

THE FELLOWSHIP

An Exposition of First John

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CHAPTER TWELVE -

THE POSSESSION OF THE FELLOWSHIP

I John 5:6-13

6 This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.

7 For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.

8 And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

9 If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son.

10 He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.

11 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

12 He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

REMEMBER that rich young ruler, who, though ardently desiring to possess himself of "**eternal life**", yet, because he could not face the condition imposed, forfeited his chance of the gift, and "**went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions**", Matthew 19:22. His earthly possessions, with all their present comfort and prestige, kept him from the eternal possession, which outlives all others, and which outshines them, even here and now. Let it be noted that members of the Fellowship have "**great possessions**", of a spiritual sort; but the first, and last, of them is this greatest of them "**eternal life**", which is the gift that this passage deals with. Which would you rather be, physically - a person with great possessions but no life; or one with, perhaps, no possessions but life? Spiritually - we have the greatest of all possessions, which is life itself. You will see that our verses discuss the subject from the point of view, not just of the Gift, but the Giver.

THE WITNESS TO THE REALITY OF THE LIFE-GIVER

John had been one of that devoted company that believed on the Son of GOD. He had gathered with the others for the Master's farewell meeting on Olivet's Mount. He had heard his once

crucified, but now living, LORD say, ere the final good-bye - "**Ye shall be witnesses unto Me**", (Acts 1:8). All his subsequent life he had striven to carry out the Saviour's wish and command. To that end, he had yielded his personality to the HOLY SPIRIT'S inspiration for the writing of a Gospel, and a Revelation, and an Epistle. The witness had cost him much, for he had been deported to the rigours of Patmos for the faith, and, if tradition be true, was martyred at the end - thus, like his brother James, years before him, he did "**drink indeed of My cup**", (Matthew 20:23), as the MASTER foretold.

At the opening of this Letter he says, concerning the Word of Life, the LORD JESUS, John 1:1, that "**the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life**" (1:2). That has been the main burden of the whole Epistle - which is why the late Mr. George Goodman called his brief study of it *The Epistle of Eternal Life*. And now, as it draws towards its close, the apostle is back again at the theme of the witness.

The Historical Witness - "**the witness of men**" (9), to JESUS CHRIST. "**This is He that came by water and Blood**" (6). Says Dr. Vincent, "these words are evidently chosen to describe something characteristic of CHRIST'S Messianic office." Various interpretations of the phrase have been suggested; but we cannot, for ourselves, avoid coming back to the view that "**water and blood**" must point to some purely historical facts in the life of our LORD on earth. We recall, then, those three years of His Messianic ministry - at its opening, the Baptism ("**by water**"); at its close, the Crucifixion ("**by Blood**").

"**Not by water only, but by water and Blood.**" Not by water only, as if you could dispense with the Blood of His Cross. There are some who preach "a bloodless Gospel." That omission was the reason why Cain's offering was not acceptable to GOD - there was no blood in it: all which was a figure of things that were to come. Like Cain, some of the extreme modernists imagine that they know better than GOD, and think that salvation can be obtained without the atoning sacrifice. They forget, if they do not despise, the Divine declaration that "**without shedding of blood is no remission**", (Hebrews 9:22) - either symbolically, as under the Old Dispensation, or actually, as unfolded in the New. How interesting it is that at the completion of the Messianic ministry we are, in symbol, reminded of its opening and finish - "**one of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and forthwith came there out blood and water**", (John 19:34).

"**Water**" - the sign of the attestation of the well-pleasing Son, Matthew 3:17, commissioned for His task. "**Blood**" - the sign of the "**finished**" accomplishment of the crucified Saviour, John 19:30, afterwards to be sealed in His resurrection. By the way, have you noticed that in His risen body there is no blood - "**a spirit hath not flesh and bones** [the usual phrase would be "flesh and blood"], **as ye see Me have**", Luke 24:39. His precious Blood had been fully shed for us. There, then, is the historical witness.

