

THE FELLOWSHIP

An Exposition of First John

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CHAPTER FIVE -

THE PERILS OF THE FELLOWSHIP

I John 2:15-29

15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him,

16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

18 Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.

19 They went out from us, but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

20 But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.

21 I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.

22 Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.

23 Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: [but] he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.

24 Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.

25 And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.

26 These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.

27 But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

28 And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.

29 If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that everyone that doeth righteousness is born of him.

SOME people have imagined that, on becoming a Christian, everything will be easy, and plain sailing, till they reach the Heavenly Harbour. Alas, in the disillusionment, and consequent reaction that follows, faith has had a rude shock. Yet a moment's reflection might have safeguarded them. Before their conversion, they were swimming down-stream, going with the tide, floating along on the current of public opinion and practice; but now they have turned ('converted') and from that moment they have been swimming up-stream, against all that they, with the others, had formerly held and believed.

Opposition, even antagonism, becomes their experience; and they begin to realize that perils - some open, some hidden - lie in the Christian's path. Our passage deals with some of them, and hints at others. But let us go back, for consideration of the first of them, to the closing words of our last Study.

FROM BENEATH

"**The wicked one**" (14). Don't be surprised that you have now attracted his attention. Time was when he did not bother you overmuch; but all that has now changed. I have learnt something interesting about professional burglars. I am not talking about the petty breaking and entering, nor about the smash and grab merchant, but of the real thing. I have discovered that before he cracks a crib he makes it his business to find out all about the place first, and that he never carries out his plan unless he is pretty sure that there is something there worth taking.

Our LORD says that the devil is "**a murderer**", and that he is "**a liar**", John 8:44. May we venture to add that he is a burglar.

Once he let you alone, for you had little worth his stealing; but now that you have moved from your old house, "in Sin", Colossians 3:7, and have entered the new dwelling, "**in Christ**", Colossians 1:2, you have so much worth taking - a peace, a power, a joy, a reward, a blessing, a crown, Revelation 3:11, which he would rob you of, if he can. Not that he cares very much about you and your loss. What he is out for is, through you, to hurt GOD - as he did with his then agent, Saul of Tarsus, who was injuring the Christians, and who heard the heavenly accusation, "**Why persecutest thou Me?**" Acts 9:4.

By the way, ye Church members, forget not that he, or she, that touches one of the LORD'S own, touches Him!

The devil is not omnipresent - since he is not GOD. It is not he personally that attacks and tempts everyone of us.

Naturally, he went in person to confront our LORD; but in the case of most of us he uses his varied agents - "**the devil and his angels**", Matthew 25:41. If he is tempting you, he can't be tempting me at the same time, for he cannot be in two places at once.

When he does himself appear, it is often with strangely mixed characteristics - as a "**serpent**", Genesis 3:1; as a "**lion**", I Peter 5:8; even as "**an angel of light**", II Corinthians 11:14. It is even possible for him to use the LORD's own people, even the best of them, even an apostle, as his tools - as when the Master so urgently chided Peter, "**Get thee behind Me, Satan**", Matthew

16:23. May we never, never lend ourselves to his iniquitous designs by leading any into sin; by leading others astray into false teachings that have no warrant of Holy Scripture; or by living inconsistent lives, to cause the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme.

The devil is not omniscient - for neither does he share this characteristic with Deity. Nevertheless, the range of his knowledge seems to be quite unique.

Judging by the variety and subtlety of his temptations, he appears to possess a wonderful acquaintance with human nature - playing, now upon our weaknesses, now even upon our very strengths. So that it is not for me to judge another man for his falls - his temptations are not mine, any more than mine are his.

With knavish ingenuity, he knows how to bait his line for the luring of us poor fish!

In all seriousness, let me point to another example of what I would call his masterly intelligence - in the realm of Spiritism. The supposed appearances of the beloved dead at seances are often fraudulent trickery; but by no means always so. The really sincere spiritualist is more anxious than anyone to get rid of the fraud; but all the same I believe that he is unwittingly playing with fire, in the face of such prohibitions as Leviticus 19:31, and Deuteronomy 18:11. I think there can be no question that "appearances" of spirits do occur; but I put it to all interested that they are not the departed spirits of dear ones, but evil spirits impersonating them. "**Try the spirits**", I John 4:1 will presently say to us: mention to them the name of JESUS, and see what will happen, verse 3.

But how is it that these "**familiar spirits**" are familiar with the little tricks and oddities of the old friend that has been summoned up? I suggest that the *almost* omniscience of Satan is the answer.

We do not know what goes on in the mysterious deeps of the Beneath world; but we may not be far wrong if we hazard the guess that in that "wicked one's" army headquarters plans are made, and information is handed out, as the emissaries of evil go forth to enslave the minds and ruin the souls of men. No, not omniscient; but he knows a rare lot!

