

## THE FELLOWSHIP

An Exposition of First John

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### CHAPTER SEVEN -

#### THE PURITY OF THE FELLOWSHIP

I John 3:4-9

**4 Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.**

**5 And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins: and in him is no sin.**

**6 Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.**

**7 Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.**

**8 He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil.**

**9 Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.**

FOR all the emphasis of this second part of the Epistle upon the subject of love, it can't avoid tackling the subject of Sin, the very negation of love. Over and over again, throughout the letter, the matter crops up - either in its negative aspect of sin, or in its positive aspect of holiness. Our present passage takes up this positive side, and discusses for us the whole question of purity of living for the believer. For the believer, notice; because the verses and truths are not for the non-Christian. The very words will be as a foreign language to him, but the real Christian, though he may not understand it all, will be able gratefully to enter into much of it. So he finds his purity -

#### AS PROVIDED IN THE LORD

*The standard set* - is the point of verse 4, "**the law**".

However you may define or interpret that word, I think you will not be far wrong if you regard it as GOD's will, GOD's will, for His people. There it was, set up for His people Israel at Sinai, when first they were welded into nationhood, this was the covenant law of their Theocratic kingdom, Exodus 20:1-17.

And now, away on into the New Testament, here is a keen young man, who comes to ask the MASTER, "**What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?**" (Mark 10:17). For answer our

LORD sets up before him the same law as He said elsewhere, "**This do, and thou shalt live**", (Luke 10:28).

And if we want to know the inner meaning and clear summing up of the law, we have only to listen again to the MASTER, as He interprets the "**Thou shalt**", and "**Thou shalt not**", by "**Thou shalt love**".

Taking up the two sections of the commandments, He shows the way that to keep the first four, Our Duty towards GOD, is, "**Thou shalt love the Lord . . . with all thy heart... soul... mind**", and the observing of the last six, Our Duty towards our neighbour, is in the injunction, "**Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself**", (Matthew 22:36-39). "**On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets**".

There it is, "**the law**".

Unfortunately, the people of the world are sitting more and more loosely these days to the Ten Commandments. They want none such. "Why can't we do as we like?" they ask restively and rebelliously. May GOD preserve us from all such throwing off of moral and spiritual restraint that keeps us sane and sober, "**Where there is no vision, the people perish**" (Proverbs 29:18). More adulteries, more divorces, more suicides, more murders, more scandals - do as we like? No, thank you. Rather we pray, "GOD save the people!"

Ah, but some will remind me of Romans 6:14, "**Ye are not under the law, but under grace**". So what? Does that mean that I need no longer heed the law? Paul himself, in the next verse, asks the very question, and energetically repudiates the suggestion - "**Shall we sin? . . . God forbid**". The very conception of sin, in this verse, is that it is a exhibition of a dispensing with law - "**whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law**". It is the violation of the law of our being, the law which includes our threefold relation, to GOD, to others, and to ourselves.

Surely, the point of the Romans statement is not that we have no further obligation to keep the law, but that we have now a new incentive to keep it.

Law tells me that here is something that I ought to do; grace is that which so fills my heart that I want to do it. Law is Love's gift; Love is Law's keeping - that says the LORD, in His Word, and in my heart, is the way grace revolutionizes the whole matter. With what ecstasy does the Psalmist exclaim, "**O how love I thy law . . .**", Psalm 119:97. And now comes the uncomfortable reflection, "But, you know, you haven't kept it!"

We are forced to acknowledge ourselves guilty before GOD, (Romans 3:19). And that is one of the three gracious purposes of the Law, which lie behind that great saying of Galatians 3:24, "**the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ**". Three great lessons it taught us, (1) We ought, (2) We haven't, (3) We can't. So our very helplessness drives us to CHRIST, who alone has Himself kept the law, and who alone can put us fully right ("righteous") with the law - "**that we might be justified by faith**", as the Galatians' word continues. How ready we are, then, to be brought unto CHRIST in Whom we find -

*The failure met* - "**He was manifested**" (5, 8) for that very purpose. Long "**before the**

**foundation of the world"**, (I Peter 1:20) - before there was a world, before there was a race, before there was a sin, GOD knew what would happen, and what would be the unhappy plight of the men that should be, and in the Council Chamber of Deity a plan of salvation was drawn up to meet the situation that would arise.

