

## **THE FELLOWSHIP**

An Exposition of First John

by Guy H. King

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### **CHAPTER ELEVEN -**

#### **THE POWER OF THE FELLOWSHIP**

I John 5:1-5

**1 Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.**

**2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.**

**3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.**

**4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.**

**5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?**

THE true member of the Fellowship is potentially so strong because he possesses a secret whereby he can, if we may put it so, turn on the power as needed. Alas, many of us are so weak, such failures, because we fail to use the switch. This passage introduces to us the whole matter of this power. So, because we all long for power, we give earnest attention to what is said. What a sad difference there is between some Christians and others - the powerful and the powerless. If we belong to the latter class, maybe this study will be the means of transferring us to the former company. To our subject, then.

#### **POWER - CRADLED IN LOVE**

The apostle seems quite unable to get away from the subject of love - he conceives it to be of such vast and vital importance that all other excellencies rest on it, or spring from it, or are irradiated by it. Paul would most heartily approve such sentiments as the study of his unmatched paean of love, in I Corinthians 13 discloses. John can most appropriately be called the apostle of love. Yet how different a character he had been, even at the beginning of his apostolate. Think of Mark 3:17, James and John "**He surnamed... Boanerges, which is The Sons of Thunder**", such was their stormy disposition.

There's not much affinity between love and a thunderstorm. Think of Mark 9:38, "**John answered Him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in Thy Name... and we forbid him, because he followeth not us**". A loveless attitude, rebuked by his LORD. Think of Luke

9:54, "**James and John... said, Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them?**" There's a deep disparity between lightning and love. If ever there were an instance of the HOLY SPIRIT'S completely transforming a man's whole nature, we find it in the case of this man John. "**The fruit of the Spirit is love . . .**," Galatians 5:22.

How amazing is the power of this gentle quality of love. You have seen illustrations of it in the field of nature. Yonder garden is wrapt in winter's grip, the icy cold has persisted long, and hardened all around. Snow now covers the ground. Yet, what is this that pokes up its little, delicate head at the foot of that tree? What power does this tiny snowdrop possess, not only to endure, but even to triumph thus over all that winter can bring?

Such is love that can persist amid all the rigours and vigours of this oft-times cruel world. Look at that irregular stone in your pavement. What has lifted it like that? Only a little seed dropped by a bird on to the earth before the stone was hammered into its place. That tiny, wee thing has lifted a weight immeasurably greater than its own. So can love lift the load that bows down many a heart, or raise the stone that hardens many a life. How often has the love of a mother's broken heart lingered on for her erring son when all other decent people have become ashamed of him and given him up. Love never gives up; but "**beareth all things . . . endureth all things,**" I Corinthians 13:7.

We are not surprised, then, at the writer's reiteration. He brings before us again the two aspects of this heavenly characteristic. First, "**everyone that loveth him that begat**" (1). It begins with love to GOD, all else springs from that. If He had not so loved the world as to send His only begotten Son to save us; if He had not so loved us individually as to beget us in newness of life, and "**unto a lively hope,**" I Peter 1:3; if He had not "**first loved us**" (4:19), we could never have loved in this Divine way.

But, first, our love is to be given to "**Him that begat,**" that, in His own Self, started it all. Second, "**loveth him also that is begotten of Him.**" We have heard the old saying, "Love me, love my dog." The idea here is similar: love GOD, love His child. Saint Augustine held that this phrase referred to CHRIST, "**the only begotten of the Father,**" John 1:14. "**We know that we love the children of God, when we love God**" (2). And this is not so much a matter of choice as a specific "**commandment,**" though this is understood to be, and found to be, not a heavy burden, but a loving rule of the Fellowship. He has said all this before, you say? But can it be said too often? Our memories are so short, and our natures so frail, that it would seem to be salutary to hear it over and over again. Let him that is conscious of fulfilling the twofold commandment complain of the repetition; but let us who are only too well aware of our shortcoming thank GOD for the constant reminder. Our spiritual power, then, is cradled in love. That which emanates from any other source is likely to be hard, remorseless, and self-seeking.

