

THE FELLOWSHIP

An Exposition of First John

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CHAPTER TEN -

THE POSITION OF THE FELLOWSHIP

I John 4:7-21

7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

12 No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

15 Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

19 We love him, because he first loved us.

20 If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

21 And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

WHAT a very great influence, both in the formation of our character, and in the experience of life, our dwelling-place has upon us - our neighbourhood, and our own home. There has often been good argument as to which is the stronger - heredity, or environment. I fancy that,

nowadays, the pundits are inclined to give it to the latter, so tremendous is the pull and power of the conditions of our habitation. The same rule holds in the spiritual sphere; and this passage deals with the Christian's position here below. We seek a city yonder (see Hebrews 13:14); but the Epistle is concerned with the earthly dwelling of the soul.

Our portion speaks of the member of the Fellowship having three places that he lives "in". One is reminded of the spacious days when the well-to-do had several houses for their enjoyment. In his delightful and revealing essays on "*Great Contemporaries*", Sir Winston Churchill has a study of the late Earl of Rosebery, in the course of which he says, "I was often his guest in all his houses, at Mentmore, in Berkeley Square, at the Durdans hard by Epsom Downs, on the Firth of Forth at Dalmeny, at his shooting-lodge, Rosebery" - well, well! Still, with all these, his life - if I may be pardoned an impertinent allusion to his family name - was along no Primrose path.

So we turn to our consideration of the three dwelling-places of the believers, and mark what are their consequent responsibilities, difficulties, and blessings in such a position as theirs.

THEIR SOCIAL POSITION

"**In this world**" (17). *The world is an alien country* - so that, in the LORD's Prayer, he says, "**They are not of the world**", (John 17:16). Yet He has said, "**I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil**". In moments of depression, we might wish that immediately upon our New Birth we were granted the administration of our Supernaturalisation Papers and were there and then transported to our now native country up yonder.

But what adventure for GOD we should then miss; what possible honours in the fight for Him we should fail to achieve! So we are left here, and may exercise in our residence so great an influence for good, and for GOD. One day, in an electric moment of time, all the believers will be taken out of the world - those who have died, and those who are alive at the moment, all suddenly transformed and transported, to "**ever be with the LORD**", I Thessalonians 4:16-17. A queer situation will then arise on the earth the moment after it has happened, that differentiating as between believers and unbelievers, living and working closely together, "**one shall be taken, and the other left**", Luke 17:34-36.

Meanwhile, it is to be remembered that *the world is a field of infection* - "**that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil**".

For our safeguard we must continually be on guard, for the virulent germs of evil thinking, evil speaking, and evil doing are for ever poisoning the spiritual atmosphere, and we shall succumb, unless we allow ourselves to be "kept" immune by the deodorizing effects of the HOLY SPIRIT, and by the disinfecting power of the Holy Scriptures.

We are told that the best defence is attack; and so it is made clear to us that we are to exercise a positive influence wherever we are - even as the Saviour taught, as we have said earlier, that we are to be as "**salt**" to prevent corruption, as "**light**" to bring cheer and guidance, and as a hill-top "**city**" to give clear testimony to Him. Here we are, then, living in this difficult environment - living to serve Him, and to help others.

There is still another New Testament figure of the Christian in an alien country which is, again, full of significance - "**we are ambassadors for CHRIST**", II Corinthians 5:20. Earthly monarchs have their ambassadors in other lands, to represent them at the foreign court - standing for the dignities and rights of their Sovereign, keeping their Government in touch with anything affecting the interests of their Country, speaking in the Name of their Ruler, and with all his Power behind them. All that lies within the ambassadorial figure that Paul here employs, to indicate still another aspect of our responsibility as representing our Sovereign LORD to those among whom we live "**in this world**".

That leads on to the further thought that *the world is a great audience* - before which we are engaged to enact a special performance. In I Corinthians 4:9 we read that "**we are made a spectacle unto the world**", where the original word for "spectacle" is the word from which our "theater" comes.

