

## THE FELLOWSHIP

An Exposition of First John

by Guy H. King

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### CHAPTER FOURTEEN - THE PERSUASIONS OF THE FELLOWSHIP

I John 5:18-21

18 **We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.**

19 **And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.**

20 **And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.**

21 **Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.**

"**WE know . . .**" (18); "**And we know . . .**" (19); "**And we know . . .**" (20). This is a characteristic word of the apostle's - seven times over - it comes within the brief space of verses 13-20 of this chapter. Indeed, he states that, as we have already remarked, while he wrote the Gospel that "**ye might have life**", John 20:31, he penned the Epistle "**that ye may know that ye have eternal life**", I John 5:13.

You see, there are certain fundamental things about which, like Paul, we may say, "**I am persuaded . . .**", Romans 8:38. We need not be afraid, nor ashamed, of such blessed dogmatism, when it is based, not on our opinion, but on the specific Word of GOD.

Let the believer, then, test his case, take his stand, upon such rock-like foundations, amid all the winds that blow, and the waves that threaten. In the world in which he is situated, he will experience much opposition, and many perplexities; theories and problems will engage his attention, and sometimes even question his Christian belief. There is a fundamental principle which should always keep him steady: Don't let what you know be upset by what you don't know. Resting upon "**Thus saith the Lord**", he need not quail before what saith the world.

Take as example the testimony of an erstwhile blind man, in answer to the quibbling assertions of unbelievers - "**Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see**", (John 9:25).

Come with me, then, as we close our meditations on this wonderful Epistle, and let us study together these three great certitudes, with which our inspired author concludes - three that he is led to select here out of many; three that should make for the establishment in faith and life of

every true member of the Fellowship.

## CONCERNING CHRISTIAN PURITY

"**We know . . .**" (18). How careful the Epistle has been all through to insist that the Christian life is a holy life, thus marking out the teaching of Christianity as something wholly different from that of other religions. In the eyes of the New Testament, an unholy Christian is an anomaly, a contradiction in terms - an unsaintly saint: no, no! Yet, alas, such a monstrosity is not uncommon. Had we better look into our own hearts, do you think?

*The Fact Stated.*

(a) "**Whosoever is born of God**", not the well-meaning, not the hard-tryer, not the new-leafer, but the really regenerate, the new "**I**" of Galatians 2:20. Of such an one, here is a remarkable statement.

(b) "**Sinneth not**" - a present tense, denoting not an isolated, or occasional wrongdoing, but a continual course of sin. Alas, we Christians do sometimes fall, though we need not; but this is a very different thing. In the old days, he travelled through life "**according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience**" (Ephesians 2:2). But, by the grace of GOD, and by the new birth of the SPIRIT, the believer has now changed his course. He may sometimes go wrong; but he won't go on in it.

*The Fact Emphasized* - "**that wicked one toucheth him not**". The word is very strong - suggesting the idea of, "lays no hold on him". You have the same word in the LORD's "**Touch Me not**", in John 20:17, where it is again the laying hold that He forbids, as if Mary, in symbol, would seek to detain Him here, and deter His departure back to Heaven. When He has "**ascended**", she may lay hold of Him in spirit; but meanwhile she must not clasp Him in body - the old physical relationship no longer obtains. So, then, let the believer rejoice that, though the wicked one may lay a hand on him, to try to turn him aside, yet he can never lay hold on him, to compel him thither. Let it not be forgotten that the devil cannot make us sin.

*The Fact Explained* - "**he that is begotten of God keepeth himself**". When we were considering the phrase "**him... that is begotten of Him**" we saw that the whole context indicated that the begotten one was the believer, the son of GOD - "the child who draws from Him the abiding principle of his life". Now, in our present verse, we have the great weight holding that the context in this case demands that "**He that is begotten of God**" refers, not to the son of GOD, but to the Son of GOD. There follows from that a great change in the verse.

He does not depend on his own strength or vigilance. He has an active Enemy, but he has also a watchful Guardian. The glorious certainty of the Christian's daily victory and purity rests on the sublime fact that the "**only begotten Son**", Whom GOD "**gave**", John 3:16, and "**sent**", I John 4:10, keeps him safe. The One Who is "**able... to save to the uttermost**", Hebrews 7:25, is also "**able to keep you from falling**", Jude 24.