### **POWER - INNATE FROM BIRTH**

Physically, we watch with wonder the strength resident in the tiny frame of the newly born babe as it battles with the world into which it has come - a struggle which, as infant mortality rates lessen, we know to be mostly successful. Spiritually, how shall it be otherwise with those who are born again - "**for whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world**" (4).

From the very moment of what we call our conversion - but which, to be exact, we should call our regeneration - the power to be, to speak, to act, to serve, to conquer, is there, if only we will use it. We are "**born of the Spirit**", John 3:6, Who, from that time, is "**in you**", I Corinthians 6:19 - so that, from our earliest days of Christian life, strength sufficient to "**overcome**" is daily at our disposal.

Turning aside for a moment, look at that distinction between conversion and regeneration. We can be regenerated but once; we can be converted often - and so many, alas, need to be. To convert is to turn back; and a regenerated person may stray from the narrow path. As often as he does so, he will need to return into the strait gate. Some have asked if, though chosen to be an apostle, Peter was not a converted man, and when was he converted, since the MASTER said, "**and when thou art converted**", Luke 22:32.

Oh yes, he was a regenerated man, a real Christian, but he would grievously stray. When he had turned back again, he was to give himself arduously to the strengthening of his fellow believers, lest they also fail and fall. If you are truly a backslider, you do not need to re-enter the Family (you are, once for all, regenerated), but to return to the Fellowship, whose sunlight you have forfeited (you are converted back from your wandering). We need, just now, to convert to our passage on spiritual strength - and to hear again that "**ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you**", (Acts 1:8), which happened to you at the instant of your regeneration.

### **POWER - AVAILABLE TO FAITH**

"**This is the victory that overcometh the world**" - even our fighting? No; prepare for a surprise - "**even our faith**" (4). The interesting discovery, as we carefully study the New Testament, is that, while the beginning of our Christian life, so far as we are concerned, is in faith, the continuing of the same is likewise in faith, from start to finish.

The principle of faith runs right through - that is our part in the matter. At the opening of this study, I spoke about a switch, for the utilizing of the power that is there. This is the switch - Faith.

I heard of an old lady who was scared of electricity, whom nothing and no one could induce to use a switch and turn on the power. As I have heard of some Christians who, in spite of spiritual failure, have never been persuaded to try the switch of faith - self-effort, at its best and fullest; but never the Bible way "**even our faith**".

Let me try to expound this secret of power, as the Scriptures set it before us.

*Power of Salvation* - "**By grace are ye saved through faith**", Ephesians 2:8. Every real member of the Fellowship, every true Christian, will subscribe to that. He knows that salvation comes from GOD; that He took the initiative; that, at the tremendous cost of the Saviour's precious Blood, this mighty Rescue is possible for us; that it is all of His "**grace**", the wholly undeserved kindness of His loving heart. "**By grace**", indeed - that, in the blessed entirety of it, is GOD's part in the great transaction. And our part? Simply "**through faith**" - we have but to turn the switch; and there is the light, the warmth, the power, that are summed up in the word and fact of

salvation. Has my reader switched on?

*Power to Continue* - "**we walk by faith, not by sight**", II Corinthians 5:7. What we call our conversion is not merely a stopping place, but a starting place - "**let us go on**", says Hebrews 6:1. As we take our journey across the ocean of life there are things like storms, and rocks, and quicksands that would hinder, or even halt, our continuance. There are things that would help and hasten it, as chart, and compass, and helm, answering to the means of grace, such as the Bible, the Prayer, the Communion, the Fellowship, the Service, which explain why the Pentecostal converts "**continued stedfastly**", Acts 2:42. But, after all, that ship cannot voyage on by what the passenger sees, but only by a force generated deep down, unseen - switched on no less than as is your little table lamp.

