost the slogan, of the Fellowship - "**walk, even as he walked**." That is the outward sign that we are abiding in CHRIST.

The Imitation must be kept in the right Order. It is quite useless to tell anyone who is not a Christian to imitate CHRIST. Even if he could, it would not make him a Christian, any more than an ape aping a man, however cleverly, makes the monkey a man. But, in any case, the non-Christian cannot imitate Him. He must take Him first as his Saviour before he can make Him his Exemplar - otherwise you might as well tell a chair to "walk", as tell a man still "**dead in trespasses and sins**", (Ephesians 2:1), "**to walk, even as He walked**". True, I Peter 2:21 tells us of the MASTER leaving us an example, "**that ye should follow His steps**", but we recall that Peter's Epistles, like all the New Testament Letters, were addressed to Christians - first Christian, then Christ-like: that is the right order.

The Imitation must be regulated in the right Manner. Says old Martin Luther, "It is not CHRIST walking on the sea, but His ordinary walk, that we are called on here to imitate" - yes, in the common ways of life.

- The little steps of Childhood as He went holding His Mother's hand;
- The bigger steps of Boyhood, as "**He went down with them... to Nazareth, and was subject unto them**", (Luke 2:51);
- The longer strides of Manhood, as He "**went about doing good**", (Acts 10:38);
- The purposeful tread of Saviourhood, as He "**steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem**", (Luke 9:51).

As we go through the sacred story, we find His example set before us on every page, in every age, at every stage.

And the rule is - as He, so we! It is the safe rule in life - not to follow other people's example: they may, though inadvertently, let you down, and lead you astray. It is like regulating your watch by another man's, when all the while his may be fast or slow. Better is it to go by Greenwich Mean Time. So, not what would others think, say, do; but what would JESUS do?

There are, of course, circumstances of our modern life that did not fall within His human experience; but, even so, the way He acted then, the spirit He shewed, will pretty well indicate how He would be likely to meet the conditions of our day.

We may very happily finish this paragraph with the twofold prayer of a very practical poet of long ago, "**Teach me... the way . . . make me to go**", Psalm 119:33, 35), which will lead us straight into our next thought: How are we to go His way, to do His will?

The Imitation can be achieved in the right Strength. That word "**ought**" is often a great comfort to men because "o-u-g-h-t" spells "Can"!

My scriptural warrant for that is in Exodus 18:23, "**If . . . God command thee so . . . thou shalt be able to**". No one will deny that we ought to do His will: in that case, let no one doubt that we can. And now He says to us through Paul, "**Be ye therefore followers [imitators] of God as dear children**", (Ephesians 5:1). The Greek word for "followers", "imitators", is that from which our English word "mimics" is derived - what mimics the "**dear children**" are!

As children, then, of the Heavenly FATHER, let this loyalty to the Rule of our Fellowship, to be increasingly like Him, be an integral part of the Passion of our lives.

And now, a third area of the passion must occupy our serious attention

LOYALTY TO THE MEMBERS OF THE FELLOWSHIP

What is it that is here said? - "**He is in the light**" (9).

Well, we shall not just take his word for it; we shall soon find out if it is really true. The law of love will test the matter. The apostle maintains this figure of light and darkness as representing love and hate.

Hatred is of the very kingdom of Darkness. What a terrible picture is given us of the man who hates another.

(a) *He lives in the dark* - "**is in darkness even until now**" (9). You know what would happen to a flower if it were kept in the dark. Oh yes, it would grow; but it would lose all its beautiful colour, and would come forth a dull, drab thing. Few things make a soul so ugly as a spirit of hatred, an unforgiving, unloving attitude towards another. Dark: what a place to live in!

(b) *He walks in the dark* - "**walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth**" (11).

That is, doesn't know where it will lead him - his vicious thoughts may lead to violent deeds. John will say presently, 3:15, "**whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer**". You never can tell. These vengeful feelings lay seeds that may grow to odious fruitage.

(c) *He gropes in the dark* - "**darkness hath blinded his eyes**" (11). Such is the inevitable result of perpetually living and walking in the dark - as may be seen in the case of the poor little pit ponies that were used (now largely displaced by machinery) in the coal-mines; there are blind fish swimming about in the darkness of certain subterranean waters. So is this deluded man blind - he can't see reason; he can't recognize truth; he can't find any safety: except in the sincere utterance of a prayer that was blessedly honoured long, long ago, "**Lord, that I may receive my sight**", (Luke 18:41).

Love is of the very Kingdom of Light. How gladsome to turn from the dreariness of the preceding paragraph. All now is completely different. "**The true light now shineth**" (8) - because you let into your heart and life Him Who said, "**I am the Light of the world**", (John 8:12); and now, reflecting Him to others, you have been fulfilling His purpose for your life, "**Ye are the light of the world**", (Matthew 5:14).

If that is really so, there is one thing, anyhow, that I know about you - you live in a spirit of love and loyalty to all the members of the Fellowship.

This law of love is "**an old commandment**" (7), not simply new - it was inculcated "**from the beginning**", that is, of the Gospel. It was an elementary, primary Lesson in the School of CHRIST. It was so obviously and regularly practiced that, as we quoted earlier, even the surrounding pagans had to say, "See how these Christians love one another."

But this law is also "**a new commandment**" (8), not only old - since it is freshly enunciated, from age to age, and even from day to day: the light of each new morning brings happy reminder of the love that is to characterize the succeeding hours.

So the passage. has much to tell us about this joyous man.

(a) *He lives in the light* - "**abideth in the light**" (10). Just as he who dwells in sunny climes, or even spends a summer fortnight by the shining sea, bears the imprint of his dwelling upon his very countenance, so he who abides in Eternal Light cannot but wear the impress upon his whole behaviour and demeanour. Do you know Psalm 34:5, "**They looked unto Him, and were lightened**"? That's it: the radiance of love.

(b) *He walks in the light* - "**there is none occasion of stumbling in him**" (10). This man, unlike his unfortunate counterpart, is able to see the pitfalls in his path, and may thus, if he so wills, avoid them. Moreover, he is in a position to refrain from leaving stumbling-blocks for others.

I remember the late beloved Bishop Taylor Smith telling us of an occasion when he was walking up and down a railway station platform, waiting for a train. Thinking of some matter, he carelessly trod on a piece of orange peel, and almost fell: not looking, not, as it were, walking in the light, he met with an occasion of stumbling. Walking on, the Bishop had a sudden, happy inspiration: he went back, and kicked the peel off on to the track, thus ensuring that he should

not leave behind him a stumbling-block for others!"

"**Which thing**" - this law of love - "**is true in Him, and in you**" (8). *In Him* - how gloriously conspicuous it was, as He trod the ways of men, and still is, as He intercedes for us above.

Do you know that vivid poem of Charles Wesley's, on "*Wrestling Jacob*", with its concluding stanzas

"Contented now upon my thigh
I halt, till life's short journey end;
All helplessness, all weakness!
On Thee alone for strength depend.
Nor have I power, from Thee, to move,
Thy nature, and Thy name is Love.

"Lame as I am, I take the prey.
Hell, earth, and sin with ease o'ercome;
I leap for joy, pursue my way,
And as a bounding hart fly home.
Thro' all eternity to prove
Thy nature, and Thy name is Love."

In you - how daily evident it should also be because He "**hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light**", (I Peter 2:9).

Here, then. we close this Meditation on the believers' threefold passion:

Loyalty to the Head - in the law of Obedience;
Loyalty to the Rule - in the law of Imitation;
Loyalty to the Members - in the law of Love.

May we all be thus utterly loyal members of this Divine Fellowship.

~ end of chapter 3 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