And now, in process of time, appeared the Divine Executant of the Plan of Grace. This was the prime cause of His being "**manifested**" among men. He did other things incidentally shewing us the FATHER, John 14:7; leaving as an Example, I Peter 2:21; and so on.

But the fundamental reason for His becoming Man was, as I Timothy 1:15 so clearly teaches us, "**This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance**, [This is a true story!] **that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners . . .**", Or, again, "**The Son of Man is come to seek, and to save that which was lost**", (Luke 19:10). And how did He do it? Verse 5 hints at the answer.

"**To take away our sins**" - His precious Blood is the Sovereign Eraser of all our guilty stain. The blood of the Old Testament sacrifices could not do that - "**It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins**", (Hebrews 10:4), could not remove them, but only cover them.

That is what the root of the word "**atonement**" really signifies. Strangely enough, it is the word that is translated "**pitch**" in Genesis 6:14, and is used of the ark's covering, thou "**shalt pitch it within and without with pitch**". It is an Old Testament idea; and the word does not properly occur in the New Testament - the one exception is in Romans 5:11\*, and even there the word "**atonement**" is the same as "**reconciliation**". The word, then, means covering, and the fact effects reconciliation. Old Testament believers were covered by the blood of their sacrifices until the time for the shedding of the blood of the One Eternal Sacrifice, which should "**take away**" their sins.

Is that not what Romans 3:25 means, "**Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his Blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God**" - believe, sins of past ages, or, again, Hebrews 9:15, "**he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament . . .**"; there it is again. His death, His Blood, were retrospective in effect.

Calvary has no date. Abraham, Moses, and the rest, will be in Heaven with you, and for the same reason, "**the Blood of Jesus Christ**" - shed in grace, and love, "**to take away our sins**".

*\*Editor's Note: Paul in Romans 5:11 states that "**we have NOW received the atonement**" - NOW that Christ, the promised Messiah, has died and shed His blood for our sins (of which the OT sacrifices were just a picture), now we receive what was only pictured and prophesied in the OT. What the blood of animal sacrifices could only cover, Christ's sacrifice for sins has taken away forever. See John 1:29.*

"**In Him is no sin**" - that was more than just a fact: it was one of the fundamental necessities of the whole transaction. As we saw in an earlier Study, "**the Lamb of God**" is the fulfillment of

the lambs of old; and as they must be certified to be stainless, "**without blemish**" (Exodus 12:5), so He must be declared to be sinless, "**I find no fault in Him**". (John 19:4), If He had sin of His own, He must die for Himself, and could not be justifiably eligible to die for others.

Thank GOD, in Him is no sin; but on Him was all sin laid, Isaiah 53:6. At the pivotal point of the world's redemption, GOD brought all the sin that ever was, and laid it upon Him; and GOD brought all the sin that ever shall be, and laid that also upon Him - "**laid**", made to meet on Him the iniquity of us all.

"**That He might destroy the works of the devil**" - here is a second purpose for which "**the Son of God was manifested**", here among men. This is one of the reasons for Deity taking Humanity. "**He that committeth sin is of the devil**" - Augustine's comment was, "The devil made no one, he begot no one, he created no one; but whosoever imitates the devil [i.e., by doing sin, as he does] is, as it were, a child of the devil, through imitating, not through being born of him".

Did not our LORD JESUS say the same thing, when, addressing His enemies, He declared, "**ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do**". John 8:44. The MASTER, then, made it His aim to "**destroy the works of the devil**" - I am greatly tempted to paraphrase "**the works**", and call it "the workings". The scholars may not allow that as a translation: I only offer it as a rendering of what seems to me to be the intention of the word. But look at that other word, "**destroy**".

Is it to be understood as referring to that yet distant day when "**the devil and his angels**", "the devil and all his works", shall be utterly done away? Revelation 20:10. Thank GOD for that coming Day of Final Triumph; but has the word some relevance for us here and now?

Is there any sense in which He may be said to "**destroy**" his works in the present?