A skipper, explaining what it was like in a storm, pictured the calm, still waters as the ship nosed her way out into the open sea. Then comes the tempest, he said, and everything seems against us - the now blackened sky, the mountainous waves, the pitiless rain, the howling wind. All speak with one frightening voice: they seem to say to me, and to my ship, "You shan't come; you shan't come; you shan't come". But, he went on, I stand there on the bridge, tightly holding on to the rail, vibrating with the force of the engines down below. Thus while everything else threatens, "You shan't come", the engines stoutly reply, "Yes, we will; yes, we will; yes, we will". And, added the captain, so we do. Ay, fellow voyager, the secret is down there below in your innermost being - the means of grace may (and will) greatly help you on, but the master power is the HOLY GHOST power within, which you can only harness to your continuance by pressing the switch of faith.

*Power to Understand* - "**through faith we understand**", Hebrews 11:3. We have a phrase that "seeing is believing"; but in the spiritual realm it is so often the opposite, that "believing is seeing". There are things of the spirit that the worldling will never understand, because he starts by not believing them. This attitude of faith seems very odd to him. Of course it does, "**But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned**", I Corinthians 2:14.

The new man takes the Word of GOD at its face value. He comes upon this thing. He says, I don't understand it, but GOD says it, and I believe it; and presently he says, I see the switch of faith turns on the light of truth.

*Power of Sanctification* - "**them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me**", Acts 26:18. The old dictum holds for every Christian, "**Be ye holy, for I am holy**" - the same in Old Testament requirement, Leviticus 11:44, as in New, I Peter 1:16. And the detailed account of it is given as "**love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness,**" temperance (self-control): that is real holiness, true sanctification.

Mark that all this is obtained, not by our works, "**the works of the flesh**" are very different, but as "**the fruit of the Spirit**", Galatians 5:22. He who dwells within every true member of the Fellowship produces, if we get out of His way, and trust Him to do it, these lovely things. The switch of faith turns on the heat that ripens this glorious fruit. This is the kernel of what is known as the Keswick message: sanctification by faith!

*Power for Victory* - "**this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith**" (4). The LORD had said to our John, and to the rest, "**Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world**", John 16:33.

Shall we who are His, who indeed are "**in Him**", fight the battle all over again? Shall we not then rather trust in what He has accomplished by His death and rising again, and take from Him the conquest? In the moment of our temptation, let us have done with struggling, and instantly, by a deliberate act of faith, take the victory already won, and in that moment made available to us. Says Bishop Gore, "It is His victory appropriated by us". Victory by faith: yes, that's it. The switch of faith turns on the power to overcome.

*Power for Daily Life* - "**the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God**", Galatians 2:20: faith on the Son of GOD is the meaning. The life that some Christians now live is a life according to the flesh - the lower nature; or, according to the fashion - like a spiritual chameleon; or, according to the feelings - now up, now down ; but Paul lives according to faith on the Son of GOD. He has found that carried him through the big occasions, and the sudden emergencies. He would have us know that it is the power sufficient to meet the calls of the ordinary, unexciting, humdrum affairs of the day-to-day routine.

I say! What an electric switch is this faith. Have you learnt to use it? So-

### **POWER - ISSUING IN VICTORY**

This is the prospect held out to all Fellowship members "**who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?**" (5). That is, that trusts in faith to Him, Whom he knows to possess all the experience of perfect humanity, and all the unconquerable power of transcendent Deity. Such unfaltering reliance on Him will have a wonderful issue in the Christian's life - victory over sinful habits, victory over all temptations, victory over trying circumstances, victory over depressing feelings, victory over personal insufficiencies, victory over dominant self. Victory all along the line - by fighting for it? No, no - "**even our faith**". Verily, "**if ye have faith . . . nothing shall be impossible unto you**", Matthew 17:20.

Then, where do I come in? If you're wise, you don't! The life of a small boy at school was made a misery by the bully. His elder brother was a senior prefect; but, of course, the youngster couldn't sneak. One day the brother saw what was going on. The bully had his back to him, and didn't observe him advancing, but the victim did. So, dodging away, he ran behind his big brother, and looking through his arms akimbo, he said to his tormentor, "Now come on!"

The Boy, the Bully, and the Big Brother - there's the secret of victory there. Never was such a bully as Satan; never such a Strong One as He who "**is not ashamed to call them brethren**", Hebrews 2:11. Get behind Him, leave the antagonist to Him.

~ end of chapter 11 ~

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