We are as a theater with the world looking on. Our representation of Him is a History, if it is a true likeness; a Comedy, if we burlesque the great part we are meant to play; a Tragedy, if we sadly misrepresent Him to the audience, Turn now to our passage and note its expression of this idea. We read that "**as He is, so are we in this world**" (17).

Not, you observe, as He was, but is even now in His Divine omnipresence, though to the world-audience unseen - the role is, that they shall see JESUS in us. How searching are the simple words of the chorus, "Can others see JESUS in me?" Well can they? Are we, by His grace, acting the part well. I believe that actors on the ordinary stage are successful in so far as they faithfully study their part. All right then - "**consider Him**", Hebrews 12:3, and act accordingly.

There is another verse in our passage, along the same lines - "**No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us . . .**" (12). The first sentence seems to hang in mid-air, having no connection with what comes before, or after. But upon reflection it seems to me that the argument is after the same pattern as in verse 17 - GOD is not seen in Himself; but, if we display the spirit of love, people can see Him in us. Does not this thought place upon us a tremendous responsibility to see that, as we considered in our sixth study, the portrait is clearly recognized, and, as here, that the performance is true to life.

Here, then, we learn something of the calls and claims resting upon the members of the Fellowship, on account of their social position, as residing "**in this world.**" Let us go on to look at their second dwelling - so utterly and beautifully contrasted as it is.

THEIR SPIRITUAL POSITION

"**In love**" (16). The whole passage is full of references to, descriptions of, and blessings in, the Love House - an exquisitely delightful residence.

- Double-fronted - love to GOD, love to others.
- Long lease - even for eternity.
- Sunny aspect - constantly lit by the Sun of Righteousness.
- Every modern convenience - for "**charity never faileth.**"

- Safe from disturbance - for "**perfect love casteth out fear.**"

Note that the phrase employed is "**dwelleth in love,**" not "lodgeth," as if for a while - there is all the difference between visiting the seaside for a holiday, and living there permanently. It is this latter condition that is envisaged here. The house itself is a permanency - "**now abideth . . . charity,**" I Corinthians 13:13- and we are never to move elsewhere.

We are said to be Born there - "**born of God**" (7). Not by natural birth, but by new birth. In the beautiful atmosphere where love reigns - that is, in effect, where GOD reigns, for "**God is love**" - there is no room for a spirit of hate, a spirit of fear, a spirit of greed, a spirit of jealousy, a spirit of self. It is a sign of a newly born body that it breathes life; likewise is it a mark of a new born soul that it breathes love for we cannot really know GOD without catching from Him some of His wonderful spirit of love (8).

We are said to Grow there - "**herein is our love made perfect**" (17). Love is not a merely static thing, but is for ever growing deeper as the days go by - from the cupboard love of the cat, to the childish love of the infant, the callow love of the youth, the awakening love of the sweetheart, the deepening love of a married couple, to the perfect love of a Darby and Joan. So does it come about, in the higher sphere, that the more we know GOD the more we love Him - and, incidentally, the more we love others. As the Christian should be always on the go, so should he also be always on the grow "**as newborn babes, desire the sincere [the unadulterated] milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby,**" (I Peter 2:2).

We are to grow in all kinds of Christian excellencies - for instance, in grace, in knowledge, and in love. This love that the Epistle is so full of is a supernatural quality - "**shed abroad in our hearts [not by our effort] by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us,**" (Romans 5:5). The New Testament word for love is not found in heathen writers; and their word for it is not found in the New Testament - though it is given an exalted place in London's Piccadilly Circus! Let us see to it that, as members of the Fellowship we are growing in the Divine virtue.

We are said to Live there - "**dwelleth in love**" (16). The Love life follows a pattern, "**manifested**" in the blessed fact that GOD sent His Son to be incarnate (9) and crucified (10) for us. A strange word is used of the latter fact - "**the propitiation**"; and we must give careful attention to it, in view of certain strictures that occur in certain quarters. They begin by quoting from this very Epistle, this very chapter, that "**God is love**". Very well, then, if that be the case, He will surely forgive "**our sins**", without any need to be propitiated on account of them.