There is another New Testament passage in which the word occurs which, in my own view, justifies us in giving the word the meaning "render void", "make inoperative", almost "draw the sting". Examine it, then, in that other passage, Romans 6:6, "**Knowing this, that our old man** [the man of old; the man we used to be - Evan Hopkins] **is crucified with Him, that the body of sin** [the body as the medium of sin] **might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin**". It is evident, isn't it, that the body is not literally destroyed; but it is part of GOD's plan for us that the body be "loosed" (the Greek word translated "destroyed") from its tendency to serve as sin's instrument, Romans 6:13.

Transfer that now to our Epistle, and I think you have its true significance. It is one of the beneficent results of His Cross that, for those who take advantage of it, He has drawn the sting from all the workings of Satan, and that, however he may fulminate, or fascinate, he is powerless to affect the believer, unless we are so foolish as to yield to his persuasions.

At Golgotha was fought the greatest battle of the ages, and the devil was completely conquered. He remains our bitter foe; but he is a beaten foe - never forget that.

After the abolition of slavery there were many Negroes who were unaware that freedom had

been won for them, and who consequently still suffered from, in many cases, cruel bondage: their masters knew all right, but their slaves didn't - and so they were exploited.

As is many a Christian, untaught in this great truth, exploited by his most cunning slave driver. The act of emancipation has been promulgated; but if we, through ignorance, indolence, or inadvertence, fail to act upon it, Satan, quite aware of the true position, is diabolically clever enough to keep us "tied and bound with the chain of our sins".

So has our gracious GOD provided, "**in Christ**", for the believer's purity. Now let us see that

### AS PRACTICED IN THE CHRISTIAN

Here, in verses 6-7, we see the beginnings of the high doctrine that John has preached being worked out in practice.

In the first of the two verses we have two Present Tenses that are of exceeding importance in the Christian life.

(1) "**Abideth**" - the New Testament attaches such value to this abiding that it would obviously be to our great profit to try to discover what is its actual significance. It is one of the big secrets of abounding fruit, "**He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit,**" (John 15:5).

"Abiding is abounding," as the late beloved, epigrammatic, Taylor Smith used to say. It is one of the big secrets of effectual prayer, "**If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you,**" (John 15:7). Both specific undertakings on the part of the covenant LORD, which He will, without fail, bring to pass, provided that we, on our part, fulfil the condition:

"**abideth**". And now we have it again in John's Letter, as one of the big secrets of a holy life, "**Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not**".

Ah, yes, we simply must try to find out what it means - and I am going to suggest something very matter-of-fact, something common or garden. When I was looking into the subject, I was greatly struck with those words of the MASTER in John 15:10, "**If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love**" - as if obeying were abiding! Anyhow, if they are not to be thought to be synonymous terms, at least it may safely be assumed that the one is, from one angle, the sign, and, from another angle, the sequel, of the other. Are you abiding? You are not sure?

Well, are you obeying? Yes? Then, you are abiding.

Let us eschew the seeking for some metaphysical, emotional, mystical explanation; but, rather, apply this simple test. I think we shall be not far wrong.

Look now at our second Present Tense.

(2) "**Sinneth not**" - the tense of the Greek verb satisfies us that the meaning is not, committeth not an occasional act of sin, but continueth not in an habitual practice of sin. The former is, alas, not uncommon even in Christians - we do commit acts of sin; and this apostle has made allowance and provision for that fact - when, in 2:1, he wrote, "**If any man sin . . .**". But the point here is different: it is, a life of sinning.

An act of sin, in a believer, is serious enough; but a life of sin is immeasurably blameworthy. Of course, a life of plain, simple, day-by-day, step-by-step obedience would safeguard any Christian from any such presumption; while a continuance in that sordid way should cause him to question whether he had actually ever "seen" or "known" Him personally for himself.

We come on, in verse 7, to another of our Present Tenses "**Doeth righteousness**" - we have left the negative, and are now at the positive.

Everyone acquainted with the New Testament Epistles is aware of the distinction between imputed and imparted righteousness. The moment we believe, our sins are cleansed through His precious Blood, and our souls are clothed with His spotless Righteousness.

This is the sense of the word, for instance, in I Corinthians 1:30, "**But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of GOD is made unto us . . . righteousness**". We are reckoned as righteous - because we are now, no longer, "**in sin**", but "**in Christ**".

But then comes the necessity to live a righteous life. Even as in Romans 1:7 and I Corinthians 1:2, says we are "**called to be saints**." There is, as you are aware that we are called to be what we are. Reckoned as righteous, our life has consistently to correspond thereto - we are to "**[do] righteousness**."