When the little child takes hold of the policeman's hand, he takes hold of hers; and her safety in

crossing that busy street lies, not in her hold, though that had to be there, but in his. Thus it is that the Psalmist is able confidently to say, "**Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe**", Psalm 119:117. And that is why it is no presumption to say about the glorious possibility of purity, "**We know . . .**"

## CONCERNING CHRISTIAN POSITION

"**We know . . .**" (19). We have, under the guidance of our writer, devoted a whole study to the consideration of this theme, and now, because of its importance for all Christian health and happiness, the apostle calls us back again to it, that we may be perfectly sure where we live - the soul's house into which we enter, for all that salvation stands for; from which we emerge, for all the service that salvation leads to. John underlines then

*The Certainty of the Believer's Situation.* We are "**of God**". We are in the Family, in the Fellowship with all that that means, as revealed in the Epistle - with a Forgiven Past, and a Fearless Present, and a Fine Prospect. We "**know**" this: whatever other people may say, whatever we may sometimes feel, whatever opposition we may encounter.

Again we say that it is no presumption to avow this in such certain tones, for it is founded, not on our being better than others, but on our believing GOD - the "better" should come afterwards. I say "should", because, alas, it does not always do so. It is the sad fact that, in not a few instances, men and women of the world often put us Christians to shame, in the uprightness of their character, in the kindness of their disposition, and in the helpfulness of their behaviour - not always, by any means, but sometimes. The Christian should always be a better man than the worldling; but, better or not, he is different. His situation is different, as John here sums it up, in recalling the phrase, "**we are in Him**" (20) - oh, blessed privilege, protection, potentiality, purpose, and provision.

"**In Him**"! Look at the situation as it is typified in the experience of Moses, "**Behold, there is a place by Me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock, and... I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with My hand**", (Exodus 33:21-22). On the rock, in the rock - even the Rock of Ages cleft for me! All that, and much more that only glory will reveal, because of our situation, "**of God**." We know that!

*The Contrast of the Unbeliever's Situation.* "**The whole world lieth in wickedness**". Or, rather, in the Wicked One. In 2:20, we have a comparable phrase, "**the Holy One**"; and it would appear that, as in physical geography, so in the geography of the spirit, there are two hemispheres - and, according to his relationship to CHRIST, every person has his situation clearly defined: he dwells either in the Holy One, or in the Wicked One. All the worldlings are positioned in the latter.

The devil, says our LORD, is "**the prince of this world**", who has usurped the Saviour's lawful throne, who is already "**judged**", John 16:11, who shall be "**cast out**", John 12:31, and who hath "**nothing in Me**", John 14:30. He is, says Paul, "**the god of this world**", II Corinthians 4:4, who has blinded the eyes of the unbeliever - so that, on the one hand, he cannot see the beauties and glories of CHRIST, and, on the other hand, cannot see the losses and perils of his situation.

Thank GOD, it is possible to emigrate from this barren hemisphere of darkness to the joyous region of light. He, Whom this very writer has recorded as saying "**I am the Way**", John 14:6, invites us to put our hand of faith in His, and He will tightly grasp, and firmly hold, and safely land us in the glad hemisphere, where reign eternal life, and light, and love. Members of the Fellowship "**know**" that, by the grace and mercy of GOD, they dwell there; and if their membership is the virile reality that it is expected to be, they will be eager to stretch out the hands of their loving service, to fetch others in.

"O strengthen me, that while I stand  
Firm on the rock, and strong in Thee,  
I may stretch out a loving hand  
To wrestlers in life's troubled sea."

### CONCERNING CHRISTIAN PERCEPTION

"**We know . . .**" (20). Members of the Fellowship, by reason of their new birth, have come to a new understanding of things. Take the story of Naaman's cleansing a-typical of our cleansing from the leprosy of sin, and mark how the miracle of mercy brings him into a different view of things. "**Behold, I thought...**", (II Kings 5:11).