The Spiritual Witness - "**the witness of God is greater**" (9). I think it is true to say that the HOLY SPIRIT has a great passion, which is implied in those words about Him of the LORD JESUS, in John 16:14, "**He shall glorify Me**". He has done that:

- (a) By writing a Book about Him;
- (b) By getting a soul to trust in Him;
- (c) By making a Christian to become like to Him; and adding to this extensive ministry;

(d) By exercising His testimony concerning Him, deigning to confirm "**the witness of men**" - and whatever may be said of the human frailty of man, this at least will be admitted on all hands that, anyhow, "**the Spirit is truth**" (6).

It is the fact, isn't it, that the believer's assurance of salvation is based upon three things:

- The Work of CHRIST;
- The Word of GOD;
- The Witness of the SPIRIT.

When anyone rests upon that finished Work, and believes what GOD says about it, then the HOLY SPIRIT brings a conviction to the heart; so that "**he that believeth on the Son of God** - and the record that GOD gave of His Son - **hath the witness in himself**" (10). Or, as Paul is led to put it, "**The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God**", (Romans 8:16).

In passing, don't be confused by that use of the word "Itself" in our Bible into imagining that it lends any support to the idea that the SPIRIT is not a personality. It is only that the grammatical accuracy of the Greek calls for it - the word for "Himself" would, of course, be masculine; but the word for "**Spirit**" is neuter, therefore strictly "**Itself**".

There is, however, on the spiritual accuracy of "Himself", an abundance of occasions on which that personal pronoun is used: for instance, no less than seven times by our LORD in one verse, John 16:13.

So, when we bear witness to our Saviour, either in preaching, or in personal testimony, it is so encouraging to realize that we are doing a work that is of particular interest to the HOLY SPIRIT, and a work to which - either in this case, or in that - He will add His own convincing witness.

This is the beginning of, the explanation of, every conversion, or regeneration. The initiative is always with Him.

And now mark

THE WORD ABOUT THE RECEPTION OF THE LIFE-GIVER

Here is a Divine Gift - "**God hath given**" (11). Therefore it will have about it all the perfections and excellencies that are associated with the Divine offers to men. And to think that, such is the perversity of the human mind and will, that men and women can be found to refuse the gift. Like the man with the muck-rake, in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, who was so completely concerned with his humble occupation that he had no eyes for the golden crown poised over his head for the taking - that's it with some people, pre-occupation with other, and lesser, things. There are some who fear that to accept the gift would involve them in responsibilities that they cannot face - what others will think, or will say, or will do.

Two soldiers - one trying to win his comrade to CHRIST were talking, when a Christian officer

happened to pass, and overheard the unbeliever say, "Well, I just can't face the cost of becoming a Christian." That fear prevents many from accepting the gift. The officer's retort was noteworthy, "Have you ever faced the cost of not becoming a Christian?" Ah yes, there are many causes (I nearly wrote, reasons!), many excuses, for the strange neglect of GOD's gift.

Here is a Lasting Gift - "eternal life" (11). So many of our gifts to one another so quickly wear out, or become out-of-fashion; but here is one that suffers no disability. "**For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should . . . have everlasting life**", (John 3:16): the gift of His life never wears out and is never out-of-fashion. It stands up to all the chances and changes of this mortal realm and is discovered to be all the fashion in the realm above. What a pity - indeed, what a tragedy - that, for the sake of the flimsy and fleeting things of this world, men and women lose this magnificent chance.

Says the wise Paul, "**We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal**", II Corinthians 4:18.

Here is a Personal Gift -

(a) "**to us**"(11). Not just to the mass and multitude of men, but to me personally, and to you: to all of us, but to each of us. Listen to Paul again, who, as we should expect, so often corroborates the teaching of the beloved John, for it is the same SPIRIT Who inspires them both - "**the life which I now live... I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself for me**", (Galatians 2:20). There is not a soul, not even the worst and wickedest, that He doesn't love, and that cannot have the gift, on the twin conditions of repentance and faith - so personal is the gift. But it is that also in another sense.

(b) "**This life is in His Son**" (11). It is not so much it, as He. How often have we blessed GOD that the MASTER is what He gives.

- "**I am the Door**" - not merely opens it, but is it. The Entrance "in" to salvation, and "out" for service, (John 10:9).

- "**I am the Way**" - not just shows it, but is it. The true and the living Way, John 14:6.

- "**I am that Bread**" - not simply gives it, but is it. The sustaining, satisfying Bread that is ever new, John 6:48.