Let no man trade on his standing before GOD, in imputed righteousness; but let him earnestly look to his state before men, by the imparting of the HOLY SPIRIT, even as the LORD was ever righteous, not only in innate nature, but in His daily walk with men. Be not deceived into imagining that, while conversion is of importance, conduct doesn't matter - you'll get there in the end! Will you?

And now, in verse 9, we go on to consider Christian purity

### **AS PERFECTED IN THE BEHAVIOUR**

This is one of the most difficult portions in all the New Testament; but here it is in the course of our expositional enquiry, so we must not shirk or shelve it. After all, it is part of the Word of GOD, and it is written for our learning.

It has a meaning for us, a message for us, so that we must now humbly try to find out what was the SPIRIT'S purpose in leading John to write such words. I offer three reflections upon the verse:

*It States a Fact* - "**born of God**". This describes every reader to whom the Epistle was addressed: birth is the beginning of life, new birth is the beginning of the new life. How

surprised Nicodemus was when our LORD said to him, "**Ye must be born again**". That was understandable for a man in the gutter of sin; but he was not that sort - brought up in a godly home; early taught the Old Scriptures; growing to be an office-bearer in the church; and now the leading Bible expositor of his day - "**a master of Israel**."

Yet, in spite of all this, our LORD tells him that, to all intents and purposes, he had not begun - "**ye must be born again**". It isn't only the bad people, but the good people as well, who "**must**": you "**must**". Is this great, eternal fact a fact in your own personal experience? You see, the members of the Fellowship are not only Servants, Soldiers, Subjects, but Sons.

The simplest explanation of how this comes about is, I believe, in John 1:12 - "**To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name**". When we do, for ourselves personally, receive the LORD JESUS into our hearts and lives as our own Saviour and LORD, that moment we are given this mysterious, life-changing "**power**" of new birth.

How vividly some Christians can recall the day, and the circumstances, when it happened; how sadly others regret that they cannot put their finger on any precise moment. I fancy it was for the comfort of these latter that the closing words of our new-birth verse were added - "**even to them that believe on His Name**."

You don't personally know your physical birthday - you've been told, and you have taken it for granted; but, date or no date, you know you are alive!

Even so, although you do not know the date of your new birth, you do "**believe**" - which proves that you really are a child of GOD. The blessed fact is your fact.

*It Shows an Effect* - "**He cannot sin**". But writing to the same group of people he said, "**If any man sin**", 2:1, as if he can! Once again the explanation lies in the use of the tenses. the "if" clause is in the aorist, and means to commit an act of sin - which even a Christian can do. This clause is in the present, and means to continue in a life of sin - which a Christian cannot do.

Verse 6 said he does not; this verse 9 says he cannot. Apart from the possibility of an occasional stumble along the way, the main trend of his journey is, all the while, in purity and holiness. But, of course, that "**can not sin**" is a claim of so sweeping a nature that we seek for some justification for it; and our verse does not fail us.

*It Suggests a Secret* - "**His seed remaineth in him**". We shall have additional remarks to make when we come to chapter 5:18; and for the moment we confine ourselves to what is said here. Well, then, "**His seed**" - that is, GOD's seed - "**remaineth in him**". Note I Peter 1:23, "**Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible . . .**"

This new Seed, new Life, new Nature, abides in him, and therein lies his secret against sin. You have the same thought of the two natures remaining within the believer in Galatians 5:17, "**the flesh . . . and the Spirit . . .**", as we considered earlier. The "**born of God**" people are thus two-natured persons; and it is the new-nature, the new "**I**", of Galatians 2:20, that "**cannot sin**". Do you recall that strange word of Paul's in Romans 7:20, "**Now if I do that I would not, it is no**

**more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me".**

When any sin eventuates, it is the old nature, the flesh that does it; the new nature, the now real new "I", "**cannot sin**".

Of course, this is given to us only as an explanation, not as an excuse - there is no reason why it should happen.

A rubber ball cannot sink - unless it is held down. We must not let our old, sinful nature get us down! There we will defer the matter, until we take it up later in that further verse I mentioned just now.

So does our Heavenly FATHER make due provision for the purity of His sons and daughters, leaving us without excuse if we fall into unclean ways.

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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