The devil is not omnipotent - as GOD is. Strong he most certainly is; mighty, but not almighty. His power is far beyond anything that we ourselves can oppose to him. It is because of the fallacy that our pride entertains of our being a match for him in ourselves that we are so constantly defeated - but of that more anon. It is enough for the moment to recall, with uttermost thankfulness, that in the peril that comes to us from Beneath, we have at our call the "Stronger than the strong", Luke 11:22, who will assuredly see us through to victory. Napoleon used to say, "Never underrate the power of the enemy", and he should know! We have thought it well here to follow his advice.

FROM AROUND

"*The world*" (15-17). One of the members of the unholy trinity, a triumvirate of evil, set in array against the blessed Holy Trinity, to accomplish, if may be, our downfall. So we are now to consider another of the perils of the members of the Fellowship.

Its Nature - had better be clear in our minds. Whatever it proves to be, it is spoken of as an evil thing, so that we can at once rule out certain aspects of it:

(a) It is not the world of Matter, as such - a form of false teaching at the basis of Gnosticism, a heresy which greatly troubled the early churches, e.g., the Colossian Epistle. GOD could not have become incarnate because matter was innately evil. His only way of contact with the human world was through a descending gradation of aeons. Of course, the Bible doctrine of the creation of the material world can have nothing to do with this abstruse and, as we should say, perverse teaching concerning our world.

(b) It is not the world of Nature - true, this is not now what it once was in its pristine glory, for it bears grievous scars of the Fall of man, as Genesis 3:17-18 said it would. Yet how filled with beautiful things and places it still remains. There is no evidence of its being inherently evil.

(c) It is not the world of Humanity - as such, that is here alluded to, and that John 3:16 refers to when it tells our wondering hearts that "**God so loved the world**".

(d) It is all within the world that is alienated from GOD - whether it be people, or things, or influences. Though it is a quite different avenue of temptation from that of the devil, he yet has a good deal to do with this also; for, is he not, as the Master described him, "**the prince of this world**", John 14:30, and referred to in another place as "**the god of this world**", II Corinthians 4:4, curious, even mysterious, utterances, but true as the Word is true.

Its Danger - the peril is not always recognized, so subtle is it. After all, what harm is there in doing this, going there, thinking that, saying the other; and, while we dally, the harm is done. This verse makes plain that the world draws away our love from the FATHER: you can't have both.

Many a Christian has found that profoundly true. He has seen no need for a life of separation from the world, and while discovering himself more and more embroiled in it, he has realized that his love for GOD, and for GOD'S things, has been ebbing fast away - his old keenness for the Bible, the Prayer Meeting, the Worship, the Sunday has gone; he is rapidly backsliding from grace. Sometimes, though with increasing rarity, a wistful mood is on him, and as he thinks back upon the simple happiness of those old days, he may ask himself, with Cowper,

"Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?"

Ah, we can tell him where it is - it has been thrown away into the world. Would GOD that he would return, and, in deepest penitence for his stupidity and sin, go on to say

"The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Thy throne
And worship only Thee."

Do you recall Paul's poignant lament from prison, "**Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this**

present world", II Timothy 4:10. What heartbreak such as he have, down the years, caused to those that loved them and hoped so much from them. I wonder what was the particular aspect of worldliness that was the lure of Demas? John Bunyan, you remember, in "*Pilgrim's Progress*", thought it was money - the silver mine. How many erstwhile godly souls that has tripped and trapped!

Its Manifestations - there they are, set out for us in verse 16.

(a) "**The lust of the flesh**" - evil desires emanating from the lower nature. What call is here for watchfulness in the realm of thought, "**bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ**", II Corinthians 10:5 - arresting, as like a policeman would, every unlawful intruder into the mind.

(b) "**the lust of the eyes**" - evil desires entering through eye-gate. How many robbers of men's purity and peace have slipped in through that unguarded entrance. "**When the woman saw . . .**," Genesis 3:6. "**When I saw . . .**," Joshua 7:21. "**When he saw . . .**," I King 19:3. "**When he saw . . .**," Matthew 14:30.

(c) "**the pride of life**" - vain-glory of life: evil desires arising out of the urge for wealth, position, comfort, power. Many a man has been brought down spiritually when he has climbed up materially. Money is not wrong, in itself; but the love of money is: that, says I Timothy 6:10, is - "**the root of all evil**", a "root of every kind of evil". Such, then, are the worldly characteristics, of which we must beware.

Its Duration - "**the world passeth away**" (17). It is not one of the eternal things. "**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. Gone will be the world, in the great earth catastrophe of II Peter 3:10, and the believer, "[**abiding**] for ever", will have been transported to a sphere where he will no longer be troubled by the "**lust thereof**". Roll on, blessed day! But we have not done with our perils yet.

FROM WITHIN

"*the flesh*" (16). We have already included a reference to this source of danger in our last section; but we feel we must return to it, and take further, and deeper, cognizance of it.

You see, it is one of the protagonists in the constant conflict in the arena of the soul. Look at Galatians 5:17 - "**The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh . . . so that ye cannot do the thing that ye would.**"

The Christian at his new birth became a two-natured being, and the two are "**contrary the one to the other**". The flesh is the old sinful nature, with which we were born, and which we inherited from Adam's fall, and which we retain till we get to the other side, when we shall lose it, as we shall also "**the lust**" of the world, to which we have just referred.