- "**I am the Resurrection and the Life**" - not only has it, but is it. The life that is life indeed, John 11:25.

Thus our passage presses home to our hearts the vital truth, "**He that hath the Son hath [the] life**" (12) - not just life in the ordinary, physical sense, but "**the life**", and the definite article is in the Greek, the life that he has all along been talking about, the life that is of that eternally enduring quality, that life which becomes ours as soon as He becomes ours - gift to a person, of a Person, by a Person.

Here is a Certain Gift - "**ye may know that ye have**" (13). That, says this author, is the reason why he has written as he has - in order that the believers he writes to may be quite sure that they have this priceless possession of eternal life, because they have the Life-giver.

- There are those who say that you can't know until you get there; but this Scripture says, "**ye may know**".

- There are others who say that it is presumption to talk like this; but our verse says, "**that ye have**".

We ask which is the more presumptuous - to believe GOD's word, or to doubt it?

John and Paul are full of sublime certitudes, because they base their certainty, not on their own merit, or power, but only on the wondrous mercy and grace of the Almighty GOD.

C. H. Spurgeon, when preaching on John 5:24, "**hath everlasting life**", exclaimed, shutting his fist up tight as he pronounced the word - "H-A-T-H spells GOT IT". Peculiar spelling, but glorious truth. Don't pass by the thought in our verse that the assurance is given to "**you that believe on the Name of the Son of GOD**" - the title is the pledge of the confidence; the Name is the surety for our sureness.

Do you notice the strange repetition of words in that 13th verse - "**These things have I written unto you that believe on the Name of the Son of God . . . that ye may believe on the Name of the Son of God**". Do they not lend support to the thesis that we propounded in our last study, that faith is the principle of the Christian life - not only in its beginning, but in its continuing all through. You do believe: very well, then you are to go on believing - and you have a sure foundation to begin with, that your receiving hand of faith has gotten the Gift.

Not that you think you have, nor hope you have, nor feel you have, but that you know you have. GOD says it, and I believe it.

Here is an Omnibus Gift - I am reminded that, at one Christmas, I was given a present of a compactum. It was a delightful box, well made, and nice to look at. Yes; but inside were many little compartments, stocked with all sorts of useful things- pins, paper-fasteners, india-rubber, luggage labels, sticking-paper, and so on.

Well now, in GOD's preeminent gift of Eternal Life, there are contained so many blessings, for the meeting of so many needs - they are all there "**in Christ**", Who is Himself the Life. Our grateful thoughts go back to the wondrous words of Romans 8:32, "**He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?**"

All the gifts are in the Gift of the Life-giver.

THE WARNING CONCERNING THE REJECTION OF THE LIFE GIVER

"**He that hath not the Son of GOD hath not life**" (12). That solemn statement embraces two consequential issues - a positive and a negative, each of which is charged, for this unbeliever,

with enormous significance. And we recall that to neglect is the equivalent of to reject - "**How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?**", (Hebrews 2:3).

In this eternally decisive matter, to say nothing is to say "No".

The Positive Consequence - of such an attitude is the dread sentence of the "**second death**", Revelation 20:14. We shall say nothing here in explanation of it. Far better to leave the matter to the actual words of Holy Scripture. Whatever our opinion may be, there it is: the alternative to such a Life is such a Death. Let us stay only to remark that we may rest assured that no one will suffer that penalty without every chance to "**escape**" - for GOD, in His love and mercy, has made "**a way to escape**", I Corinthians 10:13, by the way of the Cross. We may be sure, further, that nothing in this will impugn, or controvert, GOD's impeccable justice.

The Negative Consequence - of this negative response is the loss of all the delights, the blessings, the powers, the service, wrapped up in this omnibus gift.

- Pardon of sins,
- peace of mind,
- prosperity of spirit,
- pleasure of heart,
- power for service,
- prayer for others,
- possibility of His likeness,
- prospect of glory

"**In Christ**", all are ours; apart from Him, nothing is ours.

What a possession, then, is this Life in the Life-giver - a life that Grows, II Peter 3:18; that Knows, I John 2:20; that Shows, Luke 8:39; that Flows, John 7:38; that Glows, Psalm 34:5, "radiant."

May all Fellowship members "**possess their possessions**", Obadiah 17.

~ end of chapter 12 ~

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