- Wrong plan - as if his cleansing (or ours) could be bought.
- Wrong person - as if the king (or, with us, anyone but JESUS) could do it.
- Wrong place - as if other rivers than Jordan (picture, for us, of the stream that flows from Calvary's mountain) could effect it.
- Wrong power - as if some energy of the flesh (instead of, in our case, trust in the Divine energy) were required.

He was all wrong, as so many unregenerate people are. "**Behold, now I know...**" (II Kings 5:15) - that there is but one GOD Who can cleanse and save. After his new birth, if you like - for "**his flesh came again, like unto the flesh of a little child**" (14) he knew so differently.

It is a vivid picture of the new understanding that comes to the one who has become a member of the Family, the Fellowship. "**The natural man**", the unregenerate man, just can't see, and will not accept it, I Corinthians 2:14. But thank GOD for "**the eyes of your understanding being enlightened**", Ephesians 1:18.

*The Source of it* - (a) "**the Son of God is come**" - not only into the world, but into our hearts. If He had not, we had nothing. (b) "**and hath given us an understanding**" - a grasp of holy things that will never accrue to us by any human reasoning. But "**God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit**", I Corinthians 2:10. As we saw in 1 John 2:20, "**ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things**" - that is, are in a position to get to know all things that are needful for your spiritual growth and well-being.

*The Object of it* - "**that we may know Him that is true.**" As we come to know more and more of His ways among men, and of His will for men, so we shall see more and more of His Divine nature, and so we shall come to love Him more and more deeply, as the days go by. There is an ever deepening knowledge of Him, that every earnest member of the Fellowship will assuredly covet. Paul came first to know Him on the Damascus road, when, in response to his mystified

"**Who art Thou...?**", came the revelation that He was the Living LORD JESUS. From that moment of destiny he knew Him; but listen to him, as he writes years afterwards, "**That I may know Him**", Philippians 3:10.

*The Secret of it* - "**we are in Him that is true.**" As we said earlier, you never really know a person until you live with him. And here it is again, that because we are "**in Him**", we can increasingly know Him and understand His mind and will. By the way, you will have observed how often in our study I have repeated myself - that is only because the Epistle itself does the same. John desires, by this method of the true teacher, to instruct by repetition - to say it again, to stress the importance of the matter, and to impress the mind and memory of his readers with the truth concerned. So he has laid lasting emphasis upon the full Deity of JESUS CHRIST "**true God**"; and upon the all-embracing boon that He is to us - "**eternal life.**"

*The Responsibility of it* - "**little children, keep yourselves from idols**" (21). We have just learned that we cannot keep ourselves; but the word for "**keep**" here is a different one. In the present sense, we are enjoined to do it. An idol is, of course, anyone, or anything, that takes the place that GOD should have in our lives. Mr. R. M. L. Waugh, in his recently published book, *The Preacher and His Greek Testament*, reminds us that "We live in an age of god-makers. Narcissus, god of Self [fell in love with his own reflection in a pool]. Mars, god of War. Bacchus, god of Wine. Venus, goddess of Love, Apollo, god of physical Beauty. Minerva, goddess of Science. Fortuna, goddess of Luck. Golden Calf, god of Money." It is for us to keep any such unworthy displacement away.

Fellowship members have been given a perception, an understanding, that is denied to others. They surely should know the supreme worthiness of GOD, on the one hand, and the comparative worthlessness of idols, on the other hand, sufficiently to ensure that they "**keep [themselves] from idols.**" The word here translated "**keep**" is the same word for "guard."

So, we "**little children**" have learnt herein - what we ought to be, what we ought to do, what we ought to know, because we are members of the Fellowship.

The other day I came across these lines, wherein, as in soliloquy, Anna Barbauld speaks of her parting with life here and taking it up again hereafter:

"Life! we've been long together,  
Through pleasant and through cloudy weather;  
'Tis hard to part when friends are dear  
Perhaps 'twill cost a sigh, a tear;  
- Then steal away, give little warning,  
Choose thine own time;  
Say not Good night - but in some brighter clime  
Bid me Good morning."

Ay, all ye Fellowship Members, we'll meet in the Morning!

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