The SPIRIT is the new nature, with which we are born again, - the HOLY SPIRIT, Who Himself takes up His abode within the believer. John 14:17 - all which we have elaborated in our second

Study. It is the SPIRIT'S warring that ensures the victory, so that "**ye cannot** [rather, need not] **do the things** [the wrong things] **that ye** [otherwise, without Him] **would**".

Let us not forget that in this "**flesh**" - and note that Paul does sometimes use the word in reference to the component of the human body, Galatians 2:20 - is the Christian's most insidious peril, against which we must be ever vigilant. That is a striking phrase in Siegfried Sassoon's poem which runs, "In me the tiger sniffs the rose".

FROM ALONGSIDE

"**Antichrist**," (18) - the verse says that there are "**many**" such now, leading up to one outstanding evil personage at the close of the age. What has this not easy passage to tell us concerning this last of the perils that we have to beware of?

Consider the presence of such - members of the Christian body for a time, they have now disclosed their true nature, and departed, to work their evil works upon the Church from outside. "**They went out from us, but they were not of us**" (19). Many a defaulter has been spoken of as a backslider when, in reality, they never had been Christians at all. Like those that Peter speaks of, "**It is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire**", II Peter 2:22. They never were sheep, though they were thought to be.

Now the veneer was off; and in their reversion to type, they were seen to have been dogs and pigs all the time. A following of righteousness proves their new birth (29), a wallowing in unrighteousness shows they never were truly "**new [creatures]**", II Corinthians 5:17.

Consider the meaning of such - the "**anti**" means not so much "opposed to", but "instead of". One author's illuminating comment is, the word "describes one who assuming the guise of CHRIST opposes CHRIST . . . the anti-christ assails CHRIST by proposing to do or to preserve what He did, while he denies Him".

The church of John's day had grave need to be warned of this danger; while the church of our own day has equal need of the same.

Movements and teaching professing to be Christian who yet "**[deny] the Son**" (23)

- some deny His Deity,
- some deny His miracles,
- some deny His virgin birth,
- some deny His Word,
- some deny His atoning death,
- some deny His bodily resurrection,
- some deny His personal return.

Anti-christs, the lot of them! They preach another Christ than the One revealed in the New Testament - another Christ, which is not another, to adapt Paul's language about those who, similarly, preach "**another gospel, which is not another**", Galatians 1:6-7. There is, can be, no

other - there is but one Gospel, one CHRIST. When first we came to the study of this section, we thought it was concerned with a matter of vital importance for those early believers, but had little relevance to us; but it has appeared, as we went along in our investigation, that "**even now are there many antichrists**" (18).

Consider the danger of such - "**them that seduce you**" (26). So often these people are individuals of such charming manners, obvious enthusiasm, delightful personality, high intellectuality, that they put you completely off your guard. Ponder some of the Christian Scientists, the Spiritualists, the Jehovah's Witnesses, that you have come across. How their courage and assiduity put us Christians to shame! All the more seductive are they because they seem, only seem, to base their teaching on the Bible - in truth they wrest the Scriptures, II Peter 3:16, and so are ever "**beguiling unstable souls**", II Peter 2:14.

Consider the conquest of such - we come again to our glorious possession of the "**Unction**" (20). He, too, the great Teacher, in the face of false teaching, the great Safeguard, in the presence of dangerous doctrine, will take you, for your guidance, to the Holy Scriptures; and, if you are willing to accept and obey His word, you shall be led aright, for "**If any man will do [wills to do] His will, he shall know of the doctrine [the teaching], whether it be of God**", John 7:17.

Such recognize the truth when they see it (21). We have spoken earlier of the Bible as the believer's Diet, making him strong. Here we find it as the Christian's Disinfectant, keeping him immune from all the "ism Diseases" floating around in the spiritual atmosphere alongside him.

The same HOLY SPIRIT is spoken of also as the "**Anointing**" (27) - and the believer is assured that even if he is in a lone position, where there is not "**any man**" to whom he can turn for guidance, he shall yet find his way, because the SPIRIT will teach him independently of all human help. No man available; but He is always at hand, for He "**abideth in you**", never to be withdrawn. Yet He can, and will, be silenced, if one cease to "**abide in Him**" (28).

This abiding of ours is obeying; and so long as we continue to "**do**" the truth (not as in I John 1:6), we shall not only be in a position to know the truth here, but we shall "**not be ashamed before Him at His coming.**"

- Never to have answered His knock,
- Never to have acknowledged His name,
- Never to have engaged in His service,
- Never to have reflected His character

- then we may well be ashamed to meet Him; but if, by an implicit reliance upon His HOLY SPIRIT, and a simple obedience to His Holy Will, we are carried through all our problems and perils, we may, in spite of our personal unworthiness, look forward with glad anticipation to Titus 2:13's "**blessed [happy] Hope.**"

What a golden future awaits Fellowship members

"As this old worn-out stuff, which is threadbare To-day
May become Everlasting To-morrow."

- J. Collins.

Well may we adopt the words, though used in another sense, of George Meredith - "the rapture of the forward view."

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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