Yet the Bible does describe the Cross, not only as an example of love (how true!), but as a propitiation for sins.

You see, there are two sides to the nature of GOD, as revealed to us - "**God is love**", (4:8); but also, "**God is light**", (1:5), and the two must be held in balance. The first word signifies, shall we say, His attitude towards our highest good; the second word embraces His attitude against all evil - in consequence of this latter capacity, innate in a Holy Deity, sin must be adequately dealt with.

He cannot, from the very nature of this side of His Being, deal with it as if He were an easy-going, indulgent FATHER. A propitiation there must be - but note carefully the phrase that He

"sent . . . the propitiation." The same thought is in Romans 3:25-26, "**Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation... that He might be [at the same time] just, and the justifier.**" The Cross dealt with the sin, and delivered the sinner who believed. So that we come to this "righteous" conclusion that, seeing there must be a propitiation, His love provided what His holiness demanded! "**Herein is love**" (10) - indeed.

And now we have to remind ourselves that Life in Love lays upon us the obligation to reproduce, in our measure, the pattern of love that is set before us - not to do what He did, which was uniquely His work, but to do as He did. "**Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another**" (11). "**We love Him, because He first loved us**" (19).

It is no use our saying that the copy is too remote, and the task too difficult, for, as we learned in an earlier study, GOD never commands His children to do the impossible, Exodus 18:23, and "**this commandment have we from Him, That he who loveth God love his brother also**" (21). This rule of the household is His command; the grace for the doing of it is ours to command!

What further residence is there for the members of the Fellowship?

THEIR SUPERNATURAL POSITION

"**In Him**" (13) - a privileged position, beyond all human comprehension, but not, thank GOD, beyond our apprehension.

You will recall that the phrase is one characteristic of Paul, who constantly uses it - "**in the Lord**", "**in Christ**". Led of the SPIRIT, he confidently affirms that all that we Christians have, or hope for, is because of our being "**in Him**". Such a position brings us such a plethora of graces and blessings. "**We dwell in Him**", says John, "**and He in us**", he adds; for there is, as we have seen, a reciprocal aspect about it - if the poker is in the fire, the fire is soon in the poker; if the sponge is in the water, the water is in the sponge; if the body is in the air, the air is in the body - and, to infinitely greater purpose, if we dwell in Him, He dwells in us. It is this second side of the coin that gives the value to the specie; and if only we recognize it, we shall be saved from so much spiritual collapse.

Recall the low moral condition into which the Corinthian Christians had fallen, and note Paul's indication of its root cause - "**What? Know ye not that . . . the Holy Ghost... is in you**" (I Corinthians 6:19). With the Holy One there they ought not, and need not, be unholy; nor we!

What of the Old Home? Of the unrepentant unbeliever, the threefold record runs:

(1) "**Born in sins**", John 9:34 - not true of our LORD, but true of all else. Do you remember the pathetic lines of poor Tom Hood, in his Past and Present:

"I remember, I remember, the house where I was born
The little window where the sun came peeping in at morn."

Spiritually, this was it: "**born in sins**". If we are no longer there, let us thank GOD for the grace

that moved us; but to continue,

(2) "**Lived in them**", Colossians 3:7 - all we believers lived there once, and what a life of disappointment it was; what an unsafe and unsatisfactory house to be in.

(3) "**Die in your sins**", John 8:24 - there is the poignant Obituary Notice of the impenitent. That, then, is our original dwelling-place - in sin; until we come to be - in Him.

What of the New Home? How different from the old place. Here is love, and joy, and peace, and satisfaction, and service, and all blessing. Here we abide all the years of our earthly life - not only with Him, but in Him - until the great Removal Day when, in the mercy of GOD, we move into that other "**house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens**", II Corinthians 5:1.

Members of the Fellowship: how infinitely privileged we are in our Position, while Here - and when There.

~ end of chapter 10 ~

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